

# Identity Construction within the Production Process of Thai Silk Weaving Groups in Khon Kaen Province<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This qualitative research studied identity construction within the silk production process of weaving groups in Khon Kaen province. In-depth interviewing and observation were used to collect data from 22 key informants, including representatives from *Dok Koon* and *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Groups, as well as other relevant organizations. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The study found both similarities and differences between the two Khon Kaen-based weaving groups' identity construction through their storytelling and silk production processes. In the first stage of the production process – raw material preparation – identity construction depended on the different objectives of the weaving groups (to weave and to sell the silk thread versus to weave only), which were certified by governmental organizations differently. The different skills of the two group members led to the difference of the silk preparation stage: Identity was constructed and it differed between the two groups based on their different stories of pattern creation methods (for example, *ikat*, a traditional tie-dyeing method, versus painting) as well as their different pattern designs in response to customer preferences (targeting a customer base that favored traditionally-patterned silk versus one favoring modern silk patterns). Finally, regarding the weaving stage, both groups applied their traditional local wisdom in the weaving process and used similar storytelling content in identity construction. The study unravels the intricacies of

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identity formation and its interplay with the evolving landscape of silk weaving in contemporary Thailand.

**Keywords:** identity construction, silk production process, silk weaving group

## Introduction

Identity construction is the making of meaning and identity that occurs through discourse (Foucault, 1994) and story creation (Giddens, 1991; Hall and Du Gay, 2001). An identity is often constructed with the aim of achieving acceptance in society. Callero (2003) explained that identity construction is shaped through power, reflexivity, and social constructionism. Identity construction shaped by power occurs when knowledge and discourse are controlled. Reflexivity shapes identity construction when there is a consciousness that one's identity is a product of the social structure. Finally, identity construction shaped by social constructionism is the result of integrating power and reflexivity. That is, it is shaped by an awareness that identity is both a product of and a power within society (Rosenberg, 1981). In other words, identity making can be a product of social structures and can also be the product of groups aiming to create stories that communicate meaning about their group's identity. This shows that “identity” is never completely fixed by society and is not something innate within us. A group's constructed identity can be the basis for feelings of acceptance and worth in society and can create feelings of ownership (Stets and Burke 2014). Identity construction can also increase access to resources (Malacarne 2017; Neugarten, 1946) and replace formerly harmful perceptions of the self that were rooted in stigmatization (Kaufman and Johnson, 2004). These benefits have led to numerous studies on identity construction in order to understand the relationship between identity and expressed behaviors and how these relationships are a product of historical, political, and social factors (Callero, 2003). Identity construction has thus been used to explain a range of social phenomena occurring in different groups within society, including groups formed on the basis of ethnicity (DaCosta, 2020), political ideologies (Opp, 2012), and gender identity

(Ghaziani, 2011). Research has also shown how identity construction in subgroups within society has led to the transformation of aspects of local culture into interesting products recognizable and accepted by society at large. This has occurred in many cultures and types of production groups, including those with a focus on food (Lopez and Martin, 2016; Sassatelli and Arfini, 2017), environment and natural resources (Joosse, 2016; Yoo, 2023), agriculture (Smith, 2019), and handicrafts (Sitabutr and Deebhijarn, 2017).

In Thailand, using the identity concept as a tool to analyze social phenomena was first applied toward replacing formerly negative perceptions of the self with new meanings, particularly among minority ethnic groups (Thomson, 1993; Kuroiwa and Verkuyten, 2008). It continued to be used to explain the plights and negotiations of other marginalized groups such as LGBT (Saiphan, 2002; Jarernpanit, Qing Ma, and Ye Wang, 2019), female teenagers (Watcharapongchai, 2007), confined mothers (Thongyou, Havanon, Phongsiri, and Mattariganond, 2023) and ex-substance users (Choorat and Sakunpong, 2022). The concept was expanded in its application in order to enhance existing identities, especially in groups producing local products. This was especially in response to Thailand's 2001 national policy aiming to support local people in creating handicraft production groups, known as the "One Tambon One Product" project (OTOP). In order to ensure these products would be accepted by consumers, government agencies took on the role of supporting local production groups' identity construction process (Community Development Department (CDD), Ministry of Interior of Thailand, 2020), with a particular focus on fabric production groups. The government has continuously implemented projects in order to support local production groups, with 34,667 registered OTOP products. For example, they have supported groups in creating "product stories," implemented the OTOP Product Champion Project (Community Development Department (CDD), Ministry of Interior of Thailand, 2020), and have promoted various skills through training, such as group management, production planning, production, product development, marketing, public relations, finances, and

accounting (Grisanaputi, 2016). To support fabric production groups specifically, the government has led campaigns to encourage consumers to buy and wear Thai fabrics through the OTOP Tourism Village Project; the OTOP City Festival; the OTOP Innovation Project; the 2021 project known as "Passing down and conserving Thai local fabrics, preserving them in the country;" and the 2023 project, "The fun of wearing Thai fabrics" (Community Development Department (CDD), Ministry of Interior of Thailand, 2023).

