

Abstract

When Rice and Curry Speaks: A Narrative of a Woman, Community and Food, uses “storytelling” of Mrs. Panida Ketudat's experience as a “mother” and “merchant.” It grounds her experience as a political space and demonstrates specific aspects of women's knowledge through “life narratives” as research method. Autoethnography was employed to convey her stories about women and ready made meal or “food in plastic bags,” a social phenomenon closely related to femininity in Thai society.

It was found that “rice and curry dishes” and “food in plastic bags” changed food culture in Thai society. Eating a meal in domestic space and public space collapsed. Meanwhile women who undergone enculturation process would feel guilty not being a perfect housewife. Ready made rice and curry compromised modern women's dilemma to be “ready-made housewife” and reconfigured “good housewife roles.” They could uphold their familial institution and maintain warm and loving home. on the other hand, rice and curry dishes were marginalized from official economic sectors and other food spaces. They were not recognized as daily staples until economic crisis when the Thai state tried to impose price control so that working and middle class can rely on. Thus, food is also a space that class exploitation is visible.

According to Panida's life narratives, being rice and curry merchant was the most suitable opportunity. She could link her domestic or personal food space for her children and the public commercialized space for her customers. She could manage the two intersecting spaces in the same time while performing her parts as “housewife” and “merchant.” Yet, Panida's life still embedded in cultural and Thai femininity “bias” that she has to be a perfect mother, wife and housewife. Thus, she were locked to framework of cooking that the social imposed on her.

“Panida's stories,” was reinstated as “family's history” that connect to social history. A woman could pass on her knowledge, passions and everyday life struggling and her ancestor's heritage and pride that could not be found in official history. Her stories also opened “spaces” for ordinary women to voice their struggles. Never before

that their stories were included as knowledge. The stories of oppression or exclusion which were neglected before, are now equally counted as knowledge of the society. At the heart of feminist researches, women's experiences are a category of analysis and sources of women's knowledge. Their experiences reveal cultural and social domination processes that required women to be "good at cooking" and that "femininity" in Thai culture is composed of multiplicity of women. These stories, then, open spaces and link other women together and raise political consciousness through interrelation of self, society and culture and an awareness of collective reality.

The study departed from other women researches that focused on gender oppressions from patriarchy regime but do not study and relate to in-depth economic struggles. Those studies may not reveal all of household oppression of women. Yet, this study, through Panida's cooking stories in everyday life, portrayed sophisticated oppressions.