NATION BRANDING AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN NON-DEMOCRATIC REGIMES

Re-Branding Post-Coup Thailand

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DECLARATION

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his/her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about nation branding, a relatively recent approach to national reputation management that has gained much popularity worldwide. Many countries have invested much time, effort and financial resources into re-defining their external images and internal identities through nation branding. The concept itself has enjoyed ample academic attention, especially by scholars in the disciplines of business and urban geography studies. As a result, a dominant view of nation branding has formed that nation branding is an externally-oriented, business-derived, and somewhat superficial undertaking aimed at increasing the country's competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

In this thesis, I challenge this dominant view by examining how nation branding operates in a non-democratic context on the example of post-2014 military-ruled Thailand. I argue that nation branding is a strategy for political legitimation that is primarily aimed at changing the social attitudes and behaviours of the nation's citizens through the creation and dissemination of strategic national myths. My overall objective is to provide a holistic yet critical account of nation branding as a complex political phenomenon that can provide a useful methodological framework for future comparative studies of nation branding in non-democratic contexts.

Drawing on empirical data generated through my field research activities between June and November 2016, the core chapters of this thesis analyse the use of nation branding in military-ruled Thailand between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. They examine externally- and internally-focused nation branding campaigns and activities across multiple sectors, both public and private, and provide an account of public reactions to a select number of these efforts. The findings in the core chapters show that Thailand's post-coup nation branding was deployed to help legitimise the country's highly conservative, royalist political order. As such, it was sustained by domestic power politics rather than the economic logic of liberal capitalism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BOI	Board of Investment
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPOT	Cultural Product of Thailand
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DLIT	Distance Learning via Information Technology
DLTV	Distance Learning Television
ECT	Election Commission of Thailand
EU	European Union
FC	Football club
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FG	Focus group
G77	Group of 77
GDP	Gross domestic product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	Information operations
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoC	Ministry of Commerce
MP	Member of Parliament
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIO	National Identity Office
NLA	National Legislative Assembly
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OTOP	One Tambon One Product
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PDRC	People's Democratic Reform Committee
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PM	Prime Minister
PR	Public relations
PRD	Government Public Relations Department
PSYOP	Psychological operations
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, maths

TAT	Tourism Authority of Thailand
TRT	Thai Rak Thai
UDD	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

All Thai words have been transcribed into English using Leeds University Romanisation system, which is a simplified version of the Library of Congress system. In case of Thai proper names, I have adopted the English spelling preferred by the person involved or followed commonly recognised transliterations.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On 22 May 2014 in Thailand, a group of high-ranking army generals led by army chief General Prayuth Chan-o-cha overthrew the elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra following months of political turmoil. Operating under the name of National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the military junta abrogated the country's existing constitution and cracked down on political dissent. The NCPO did not tolerate even the smallest signs of opposition and the country made international news for a series of unconventional arrests including flashing a three-finger 'Hunger Game' salute, reading George Orwell's book *1984* in public, and 'liking' or sharing anti-junta memes on Facebook.[1] It soon became clear that the NCPO was in no rush to restore civilian rule. Thailand was without an interim constitution for two months and a prime minister or cabinet for three months following the coup. General Prayuth was appointed the country's prime minister in August 2014. Since then, the NCPO kept postponing their election timeline making it the longest military-led government in Thailand since the 1980s.[2] However, sustaining the increasingly protracted military rule was never easy. The coup, along with Prayuth's often erratic leadership style, the junta's human rights violations and their reluctance to hold elections were subject to frequent international criticism. Dwindling economic performance, mega-projects riddled with corruption scandals and constant suppression of political and civil rights also threatened to undermine the junta's legitimacy at home. External and internal national reputation management has thus played an important role in the junta's post-coup political activities.

