

Local Curriculum as Cultural Practices for Lanna-ness Identity under Place-based Education Reform Policy in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Abstract

The present article investigates the local curriculum development process under place-based education reform policy in Chiang Mai, Thailand. I examined this phenomenon in two public schools under Chiang Mai's urban municipality, through the local curriculum and its cultural practices in which the curriculum was implemented. Using qualitative methodology, I investigated local curriculum texts and cultural practices through documentary research, non-participatory and participatory observation, and in-depth interviews. Then the data were analyzed and theoretically conceptualized by constructing the local curriculum as cultural practices. The curriculum was placed as the primary unit of critical analysis to theorize cultural practices as significant socio-cultural, historical, and ideological contextualization. The findings were two-fold. First, based on textual analysis, the local curriculum had been constructed through the leadership of school principals and teachers partnered by educational stakeholders. The curriculum emerged under the interface between local, national, and global dimensions of knowledge. Second, based on cultural practices, the local curriculum was represented in accordance with the policy of promoting tourism, arts, culture, and education that emphasizes place-based education reform. This indicated that the local curriculum and cultural practices exist in the sphere of localism discourse that leads to the reconstruction of Lanna-ness identity in the context of globalization.

Keywords: local curriculum, curriculum as cultural practices, Lanna-ness identity, localism discourse, place-based education reform

Introduction

Since its established position in educational reform discourse, local curriculum can reflect Thailand's stance on the rhetoric of cultural pluralism and ethnic minority cultures, as evidenced in the country's 1997 Constitution, in which a change at the policy level was perceived, reflecting the concept of universal education. The change involves the right to basic education of no less than 12 years, while the 1999 National Education Act has expressed the intention to accept a community's right for educational provision, cultural and local wisdom revival, children's rights in education and access to free education, as well as providing quality education at the basic education level for learners of various ethnic groups (Jory, 2000; Arphattananon, 2018).

The educational reform was carried out in compliance with the educational reform mandate 1999, which, after two decades, subsequently developed into the 2019 National Education Act. However, local curriculum and its implementation, focusing on cultural pluralism do not seem to have accomplished the desired ends. This can be observed from the pedagogical culture that is framed by the central Thai language and the fact that teachers are culturally different from learners, and are not adequately prepared to teach and work in culturally sensitive contexts where very few are able to appropriately provide pedagogy for diverse groups of students (Arphattananon, 2021).

Scholars have noted that the notion of cultural pluralism exists within the framework of global capitalism, which has immense influence in transforming cultures into commodified objects with infinite possibilities. That includes the issue of cultural pluralism within the framework of the nation state. This issue entails acceptance by which certain imaginary ideals are forged. The most important such fabrication is the assumption that culture can be transformed into a commodity. This practice is commonly referred to as the commodification of culture, with the purpose of promoting tourism and hospitality businesses (Jory, 2000; Hayami, 2006).

There is evidence that public schools in Chiang Mai have developed local curricula that promote a positive view of cultural diversity and recognition of ethnic minorities (Jatuporn, 2021). This is also in accordance with the policy to promote tourism, arts and culture, and education that emphasizes place-based education reform. This policy, intended to propel the issues of transforming Chiang Mai into a tourist city, is the origin of commercialized culture. It started at the end of 1947 under conditions of free economic expansion, along with the desire of upper and middle classes to appreciate the unique and diverse lifestyles of local people, beautiful arts and culture, and exotic folkways.

Therefore, Chiang Mai, as the cultural center of Lanna in the past, has been commodified to serve the needs of Thai and foreign tourists traveling to Chiang Mai. Local knowledge and culture are transformed into products that have value both in the sense of their usage and signified meaning for consumption and reproduction in the market. This consumption can be experienced through attending local religious rituals and watching folk performances set up in learning centers, communities and cultural spaces, malls, and famous hotels (Sattayanurak, 2004).

