The Critical Analysis of the Construction of Teacher-ness Identities in Contemporary Thai Films

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Abstract

This article aimed to analyze the construction of teacher-ness identities in contemporary Thai films. The Thai teacher-ness identities represented in films were a unit of cultural analysis in contemporary popular culture, a methodological approach informed by British Cultural Studies. The researcher analyzed the texts of nine teacher-related films released in cinemas between 1977 and 2017, under the theoretical framework of the construction of social realities. The findings indicated that teacher representations were presented in three ways: 1) the ideal teacher-ness, 2) the negotiation with the ideal teacher-ness, and 3) the non-ideal teacher-ness. In general, teacher characters were created to exhibit consistent and different from the social realities. However, the representations of teacher-ness identities that appear in films have not kept pace with the changes in teacher-ness identities in the real world, due to the political, socio-cultural, and ideological landscape in Thailand, which has undergone enormous changes. The representations of teacher-ness identities thus need to be transformed in accordance with those changes. The influence of changing social realities of teacher-ness as well as competing for hegemonic discourses in the teaching profession, in particular, and teacher education, in general, plays a critical role in shaping the representations of those teachers. In addition, film, as one of the socio-cultural institutions, tend to produce and reproduce teacher-ness identities to be in line with social norms and expectations.
Keywords: Teacher, Teacher-ness identities, Representation, Construction of social realities, Contemporary Thai films

Introduction

Teachers and teacher-ness representations have appeared in Thai films, the titles of which can be traced back to 1977. Since then, the representations of teacher and teacher-ness had been constructed in relation to the socio-cultural and political changes in Thailand. The change was quite evident, that is, the image of the teachers portrayed in those films would be the images of teachers who adhered to the principles of being ideal teachers, having

perseverance, morals, and professional ethics (Jatuporn, 2021). The images of Thai teachers in the films in the early years were centered on teachers who are respected and highly revered by other characters, as shown in the films, *Khru Ban Nok* [The rural teachers], *Khun Khru Tee Rak* [The beloved teachers], and *Sawasdee Khun Khru* [Say hello to teachers]. These characteristics can reliably reflect the feelings of people in the society towards a teacher that a teacher is treated with high respect, worshiped, and admired.

Previously, there were different approaches to studying teacher-ness identities, one of which is symbolic interaction theory, according to Blumer (1969), whose investigation mainly focuses on the process of defining and self-defining as a social object. Therefore, teacher-ness identities lie in self-defining as a teacher, who is subject to the interactions between themselves and the social audience on a daily basis. This contributes to the selection of the line of action that is appropriate for them as a teacher. However, the study of teacher-ness identities within the framework of symbolic interaction theory focuses on a processual model of causation. But, in fact, such studies have significant challenges, as teacher-ness identities are not necessarily developed in a linear process, or all teachers must come to the same consensus. There have been severe criticisms for neglecting or disregarding the dimensions of power that influenced identity development.

Therefore, a study based on symbolic interaction theory that focuses on interaction processes may still be a limitation for this study, as it explores teacher-ness identities from creative media such as films (Fisher et al., 2008). The researcher decided to embrace the concept of construction of social realities to elucidate the process involved in constructing teacher-ness identities. *"Representation"* of teacher-ness identities that appeared in the films, within the framework of British Cultural Studies, were influenced by semiotics and phenomenology, asserting that the constructed representations were not the reflection, imitation, or discovery (Louiyapong, 2013). Rather than the construction of partial realities, this is the original concept of the construction of social realities. In other words, teacher-ness identities, in reality, are not equally as important as the teacher-ness identities constructed by the films.

Films have become the medium of production and meaning construction to social audiences, as Turner (1993) suggested that a film is a form of imaginary medium that involves the process of creating representation. In other words, films are responsible for constructing meanings to events and the world around us through the production of images, sounds and signals, used to construe the meanings of something. Therefore, films are not a mere source of enjoyment for people in society, but a channel for cultural production and reproduction, which extends to the construction of a way of life, values, meaning, and consciousness of the society. For that reason, Louiyapong (2013) stated that films have become an important channel to transfer meanings to social audiences. Not only are they capable of producing and reproducing the meanings of things, but films are also an effective medium for instilling ideologies or dominating thoughts oblivious among the audience. Films are produced to be shown in dark environment and captivate the audiences' attention to focus on what is shown on the screen for a period of two to three hours. Viewing the films in the cinemas clearly reflects that it is the

viewers' decision to choose to deliberately receive what is shown on the screen. Therefore, the audiences tend to absorb what is shown in the films more naturally than being forced to sit on the screen.

