FROM “ASIA AS METHOD” TO “HOME AS METHOD”: THE INTERNAL (DE)-COLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE THAI CURRICULUM STUDIES
Omsin Jatuporn

1Department of Educational Foundations and Development, Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Corresponding author’s email: omsin.j@cmu.ac.th

ABSTRACT
Thailand has never been officially colonized by foreign powers whereas the re-appropriation of neo-liberal policy and nationalistic propaganda by the Thai government to promote the conservative elites’ version of nation-centrism clearly functions to maintain the hierarchical social structure and dominant hegemony through education. Grounded in Chen’s idea, Asia as Method, Winichakul’s framework (2014) on Thai cultural studies, home as method, has been recontextualized for understanding how the researcher gain and encounter educational experiences as well as having freedom of choice to reconstitute on the powerful curriculum discourse in Thailand. The notion of “home” signifying Thailand is a part of Asia is used to move beyond the debate over “us vs. them” or “insider vs. outsider” which is neither misleading nor productive. Additionally, it is employed for the understanding of the hegemonic roles of national elites on policy re-contextualization to combine both the neo-liberalism and neo-conservative discourse in education. Given that “curriculum studies” is an intellectual sphere in which competing discourses, plural assumptions, and pedagogical practices deserved its place, the field itself needs to be re-conceptualized and goes beyond the legacy of both western cultural imperialism and internal colonialism, a legacy that continues to take place at the deep-rooted cultural and psychological level and plays a significant role in constructing cultural imaginary and subjectivity, which also has shaped many of our ideas about education, schooling, curriculum, and pedagogy. Thus, the onus is on us, critical curriculum workers, to explore and discover our diverse reflective ways in order to move forward our critical curriculum projects. The relationship between the home as method and critical curriculum projects needs to be a point of departure for discussions and an illustration of how curriculum as a form of cultural practice and cultural politics works to hegemonize particular knowledge production and distribution for many decades in Thailand.

Keywords: knowledge, subjectivity, curriculum studies, decolonization, Thailand

Introduction
By employing the concept of “currere” proposed by Pinar (1975), he has provided the researcher an intellectual tool for understanding how the researcher gained and encountered experiences in the world as well as having freedom of choice to reconstitute, narrate and reflect on the powerful discourse in education. This concept articulated an infinite engagement with our educational organisms, one that could be helpful in critiquing the status of curriculum by framing the fluid educational being of our world. As educators, we have been exposed to the socio-political and historical contexts of education where many truths and histories have been encoded into our ways of being through personal experiences, language varieties, and our own individual contexts. This awareness of self and their place within the world or “world making” is created not only through active individual experiences and thinking, but also through others interpretations of our beings, our activities, discourses and communities in which we live. Thus, multiple interactions of a history, community (local and global), and self and the encoded experienced truths are the
interactions which have been constructed from a messy, chaotic, disordered, conflicting, partial and ambiguous milieu. Within this context, understanding curriculum and knowledge production through individual experiences and praxis could inform and create awareness of “the self” and “the others” which were shaped and constructed within specific contexts (Pinar, 1975).

To shed light on the contemporary socio-political and historical contexts of education and the interrelationship between these contexts and the educational spheres, the challenges the researcher, as a Thai educator living in Thailand, have faced transcend national boundaries and single sets of discourses which are known as supranational and transnational challenges. Addressing these challenges require critical, reflective, and hybrid curriculum thinking (Kanu, 2003). Thus, the researcher undertake this project from the position of a critical curriculum worker who has been trying to foster understanding about the contested and sophisticated space in education. To achieve this, the researcher orient the educational subjectivities such as experiences, beliefs, perspectives and worldviews together with reflecting upon the contemporary scholarship in the field of curriculum studies and cultural studies where leading scholars have reconceptualized the intersection of these two scholarly fields into the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies in education by primarily focusing on the critical questions regarding knowledge, power, culture, hegemony and discourse in education (Razfar, 2012). In light of this, the researcher recontextualize the positionality in this paper based on two key conceptual frameworks: 1) Chen’s Asia as method and de-imperialisation (Chen, 2010) and Winichakul’s home as method and internal decolonization (Winichakul, 2014) and 2) critical educational policy analysis which views curriculum policy as text and discourse (Allan, 2008; Ball, 1990; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997). The researcher also choose to embrace experiential, reflective, and deliberative approaches for presenting this paper. Buripakdi (2013) argued that narratives might make the paper carry a personal tone but the intent was far from personal. In addition, the conventional texts can have subjective aspects through storytelling in the literature reviews and the narrative could provide a pedagogical space to insert subjectivity into a formal representation.

Education, Curriculum and the Nation-Building in Thailand

In the 19th century, the nation became the focus of people’s loyalty and the modern idea of the national character created a unique sense of identity critical to the survival of the state. The effect was the production of good citizens becoming the hegemonic domain of the nation-state construction. On the one hand, the nation as the political construct and the consensual contract between the governed and the governors remained a fairly abstract concept, while on the other hand, it romanticized nationalism for its people (Richardson, 2002). As such, in the case of Thailand, Thai people have been enculturated to perceive Thailand in an idealized image, as the country rooted in a rural agrarian society that loves peace, tranquility, and harmony. Thai society is orderly where people know their place in the hierarchy and thus the nation is linked to a large family made up of people who are alike. While both of these constructs created the modernist idea of identity, it was the state itself that developed the national character of its citizens.

