



Utilizing cultural capital to create the identity of the silk weaving group

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a qualitative research on the use of cultural capital to create the identity of silk produced by the weaving group in northeast Thailand (Isan). Data was collected from ten key informants who were committee members of the silk weaving groups, and eight officials from government agencies, academics and eight consumers at Ton Nam Village (Pseudonym) in the Northeast. The village was an area where the phenomenon of cultural capital was used in weaving the silk production to create each group's identity. The created identity was expected to gain acceptance from consumers and to increase sales. Data were collected from November 2020 to July 2021. Data were analyzed and presented in a descriptive manner. The results showed how cultural capital was used by the silk weaving groups in three ways: 1) embodies state), 2) the objectified state, and 3) the institutionalization state in presenting a group that preserves and carries on local wisdom to the world for the group to gain confidence and accepted by consumers.

Keywords: cultural capital, group identity, silk weaving group

¹This article is part of the dissertation titled "Isan Silk Weaving Groups: Weaving Varieties of Capital and Identity into Fabric" and received funding from Research Fund for Supporting Lecturer to Admit High Potential Student to Study and Research on His Expert Program Year 2018



1. Introduction

The study of identity over the past two centuries has broadened the perspective of research focused on intrinsic influences resulting from identity to focusing on the external influences (Thoits & Virshup, 1997; Owens, 2003), such as the influence of the institution's social structure and the various forms of capital arising from globalization that reflect the increasing differences of social life (Bourdieu, 1984; Frank & Meyer, 2002), especially the influence of capital to create power in identity suitable for one's self (Bourdieu, 1986).

The phenomenon of creating the identity of the silk products made by the weaving groups had arisen from the transformation of silk production from a means making a living to a business. In the past, weaving was considered either the part of the art of being a housewife passed on from generation to generation, or a traditional way for making garments for domestic use (Dechwittayaporn, 2005). However, changes in economic conditions, in particular, the transition from a sufficiency economy to a capitalist economy, which came with the ideology development resulted in the implementation of the National Economic and Social Development Plan as a guideline for the country development (Puntharik, 2001). Accordingly, silk production has expanded from micro production to enterprise, to entrepreneurs in peri-urban areas, to achieve a large scale and competitive market, the weaving group in the community were to add value as well as to create identity for the silk products.

Accordingly, forming weavers in the same and nearby areas to be a group was considered as an appropriate way to enhance both value proposition and value addition to the existing business. It was also a mechanism to improve the design and quality of the silk products which had long been criticized as less attractive for buyers compared to the textile industrial products (Teerasawat, 2015; Pipitkul, 2016). Considering silk production was a source of income to enhance the livelihoods of small-scale weavers, the government encouraged weavers to form a group in two models: community enterprise and OTOP, or One Tambon (sub-district), One Product, (Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior), 2015). The policy was expected to be a tool to strengthen unity and enhance creativity, and the communities. group so that weaving products were better known globally and was able to compete in the international market (Vecco, Montagner & Srakar, 2020; Sanpa, 2020; Cherdchoo, Umasin, Tanaspansarrat, Chotimukta, & Yoosuk, 2020; Roadkasamsri, & Sikka, 2021). As a result, it was significant to study how cultural capital was used to leverage the weaving profession to be accepted and known to the global



consumers. Thus, silk patterns should reflect the uniqueness and identity of the product, and this would differentiate them from the industrial products with their own weaving group's cultural capital; the products' distinguishing characteristics was a different proposition leading to a sustainable growth of the business.

2. Research Methodology

A study on the use of cultural capital to create the identity of the silk weaving group employed a qualitative research methodology, following the phenomenological research approach to gain insights into the phenomenon of the use of cultural capital of a silk weaving group. The key informants were those from each silk weaving group including, 1) Ten key informants: silk weaving group's members, namely chairman, vice chairman, committee, public relations staff, and marketing staff. They were to learn about the use of cultural capital of the silk weaving group both what the embodiment of the cultural goods and institutional acceptance were. The group would use the concept to create their identity, and 2) Eight key informants who were government officials, academics and consumers to learn about the influence of the silk weaving group's cultural capital. The research site was Ton Nam Village (Pseudonym), which was a village in Northeastern Thailand where the phenomenon of cultural capital to be used to create the product identity to promote the sales. The in-depth interview was used, together with the use of participatory and non-participatory observation approaches. Data were collected from November 2020 to July 2021, and validated using a triangular technique (Podhisita, 2016). The data were then analyzed by content analysis to study the use of cultural capital of the silk weaving group to create their product identity.