Thus, public schools have embraced the socio-cultural, historical, and ideological contexts in educational provision for students through school curricula, in general, and the local curriculum, in particular. The local curriculum, technically known as place-based curriculum, and cultural practices promote cultural revitalization by representing commodified culture (Paris, 2012; Waite, 2013). I examined such phenomena in two public schools in Chiang Mai Municipality, through local curriculum and cultural practices in which the local curriculum was implemented. The underlying approach for this inquiry has been informed by critical curriculum discourse that conceptualizes curricula as cultural practices (Kanu, 2006). The qualitative method was employed to explain that the local curriculum is cultural practice and this practice is triggered by commodification of Lanna culture in the context of place-based education reform policy.

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to study local curriculum as cultural practices for Lanna-ness identity under place-based education reform policy in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework: Curriculum as Cultural Practices

Curriculum as cultural practices is conceptualized by focusing on culture in such ways as values, ways of seeing, social beliefs, norms, and meanings of diverse groups of people of various races, classes, genders, ethnicities, cultures as well as identities to construct meaning of their social and lived world. Curriculum, thus, is socio-culturally, politically, and historically contested by the process of critique, deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction (Cornbleth, 1990; Apple, 2018). This implies that the production of a curriculum is political in nature because interpretation and critique involve different and contradictory constructions of meaning-making (Lim and Apple, 2016). By doing so, curriculum is placed as the primary unit of critical analysis to theorize cultural practices as significant socio-cultural and structural contextualization for inquiry (Kanu, 2006; Paraskeva, 2016).

The critical turn towards cultural inquiry in curriculum finds evidence in critical theory and cultural studies in education. Critical educators view education as a site of knowledge production and reproduction, and thus curriculum is a sphere of cultural politics in education in enculturing legitimate knowledge of hegemonic powerful groups (Giroux, 1983). Due to the significant entanglement of knowledge, culture, and power, any critical commitment to 21st century education discourse must emphasize culture as a unit of analysis. Cultural inquiry, especially, is an approach to destabilizing normative signifiers, meanings, representations, and social construction of reality in curriculum texts and cultural practices (Kanu, 2006).

The Politics of Culture and Knowledge in Curriculum

In light of contemporary cultural practices in the context of cultural pluralism, scholars have noted that the practices exist within the framework of global capitalism, which has immense influence in commodifying cultures into objects and niche lifestyles based on a prefabricated cultural identity package. This has negative impacts as it compartmentalizes cultures and presents them as cultural goods (Boniface and Fowler, 1993). The concept of cultural pluralism is therefore limited to cultural lifestyles, such as clothing, accessories, decorations, foods, fairs and festivals, which are believed to represent the cultural identity of people of various races, classes, genders, ethnicities, cultures as well as identities (Fish, 1997).

This view is consistent with that of Arphattananon (2018), suggesting that educators should move beyond the “basket weaving” method in designing curriculum and pedagogy. This method tends to merely insert cultural diversities such as food, costume, language, history, heroes, and traditions and beliefs, considered neutral and non-political issues into the dominant existing curriculum and does little to contest knowledge transmission of the hegemonic group. Curriculum, therefore, must be designed to make learners aware of the social reality where cultural hierarchies and social stratification exist. In this light, the recognition of cultural pluralism in Thailand appears to be thriving. However, the acceptance of others occurs under the condition that the otherness is made docile and harmless to the existing status quo and power relations (Winichakul, 2000; Hayami, 2006), and such acceptance develops on a superficial level and mainly for economic reasons such as promoting tourism and the hospitality business (Jory, 2000; Hayami, 2006, Jantakad, 2022).