In the educational spheres, curriculum as a space for knowledge production of the nation-state as well as the discursive practices of its enacted pedagogy, and school knowledge have become the contested site for the Thai elites and ruling classes to exercise their dominant power and cultural hegemony. Simply put, the national curriculum has been mediated by the nation-state for inscribing particular rationalities in the sensitivities, dispositions and awarenesses of individuals to legitimize historical tradition, garner the allegiance of people to the existing political status quo and fit into a single set of unifying imaginaries about national citizenship (Kanu, 2003; Richardson, 2002). Given this importance, the curriculum has been the centerpiece of public schools’ efforts to
cultivate younger generations into national harmony and unifying national cultures and also is the powerful tool in instigating nationalism, to make a perfect nation, a perfect history about heroism, sacrifice, courage, and patriotism (Kanu, 2003).

In Thailand, Thai-centrism in which a sense of nationalism is a part of is unlike that of any other country. It did not derive its motivation from the people, but rather, was organized by the monarchs and the elites who were the ruling classes of the society. By tracing back into the historical ideology of Thai-centrism and similar ideology like “Thai-ness”, I have focused on my own reflexive and critical experiences or “currere” in education (Pinar, 2003). Based on the prior knowledge of modern Thai history or specifically the history of Siam during the 19th century in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V), the researcher learned about the significant historical events from the social studies teachers and read through social studies and history textbooks which were published under the past national curriculum of Thailand. It came to the realization that Thailand has never been colonized because of King Rama V’s contribution to progressive reforms in every aspect of Thai life which was to prove of great significance to modern Thailand. His policies were deemed to be essential for Siam’s survival as a sovereign state and its progress to modernity. Therefore, Siam or Thailand is the only country, which is free from foreign powers in the colonial era, in Southeast Asian nations (Winichakul, 2014). However, the most important question that emerges in my mind when I would like to locate my curriculum inquiry into the postcolonial subjectivities and theory is, how could the researcher manage this subjectivity and use this theory since Thailand was not colonized by the Western nations?

The researcher have been intellectually shaken by the notion of “never-colonized” when I first encountered it with multinational scholars at the international conference on social sciences and humanities in the United Kingdom. During an informal discussion with scholars from many countries around the world, one scholar, who had experienced Thailand as a peace corps volunteer, had proposed various questions. One of the questions which brought the researcher’s curriculum inquiry into the scholarship in postcolonial studies is: how do you distinguish your country’s identity from other countries in Southeast Asia? The sudden response was “Thailand was never colonized by the West!”. That scholar just smiled and said nothing to me. The researcher accepted that and this perspective has meaningfully changed my worldview toward the notion of “never-colonized”. This can be easily defined by looking at how the Thais are superior to other nations in Southeast Asia region. It is in this context that sparked my intellectual journey into the works of Winichakul and other Asian studies scholars whose subjectivities are constructed under the contexts of post-colonial Asia.

With this “never-colonized” historical understanding in my mind, I admit that in the recent past I have a sense of being superior and exceptional to other nations in Southeast Asian regions and I cannot help thinking that being “Thai” is the most civilized racial status which is second to none in this world because “We” as Thais people have never been colonized while “Others” were colonized by the western countries. It is in this context in which Nopphorn Prachakul states in one of the first articles in Thai on postcolonialism. “Upon hearing the word “colony” (ananikom), many people probably think that this is something old and long-gone. And among Thai people, in particular, the most common initial reaction is, “That’s not relevant to us. We, Thai, have never been anyone’s colony.” (Nopphorn, n.d., p.156; cited in Jackson, 2007). In the Thai mind, Thailand is like the lone diamond in the region and is a unique country despite numerous studies showing that Thailand has long been an integral part of Southeast Asia.

Winichakul, a renowned historian, and professor of Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, approaches the study of history and national identity of Thailand with his concept of the “Thai Geo-Body” which is inspired by Anderson’s seminal work Imagined
Communities (Anderson, 1991), on nationalism. He dispels the myth that the Thai people have been taught to perceive Thailand is an idealized agrarian society. The Thai people have been living peacefully under their Buddhist Kingdom and were mere victims of or only innocent bystanders of the high political game that was played by the colonial powers in 19th Century Asia (Winichakul, 2000). Instead, he contends that the significance of the European colonialism of the 19th century is diffused, becoming just another episode in the long historical series of the struggles for independence. Siam was very conscious of what was at stake and was just as much an active player as Britain or France. Thus, colonialism is not the target of this historical ideology as much as an enemy – any enemy– of the nation. It is a nationalist history, but not an anti-colonial one (Winichakul, 1994; Winichakul, 2000). Thus, the term “colonial” reveals peculiar characteristics of local institutions like monarchy and feudal orders which represent the binary opposition of the internal colonizer or the “within emperor” versus “the colonized” (Harrison & Jackson, 2010). Colonial, in this sense, is systematically organized by monarchy and ruling classes and turns into internal colonization for dominating subaltern subjects – that are the Thais. While mainstream curriculum and education discourse can provide one frame of reference, it can also seem detached from the researcher’s own critical understanding of curriculum and knowledge production in Thailand.

