

Abstract

Tourism is the main culture in modern society. It makes more and more people travel out of their boring, conventional everyday lives. Tourists in modern culture seek for the "authenticity" which is the other side of the inauthenticity of lives in industrial society by consuming the meaning of different places. Such consumption is practiced through visual activity in form of the "gaze" which is developed mainly from the tourist culture and the construction of image of various tourist attractions.

There are several attempts in creating meanings and organizing different space to satisfy such tourists' needs, simultaneously turn such space into mere source of human's gazing. Space is labeled with diverse meaning to fulfill the economic, ideological and cultural goals. The meaning of space has a complicated relationship towards its creator. People actively appropriate only meanings which encourage their diversified benefits and presence of the selves.

In the case of Luang Phrabang, the space has its significance as the "center of culture" among the Laotian's perception, while the scheme of the World Heritage Committee has recently brought the city to the status of the "world heritage of mankind". Gradually, the Laotian state has adopted both sets of meaning to encourage their campaigns in tourism. The private sectors however persist, despite their great profits from tourism, in negotiating against the state for more and more benefits.

The construction of the "tourist gaze" in any space has a complicated process acted by various groups of people. Other than the active roles of three primary groups mentioned above, mass media also play an important role in the construction of the city's chief image. The media has demonstrated their power in changing perception about Luang Phrabang among contemporary Thais from what they perceived a century ago.

Clearly is that the meaning doesn't mean similarly among indigenous people. Most meaning employed by the people of Luang Phrabang rooted in their own culture, especially the meaning of rites or traditional ceremonies. The construction of new meanings from people in other cultures has continuously mystified the people's systems of value. The researcher has however found in this study that the people of Luang Phrabang are still capable of utilizing both the "world heritage" label and the overwhelming visits from all over

the world. Amidst such mystification, their identity and uniqueness have been absorbed into the broaden understanding of the world.

The struggle for authority in imposing the meaning of “the city of Luang Phrabang” is currently intense. And what mainly motivates every single group is tourism.