3. Results

In presenting the results of this research, the characteristics of the silk weaving group, and the use of cultural capital according to Bourdieu's view, which reflects the reasons in choosing the identity of the silk weaving group from the power-generating capital that helps create acceptance with an interpretive analysis approach from the appearance of the silk weaving group are to be discussed.

3.1 Characteristics of the silk weaving group

Previously, Ton Nam villagers practiced handloom weaving cotton garments for their everyday use, and weaved silk garments for religious and special occasions, and to offer as a token for example silk is given to pay respect to the bridegroom's senior relatives at the wedding ceremony.



Later in 1975, the Arts and Crafts Center at Chitralada Garden encouraged people in the community to weave garments to sell to the center to generate income. At Ton Nam Village, the community started to informally establish a group, and then registered as a Farmer Housewife group under the Department of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in 1981. Later, in 2001 to comply with the community economy policy, the group was renamed OTOP, aiming to generate income to the community by producing local products for sale (Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, 2015). Similarly, the silk weaving group in Ton Nam Village has been supported by the Department of Community Development to make silk products with the local wisdom and to promote them to be better known and accepted among international customers. To achieve such a goal, the silk weaving group looked to develop its identity to allow the group's product to present its unique characteristics to guide its way to enter the marketplace, as stated by the committee.

‘... value creation is based on how well the product speaks to the buyers. If you just make it and sell it off, you can just sell it at a low price. However, if you can make the product speak to the buyers with its identity, you can get a higher price from it...’ (Mrs.Kanya, Pseudonym, age 57 years).

To make the introduction the identity of the group credible, the group members were to find an appropriate combination of the group's cultural capital and the current global wisdom to gain confidence and acceptance in the group's products.

3.2 Using cultural capital to create the identity of the silk weaving group

Using cultural capital to create the identity of the silk weaving group in presenting the image of the group in preserving and carrying on the local wisdom to the world is considered a wise way to gain confidence and acceptance from consumers. The silk weaving group uses its cultural capital in three ways: cultural capital in people; cultural goods and institutional acceptance as to be detailed. Using what is embedded in people to create the identity of the silk weaving group

Beliefs of local people are used to create the identity of the group through the pattern of silk that they weave. The design of the patterns on the fabric reflects people's beliefs. and the context of the areas where they live. The silk weaving group therefore designs the fabric patterns



by using everyday objects and the environment such as plants, flowers, animals, culture, etc. The presentation of the group's identity is reflected through the patterns on the fabric. This is a significant part of the process for the pattern design to meet the international consumer demand (Cherdchoo, Umasin, Tanaspansarrat, Chotimukta, & Yoosuk, 2020; Roadkasamsri, & Sikka, 2021). The beliefs of the weaving group at Ton Nam Village are not merely limited to making the product attractive to consumers. Moreover, the group uses its ideas and beliefs to preserve and carry on its local wisdom to the world. Accordingly, the product designs are more universal such as an integration of the traditional patterns with the geometric designs.

This well responds to the group's mission in preserving local culture from the inheritance by the new generation. To achieve the mission, the weaving should be simple, easy to learn, while the product design is made practical for contemporary use. The mission is accomplished if the customers accept the products identity and are aware that they are not only the buyers, but also the contributors to the persistence of the local weaving wisdom. The purchases are to create morale from having jobs and income as well as support the new generation to be part of the silk weaving profession in the community.

Promoting the use of cultural products to create the identity of the weaving group

Under this scheme, the group's members are encouraged to promote it, wearing silk costumes and using other products. which represents the ownership of the identity of cultural capital that has inherited the weaving culture. The group members wear the silk products in various occasions both in the formal and in everyday life. This also creates the values of silk apparels which were originally worn only for ceremonial events. Nowadays, silk is also made to suit everyday culture, for example robes, suits, dresses, bags, and fabric masks. This indicates the integration between new and old silk products (Cherdchoo, Umasin, Tanaspansarrat, Chotimukta & Yoosuk, 2020) led to the group's success in introducing local wisdom to the world.

