

Vision and Memory: A Film History of the Royal Factories of Rural Thailand

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Abstract

King Rama IX initially established four Royal Factories in 1972 to enhance the quality of life of rural marginalized minorities, including Hmong, Chinese, Yao, Laos and Yor in the Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Sakon Nakorn and Buriram provinces of Thailand. The purpose of this project is to juxtapose the vision of King Rama IX with the memories and feelings of people involved in the Royal factories to create a history in film. The filmmaker brings his personal experience as a key facilitator (barefoot engineer) in the development of these factories. Ethnographic research methodology helped insure that the data from the interviews, including narratives from nearby villagers, current and retired employees, and board members of the Royal factories, controlled the final script and storyboard of the film. A collection of archival photos and current films, especially from the time of mourning, help create a historical context for the lessons learned from the King's initial vision of sustainable development in the context of poverty, opium plantation and border security issues to subsequent factory development. These elements are integrated into a structure of three important components: the development of the Royal Factories over four decades, the current situation of villagers and the factories, and the future vision of collaboration between communities and factories. The creative components of the final product, including editing juxtaposition, visual symbols, and ethnic music and compositions of the King, help enhance the film's purpose to portray the King's vision and perseverance and the memories and feelings of the people.

Key words: Documentary film, The history of Thai Royal Factory, marginalized minorities

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Introduction

The King's vision for marginalized minorities development includes the hill tribe people in the highland area along the borderline between Thailand and Myanmar and Laos in the Northern part where they had been growing opium for a long time. The poor people in the Northeastern area had who very low yield rice and depended on the forest for survival

History and development of four Thai Royal Factories in four decades (1972-2017) had four main stages: surveying and social preparation, training, agro-industries chain of value development, and transformation. The continuous development program of more than three decades from 1969 to 1994 throughout manifested the King's philosophy of "Our Loss is Our Gain." In other words, "Although we have financial loss, we gain countless socio-economic return of sustainability."

First, the surveying and social preparation stage identified the components to improve the quality of life and infrastructure. The King personally surveyed the target areas. He learned from dialogue and discussion with the village leaders and the villagers and then reviewed all key data from involved government agencies and his special volunteer supporting teams. Based on this research and data from the target areas, the King recommended three strategic actions for the agencies involved.

1. Improve the quality of life of the villagers
2. Arrange the capability and employments for the villagers.
3. Empower and develop the villagers to reach the level to maintain sustainability independently.

The king constructed networks of small dams, water reservoirs, and irrigation systems spreading throughout the plantation areas to secure the water supply for agriculture. At the same time he improved the sanitary systems, providing; toilets, underground clean water, and promoted micro cow and chicken farms for solving mal-nutrition problems. The King donated micro rice mill facilities, rice banks, health care facilities, child care centers with food, and Buddhist temples.

The second stage, training, provided technology and technical skills transfer for intensive agriculture and processing in the factory.; After stage one, villagers were trained in intensive agriculture methods and in crop rotation management to keep produce available through all seasons for factory processing. The agro-industry system was initiated under the key concept of contract farming for small farmers. In this system, the villagers apply to be members and signed a contract to deliver raw material at the right quality and quantity. This then gave a guarantee for a minimum price and harmonized the production planning of the factory.

The third stage, agro-industries chain of value development, concentrated on quality assurance and continuously productivity improvement from growing the produce, to

processing, to the end customers. All stakeholders including the farmers and part- and full-time employees, were trained to achieve the goal of long term sustainable growth.

The final stage, transformation, removed the Royal factories from under the King's patronage to Doikham Food Products Company, the 99th company under the Crown Property Bureau Organization. The new business entity changed the direction of the project from social and economic sustainability to a financial profit orientation which was steered by the new management board and resulted in the decision to stop the fourth factory due to financial losses.

The documentary film, *Vision and Memory: A Film History of the Royal Factories of Rural Thailand*, portrays the King's vision and perseverance as well as the memories and feelings of the people who were involved in the Royal Factory project. The researcher's perspective is based upon thirteen years of experience, 1984 to 1997, in the four Royal Factories. These roles included three years as an engineering manager, five years as a senior production and engineering manager, and five years as an assistant managing director, HRD manager, and Agriculture Promotion Manager.