In addition to contemporary popular cultures such as movies and films, the narratives about teachers were widely presented through Thai songs, covering both Thai string songs: *Luk Krung* [urban songs], and *Luk Thung* [country songs], examples of which were *Mae Pim Khong Chad* [idealistic teachers of the nation], *Khru Bon Doi* [teachers in the highland areas], and *Phra Khun Tee Sam* [teachers' benevolence]. These literary songs influence the construction of teacher-ness identities, dealing with thoughts, beliefs, feelings, values, and ideology of being a teacher in Thailand.

It must be noted that key terms used in this article, including *teacher* and *teacher-ness,* have been contested and problematized by recent scholarship in curriculum studies, teacher education, and cultural studies in education (Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Cohen, 2010; Goldstein, 2011). Teacher and teacher-ness will remain ambiguous; their usage is identified only when necessary since it refers to both conventional definitions of teachers in the mainstream formal and in/non-formal education system and new constructions in which teacher and teacher-ness are not discrete categories. Teacher and teacher-ness are instead perceived as fluid, rhizomatic, and meaningful socio-cultural construction and practices embedded in broader socio-political and cultural milieus, power relations, and specific historical contexts (Jatuporn, 2021).

My use of this ambiguity is deliberate and allows for a wide range of interpretations (Hall, 2013). As the Teachers Council Committee has defined the dimensions of teacher-ness in the Teachers Council's Regulations on Teaching Profession Standards 2019, all curricula of teacher education institutions must contain all dimensions of the knowledge and experiences mentioned in the Teaching Profession Standards, so that the curriculum standard is certified by the Teachers' Council (Khurusapha, 2019). The three dimensions are knowledge, competence, and professional experience in the teaching profession. In this light, teacher-ness is a term that is open to interpretation by teacher education institutions and is not limited by state-determined definitions, as teacher-ness is fluid, ever-changing, and dynamic, depending on by whom, by which groups of people, and by what positions they have, attempts are made to take over and define the meaning of teacher-ness (Giroux, 2004).

As for teacher-ness, the professional teaching standards consist of the knowledge base, namely, the teacher's responsibilities, characteristics, and professional standards, cultivation of teachers' spirit, laws related to teachers and the teaching profession, knowledge management of the teaching profession, and continuous professional development in the teaching profession. It can be seen that the state has defined the meaning of teacher-ness that combines both the dimensions of inner spiritual values and ideology and the dimensions of professionalism in the bureaucratic system that need to be efficient and effective (Khurusapha, 2019).

Due to the importance of the issues and theoretical perspectives mentioned above, the researcher, thus, aimed to study the construction of teacher-ness identities through textual analysis and contextual analysis in contemporary Thai films. The aspect of teacher-ness that

appeared in films is a unit of cultural analysis, a methodological approach informed by the Cultural Studies of British Cultural Studies (Willis, 1995; Fisher et al., 2008). It enables the researcher to understand the interactions between knowledge, discourse, and power in the area of knowledge and cultural (re)production, especially in the educational spheres and the school system, which develop into a multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge known as cultural studies in education (Giroux, 1995; Giroux, 2004). More specifically, teacher education is one of the cultural praxis spaces of cultural studies that emphasizes negotiation, resistance, and transformation in power and social relations in education (Helfenbein, 2019).

Research question and objective

In this research, the researcher would like to study, to what extent, how Thai teacher-ness identities have been constructed in contemporary Thai films.

Based on the aforementioned research question, the researcher aimed to examine the construction of Thai teacher-ness identities through textual analysis and contextual analysis of contemporary Thai films.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Reviewing related documents and research indicated that films and songs are units of analysis of teacher-ness identities. Furthermore, films and songs are regarded as a socio-cultural and political unit of analysis (Louiyapong, 2013), as they exhibit the Thai teachers' representations, which can be divided into two categories, namely, the representations of teachers that reflect the social realities; and the representations of teachers arising from the construction of social realities, which leads to the creation of a conceptual framework, practices, and teacher-ness identities.

Such findings can be found in a research study entitled "The representation of teachers in album *Kru Nai Duang Jai* [beloved teachers' in our heart]." The research indicated that the representation of teachers consisted of three representations: 1) being a beloved teacher and honored by students, including other people in society, represented teachers in this group. Often there has a presentation of teachers' virtues, ethics, and good deeds. Teachers' spirit and teacher-ness are something that society should highly recognize. 2) being a fighting teacher and come overall facing hardships and difficulties; this representation was presented through songs that deal with the difficulties encountered by teachers who face problems arising from students and society. 3) being different from expected cultural norms of ideal teachers in Thai society. This representation was presented to all teachers who needed to meet society's expectations. The narrative suggests that some teachers have a sense of personal needs and private meaning, so they cannot function successfully in expected roles and duties as ideal teachers (Pedthip & Sorthip, 2018).