Northeast Thailand is a significant source of Thai silks, apparent by its geographical indication (GI) certifications in relation to fabric production groups. Thailand has only nine GI provinces for silk, six of which are in the Northeast: *Praewa* Silk of Kalasin; *Ikat Chonnabot* Silk of Khon Kaen; Natural Indigo Fabrics of Sakhon Nakhon; *Ikat Red-Hemmed* Silk of Buriram; Nong Sung's Fermented Mud Fabric of Mukdahan; and *Kep Ban Mueang Luang* Silk of Srisaket. The three other provinces are in the North of Thailand: *Teen Jok* Mae Jam Fabric of Chiang Mai; *Lamphun Yok Dok* Silk of Lamphun; and Woven Cotton Blend Fleece of Huai Hom Village, Mae Hong Son province (Department of Intellectual Property, 2016). Khon Kaen province is at the center of silk production in the Northeast, particularly Chonnabot district, which produces a high-quality, beautiful *ikat* silk. This is evidenced by its designation as a World City for *Ikat* Fabrics. Handweaving practices in Khon Kaen, along with creative, elaborate patterns and the detail-oriented *ikat* method, have been passed down from generation to generation. This has resulted in Khon Kaen's *ikat* silks being awarded over 60 UNESCO Craft Prizes (World Craft Council (WCC AISBL) International, 2018). Moreover, an interesting aspect of the silk weaving groups in the context of Chonnabot district is that of identity construction. Ton Nam Village (pseudonym) is a village with two silk weaving groups: *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group (pseudonym) and *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group (pseudonym). Each group constructs their own identity by telling their own unique story about their different silk weaving process, despite having inherited their knowledge from shared ancestors.

The case of these two silk weaving groups at the local level shows that groups with a common historical, political, and social context may still construct distinct identities. Thanks to globalization, the opportunity to choose how to tell your own story, revealing your identity to a wider audience, has increased (Arnett, 2002). Groups may engage in storytelling in order to meet social norms (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Vergne and Wry, 2014; Butsalee, Utiram and Ketsripongsa, 2019; Dononbao and Peerasan, 2020; Jasovska et al., 2023) or to meet their own group's needs or goals (Vergne and Wry, 2014; Chamnian, 2021).

In light of these observations, this study seeks to unravel the intricacies of identity construction within the silk production process of Thai silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province. By examining how these groups navigate their cultural identity amidst globalization and social change, the research aims to address the fundamental question: How do silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province construct and negotiate their identities through the intricate process of silk production? This inquiry forms the cornerstone of our objective to delve deeper into the dynamics of identity construction within this rich cultural tradition.

## Objective and Methods

The objective of this research was to study identity construction as it relates to the silk production process among silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province. Because of the clear scope of this research in terms of content, time, place, and overall context, a case study was conducted using qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach (Podhisita, 2016). The objective of the study was to understand identity construction through storytelling via word of mouth, Facebook brochures, certified quality symbols, and exhibitions as they relate to the silk production process in Khon Kaen silk weaving groups. The study area was Ton Nam village (pseudonym), Chonnabot district, Khon Kaen province, where both the *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group (pseudonym) and *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group (pseudonym) are located. This district was chosen due to its importance and reputation as a source of silk

production, as illustrated by its designation as a World City for *ikat* Fabrics (World Craft Council (WCC AISBL) International, 2018). In addition, the study area was chosen because of the differences in identity construction between the two groups despite their common geographical and historical context, which are normally regarded as two important contextual factors related to identity construction.

*Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group unofficially began working together within their kinship network in 1981, applying local wisdom to guide them in their work. They produced silk thread as raw material for weaving fabrics and silks to sell to the Chitralada Arts and Crafts Center. Later, in 1996, the group was formally registered, and management became more structured with roles distributed among group members. In 2001, the group joined the government's One Tambon One Product (OTOP) Project, aiming to advance their local knowledge, resources, and group members' abilities, as well as construct their group's identity in order to add value to their products. In this spirit, the group decided to construct their identity around the concept of conserving traditional weaving practices. Meanwhile, the *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group was officially founded in 1983. Likewise rooted in the application of "local wisdom" inherited from their ancestors, the group engaged in silk weaving as a supplementary income. At that time, the group lacked any outstanding identity or story. Later, in 2001, they also joined the OTOP Project and were subsequently encouraged to engage in identity construction for the group. Similar to the *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group, they chose to create an identity around the idea of passing on wisdom from their ancestors. In 2012, however, this group had the opportunity to join a participatory action research (PAR) project aimed at developing new products, conducted in collaboration with the government and researchers. This PAR project facilitated the group's experimentation with traditional *ikat* patterns, resulting in innovative uses of paintbrushes to help the group add new patterns to the fabric. Presently, *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group has created and produced more than 300 patterns of its own. From this experience, aside from gaining the knowledge necessary for modernizing their fabric patterns,

the group members learned that in designing fabric patterns, their local environment was not a limiting factor. They gained a new perspective through an artistic type of pattern formation called Op Art, a type of patterning that emphasizes geometric shapes. This transformed the group's identity from one focused on tradition to one focused on modernity.

The unit of analysis used in this study was the group level, with two sets of informants: 1) representatives from the two silk weaving groups, including 20 individuals, namely, the group presidents and vice presidents, committee members, public relations representatives, and marketing representatives; and 2) two representatives from other relevant agencies, who helped to build understanding about the silk weaving groups' identity construction within the *ikat* silk weaving process. Tools used in the research and in gathering data included in-depth interviewing based on pre-established interview guidelines and participatory and non-participatory observation approaches. Pseudonyms were used in all cases to protect informants' privacy and informants' needs were protected at every level during the interview process according to ethical principles for researchers in the humanities field. This research passed certification by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Khon Kaen University, No. 4.3.01: 20/2563, on 15 November 2020 (Project No. HE633149). Triangulation was used to check the data for accuracy (Podhisita, 2016), and descriptive analytics were used to analyze the data.

## Results

The silk production process consists of three steps: raw material preparation, silk thread preparation, and silk weaving. According to the research findings, for each step, both of the silk weaving groups incorporated identity construction toward their product in the ways described below.

## Raw Material Preparation

The raw material preparation step refers to production of the raw silk thread used in silk weaving and involves planting mulberries, raising silkworms, and silk reeling. Both groups used storytelling to construct their identities, as follows.

**1. Planting mulberry trees:** Both groups were found to engage in telling the story of how they managed their mulberry tree plantations in line with standards outlined by GAP (good agricultural practices). Before receiving their certification, both groups had to send their mulberry planters to a government-led training session, where they learned how to systematically manage their mulberry plantation, including how to safeguard against chemicals by using organic fertilizers. They learned that these fertilizers needed to undergo a fermentation process prior to use on the plantation, as raw manure may still contain gases that are the source of disease. The training and certification thus ensure that the mulberry leaves produced on the plantation are safe for consumption by silk worms according to GAP standards set by the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

**2. Rearing silkworms:** *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group's storytelling revealed their objective to produce silk thread not only for the group's own weaving but also for selling. In their storytelling, they therefore emphasized the care they take to raise the silkworms for both a high-yield and high-quality product. They achieve this through systematically managing every step of the process, starting with sourcing the silkworm eggs from the Queen Sirikit Sericulture Center in Khon Kaen and moving them into the silkworm rearing house back at the group's station, where the group members divide the responsibilities of tending the silkworm eggs. In the first stages, from looking after the eggs until the first hatch, and then rearing them until their second stage of life (5-7 days after hatching), group members who have been trained in rearing young silkworms take responsibility for the rearing. After this, announcements are made to the wider group, to others interested



in the village, and to a network of silkworm raisers in other villages that the silkworms are ready to be picked up for distribution. For this reason, the silkworms, carefully managed by this group, are strong and ready to provide a high-quality product of silk thread that meets the standards necessary for certification of Thai Agricultural Standard TAS 5900-2559, Good Practices for Producing Raw Silk Thread. One of the group members, aged 73 and a representative *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group, explained,

Our group was well known for planting mulberry trees and rearing silkworms. In the village, we were the only group rearing silkworms beginning with the larval stage (3-5 days). This was our strength to draw attention from others to visit and learn about larval stage rearing (Anong [Pseudonym], 2022).