In addition, under the trend of contemporary popular tourism, culture and knowledge are transformed into a commodity. There are local histories, tales, legends, and stories that add values to commodified products in every community (Jantakad, 2022; Phutthanathanapa, Narongchai, and Chumnanmak, 2020). Another interesting phenomenon is the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) policy, which somehow leads

to the contention for local identity to present to the general public. Culture and knowledge thus become important signified meaning that attracts public interest. This phenomenon was evidenced in the history of tourism culture since 1960. It was then that tourism had an impact on the national economy and Thailand established the national tourism organization. Its role was to promote tourism by supporting the organization of local festivals that honored the cultural and ethnic values of local people. In this regard, Saipan (2014) observed the implications for social change in the form of commodification of culture. For example, the elephant fair in Surin province demonstrates a part of the revitalization of the Kui people's identity. But questions arose whether those identities were the ones chosen by Kui people or not, or whether they were the identities that powerful outsiders handed over to them.

Under global capitalism, elements of identity have to be selected from the plurality of identity politics to be presented in the form of a commodity and for trading in the tourism market. This allows space for diverse ethnic minority identities to play a role in the production of culture and knowledge. In this light, Mukdawijitra (2005) stated that culture, whether it be inventions, traditions, rituals, or ways of life, will be traded and have exchange value not different from other goods. Especially in 1987, the year of Thai tourism, Thai culture was widely and extensively used, and has been used until today. Each locality is trying to find its own identity in order to respond to national policies, causing the contention for various symbols to announce the ownership. In some cases, knowledge and culture are constructed to serve the recognition and signification of identity politics of local people in the global capitalist society.

To understand these phenomena, especially as educational reform has something to do with socio-cultural inclusion and marginalization and with the entanglements of knowledge, culture and power, culture must be conceptualized as a foundational element for critical inquiry since culture constructs our ways of being, seeing, understanding, and living. Therefore, as critical educators, we have to problematize the notion of culture if we aim to create possibilities for

changing practices at the level of individual, group, family, or larger society or the macro political economy of the educational system. The conceptual framework thus was presented as follows:

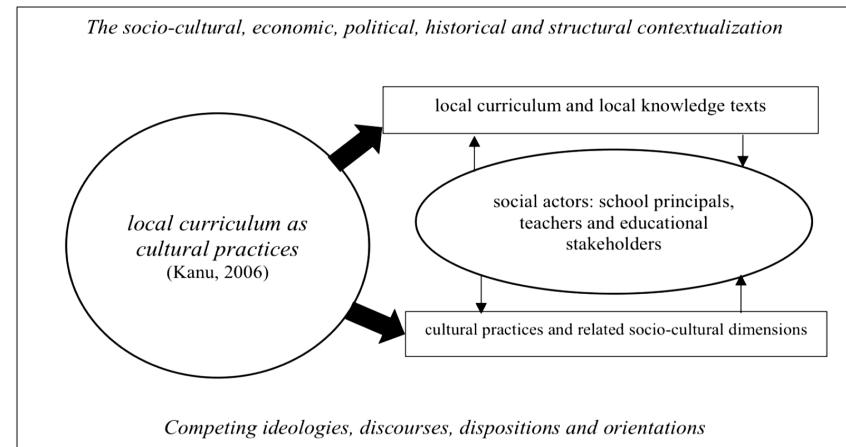


Figure 1 The conceptual framework

Research Methodology

Key Informants

Key informants consisted of the following persons. 1) Two school principals, as legitimate people who are in leadership positions and have power to make changes and who play a key role in shaping schools' policies affecting teachers and students. They are in charge of the organization of culture for the local curriculum. 2) Four teachers who select the contents and materials, design the instruction, and conduct the evaluation. 3) Four actors, including the associate director of Chiang Mai municipality, an educational supervisor, a local wisdom expert and a curriculum specialist from Chiang Mai University. The selected actors were active in school board committees and participated in important educational decision-making. As active participants in the local curriculum development process, they were involved in educational

provision at the level of policy, administration, curriculum development, textbook selection, teaching and evaluation, and as well as cultural practices that were undertaken in the schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