Purpose

- 1) To juxtapose the vision of King Rama IX with the memories and feelings of people who are a) villagers nearby the four Royal Factories, b) employees and retired employee, c) current board members, involved in the Royal factories to create a history in film of the Royal Factories
- 2) The filmmaker brings his personal experiences and bonding network (his colleagues and friends during his work in Royal Factory) as a key facilitator (barefoot engineer) brings up by interviewing the memories and feelings of the involved people into the film.

Research Framework

1. The areas of field work were in Fang - Chiang Mai, Mae - Chang - Chiang Rai, Taongoy – Sakonnakorn and Nondindaeng – Burirum from April 2016 to February 2017.
2. The interviews included nearby villagers, current and retired employees, and board members of the Royal factories.
3. These elements were incorporated into a documentary film which portrays the perspectives of each group into the history of four Royal Factories, following the four decades development timeline.

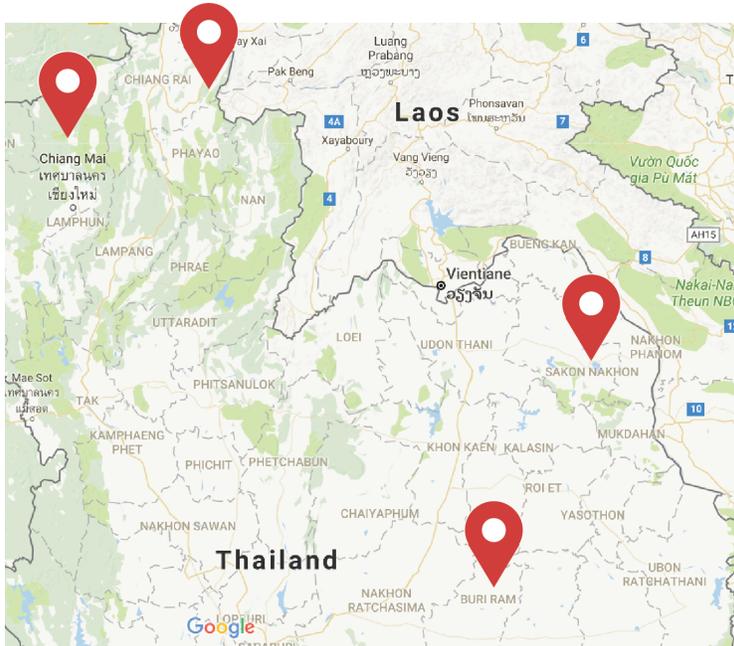


Fig.1: The area of research project the source by Google map

Methodology

This research applies ethnographic research techniques to collect and evaluate the data from the interviews in order to arrange into a storyline. The survey and field research is a key process to create a film history.



Fig. 2: The methodology procedure

Method

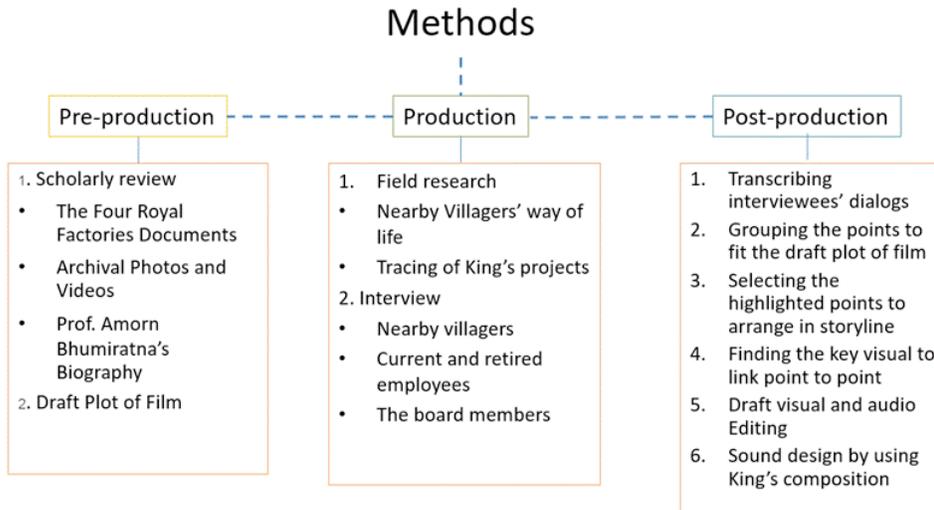


Fig. 3: The flow method

Pre-production

The four Royal Factories documents

The data and story of the Royal Factory was reviewed and collected from many sources, including the working reports of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology (KMUTT), Institute of Food Research and Product development (IFRPD), the meeting reports and performance reports of the Royal Factories and Doikham Food Products, Co., Ltd., and other research reports. All the Royal Factories are situated within the villages.