A research study entitled "Who is a teacher: conceptual metaphor about teacher in Thai songs" demonstrated the conceptual metaphors about teachers in Thai songs; teacher as illuminator, teacher as builder, teacher as plate, and teacher as hired boat. Conceptual

metaphors about teachers reflect the concept of language users: 1) Teachers who provide knowledge to wisdom and the wise shall understand everything. 2) Teachers are the foundations of nation-building by constructing pupils with full capability to create innovation and productivity. 3) Teachers are considered appropriate models for cultural assimilation and transmission of Thai culture. 4) The mission of teachers is to help students become successful adults (Noyjarean, 2015).

Similar results can be found in a research study entitled "Representation of rural people's responses to the discourse of education development for modernization through Thai country songs". This study indicated that the status of teachers in rural society, as portrayed in Thai country songs, is inappropriate and in need of professional and quality development. In addition, educational quality in rural area still needs to be standardized and lack efficiency. In light of educational-related issues, the meaning of education was implicitly critiqued through songs such as possessing a bachelor's degree or being a pundit is considered unworthy or incompetent compared with learning from real-life experiences, and attending education has to be exchanged with the difficulties of the family. Moreover, lower education level criteria compared with people in urban areas cause difficulties for rural people in finding an appropriate career and needing more opportunities to mobilize their social status. (Fivetes & Nuntachantoon, 2020).

In addition, "Discourses of Thai teacher-ness in teacher ceremonial songs in teacher education institutions" revealed that the teacher-ness could be systematically classified into four representations in which teachers in Thailand have been portrayed as 1) teacher as caregiver, 2) teacher as intellectual, 3) teacher as knowledge provider, and 4) teacher as hard-working profession. The mentioned representations lead to the formation of Thai teacher-ness identities, which, construct discursive material aspects of teacher-ness as follows: First, teachers are sacrificers. Second, teachers are responsible for teaching and disciplining members of society. Third, teachers are intellectual. Fourth, teachers are patient and dedicated. Last, students are indebted to teachers (Chantapisit, 2020).

Reviewing the aforementioned related documents and research works provided the researcher with the construction of social realities framework for analyzing the data. In addition, some related current literatures investigate the relationship between teachers, representations through popular film and media, and the construction of social realities in various contexts. Recent studies in this trend reflect in the works conducted by Shoffner (2016) exploring teachers in fiction and film: saviors, scapegoats and schoolmarms and Conrad and Prendergast (2019) in teachers and teaching on stage and screen: dramatic depictions. The concept of construction of social realities, which viewed that social processes can create reality; disregards whether or not such a fact exists in the physical world. Realities can be constructed (Hall, 2013). Likewise, in the films which portray the stories of teachers, the reality in the physical world is less important than the ways by which the representations of the teachers are created, and what methods are used to construct a realistic reality. These aspects are considered the core issues in the study because when the representation of teacher-ness identity is created,

regardless of the processes involved, it affects society's view of teachers. Significantly, society tends to believe that teachers possess the traits shown in the films, thus imprinting the stereotypical teacher-ness identity in society. Based on the literature review aforementioned, the researcher conceptualizes both theoretical debates and results from recent studies into the conceptual framework as follows:
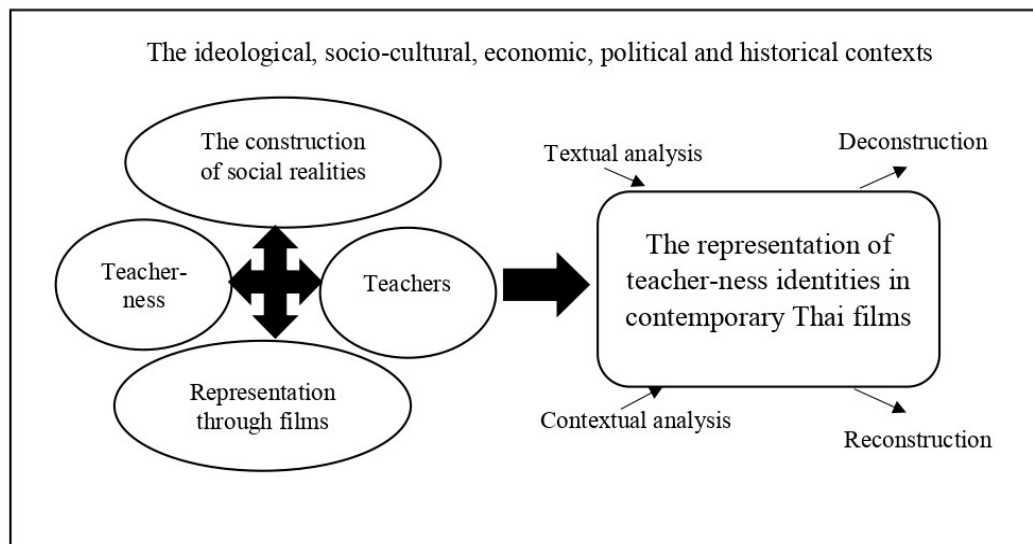

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Research methodology

        This study was qualitative research, examining the construction of Thai teacher-ness identities through textual and contextual analysis of contemporary Thai films, which have been regarded as one of the most powerful knowledge production units in education (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1996; Giroux, 2004), the principles of which are outlined as follows:

        1) The text of the film contains one or more teacher characters, who can be either the main or supporting characters. The teacher characters must play essential roles in the film's overall story, with a sufficient quantity of screen appearances for analysis. The teacher characters in each film selected must be of various personalities for the research results to be comprehensive and present a broad representation of Thai teacher-ness identities.