1. Documentary research

I selected two public elementary schools under the jurisdiction of Chiang Mai's urban municipality because the schools were historically and geographically established in the multicultural urban community in Chiang Mai. In light of socio-cultural aspects of the community, they were evidence illustrating that local people residing in these areas were from diverse socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds and constantly participated in local curriculum development of the schools since the previous decades of educational reform in Thailand. The schools also demonstrated a significant increase in the enrollment rate of linguistically, ethnically, and socio-culturally diverse students. I explored local curricula (thematic learning units, lessons, and textbooks) provided by the schools and various kinds of relevant academic documents from Chiang Mai municipality and local libraries. These documents provided socio-cultural and historical backgrounds of the schools, local community contexts as well as data about school-community partnerships in the past decades. The examination of these texts was for the purpose of analyzing ideas, perspectives, and cultural practices in diverse dimensions in order to reveal foundational logic embedded in local curriculum texts.

2. Field research

I collected the data on cultural practices of local curricula through non-participatory observation, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews. The practices demonstrate the interrelationships between knowledge, culture, and power to mediate through local curriculum in a realistic context. The details are described below.

2.1) Non-participatory observation was used in conjunction with in-depth interviews. It was used to collect details from key informants by observing speech, gestures, and reactions during the delivery of spoken language and other behaviors of school principals,

teachers, and educational stakeholders that occurred during the local curriculum development process.

2.2) Participatory observation was employed to collect data by observing key informants as they participated in socio-cultural activities, such as academic meetings between school principals and teachers, cultural diversity weeks, and extracurricular clubs that took place once a week. The activities observed were mainly the implementation of local curricula and local knowledge by school principals, teachers, and educational stakeholders.

2.3) In-depth interviews consisted of a semi-structured form of probing questions. For example, by developing the curriculum, why did school principals, teachers, and educational stakeholders decide to select this kind of knowledge for students in the local community? Along with the series of questions, I strictly followed the voluntary principle of the informants in providing the information. Interviews were conducted to discuss various issues until it was sufficient for analysis according to the objective. The interviews were flexible, with adjustable wording suitable for each research participant and situation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Before every interview, I introduced myself, and then explained in detail the purpose of the research, and requested permission to take notes and make audio recordings during the conversations.

I next examined the reliability of the data, using triangulation, to confirm that the information obtained was accurate and credible before the data were analyzed. Then, the data were analyzed in the form of a description, with illustrative examples. The verbal expressions of key informants were quoted to support the analysis, which was linked to the conceptual framework (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Findings and Discussion

Local Curriculum Development and Cultural Practices

The two public schools in Chiang Mai municipality shared the process of local curriculum development in a similar manner. In this light,

it must be noted that principals of both schools had demonstrated active leadership in local curriculum development and in almost all initiatives regarding cultural practices that aimed to revitalize Lanna-ness identity. In addition, teachers who actively participated in local curriculum development were personally interested in and passionate about local community contexts in terms of cultures, foods, languages, places and socio-cultural events of the community. Almost all of them had experience in teaching local knowledge and were local people themselves. In a similar manner, educational stakeholders were active participants in local curriculum design because of their keen interests in local wisdom and culture of the community. This project could not have been achieved without the school principals' leadership role in curriculum development and the active agency character of the teachers.

The local curriculum development process would be presented and analyzed in accordance with the conceptual framework to identify the principal actors in local curriculum development. The reasons for and the extent to which their perspectives on local curriculum and local knowledge are reflected in the alignment with the policy promoting tourism, arts, culture, and education that emphasizes place-based education reform leading to the reconstruction of Lanna-ness identity. Thus, the local curriculum development process was presented as described below.