Fig. 4: First Royal Factory where located in the center of village

The primary data collection to film drafting

In order to draft a plot of the film, the research team went into the field to learn about and film the current status of the four Royal Factories. The interviews were used to identify the initial conditions of the communities before the King established each factory.

Semi-structured questionnaire guideline questions;

1. How were you involved with your own Royal Factory, and why did you choose to work with them? How long did you work for the factory?
2. What does the royal factory mean to you? Why it is important?
3. Did you know why His Majesty the King Bhumipol chose to found the Royal Factories here, and what did he do to prepare the location and people who lived nearby?
4. Did you know the Royal Factory's name and advisory board were changed in 1994 from the Royal Factory to "Doikham" (Golden Mountain)? How did you feel and were there any changes that affected you or anyone else?
5. Please kindly express your memories and feelings about your appreciation and gratitude to the King?
6. How do you expect relationship between the village and the Royal Factories will be in the future? Are there any concerns? What will be changed to enhance surrounding villages or environment?



Fig. 5: The field research within and outside the Royal Factories

Draft plot of film

The Royal Project and Royal Recommended Project on food processing plants were first initiated by HM the King Rama IX over four decades ago in order to alleviate rural hardship, to increase agricultural production, to increase the diversification of agricultural productivity rather than by expanding cultivated land, and to serve as pilot studies on agro-

processing industries in rural areas and associated social interface problems. There are four food processing plants located in northern and north-eastern Thailand.

The two plants in the north of Thailand are at Fang District, Chiangmai Province, and Maechan District, Chiangrai Province. These two plants were initially established to process certain agricultural products such as temperate-climate fruits and vegetables that have been introduced to northern Thailand to the Royal Project on crop substitution, watershed protection and management, and afforestation.

The other two plants, on northeastern Thailand, are at Tao Ngoy District, Sakonnakorn Province, and Nondindaeng district, Burirum Province. Poverty problems, border security, and strategic reasons are the driving force in setting up these two plants.

Notwithstanding the diverse considerations given at the time of establishing the four plants, the common development objective of the projects is to introduce the concept of crop production for agro-industry through integrated planning of farming and processing schedules. Moreover, the scheme for guaranteeing crop price is instituted. Emphasis is placed on the farming aspect more than the processing part, this being distinct and different from general to agro-industrial enterprises. As the plants are unique in their purposes and site-specific social conditions, study on interfacing agro-processing technology with rural environment, on both technical and social aspects, will be highly valuable in promoting medium-size agro-processing industries in rural Thailand as planned at the national level through the industrial restructuring program of the country. Under HM the King's Recommendations, pilot rural development projects starting from land and water development and management, crop production culminating in agro-industry are planned to be established for demonstration in various parts of the country. The experience acquired from these four plants was very useful for other subsequent projects.

Standard food processing equipment is available at the four plants. Agricultural outputs to be processed vary from place to place and depending on the time of the year. In all cases, farmers are still engaged in rice production and supplement their income by selling agricultural products produced by the Royal factory. During the rainy season, these products include, baby corn, bamboo shoots, and fruits such as lychees and longans, whereas tomatoes are processed takes place during the dry season. The factory farmers are provided on credit basis, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and necessary equipment, as well as guaranteed crop prices. Agricultural workers attached to the plants and government officers responsible for agricultural extension and promotion are available to demonstrate and help solve technical problems. Examples of the products are:

- Tomato-based: juice, paste, and peeled-tomatoes
- Bamboo-shoot: dry and canned bamboo-shoots
- Canned baby corn
- Canned fruits such as longans, lychees, and strawberries.
- Fruit glaze
- Full fat soy flour
- High protein baby food based on domestic produces as soybeans and sesame seeds.

Owing to the scheme, the livelihood of farmers need not solely depend on rice production as supplementary incomes are available. In many cases these additional sources of income are of higher value than those obtained from rice, and also cushion the hardship should rice production fail due to droughts and pests. As farmers can now work on their land throughout the year, seasonal migration to cities and rural to rural migration are curtailed. Typically, during one season a plant would buy agricultural products from a few hundred to more than ten thousand farming families as well as employ villagers on the production line; economic and social benefits and impacts are felt throughout the plant community and its surrounding area.

