

Abstract

This thesis studies the construction of Chiangmai people's imagined Lanna identity through the performance of Sabatchai Drum in contemporary Chiangmai. I employ the conceptual framework of imagined identity and the anthropological study of music and performance in this study. Research methodology applied ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Chiangmai conducted January 2008 – April 2009.

I found that "imagined Lanna identity," which contextualizes the performance of Sabatchai Drum, has been constructed since 1957. During such period Chiangmai became rapidly urbanized in two main conditions: the rise of agricultural commercial production on a replacement to production for consumption and the rise of tourist industry. Under such conditions, Chiangmai profoundly changes both in its physical condition and social relation. The construction of "imagined Lanna identity" existing from 1957 until the 700th anniversary of Chiangmai (1996) creates two major contradictory characteristics: the imagined identity as "commodity" and the imagined identity as "local wisdom." This contradiction appears in the identity of Sabatchai Drum presented as "contemporary Sabatchai Drum" and "traditional Sabatchai Drum." However, as seen from the performance, the two definitions are not absolutely different. The meanings are overlapped.

In the same direction of the growth of Chiangmai city, the popularity of Sabatchai Drum performance not only expands into the modern context. This popularity also extends the role of the Sabatchai Drum in the context of the Buddhist local traditions and ceremonies, although previously Sabatchai Drum had never existed in this context. Demonstrated in the performance of Sabatchai Drum in Poi Luang ceremony and Chiangmai's New Year celebration, Sabatchai Drum is adaptively identified as "offering to the Buddha" and "tourist entertainment."

The variation of the imagined identity also occurs in the level of drum performers. The study reveals that each drum performance band constructs its specific imagined identity through stories and performances including (1) the system of training (2) the performance style represented in sounds and gestures (3) the background explained by the groups. The identities constructed by different drum performance

bands are means of cultural politics. The identities are employed by the bands to struggle for various kinds of capital circulating in the “field” of performance. Not only does the imagined Lanna identity reveals how identity is constructed in several dimensions but it also reveals both local and non-local people’s struggle for the “Lanna-ness.” The imagined Lanna identity can be varied, depending on political and cultural objectives of each party.