

Abstract

This research aims to examine the nature of invented traditions of the floating market at Khlong Hae community in Songkhla province of southern Thailand with two following objectives. Firstly, the study investigates processes of invented culture at the floating market. Secondly, it explores how contested meanings and development of the floating market have been endorsed by different interest groups locally. In his attempts to understand the nature of invented traditions at the floating market, the researcher has employed an anthropological field research methodology to collect field data. The use of key informants and participant observations were conducted from time to time at the field level between 2009 and 2010. Also, relevant documents were collected. The researcher has adopted the concept of invented traditions proposed by Hobsbawm to be the main conceptual frame of the study. The concept helps generate research questions and analyze field data.

Research findings confirm that processes of reinvented traditions at the Khlong Hae floating market reflect the rural nostalgia of their cultural past of community people through the revival and preservation of hygienic canal, traditional local dance, food and handicrafts. Also, the myth of community origin and history has been reconstructed in relation with Phra Borom That stupa and popular Buddhist beliefs highlighting their community identities as moral, prosperous and civilized. During the processes of reinvented culture, various local interest groups including the local municipality, the monastery committee, the network of U-Tapaw environmental preservation group, and the Bang Klam teachers' group have contested the meanings of the floating market in order to protect their interests.

The Khlong Hae floating market is not only an amazing sight-seeing spot for tourists who have nostalgia of local community cultural past, but has also provided a negotiating space for different interest groups, especially the municipality group and the monastery group to define community identities through reinvented traditions. While the monastery group has promoted a kind of community culture-oriented floating

market, emphasizing local community culture, such as organizing community people for cleaning and preserving the Khlong Hae canal, paying homage to Phra Borom That stupa and supporting a group of Nora local dance, the municipality group aims to promote the floating market for tourism highlighting three main reinvented cultural past including the revival of the local floating market, promoting traditional costume wearing and selling local food and products. In addition, the Khlong Hae floating market has become a space for competition between the municipality group and the monastery group in attempting to win the hearts of community fellows to support their floating market development scheme and attracting tourists to visit their respective areas of supervision at the floating market.

The study has confirmed that reinvented traditions not only reiterate the nature and processes of community cultural past revival, but reflect negotiating and conflicting processes of meaning construction to define community culture by various groups within and outside the community based upon their interests.