1) Drafting the local curriculum proposal. School principals, with teachers and educational stakeholders, participated in formal academic meetings to share their ideas, perspectives, and dispositions for local curriculum development as well as the local curriculum proposal. Along this process, school principals took leadership roles in asking probing questions related to schools and local community contexts as well as reflecting back and forth between teachers and educational stakeholders regarding the philosophy and vision of local curriculum. They mutually decided what kinds of local knowledge were socio-culturally appropriate in local curriculum documents at elementary levels. The teachers were responsible for the specific teaching and learning units that had been decided upon, and writing up information

on general and specific learning objectives, and series of thematic topics to be covered. Local curriculum proposals from both schools were reviewed and reflected on for further revision and improvement by school board committees and curriculum specialists.

2) In accordance with socio-cultural, historical and economic aspects of the local community, school principals and teachers collaboratively identified thematic learning units and drafted appropriate contents under identified themes. These thematic learning units were composed of seven units and required study period in one semester for each 4th to 6th elementary level.

The local curriculum must be based on Lanna local wisdom by incorporating Lanna-ness into educational provision. The curriculum should consist of Lanna local wisdom derived from each specific locality. For example, in a community that produces silverware, the local curriculum must address silverware knowledge which is the local wisdom of the community (School principal, 2021).

In light of curriculum as cultural practices, the school principal believed that the local curriculum must be grounded upon Lanna local wisdom. However, from the lens of cultural politics in education and curriculum, one of the critical questions that emerged was what "Lanna" and "local" actually mean in this context. Is it a part of social construction of knowledge under the discourse of localism in Thailand? In this drafting process, school principals played instrumental roles in defining and selecting local knowledge that aimed to revitalize Lanna-ness identity and that kind of knowledge reflected the perspectives of school principals and teachers under localism discourse.

3) Because of both previous steps of local curriculum development process, the schools got local curriculum proposals that could demonstrate overall local curriculum contents. In this step, school principals with the assistance of teachers organized the meeting. The meeting was set for educational stakeholders to accumulate their perspectives on local curriculum documents, that is, to collect their

ideas and perspectives as the foundation for drafting the curriculum. Based on their reflections and comments, schools would mediate between local knowledge as representative of Lanna-ness identity and national content standards from the Basic Education Curriculum 2008 as representative of common national/global identity. The mediation of curriculum contents had been achieved by using identified themes from previous stages.

Those involved with local curriculum were of the opinion that the curriculum implemented in school might not cover essential matters about the local community in which students live. In Chiang Mai province, our local wisdom and culture are so culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse that the contents of each local curriculum could not include all aspects of knowledge. So, Lanna local studies are a subject that encourages students to learn in depth about their local community. Learn how to live in the local community. Understand what previous generations faced in the past. What are the important lessons left for young generations? (Educational stakeholder [Pseudonym], 2021).

By acknowledging that the local curriculum should be mediated space between local, national, and global dimensions of knowledge, school principals, teachers, and educational stakeholders made a mutual decision that the local curriculum must be grounded upon the discourse of localism. However, the construct of localism in this manner extends beyond the rhetorical debate on romantic and nostalgic learning of the beautiful past to the interface between local, national, and global in the context of glocalization – deriving from the dialectical relationship between local and grassroot movements and global and international movements of culture and knowledge production. Therefore, the local curriculum contents of both schools consisted of seven units as follows: 1) Lanna local history; 2) history and development of the Lanna kingdom; 3) festivals, foods, folkways, and cultural diversity of Lanna; 4) Lanna local identities; 5) issues of local politics, economics, and the

environment in Chiang Mai and other northern provinces; 6) youth and junior guides for the local community; and 7) Chiang Mai as cultural heritage for a sustainable learning city.

4) Developing and evaluating the local curriculum. Teachers participated mainly in the local curriculum development process by being responsible for specific thematic units and designing pedagogical approaches to teach curriculum contents and organize relevant activities related to local community studies. In this light, school principals and educational stakeholders such as educational supervisors and curriculum specialists would take part in conducting research on particular topics by participating in socio-cultural events of both schools and local community activities, and collecting relevant data from other educational resources. All elements of the local curriculum and related curriculum materials were assessed by school board committees and curriculum specialists.