It is perceived that the possession of weaving equipment helps the group to preserve the local culture, the group has been gathering silk weaving equipment such as Kong, Ak Nai, bobbins, looms, looms, etc., which are devices that cannot be found in the general community, to display at the center. The equipment on display is also used to demonstrate the weaving process, and to increase the value of cultural heritage by collecting the cultural products related to weaving. As mentioned by the committee of the silk weaving group.



“...as known that the group has a learning building, and the weaving equipment, anyone who wishes to become part of this project can come in and learn weaving from the members who will demonstrate. the whole weaving processes. Visitors can enjoy product display addition, there will be a demonstration of weaving...” (Mrs. Sunee, pseudonym, 68 years old)

The use of cultural capital in the form of material allows group 's identities, originally abstracted, unclear, to become visible and tangible. This gains credibility and acceptance for the product identity.

Promoting recognition from the institution to create the acceptance identity of the silk weaving group

Acceptance by the institutions promotes the confidence in existing products and the group' s identity in serving as the preserver and heir of the local wisdom. As a result, some group members were awarded the 'The Craftsman's Master Certificate,' in 2013. Later in 2016, the group members also received the 'The Craftsman's Heir Certificate,' As said by the committee of the silk weaving group (Mrs, Sunee, pseudonym, 68 years old)

“...I received the Master Craftsman's certificate, and my daughter obtained 'The Craftsman's Heir Certificate.' It's not easy. You must take the exam. Heir also takes the exam until you pass it. It is an international competition among Crafts and Arts centers from many countries. Finally, there are only the skilled craftsmen who got the award' (Mrs. Sunee, Pseudonym, 68 years old).

The silk weaving group has well-trained artisans who specialize in weaving from the special institute, which is scarce in the local area. The selection of potential applicants to join class is known as the rigor. Having the cultural capital as a device to gain credibility and the fact that the group owns this kind of cultural capital and uses it to represent the group's identity. The silk weaving group is confidence in its position. The group's prominence is even more credible (Vecco, Montagner&Srakar, 2020) with empirical evidence reflecting the cultural capital that underscores the group's globalization of indigenous knowledge.



The study results point out that the use of cultural capital to create the identity of the silk weaving group has given rise to power to create an identity suited to its profile (Bourdieu, 1986). Even though the creation of the identity of the silk weaving group is influenced by external influences (Thoits&Virshup, 1997; Owens, 2003), the group can be strengthened to be entrepreneurs who can produce products with local wisdom to meet the needs of the international market. The business is likely to sell and generate income for the livelihood of the villagers. Moreover, it is important that the group as this one can both present a cultural capital that it preserves and inherit local wisdom to the world. Thus, the impacts are far beyond making the product stand out.

In addition to the above study results, this article focuses on the issue of the distinctiveness of the group identity that will lead to the development of the weaving silk group. In the concept of identity used to verify identity It is also associated with prominence (Stryker, 2004), with highly distinguished identities being more likely to present one's identity rather than non-dominant identities (Burke, 1991, 1996). In other words, the silk weavers want the group to have a distinctive identity; therefore, it must continuously represent the group's identity. Without the continuation of the identity representation, the group's identities, the prominence of the identities fade. In this case, reestablishing its distinctive identity, the group may need to change their presented identities by comparing from the perceptions that customers have previously had on their identities. However, if the silk weaving group doesn't try to make its identity stand out, customers may lose confidence and acceptance in the products, making the group unsuccessful.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study reflects that the value of silk weaving products can be created in more ways than product development. Another effective way is to use the cultural capital to create the identity of the products. This can be done by using what is embedded in the people who are the weavers to reflect on the products they make. This means that the silk products will reveal the group's beliefs. Also, the identity of the silk products can be enhanced from the design of clothes and other products to suit everyday use. In addition, acceptance and confidence in the products can be promoted by having the collections of genuine silk weaving equipment to display at the center, together with the weaving demonstration by artisans who specialize in weaving, gurus and experts who are recognized by accredited institutions. This is an important part of creating consumers' trust. In summary, value creation of the products can be made by the group as ones who have a role to play in supporting the preservation of the weaving culture. The results of this study will be beneficial to the Department of Community Development. or government agencies responsible for promoting the silk weaving enterprise in the community.



5. References

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