Meanwhile, the *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group describes the meaning of their identity construction in terms of rearing silkworms strictly for their own weaving. They have group members who rear the silkworms as raw material for weaving, and members weave the silk into sheets that can be sold, a more affordable option than buying the more expensive, commercialized silk thread. By selling the silk thread in woven sheets rather than as the unprocessed raw silk thread, the group members also gain more income, as the latter has a lower price. After the group sources their silkworm eggs from the Queen Sirikit Sericulture Center, they distribute the eggs to group members who have been trained in rearing young silkworms, and those members take care of the eggs in their own silkworm rearing houses. A 67-year-old representative of this group stated,

Group members were encouraged to raise their silkworms to reduce fixed cost. You should not only sell silk yarn but you also had to weave as well to earn money. Selling silk yarn did not make any money (Muk [Pseudonym], 2022).

**3. Silk reeling:** Both groups constructed their identity through telling the story of their silk reeling process, which is done in a traditional

manner by hand, or using a small silk spinner. This storytelling confirms the authenticity of their handicraft. In addition, both groups talk about the uniqueness of the silk thread spun by this process of silk reeling. That is, the spinning process causes irregularities in the outer and inner layers of the silk thread. When this thread is used in the weaving process, the silk is uneven to the touch. This means that every silk fabric woven by handspun silk is one of a kind.

### **Silk Thread Preparation**

Preparation for the weaving process begins with bleaching the silk thread. It is then stretched onto a yarn tension device where the pattern can be created (using the *ikat* process and painting or scoring the thread). The present study found that both silk weaving groups constructed their identities so as to clearly reveal their goals as well as their identities through storytelling about their pattern design methods. The *Dok Koon* group opts to create their patterns using traditional *ikat* methods, whereas the *Ratchaphruk* group creates patterns using both *ikat* and painting techniques in order to design more modern patterns.

The *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group: Their storytelling was aimed at constructing an identity showcasing the group's traditional methods of pattern design and production, responding to the demands of consumers who admire and prefer traditional patterns. In creating their patterns, the group mixes design methods from various other local cultures in Thailand, namely traditional *batik* patterns, knowledge about which the group gained from government outreach. The group uses *batik* characteristics derived from nature, such as flowers, trees, or geometric shapes, and creates unique patterns unlike the traditional, local *ikat* patterns. However, they continue to use the traditional *ikat* methods to create the patterns rather than painting them the way *batik* patterns are conventionally made. Since the group members' expertise is in *ikat* patterning, they are able to create detailed patterns using this technique. Regardless, the technique is time consuming and complex, both in terms of creating the patterns and dyeing the threads. As dyeing takes one day per color, the more colors in a pattern, the longer the

process will take. A 73-year-old representative from the *Dok Koon* group explained,

Our silk fabrics used to have five colors, consisting of yellow, white, purple, red and fuchsia. Some of them added the sixth color, which was tamarind seed color. The colorful shades of our silk fabric make our products outstanding (Anong [Pseudonym], 2022).

The finished product depends on both the time and effort of the weaver. In summary, the production group aims to create patterns that respond to consumer preferences, particularly those interested in traditional, detail-oriented, and exquisite patterns.

The *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group tells stories that help to construct an identity based on novelties in the design and production of patterns, responding to consumers who prefer and appreciate more modern designs. They do this by emphasizing the development of their pattern-designing techniques, beginning with their participation in a research project aimed at developing silk production. This led to the group's ability to develop new methods for creating fabric patterns using paintbrushes to paint rather than using traditional *ikat* techniques. It also decreased the time necessary for dyeing from days to just one day regardless of the number of colors used in the pattern. As was mentioned earlier, the group's continuing participation in training focusing on pattern design for fabrics led to the group's being influenced by a modern artistic form of pattern design called Op Art, a universal art. The group was able to take this method of pattern design that they had learned in the training and apply it to their later work. When the present study was conducted, the group had designed more than 300 silk patterns. Their ability to respond to consumer demand has led to the group's maxim: "Production-led marketing; marketing-led production." One of the group members, aged 67, recalled,

We had to design new patterns quite often because our patterns were always copied. We also had to design new collections regularly. The customers would not buy patterns they already had. They wanted new patterns (Muk [Pseudonym], 2022).

In other words, the patterns that this group creates are targeted toward consumers who prefer to wear Thai fabrics with a significant modernistic element to them. This is evidenced in the number of patterns produced by the group, which are created continuously in an effort to match their product with the popular consumer trends of the day.