Based on the local curriculum development process illustrated above, the following sections present the findings based on both textual analysis and cultural practices of the local curriculum. In addition to undertaking a leadership role by school principals and teachers with the partnership of educational stakeholders, they were significant actors in critique, deconstruction, interpretation and reconstruction of the local curriculum as cultural practices (Apple, 2018). By doing so, the local curriculum in Chiang Mai's urban municipality did not really serve local community revitalization and sustainability as embedded in the goal of rural philosophy of education, which was a philosophical foundation of place-based education since the beginning of this idea (Martusewicz, 2018). Local curriculum as well as its various forms of culturally responsive pedagogy that are embedded in the context of place-based knowledge and practices have increasingly become a space for commodifying culture and knowledge into capitalist/neoliberal-oriented policies promoting tourism, arts, culture, and education that emphasize place-based education reform nationally and globally (Gruenewald, 2003).

Local Curriculum in the Context of Localism: The Reconstruction of Lanna-ness Identity

In this part, I would conceptualize empirical data from local curriculum texts in juxtaposition to conceptual framework and theoretical discussion regarding local curriculum policy and discourse in Thailand.

Local curriculum was constructed in the form of local studies and this construct was related to the story of the past – the time when Chiang Mai city was founded, when residents were mobilized to settle in the new city. That was considered the great achievement of Phaya Mangrai, the great king of Lanna, from August 12, 1296 until Chiang Mai became the center of the kingdom's prosperity. Although, in the past century, Chiang Mai has been subjected to a centralized bureaucratic culture, putting Chiang Mai under administrative control of Bangkok, Chiang Mai is ubiquitously filled with distinct historical and cultural traces, both in writing and other forms of expression. They are the evidence to remind people of the greatness of Chiang Mai in the past.

In addition, local studies, as appeared in local curriculum since the revised curriculum in 1990 and in the basic education curriculum in 2001, are consistent with the term, "local content substance." The Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) has set guidelines for creating local curriculum framework according to the Basic Education Curriculum 2008, stating that local content substance is a body of knowledge, skills, and desirable characteristics that learners should acquire. It is defined by the Educational Service Area Office (ESAO), considering geography, history, community issues, culture, economy, society, occupations, local wisdom and local development trends, to instill in the learners love and pride in the social heritage of their ancestors. The learners would be fostered in Thai-ness, able to live and be good citizens of society (OBEC, 2010).

This content of localism is clearly reflected through decentralization in educational decision-making and local curriculum rhetoric (Jatuporn and Wattanatorn, 2014). However, before Thailand's education reform era, the national curriculum mandate provided room for schools to develop their own curriculum in specific contexts, so they

could construct local community subjects in both elementary and secondary education. These subjects serve as a foundation in cultivating students' love and understanding of their local legacies.

In this light, the Ministry of Education officially published a book series entitled, "History, Developments in History, Identity and Wisdom," demonstrating the importance of each province throughout Thailand and also addressing the significance of regional communities in terms of history, language, culture, place, environment, and people. Also, 1999 was the year that marked the beginning of the educational reform mandate 1999, which was the first educational act in Thailand. This act significantly gave legitimacy to localism discourse and allowed local narratives outlined in the development framework of the nation-state to be more firmly incorporated into educational institutions at all levels. The effort to endorse such localism of the state also complemented the policies demonstrated in the 1997 Thailand Constitution, to achieve the goals set forth. The evidence of localism discourse was shown in the local content framework of Chiang Mai Educational Service Area 1, involving the history of Chiang Mai city. It consists of five chapters, detailed as follows:

- Chapter 1 The History of the ancient Chiang Mai City
- Chapter 2 The History of Chiang Mai in the Sukhothai Period
- Chapter 3 The History of Chiang Mai in the Ayutthaya Period
- Chapter 4 The History of Chiang Mai in the Thonburi Period
- Chapter 5 The History of Chiang Mai in the Rattanakosin Period

(Chiang Mai Educational Service Area 1, 2019).

