

Imagined Chineseness : The Identity Politics of the Second-generation Yunnanese Chinese in Northern Thailand

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This research focuses on the identity politics of the second-generation yunnanese chinese in northern Thailand. I use the social constructionism of ethnic theory as my viewpoint and scrutinize the ethnic phenomena of the yunnanese who migrated to the boundary of Thai-Myanmar since the Chinese civil war. I argue that the yunnanese Chinese identity's change is not nearly personal choice which got the Thai-citizenship in 1980s. Instead, we have to understand the process by embedding the overseas community's policy of the R.O.C government since 1949 and the governance of Thailand government. The two things trigger the yunnanese Chinese to form the "boundaries of ethnic group."

Taking the yunnanese as a community, it not only shows the transnationality of the R.O.C's nationalism since the Chinese civil war, but also reflects the policies of the thai-nationalism assimilation. And the latter one promotes the yunnanese to think about the relationship with the other ethnic groups in Thailand. On the one hand, they became as compatriots of the R.O.C's government before 1980s. And then they became as outsiders since the Taiwanese subjectivity discourse rising after 1980s. On the other hand, as the improvement of Chinese policy in Thailand, the yunnanese were been taken as the minority in the thai-nationalism. Since that, they started to construct the northern-thai chineseness and identified the difference from the Teochew chinese in Bangkok through the Chinese representative.

This research takes Mae Salong Chinese village as the major field site. And the ethnic phenomena show that the factors of the identity negotiation are political structure, citizenship, and the collective memory of the Chinese civil war. The yunnanese strategically use their own ethnicity to perform their ethnic identity and othering the chinese in Bangkok. Finally, this research argues that the northern-thai chineseness is the product of political power and ethnic relationship, and the yunnanese ethnic identity is wavering between primordialism and instrumentalism.

Keywords : identity politics, northern-thai Chinese, nationalism, chineseness, ethnic identity