### **Silk Weaving**

During the weaving step, two types of silk thread are interwoven together: the warp (longitudinal) threads and the weft (transverse) threads. A shuttle is passed through the shed (the opening between the warp yarns) and then the weft yarn is packed into the cloth by "beating up" (using the reed or "beater"). This weaving process is repeated for each thread until the fabric is finished. The present study found that both groups constructed their identity using storytelling that reflected the value of the knowledge passed down to them from their ancestors. They told their stories through portrayals of the traditional equipment which they preserved and continued to use for silk weaving, including the traditional loom, shuttle, (silk) thread spools, loom brush, treadles, wooden castle (which holds the shafts), and the beater. While some of the materials that are used to make the equipment had changed, the traditional style of all of the equipment has been preserved. Stories were told of both groups' weavers and their expertise and many years of experience. Yet, it is not only the group members' weaving experience that guarantees the quality of each piece of silk fabric; both groups also talk about the quality assessment that goes into each piece, including the symmetry of the patterns woven into the fabric. For example, if there is a triangular pattern, it should not be tilted or distorted in any one direction. This quality assessment assures that careful attention is paid during the weaving process and guarantees the high quality of every piece of fabric woven by both groups, as each piece has met various set standards, such as the OTOP Product Level of 5 stars, community product standards, geographical indication (GI) criteria, or standards required for using the Thai silk brand. In fact, both groups have produced silk that meets royal Thai silk certification standards, the highest existing

standard. In the production of this silk, thread derived from indigenous silkworms must be used for both the warp and weft threads, it should be woven by hand using a traditional, local loom, and the thread must be dyed using natural dyes. In summary, both groups construct their identity in relation to the weaving process by talking about the traditional methods they use, which facilitate production of silk fabrics that are not only of the highest quality, but also meet various certification standards.

In conclusion, identity construction in the silk weaving production process among weaving groups in Khon Kaen province includes the following steps: raw material preparation, thread preparation, and weaving. The aspects of identity construction in each step of the production process are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** Identity construction in the silk weaving production process among silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province

Silk weaving production process	Identity construction among silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province		Summary of similarities and differences in identity construction	Reasons/ facilitating factors	Identity construction (characteristics/ meanings)
	Dok Koon Silk Weaving Group	Ratchaphruk Silk Weaving Group			
<b>1. Raw material preparation</b>					
- Mulberry planting	Storytelling emphasizes mulberry planting that meets GAP standards	Storytelling emphasizes mulberry planting that meets GAP standards	Same (mulberry planting that meets GAP standards)	To meet the standard of GAP (good agricultural practices), which was promoted by the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the expectation of consumers)	Standardization; Institutional endorsement

**Table 1** Identity construction in the silk weaving production process among silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province (cont.)

Silk weaving production process	Identity construction among silk weaving groups in Khon Kaen province		Summary of similarities and differences in identity construction	Reasons/ facilitating factors	Identity construction (characteristics/ meanings)
	Dok Koon Silk Weaving Group	Ratchaphruk Silk Weaving Group			
- Rearing silkworms	Storytelling emphasizes the systematic management of rearing the young larvae for purposes of weaving as well as selling the silk thread. Then, the quality of silk yarn has to meet standards necessary for Certificate of the Thai Agricultural Standard TAS5900-2559.	Storytelling about silkworm rearing for the purposes of weaving only. Therefore, the requirement of standard measures is not necessary.	Different (the purposes for silkworm rearing)	The differences of the groups' purposes of usages	Traditional wisdom; Purposive selection of institutional endorsement
- Silk reeling	Storytelling about silk reeling by hand	Storytelling about silk reeling by hand	Same (silk reeling by hand)	Local wisdom	Uniqueness; Traditional wisdom
<b>2. Silk thread preparation</b>					
- silk thread pattern formation	Storytelling emphasizes <i>ikat</i> methods of pattern formation and meeting consumer demand among consumers who prefer traditional patterns	Storytelling emphasizes painting methods of pattern formation and meeting consumer demand among consumers who prefer modern patterns	Different (methods for pattern formation and responding to consumer demand)	Being trained by the Provincial Community Development Office of Khon Kaen and the desires of customers	Cultural preservation; Traditional wisdom; Modernity with cultural roots; Consumer responsiveness
<b>3. Silk weaving</b>	Storytelling emphasizes knowledge of traditional weaving practices and weaving skills of experienced group members	Storytelling emphasizes knowledge of traditional weaving practices and weaving skills of experienced group members	Same (weaving knowledge and skills)	Local wisdom	Uniqueness; Traditional wisdom

## Conclusion and Discussion

This qualitative research delved into identity construction within the silk production process of weaving groups in Khon Kaen province. The study uncovered both similarities and differences in identity construction between these groups, particularly evident in their storytelling and silk production processes. Notably, in the raw material preparation stage, identity construction varied based on the groups' objectives and certification by governmental organizations. Differences in skills among group members influenced the silk preparation stage, while disparities in pattern creation methods and designs reflected distinct approaches to customer preferences. However, in the weaving stage, both groups applied traditional local wisdom, reinforcing their identities through similar storytelling content.