In addition, when examining the local curriculum document, it was found that the local curriculum has set an important goal, stating:

The local curriculum, particularly in "Magnificent Chiang Mai" subjects, aims to develop learners, so they can have profound knowledge and understanding of Lanna's key iconic figures, such as Mr. Jarun Manopetch. The learners will have a wide range of knowledge of Lanna as a colonized city of the Kingdom of Siam, the integration with Siam, rituals and traditions,

cultures, natural disasters, smog in the dry season, local career, recreational activities in Chiang Mai, traditional Lanna food (School A [Pseudonym], 2020).

The local curriculum specified the desirable characteristics of learners at the end of Grade 6 as follows:

Understand and be able to present the background of a Lanna artist, Mr. Jaran Manopetch, a musician, singer, songwriter and actor. Jaran Manopetch's music is uniquely created from the northern dialect (*kham mueang*), which is called folk song *kham mueang*. The style began in 1977 and has become widely accepted and a model of contemporary local music today (School B [Pseudonym], 2020).

Understand and be able to present the importance of the tradition of walking up Doi Suthep, which is held every year on the night before Visakha Bucha Day. It is a tradition of Chiang Mai people where people come together to walk up the mountain to worship Phra That Doi Suthep. There will be a procession of monks and various faculties (groups of people). The starting point is in front of Chiang Mai University, and the walk will pass the Khru Ba Siwichai monument, a statue of the monk who was the key figure in building the road up to Doi Suthep, which is the most revered by Chiang Mai people. The uphill walk continues until it reaches Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. The distance is approximately 14 kilometers (School B [Pseudonym], 2020).

As demonstrated in the goals of local curriculum, educational discourse in localism has been evident as indicated in the study of national, regional, and local history. This was the effort by public intellectuals who wanted to create spaces and identities of their own in the sense of rural/regional place and locality (meaning important people, cities, provinces, etc.) to exist in the grand narratives of Thai national

history. These public intellectuals influenced the work of government agencies and academics in regional Rajabhat University networks and public universities. They all had backgrounds attached to nation-centric historical narratives and had served on government bodies in various departments. Therefore, the contents of those local histories tend to focus only on the parts that highlight the greatness of the locality in the past, and the relations with the center (Siam and Bangkok) in such a way that the locality has always been under the Thai-centric focus on the powerful authority in the center of the regime.

Local knowledge that was constructed will be disseminated to the people of each province through the government and public agencies, whose goal is to bring such knowledge to publicize the greatness of that province, echoing the important roles in the Thai-centric narratives. In addition, as curricula at all levels of educational institutes never regarded local studies education as a priority from the beginning, or never changed the concept of the study, the study of local knowledge within the framework of Thai national history has strong influence among public intellectuals, government officials, and people in each province, leading to the construction of localness by making one's own locality known publicly. These people believe that doing so will bring them honor, reputation, prestige, pride, and other qualities (Sattayanurak, 2004).

The issues discussed above are deeply related to the campaign for "Thai-ness in the rurality," which is systematically reproduced in public discourse in Thailand. It is evident in groups of words formed to denote the profoundness of rural areas, including the following: local sage, folk wisdom, local wisdom, self-reliance, sustainable agriculture, sufficiency economy, rural lifestyle, local community management, etc. In this regard, Sresunt (2011) explains that this view toward rurality is still dominant and powerful because Thai-ness in rural communities is constructed by local historical narratives focusing on peasant society: an idealistic past, later ruined by capitalism and western cultural imperialism. Thus, Thai people, today, must heed to support the campaign for Thai-ness in the rurality.