        2) The selected films were produced and released in cinemas between 1977 and 2017. Such timing is set for the following reasons:

        2.1) The field of film studies considers the years 1977 to 1986 as the golden age of films that reflect society (social films). Although there were few films reflecting the society in Thai cinema history, compared to other genres, the period from 1973 to1986, especially the years 1978 to 1982, was the one in which the social films were the most outstanding. Hence, this was the golden age of Thai social films (Louiyapong, 2013).

        2.2) A study of Thai films produced from 1977 to 2017 allows us to clearly see the differences in the economic, political, social, cultural, and historical contexts of each

period. The selected films that are qualified by the criteria of this study are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1 List of films classified by year of release and list of teacher characters who are the main characters

Film titles	Year of release	Names of main characters
Khru Ban Nok [The rural teachers]	2521 (1978)	*Khru Piya* [Mr. Piya], *Khru Duang Dao* [Ms. Duang Dao], *Khru Phisit* [Mr. Phisit], *Khru Yai Khammao* [Mr. Khammao]
Khru Suea [Mr. Suea, the vicious teacher]	2527 (1984)	*Khru Suea* [Mr. Suea]
Khru Wai Jai Rai [Ms. Sawai, the vicious teacher]	2532 (1989)	*Khru Wai* [Ms. Sawai]
Khru Chanram: Prateep Haeng Lum Nam Maesai [Ms. Chanram, the candlelight of Maesai river]	2535 (1992)	*Khru Chanram* [Ms. Chanram]
Baeb Wa Lok Nee Mee Nam Tao Hu Lae Khru Rabiab [Ms. Rabiab and her naughty students]	2537 (1994)	*Khru Rabiab* [Ms. Rabiab]
Mor. 8 [The 8th Mathayomsuksa class]	2549 (2006)	*Khru Sompat* [Ms. Sompat], *Khru Gaysorn* [Ms. Gaysorn]
Khru Ban Nok Ban Nong He Yai [The rural teachers of Ban Nong He Yai]	2553 (2010)	*Khru Pichet* [Mr. Pichet], *Khru Saeng Dao* [Ms. Saeng Dao], *Khru Somchat* [Mr. Somchat], *Khru Yai Charlie* [Mr. Charlie]
Kid Tueng Wittaya [Teacher's diary]	2557 (2014)	*Khru Song* [Mr. Song], *Khru Ann* [Ms. Ann]
I fine…Thank you…Love you [I am fine, thank you, love you]	2557 (2014)	*Khru Pleng* [Ms. Pleng]

Note: *Khru* means teacher in Thai

3) The textual analysis and contextual analysis consisted of details as follows:

3.1) Textual analysis: the analysis of narratives demonstrated in films through language, discourse, and symbolic meanings of Thai teacher-ness identities. Teacher-ness identities were investigated through discourse analysis by studying the connection between language use and socio-cultural, historical, and ideological contexts regarding power, ideology, status quo, and hegemony and then decoding the meanings through the construction of social realities (Fairclough, 1995). In addition, related documents such as movie reviews, film commentaries, directors' interviews, and narratives were critically analyzed by using content analysis.

3.2) Contextual analysis: the analysis of the relationship between the construction of Thai teacher-ness identities and the socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts of the films by analyzing words, expressions, conversations, and actions of the characters, taking into accounts their in-story contextual circumstances, settings, and historical backgrounds (Shoffner, 2016).

3.3) Data triangulation was used to examine the reliability of the data by employing multiple sources of data and information obtained from related documents, research reports, interview records, and social media to establish validity for interpretative analysis of Thai teacher-ness identities (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Then, the data were analyzed as a description, with illustrative examples. The expressions of key texts were quoted to support the analysis, which was linked to the construction of social realities as conceptual framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Research finding

The researcher presents the research findings in two parts, textual analysis, and contextual analysis.

1) Textual analysis

From the analysis of nine films through language, discourse and symbolic meanings, and related documents, it was found that the narrative strategy was designed to tell the story through the points of view of the teachers, students, and public. The teacher-ness representations can be categorized into three main themes: 1) the ideal teacher-ness, 2) the negotiation with the ideal teacher-ness, and 3) the non-ideal teacher-ness. The details are as follows.