From “Asia as Method” to “Home as Method”: the Framework for Re-conceptualizing Curriculum and Knowledge Production

Grounded in the postcolonial theory in curriculum studies scholarship, the researcher argue for the use of the postcolonial framework for critique “imagination” which is used to construct the seam of a collective narrative in curriculum and knowledge production. In addition, it offers critical insights into why and how de-colonizing and de-imperializing the western cultural imperialism that has been selectively re-contextualized by the Thai elites and ruling classes into the Siamese colonial discourse and internal colonialism (Winichakul, 2000) in curriculum and knowledge production is central to the development of Thai citizens as part of global citizenship in the post-national era. However, the “postcolonial” term in Thai academia remains ambiguous. This characteristic comes as a result of the stranglehold which traditionalist discourses have influenced upon this field of inquiry, with its adherence to the nationalist historiography promising that Thailand was never a Western colony. Thus, Thailand is in the incompleteness status of Western theory, whether Marxist, poststructuralist, or postcolonial. As a semi-colonialist country, it marks the need to beware of falling into the trap of believing that a Marx, a Derrida, a Bhabha, or a Spivak has already done the hard theoretical work (Reynolds & Hong, 1983; Reynolds, 1987).

Recently, Chen has proposed the innovative method that can be applied into the management of subjectivity and objectivity in the social sciences and humanities by using the name “Asia as method” as appeared in the book “ Asia as Method: toward De-imperialization”. Chen (2010) proposed that……the potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other’s points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. On this basis the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method of engagement, I believe, has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history….. (Chen, 2010, p. 212). Chen also suggests that the task for Asia as method is for the colonizing or imperializing the population to examine the conduct, motives, desires and consequences of the imperialist history that has formed its own subjectivity (Chen, 2010, p.4) and that deimperialization offers a powerful tool with which we can examine the larger historical impact of imperialism (Chen, 2010. p.4). This means that Asia as method has its
potentialities for the decolonization and deimperialization of knowledge and subjectivities. Due to its critical implications for knowledge, power, culture, and subjectivities, Asia as method, therefore, has been embraced by educational scholars such as curriculum theorists and critical educators especially those in post-colonial Asia and beyond (Lin, 2012; Rhee, 2013; Rizvi, 2015; Zhang, Chan, & Kenway, 2015).

Grounded in Chen’s idea, Asia as Method, the researcher re-contextualized his theorization with Winichakul’s framework (2014) on Thai cultural studies, home as method, for understanding how I gain and encounter educational experiences as well as having freedom of choice to reconstitute on the powerful curriculum discourse in Thailand. The home approach is a scholarship that has emerged under the national and socio-political contexts of Asia thanks to common roots in the twin processes of nation-building. Similar to the Asia as method, the home as method has its critical implications for Thai scholars by suggesting that they should go beyond “Thai-ness” and offers the tendency to represent “Thai-ness” as a colonial imagination even when critiquing “Thai-ness” as a construction. In addition, it offers the new modes of thinking about Thai history by seeing Thai history as a product of historical construction and realizing that Thai history and Thai-ness has been an active participant in the historical processes that have been constructed by the elites and ruling classes. The notion of “home” signifying Thailand is a part of Asia and is used to move beyond the debate over “us vs. them” or “insider vs. outsider” which is misleading and not productive (Winichakul, 2014). The home approach can be employed for the understanding of the nationalistic discourse in education, particularly its historiography and for critiquing the “imagination” which is used to construct the seam of a collective narrative in curriculum and knowledge production (Jory, 2003).

Conclusion

Curriculum, on the one hand, has been contested, exploited and developed as manifested in the curriculum development paradigm. The researcher, as a Thai scholar and citizen, who has personally and professionally benefited and continues to benefit from the curriculum, acknowledge the production and stratification of the Thai society. This paper thus reflects my own critical awareness, reflection, and problematization of the ways in which I understand my position within these hierarchies of curriculum and knowledge. Accordingly, I tried at my best efforts to reflect throughout this paper on how the influences of powerful ideas of prominent scholars in the field of social sciences and humanities have informed the scholarly fields of education, especially the field of curriculum studies by moving toward the cultural studies in education. As part of my discussion in this paper, I oriented my position to conceptual frameworks proposed by scholars who obtained their conceptual influence from poststructuralists and brought in the postcolonial theory into educational studies for de-colonization and de-imperialisation. All of these frameworks offered critical and reflective insights into why and how decolonizing and de-imperializing the curriculum, knowledge, subjectivity and discourse in education is central to the democratic development of Thai citizens to become global citizens in the 21st century.

References


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**COMMENTS**

The article could have been better if the writer employed third person or impersonal pronoun. As it is not a critique writing, but the proposed article.