In light of public education and schooling in Thailand, educational reform policies and discourse have empowered schools to develop local curricula and various forms of culturally responsive curricula since the promulgation of the 1997 Thailand Constitution and the 1999 National Education Act. This factor makes possible space for curricular critique, deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction (Cornbleth, 1990). Public schools have ample space for constructing local curricula based on their own autonomy, democratic decision-making and participatory engagement, as demonstrated in the perspective of a school principal:

In some families, people made *tung Lanna*, (local woven cloth banners) or prepared traditional Lanna food. The students can learn from what we teach in the local curriculum, which covers local wisdom, food, and music. That is very useful because it has been used to help their families to earn more income. Some parents are also guest speakers for the school. Therefore, even if there is no budget, or no policy from above, the local curriculum remains the policy focus and vision of the school (School principal [Pseudonym], 2021).

When public schools are legitimized to develop a local curriculum on their own, local knowledge that is selected and distributed is therefore interpreted and represented in accordance with the policy promoting tourism, arts and culture, and education that emphasizes place-based education reform.

That one student can excel in a certain branch of local wisdom will benefit him or her in the future. For example, this student may dance well, and he/she would go on to become a good dancer in the next school. It will make him/her stand out and be able to earn money. For students who cook local food very well, they always told us what happened to them in new schools and how they earned income. Those who play traditional music are able to perform in their community, for example, to play folk music at funerals. That means they can use the skill in daily life,

while making money for themselves (Teacher A [Pseudonym], 2021).

As illustrated, local curriculum development in both of the schools in the study was interpreted and implemented based on local community contexts; economic and monetary values of local curriculum that supported students to have more capability to “make money” and “create monetary value” were an essential driving mechanism for schools to construct local curriculum for its own sake. Local curriculum in Chiang Mai’s urban municipality thus placed greater emphasis on the “basket weaving” method to merely insert cultural diversities such as food, costume, language, history as well as heroes, and traditions, and beliefs into the school curriculum rather than adhering to the principle of rural philosophy of education.

This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Tathong and Cadchumsang (2016), about the use of local curriculum and governmentality for social discipline in Khon Kaen province. The authors argue that the Lao *Sinsai* epic is a mechanism of power that in recent years has been utilized through symbols of the epic’s heroes in the form of sculptures, light poles, bus stop pavilions, municipal emblems, names of meeting rooms and municipal buildings; performances of *molam*, Isan shadow play, and modern theatre; as well as academic conferences and cultural traditions related to local communities and Khon Kaen University. It thus reflects the invention of cultural traditions and the commoditization process of culture, while fostering love for and pride in local culture among children and youth.

Local curriculum and the production of local knowledge have never been free from socio-cultural, political, historical, and economic contexts (Kanu, 2006). Rather, they exist in the cultural politics sphere of localism discourse that extends beyond the rhetorical debate on nostalgic and romanticized imagination of the past to the local-global nexus of knowledge, and as a result, will lead to the reconstruction of Lanna-ness identity in the context of globalization.

Conclusion

Conceptualizing local curriculum as cultural practices and understanding the commodification of Lanna culture and knowledge in the context of place-based education reform is not a superficial matter for educators, curriculum scholars, or policy officials. It is a dialectical process that involves many constructs that overlap each other on many levels. The study of interconnectedness of various constructs will lead to the explanation of structural changes in the political economy of education and curriculum policies, and will elucidate the real phenomenon of contemporary educational reform in various issues and contexts in the 21st century at local, regional, national, and global levels.

The importance of the curriculum lies not only in the methods used by educators to construct curricula, in relation to these powers, but the important issue is: how can we deconstruct and democratize curricula that transcend the dominance of capitalist/neoliberal-oriented discourse and empower diverse learners for their fullest potential? This is essential because conceptualizing local curricula as cultural practices provide leadership vision for educators to examine deeply how a curriculum is situated within sociopolitical and cultural politics with competing ideologies, discourses, and orientations as well as to imagine transformative possibilities and take critical action for curriculum changes both in policy and cultural practices.

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