1) *Ideal teacher-ness*, loved and honored by students and other people in society. The films that depict teachers' dignity present this representative image of teachers. Often presented are the virtues and morality of teachers, the spirit of being teachers, and the qualities accepted and respected by society.

1.1) Teachers with strict teaching behavior, discipline-oriented, prone to exercise severe punishment can be found in the following films: *Khru Suea* [Mr. Suea, the vicious teacher] (1984), *Khru Wai Jai Rai* [Ms. Sawai, the vicious teacher] (1989), *Baeb Wa Lok Nee Mee Nam Tao Hu Lae Khru Rabiab* [Ms. Rabiab and her naughty students] (1994) and *Mor 8* [The 8th Mathayomsuksa class] (2006).

1.2) Teachers who focus on teaching and learning, providing care and assistance, and solving the problems of students can be found in the following films: *Khru Ban Nok* [The rural teachers] (1978), *Khru Suea* [Mr. Suea, the vicious teacher] (1984), and *Khru Ban Nok Ban Nong He Yai* [The rural teachers of Ban Nong He Yai] (2010).

Examples of expressions by *Khru Piya* that demonstrated the devoted and idealistic spirits of teachers toward the values of education in improving the quality of life of rural people and disenfranchised areas were: *"I am from disadvantaged rural areas, so I deeply understand hardship in real life. I am a teacher, so I want to make my real intentions come true. I hope to see people sincere with each other and happy. The sky will be clear and people will be smiling."* This kind of teacher also perceived him/herself as the agent of community development by using their utmost efforts to transform the unjust society as follows: *"I do not want to be only hired boat teacher as people used; I instead would like to contribute myself for helping children and villagers who are drowning from difficult hardship to have a better quality of life."*

2) *Negotiation with the ideal teacher-ness*, being a fighter. This representation was portrayed in the films that captivate teachers' encounters with various obstacles, both as rivals with students and struggles with hardships at work. These characteristics are found in the following films: *Khru Ban Nok* [The rural teachers] (1978), *Khru Chanram: Prateep Haeng Lum Nam Maesai* [Ms. Chanram, the candlelight of Maesai river] (1992), *Khru Ban Nok Ban Nong He Yai* [The rural teachers of Ban Nong He Yai] (2010), and *Kid Tueng Wittaya* [Teacher's diary] (2014). Examples of expressions by *Khru Chanram* that demonstrated the teacher-ness characteristic in this group were: *"No matter how I am going to lost my life, the school will be exist for children"* and *"I don't want to see illiterate people; I don't want to see people become commoditized, being addicted, being prostitutes in the city"*.

3) *Non-ideal teacher-ness*, teachers who do not fit the ideals. This representation suggests that not all teachers can meet society's expectations. Some teachers may have personal reasons and necessities hindering them to perform their full responsibilities. Teachers under this category demonstrated contestation and negotiation against the mainstream depictions of teacher-ness identities. That includes having a position or ideological concepts of teacher-ness that are different from social expectations, norms and socio-cultural constructions. The films that rendered these characteristics are as follows: *Kid Tueng Wittaya* [Teacher's diary] (2014) and *I fine...Thank you...Love You* [I am fine, thank you, love you] (2014). Example of expressions by *Khru Song* that demonstrated critical mindset of teacher toward the values of education and the relationship of students' competence and the capitalist society were: *"If you have literacy*

knowledge, it will make you have enough lessons so that capitalists or defraud people cannot fool or take advantages of you."

Based on the results of textual analysis, it must be noted that all three main groups of teacher-ness representations demonstrated a standardized mainstream narrative about Thai teacher-ness identities: the teachers had good intentions and dedication to students, but their external expressions, behaviors, and actions were shown quite differently. Most teachers would begin with antagonistic characters against their students, who first displayed undesired and unexpected dispositions. For example, in *Khru Suea* [Mr. Suea, the vicious teacher] (1984), *Khru Wai Jai Rai* [Ms. Sawai, the vicious teacher] (1989), and *Khru Ban Nok Ban Nong He Yai* [The rural teachers of Ban Nong He Yai] (2010), there will be expressions demonstrated in a similar manner, such as *"good teachers must dedicate his/her life to students without any difficult reasons"* and *"students can't be good people without the discipline and teacher's stick."*

After the story had reached its peak and closed to resolutions, the students would gradually recognize and accept their teachers and adjust or improve themselves to be better students. As demonstrated clearly in the excerpt statement by *Kru Rabiab* in *Baeb Wa Lok Nee Mee Nam Tao Hu Lae Khru-Rabiab* [Ms. Rabiab and her naughty students] as follows: *"Every year, I will be standing here on stage to ensure you all can overcome all difficulties and reach the final destination. Be sure you all are ready to protect yourself in real life. You all have learned how to live with others and understand yourself. Being a teacher just one day means being long-lasting teacher throughout your life. Whenever you face difficulties; please be reminded that you have teachers. Give a good bless to you and live your life modestly, happily and being good-hearted people."*