Certain community development projects proceeded, and some have been still in operation concurrent to the Royal factory until it turned to Doikham Food Product., Co, Ltd. in 1994. Notable projects are the establishment of day-centers for village children, growth monitoring of children and provision of protein supplements for undernourished children and lactating mothers, establishment of village health clinics, construction of Buddhist temples, and water supply systems. Both the Royal factory and the villages contribute towards the construction and operation. The underlying principles are to establish effective interface mechanisms between the plants and their surrounding communities and self-dependence. In some areas where villagers cannot support the operation, the centers and clinics, material and financial assistance are provided by the Royal factory. Traditional handcrafts are promoted. For example, at Sakonnakorn, villagers are encouraged to supplement the family income during less strenuous working period by undertaking silk ,cloth weaving and making brooms. The techniques are indigenous to the area; the Royal factory provided required materials on credit basis so that more villagers can be trained on the crafts.



Fig. 6: The fourth Royal Factory after the close

The analysis of the draft plot of the film

The draft plot is analyzed in order to outline the film into four periods: the development of the four Royal Factories, the current situation of villagers and factories, the conflicts and solutions, and the future vision of collaboration between communities and factories.

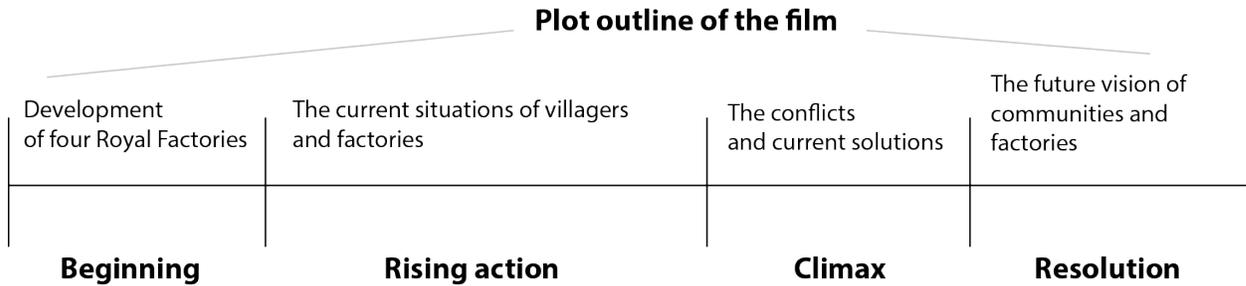


Fig. 7: The storyline in the film

Concept of the artwork

Concept: “Our memories of the Royal Factory”

The researcher explored self-experiences of about two decades to lead the story as well as, stakeholders who were involved directly and indirectly by the effects of each Royal Factory. The film narrates memories, feelings, and appreciations from surrounding communities starting from the Royal Factory establishment passed through the change of management’s policy that had the change of the name and concept of Royal Factory to be Doikham Food Product Company limited. Due to the concept change of the Royal Factory, which was the concept of social enterprise as to be social business that resulted in the closure of the Fourth Royal Factory because of financial loss. The change of management concept reflected the conflicts and effects of any Royal Factories, such as environmental pollution and the solid fence built rounded the Royal Factories that it had never done before. It made people frustrated due to the inconvenience of walking within the villages.

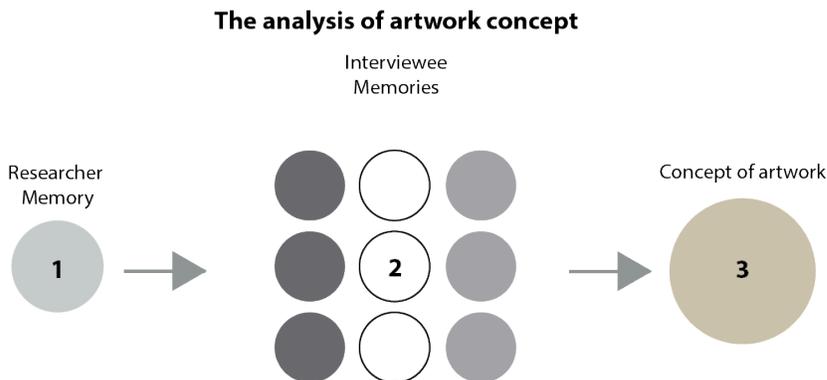


Fig. 8: Process of creative concept flow

The creative artwork

Storyboard

The story begins from The King’s work in the rural areas in the North of Thailand where opium was planted. The voice of the researcher conveys the story since he worked in the early development for of the four Royal Factories until he resigned. The story is then passed to others as the story flows to the end. However, the researcher’s voice is a key control in the story along each transition period.