This study found two types of storytelling for the purposes of identity construction related to the silk weaving production process among Khon Kaen silk weaving groups. The first type was defined by references to institutional endorsements, particularly in the context of having met various standards (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Vergne and Wry, 2014; Butsalee, Utiram and Ketsripongsa, 2019; Dononbao and Peerasan, 2020; Jasovska et al., 2023). This type of storytelling was exemplified by both silk weaving groups when they referenced their GAP standard certification for their mulberry tree plantations. Other referenced standards included the 5-star standard, community product standards, the royal Thai silk brand, and geographical indication (GI) criteria. The groups also referenced the knowledge that they had gained from government agencies, which led to both groups modifying their techniques and their pattern designs in order to meet social norms relating to beauty and utility. Finally, both groups received institutional endorsements in the form of the help they received in increasing the credibility of their stories, as they were guided in sourcing their raw materials from a reliable source (Charungkiattikul and Joneurairatana, 2021), and in getting their production practices up to a certain quality and standard (Toombs, 2023). The second type of storytelling was

rooted in the goals of each group (Vergne and Wry, 2014; Chamnian, 2021; Kuikaew and Panichkul, 2022). This was apparent in the different storytelling purposes of each group. As the *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group aimed to construct an identity entrenched in preserving traditional knowledge, their storytelling emphasized the traditional origins that were preserved in their *ikat* pattern formation techniques. Meanwhile, as the *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group's aim was to carry on their ancestors' knowledge through modernity, their storytelling stressed their modern pattern formation techniques using paintbrushes and their modern art designs.

The fact that the two groups decided to construct different identities is indicative of the different goals of each group in terms of meaning making (Jasovska et al, 2023; Sysomphanh and Promphakping, 2022). The *Dok Koon* Silk Weaving Group has the goal of constructing an identity accepted by and attractive to people interested in elaborate handicrafts; their target group is, therefore, people middle-aged or older. *Ratchaphruk* Silk Weaving Group, on the other hand, aims to be accepted by both middle-aged people and the newest generation of consumers who are interested in wearing Thai dress but desire an aspect of modernity suitable to their age. This weaving group also aims to market to global consumers. From a sociological perspective, the identity construction that is manifested in both groups is a type of marketing strategy that uses storytelling about the production group in order to influence buyers by attracting consumer interest and integrating information into consumers' memories. Identity construction through storytelling can also create for the consumer a feeling of connection to the process that takes place prior to the finished product being ready for use (Grisanaputi, 2016). Appreciation for the production group as well as the product, itself, thus helps to add value to the product, and ultimately, contributes to the production group's ability to survive. For these reasons, silk producing groups construct identities through storytelling, communicating meaning relevant to the worth, and value derived from the production process.



One more interesting finding was that identity construction that differentiated between the two groups necessitated the allocation of capital to support storytelling of the group. While this issue is outside the scope of the present study, the use of capital to support the group's storytelling and increase its credibility was apparent as part of the identity construction process. The types of capital include cultural (local wisdom on silk weaving), natural (mulberry plantation in line, silkworm rearing for producing silk yarn) symbolic (receiving a standard certificate from a governmental organization) and human capital. In particular, human capital in the form of the groups' members played a significant role. Aside from being responsible for telling the groups' stories and creating art to represent their group identity (Vergne and Wry, 2014), the ability to reference institutional endorsements from agencies responsible for certification depends on the human capital of the group members, who must operate the group's activities so as to meet the evaluation criteria of the institution or agency. Therefore, the capital needed to differentiate the two groups is not only in the form of equipment and resources (Swidler, 1986; Freese and Burke, 1994; Stets and Cast, 2007; Burke and Stets, 2009), which is just one of the components of identity formation. In the Thai social context, capital should be considered an important factor leading to successful identity construction among weaving groups, particularly human capital that must be cultivated in the form of group members' capacities. In these cases, group members are the core of the enterprise and will determine the effectiveness of other supporting factors and other types of capital.

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