Likewise, teachers would also transform their antagonistic representations of the protagonist characters. Even though the conflicts between teachers and students, or students and related people in society always occurred, the teachers portrayed in the films would always take significant roles. They would be key instrumental in finding alternatives and resolutions for all of them, and the outcomes were satisfactorily demonstrated. Finally, the teachers would be honored and respected for their good deeds as a joyful, pleasant, and benevolent state of emotions to see the ones, whom the teachers used to teach and take care of since they were young and naïve, succeed in their education, their increased mutual relationship with family members, and their life. This typical narrative regularly appears in statement like *"without teachers, students can't be successful in their life"*.

2) Contextual analysis

The study of the construction of teacher-ness identities in contemporary Thai films was similar too other studies on social phenomena that required theories to explain the studied topics. The researcher has chosen the theory of the construction of social realities as a

conceptual framework to study how Thai teacher-ness identities have been constructed through textual analysis and contextual analysis of contemporary Thai films.

The changes in the representations of teacher-ness identities in contemporary Thai films demonstrated that the construction of social realities is less focused on the physical world - as reality can be created. This study indicated, however, that the real world, or the discursive practices of the teaching profession, teacher education and mainstream teacher-ness discourse in Thailand have a significant influence on the construction of representations of teacher-ness identities appeared in the films. As a result, the teacher-ness identities this study acknowledges are not identical to the identities presented in previous studies.

In addition, the representations of teacher-ness identities that appear in the films have not kept pace with the changes in the teacher-ness identities in the real world, due to the political and socio-cultural landscape in Thailand, which has undergone enormous changes. The representations of teacher-ness identities also need to be adjusted in accordance with those changes. For example, in the image of Thai teachers in selected films (Tongtip, 1997), the teachers would always take significant roles and would be key instrumental in finding alternatives and resolutions for difficult problems and challenging situations, and in the final scene, the teachers would be honored and respected for their good deeds.

In this case, teachers portrayed in contemporary Thai films were still under the mainstream construction and representation of Thai teacher-ness. This is because teachers are prospected to be role models for being virtuous guardians according to the ideal Thai culture. This means that teachers should exhibit conservative traits, orderliness, politeness, compliance with the rules, and be good-natured and caring as parental mothers (Wallace, 2003).

The meanings for teacher-ness identities constructed by films clearly indicate that the films have chosen some aspects of reality in the physical world, as Schutz (1967; cited in Kaewthep & Hinviman, 2008) divided the world around us into two categories; the physical world which is a world of natural occurrences; and the world of meanings or symbols arising from the work of various institutions in society. Yet, the physical world or the real world is a remotely accessible world to humans and a very complex one. Therefore, the understanding of this world must be done through an intermediary, with film as a unit that construct meanings for teacher-ness identities.

Not only films, as a branch of mass media, but other social units or institutions that responsible for the meaning construction. From the plots of the nine films about teachers, it is clear that some other units or institutions are involved in creating meanings or constructing important teacher-ness identities, such as schoolings, religious institutions, and social groups. In constructing meanings to the reality in the social world, human beings partially perceive reality from the real world and then invent it as the stock of social knowledge, which will be used to ascertain the meaning of a new set of realities when occurred. Such reality occurs in human perception, and, thus, is the social reality.

The social realities mentioned above are the realities in the empirical world. The meanings of the realities do not belong to an individual, but rather a set of definitions constructed by groups of individuals or society. Such a process of interactions brings out

"intersubjectivity", which allows the members of society to understand things in common. But, realities in the physical world are diverse, and there are many social groups, resulting in different sets of intersubjectivity, which can be either congruent or contradictory among the members of society. Any social group that can create the dominant intersubjectivity has the power to define a reality over other groups (Chomsky & Herman, 1994). That is a form of power to control people's understanding of a phenomenon, including teacher-ness identities, which most people in society consider conservative and authoritative.

In trying to understand social reality, one must remember that it is not constant or not unchangeable. Rather, social reality can change over time. When the realities of the physical world change, so do social realities. Therefore, the meaning or understanding of the things surrounding us is impermanent. From this viewpoint, teacher-ness identities can be changed according to the values and meanings of each society. Thus, by categorizing teacher-ness representations portrayed in Thai films, they can be categorized into three main groups: namely, the ideal teacher-ness, the negotiation with the ideal teacher-ness, and the non-ideal teacher-ness. In addition, by categorizing teacher-ness representations based on the periodical time frame in the history of education in Thailand from the past to the present, they can be put into two major periods; namely, local teachers as representatives of rural teachers in the pre-modern education reform era and teachers who are the bringers of changes as representatives of teachers in the modern education reform era (Jatuporn, 2021).