Fig. 9: Excerpts from the film.

The shooting and editing rhythm

This film adopted the Soviet Montage of Eisenstein - “The Five Methods of Montage” as the way to convey the “message” from the film to an audience. The rhythmic method used to create the flow of the story and the tonal method establishes the emotion of the shots which can represent different memories and feelings of situations that interviewees narrated.

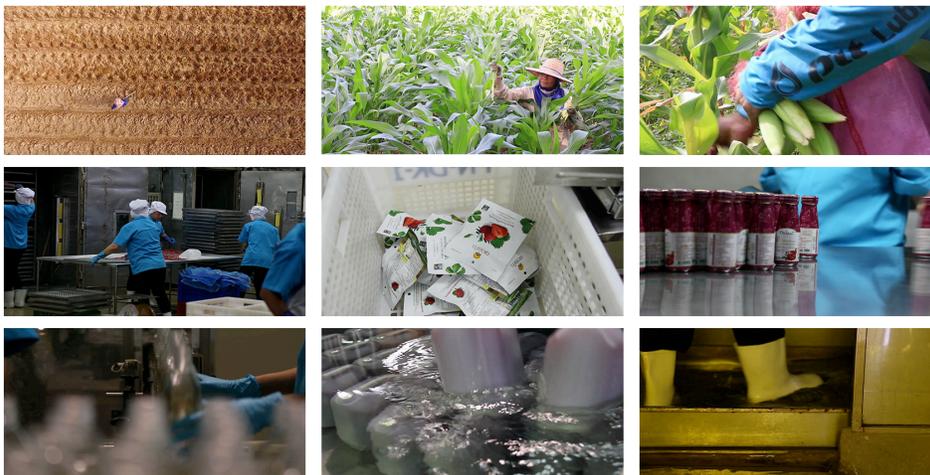


Fig. 10: The examples of utilizing The Methods of Montage.

Result

Survey and Field research

First, the team surveyed and recorded the current situation and the way of life of villagers near the four Royal Factories. A total of eight field trips were planned and organized: two trips for each factory distributed throughout the year from April, 2016 to February, 2017 in order to cover the planting seasons and the diverse production in the Royal Factories.

Dialogues and interviews were planned for three group segments

The field research trips to the sites of the four factories to collect data, interviews, and film footage shooting for creating for the documentary. These elements helped guide the narration:

1. The First Royal Factory (Fang) and Second Royal Factory (Maechan) were in the Northern region along the borderline between Thailand and Myanmar which had been the big opium growing area of hill tribe people. HM the King came to survey and identify the root cause of this problem which could be remedied by highland temperate crops and gradually reduced the opium growing areas.
2. The Third Royal Factory (Tao Ngoy) was in a poor village with very dry land which was not suitable for growing.
3. The Fourth Royal Factory (Nondindaeng) was initiated to develop the poor village and build up the security along the borderline between Thailand and Cambodia.

Cultural context in the Royal Factory area

In order for the film to portray the each specific cultural heritage, as well as environmental and socio-economic problems of these diverse communities, the film teams filmed the day-to-day lives with footage of activities from conversations in tea shops, work in the fields and forests, morning markets, worship in the Muslim mosque, to craft noodle production.

First and Second Royal Factory: The reflection of Marginalized Peoples

This area has three different religions: Buddhism, Christianity and Muslim, that stay harmoniously together with multi-ethnic groups such as Chinese Yunnan, Tai-Yai and Thais. The researcher interviewed to understand different perspectives that interviewees reflected the positive and negative effect of the Royal Factory to their communities. The research team explored many local places to understand the cultural aspects:

- Ankang Royal Agricultural Research Station
- Yunan village: harmonized living under three different religions
- Quan Yin shrine: gift from the king
- Strawberry and tomato plantation area
- Banyang Muslim shrine
- Villages around the factory
- Passion fruit and red guava plantation

The Third Royal Factory: The Fighting against Communists, Poverty and Starvation

There were two key reasons for the king to establish the third Royal Factory in 1976. First, Sakon Nakorn was a communist camp, located in Phuparn mountain ranges. Second, this red zone was a remote area and difficult to reach. At the first visit to the area, the King established a Buddhist temple improvement and gave a Buddha statue because the temples

played the role of spiritual bonding among the villagers. In order to establish sustainable development a micro dam, water reservoir and water distribution network system for agriculture and a child care center were established under the patronage of the King.