However, perception plays an important role in understanding teacher-ness identities in Thailand so far. The perception of representations of teachers, including discourses on teacher-ness and the teaching profession over the past several decades, is not dependent on a single mainstream narrative. Neither story about teacher and teacher-ness are unified (Arnon & Reichel, 2007). Rather, it is a collection of various minor narratives that construe the perception of people about teacher-ness in Thailand.

Perception is thus an arena of contested political, social, and cultural struggle, in the form of power contention to produce or construct meanings and create a specific set of cognitive impacts, through various activities in society, such as participation in the education reform movement, networks of teachers, educators, and activists in schools and educational institutions at different levels, as well as a cultural expression in educational spheres (Lertchoosakul, 2021). As such, the perception constructing process and subjectification become inseparable. But once there is a gap in the perception process, as happened in an emerging phenomenon known as "eye-opening" among children, youth, and the new generation of Thai citizens, the representations of Thai teacher-ness identities in an imagined world systematically constructed by the elites and ruling classes have collapsed.

In Thailand, a significant conflict exists between traditional values and culture and the modern educational reform agenda exists. Thai teachers are anticipated to be models of moral character for being virtuous guardians according to the ideal Thai culture. Teachers should exhibit conservative traits, orderliness, and politeness, comply with the expected norms and regulations, and be good-natured and caring. Meanwhile, current education reforms also expect Thai teachers to have critical reflexive thoughts and to teach students to have critical and

thoughtful learning. Is it possible for Thai teachers to be both virtuous guardians and critical thinkers? (Wallace, 2003). In this regard, Wallace (2003) argues that such a phenomenon can occur only when two events occur: a cultural shift in terms of idealism and virtuous guardians and a real-world transformation in which corruption, fraud, and bribery no longer exists.

Discussion and recommendation

In this part, the researcher presents more details about the deliberation of teachers' identities after the construction of Thai teacher-ness identities in contemporary Thai films by the method of deconstruction and reconstruction of teacher-ness identities.

Deconstruction of teacher-ness identities

The researcher's aspiration emerging from this research is to assert that transcending from the mainstream representation of Thai teacher-ness identities to *"Teachers as cultural workers"* is essential to Thai education reform. In Freire's proposal, teachers are considered agents of change in the socio-cultural, economic, political and historical sphere and knowledge production (Freire, 1998), whose duties differ from those designated by the state to be technocratic officials or technical craftsmen. This is because teachers work in socio-cultural and political civic spheres just as artists create works of art (Hargreaves, 1994; Palmer, 1998). In that sense, language, discourse, ideology, and practice of teachers as cultural workers are very essential in Thailand in the present and future.

By doing so, this is not a new proposal in Thai educational reform, as there have been intellectuals who presented ideas of new experimenting in education, that were different from the conventional educational management model. This process goes hand in hand with the democratization process. The 1997 National Constitution included education reform as a national agenda, but at present, Thailand is still mired in educational reform under the neoconservative/neoliberal ideology that is subtle and deeply rooted in all dimensions of society (Jatuporn, 2021).

The researcher believes that teachers are cultural workers and transformative leaders in schools and educational institutions. Therefore, the effort to deconstruct and reconstruct the teacher-ness discourse, based on the ideological and philosophical praxis of critical educators and political activists like Paulo Freire, will inspire teachers, educators, and educational policymakers who value freedom, equality, justice, fairness, and democracy in education. Discourse on teachers as cultural workers implicitly expresses a vision and delivers a message to a growing number of new generation of teachers, who see themselves as cultural workers (Beyer, 1996; Giroux, 2004; Helfenbein, 2019).

Reconstruction of teacher-ness identities

We are living in a period of global educational reform movements as well as national reform in education. The premises of this reform embrace the values and practices of teachers who possess good dispositions and moral characters that, for the most part, are at odds with the representations of teacher-ness identities as cultural workers (Osguthorpe, 2008; Picower, 2011). The current national reform agenda is motivated not by a humanistic vision of the possibilities of human consciousness, but by a concern that Thai schools are not keeping up

with their global competitors. The 2040s was put forward as a point at which Thailand will be number one in science and mathematics, technology, and creative innovation (Vandeweyer et al., 2020). The general theme of the national reform agenda is to regain educational leadership so that we can become effective competitors in a world economy. The result of this agenda is to utilize a form of technical rationality to bring schools up to snuff. So, teachers are instrumental in this new phase of educational reform.

Teachers as cultural workers are cemented in continuous self and socio-cultural investigation. The search for the meaning of teacher and teacher-ness is tempered by a rejection of certainty and made more robust by considering multiple frames of reference. Moral, aesthetic, political, economic, and epistemological questions are neither taken for granted nor deemed the exclusive prerogatives of power elites. To be a transformative teacher, teaching practice fosters a love of generous and generative inquiry for all citizens. To have meaningful teacher-ness and to provide students an opportunity into such a life, teachers must contemplate the ethics of caring, humanizing, transformative and collegial inquiry (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000; Giroux, 2004). In other words, teacher-ness identities as cultural workers must be lived by teachers and educators as they collaboratively create and enact an education imbued with the growing passion through inquiry.

However, the essence and spirit of teachers as cultural workers project a significantly different view of the mainstream mission of being a teacher and teaching profession. First, it embraces a conception of the teacher and teaching profession that has more to do with the cultivation of productive idiosyncrasy and the creation of a democratic community than with regaining the lead in an economically competitive world. Teachers have more to do with liberation than with domination. It is more concerned with participatory democracy and the development of communities that discuss and debate competing for educational values than with creating a professional workforce that is encouraged to use its professional ingenuity to accomplish uniform national goals (Beyer, 1996; Goldstein, 2011).

From the results of this study, the teacher-ness representations can be categorized into three main groups: 1) the ideal teacher-ness, 2) the negotiation with the ideal teacher-ness, and 3) the non-ideal teacher-ness. Even though broad and general distinctions could be addressed among these three representations, they do not exist separately from one another. Each also displays the dispositions of ingrained mainstream teacher-ness. The values and assumptions of these three representations of teacher-ness do not differ in substance from the mainstream teacher-ness constructed by the conservative/neoliberal elites and ruling classes who have legitimate authority to define the meaning of ideal Thai teacher-ness in public discourse and popular culture texts (Jatuporn, 2021).

In addition, the discursive and material construction of Thai teacher-ness representations has been reproduced through the continuous process of production, distribution, and consumption of contemporary popular cultures such as movies, songs, screenplays, and social media. Then, Thai teacher-ness representations gradually become status quo and hegemonic discourse that have influential impacts upon the institutions of teacher education and the teaching profession to reproduce teachers' candidates to have characteristics

and identities in accordance with the mainstream teacher-ness and the society at large to internalize the mainstream teacher-ness (Pipatpen, 2013; Kongsook & Hinviman, 2022).

Constructing teacher-ness identities by proposing the discourse on teachers as cultural workers is thus a vision of possible contemporary and future teachers in Thailand. However, the researcher acknowledges that such work cannot be done in any depth without also affecting changes in the ways in which schools are organized and governed under the political economy of education and society. This is because most teachers have been trained to work with hierarchical power-relations, solve their classroom problems, and to do what state and local educational service areas expect rather than involving in school policy deliberation and decisions. By doing so, school principals and educational officials from educational service areas should provide support and foster such work to happen.

The work of teachers, as cultural workers, requires educational professionals and the community to collaboratively develop visions of possible educational futures; problem solves what(s), how(s), and why(s) of school life; and assess the quality and impact of the educational programs and practices on the students. All of this work emphasizes the challenging human development and political dimensions of teachers as cultural workers for transformative education reform. The kind of teacher that the researcher believes to be valuable recognizes that the meaning of teacher-ness is always a form of personal construction. In this sense, all educative teacher-ness forms are artistic and aesthetic. And precisely because such teacher-ness is fundamentally personal, its outcomes among a group of teachers will never be identical. Indeed, the process of teaching is optimized when the teacher-ness made by individuals is congruent with their own experiences, talents, and aspirations.

To say that the meaning of teacher-ness is always private and personal meaning-making is not to subordinate the importance of socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical aspects. In doing so, democracy itself cherishes that human growth is a matter of socialization; we, as educators, take care of the contributions of others. Thus, we learn most from those who are similar to ourselves. In this sense, teachers are important part of learning communities within which the diverse talents of students, teachers, school administrators, and the public at large can contribute their perspectives, their arguments, and their aspirations to create not only a vision of educational virtue, but an organization that is effective in realizing such a vision. Thus, it is to be hoped that the values that the researcher has explored and embraced become a part of our national public dialogue on teachers and teaching profession reform.

Conclusion

The research concluded out that teacher representations were presented in three ways: 1) the ideal teacher-ness, 2) the negotiation with the ideal teacher-ness, and 3) the non-ideal teacher-ness. In general, the teacher characters were created to exhibit various characteristics that were consistent and different from social reality. The influence of changing social realities played a significant role in shaping the representations of those teachers. Additionally, film, as one of the socio-cultural institutions, tended to produce and reproduce teacher-ness identities to align with social norms and expectations. The Thai teacher-ness identities are constructed

by the interpretations of social and cultural texts, which are ideals, values, and the customary rules of the past and present. Films related to teacher-ness are both a product and a process resulting from the efforts to define and construct diverse and dynamic teacher-ness identities. The process of constructing teacher-ness identities is self-defined. It is crafted through interactions between individuals and social institutions, and through the relationships with the socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts that are unique in Thailand.

Acknowledgment

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