Fourth Royal Factory: Empowerment of The Buffer Villages Along the Cambodian Border

The Burirum province, a region of former battlefields, has many elements of Cambodian culture, including ancient Hindu shrines and fortified villages settled by retired Thai soldiers. People who live in this area are traditionally both Thais and Cambodians. The King began development by creating a series of small and micro dams for water reservoirs and irrigation for comprehensive agricultural infrastructure development. Then, the King recommended the establishment of the fourth Royal Factory to create jobs in the area. After fourteen years of operation, it was closed because of an economic crisis. It caused unemployment in twenty households and loss of markets for farmers in 4000 households.

The Findings of the Interviews

The interviews yielded five main points.

1. The summary of the four Royal Factories establishment

After the king arrived, the problems in the areas were identified such as poverty, unemployment, lack of nutrition and health care systems, as well as, a lack of education. The King took the action of establishing the Royal Factories as a key facility for the improvement of life quality.

2. The working process of employees change when the Royal Factories transferred to Doikham Food Product Company Ltd.

In 1994, the fourth Royal Factory was taken over by Doikham Food Product Company Ltd in order to maximize profits. This was a departure from the King's philosophy which emphasized profit sharing through contracts between the farmers, factory workers, and the Royal Factory. This was a change to a business model that pitted the new factory management against the community of farmers and factory workers in order to maximize profits. After three years, the fourth factory under the new model of factory management failed, and the entire enterprise shut down. One of the interviewees said "We nearly won the poverty but we loss when the fourth Royal Factory closed,"

3. The negative effects

Strong negative emotions resulted from the shift from the original philosophy underlying the Royal Factory development projects to the new profit business model. The original philosophy endeavored to build a harmonious community amongst all of the participants in the enterprise, experts, management, farmers, and part and full time factory workers. As a result of the destruction of this goal, the villagers felt isolated and a gap developed between the new management and the community. Once the fourth Royal Factory project closed, the community has suffered from pollution to the rice fields and the loss of markets

for crops. The tears of the interviewees eloquently show the losses of the closing of this project.

4. The conflicts

However, the remaining Royal Factories have tried to solve this problem and maintain the relationship as in the past, so that the villagers near the Royal Factories hope that the relationship maintains a concern for the community's way of life and the environment. Some of the Royal Factories need to improve social concern and agricultural promotion.

5. The feelings to the king

Once people were asked to express the feelings for the king, most of them were lost and deeply downhearted with this loss. They feel a deep appreciation of what the king had done for them and he will be in their memories forever. This reflects the deep bonding between people and the king.

Conclusion

This creative research project was integrated with a KMUTT Media Art Department senior student documentary film project for one year (April 2016 – May 2017). The documentary film is a tool to narrate the development of the four Royal factories which the King established to enhance the quality of life of the marginalized minorities in sensitive areas for the reduction of opium production and communism and the enhancement of border security.

The creation of film script was arranged from the four decade timeline which came from the three different groups of people who were involved in different positions and roles throughout the development and changing period. This meant that the research team interviewed seventy narrators to participate in drawing the beautiful story, showing deeply meaningful appreciation of the kindheartedness of the king to the poor. This kind of development process isn't possible under the normal mechanisms of the government agencies.

The findings illustrate the King's high talents of organizing the experimental processing in the palace laboratories which he then scaled up to larger scale experiments as the first Royal Factory, then scale up to the pilot scale as the second Royal Factory, and then finally became the micro scale factory of the third and fourth Royal factories.

The story was narrated by many people who were involved with the Royal Factories that gave many different perspectives to construct the film. The Royal Factories in people's memories portrays the gratitude and bonding of the king to local people. It grows along with villagers that has success and failure as the Royal Factory metaphor of person. As the Royal Factory project grows along with the village communities with its successes and failures, it becomes a metaphor for life.

In summary, "Our the Royal Factories in our memories" conveys the history, story and narrative that is rooted in agricultural culture in the poor rural society in Thailand. This

film portrays the King's model that implements his research through the Royal Factories to empower quality of life holistically, encompassing the economic, education, environment, and health care systems in Thai society.

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