Nation branding is an approach to national reputation management that utilises techniques of commercial branding and marketing. Although nations have always strived to manage their reputations, nation branding is a relatively recent concept. It evolved in the late 1990s as an extension of place branding – the practice of branding locations such as villages, towns, cities or regions to attract tourism, investment and human capital – rooted in business and urban geography studies. Since then, many countries have enthusiastically re-defined their identities through attractive logos and

[1] For background on the 2014 coup, see Duncan McCargo, 'Thailand in 2014: The Trouble with Magic Swords,' in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, ed. Daljit Singh (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 336–58.
[2] Both the 2006 and the 1991 juntas held the first post-coup elections in just over a year after their respective coups.

catchy slogans. As a result, it is often assumed that nation branding is an externally-oriented, business-derived, and somewhat superficial undertaking aimed at increasing the country's competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

The initial enthusiasm with which nation branding was greeted in the policy world did not fully translate into the scholarly realm. As Wally Olins first noted in the late 1990s, nation branding attracted 'visceral antagonism' from the more traditional and established fields of politics and social sciences due to its business-derived approaches to national identity, nationalism and nation building.[3] As a result, much of the early research on nation branding was driven by nation branding consultants, who had vested interests in presenting the practice in a positive light.[4] The past twenty years have seen an increase in nation branding scholarship as well as its diversification.[5] Besides the traditional fields of business and urban geography studies, some of the recent research has been produced by scholars in the fields of politics, international relations, social sciences, media, culture and communication studies. This has led to the emergence of critical research on nation branding. Yet, as Dolea points out, more critical research is needed since much of the current scholarship still provides an overly positivist and functionalist account of nation branding without due consideration to its broader socio-political and cultural implications.[6] To further expand the existing critical research, I examine the politics of nation branding in a non-democratic context using post-2014 Thailand as the case study. I argue that nation branding is a strategy for political legitimation that is primarily aimed at changing the social attitudes and behaviour of citizens through the

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[3] Olins first made this claim in his 1999 book *Trading Identities: Why countries and companies are taking on each other's roles.* He made the same claim again in his 2002 opinion piece, see Wally Olins 'Branding the nation – the historical context,' *Brand Management* 9, no.4-5 (2002): 241. For similar observations see Simon Anholt, *Competitive identity: the new brand management for nations, cities and regions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4; Simon Anholt, *Brand new justice: how branding places and products can help the developing world* (Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), 12-3; Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the nation: the global business of national identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

[4] Alina Dolea, 'The need for critical thinking in country promotion: Public diplomacy, nation branding, and public relations,' in *The Routledge handbook of critical public relations*, ed. Jacquie L'Etang (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 279; Nadia Kaneva, 'The Branded National Imagination and Its Limits: Insights from the post-socialist experience,' *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 39, no.1 (2017): 119; Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg, 'Mediating the Nation-State: Agency and the Media in Nation-Branding Campaigns,' *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015): 3065.

[5] Nadia Kaneva, 'Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research,' *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 117 and 120.

[6] Dolea, 'Country promotion,' 275 and 279.

creation and dissemination of strategic national myths. My overall objective is to provide a holistic yet critical account of nation branding as a political phenomenon that can provide a useful methodological framework for future comparative studies of nation branding in non-democratic contexts. Although some of the arguments advanced in this thesis could also apply to the use of nation branding in democratic contexts, such claims are outside the scope of my thesis. The following sections outline the conceptual framework that underpins the research in this thesis.

Conceptualising Nation Branding

In her 2011 article, Kaneva provides a useful classification of the existing academic literature on nation branding into three different strands: technical-economic, political, and cultural.[7] Although many studies now adopt a more mixed approach, Kaneva's classification is a good starting point for the analysis of nation branding. It illustrates how different strands understand national reputation management and approach the questions of what nation branding is, what it does and why, and who it is aimed at. The following sections provide a more detailed account of studies within each strand, their approaches and shortcomings.

Technical-Economic Strand

Research within Kaneva's technical-economic strand treats a nation's reputation as an asset that can be utilised for capital accumulation and economic growth and is dominated by marketing, management and tourism studies. Studies within this strand often rely on narrow assumptions about the nature of the modern world, which they treat as a single globalised marketplace governed by the logic of liberal capitalism.[8] The rise of new state and non-state actors following the two world wars and the Cold War has made the global marketplace more crowded (multiplying the number of actors competing for resources, investment and economic influence), while economic globalisation has led to the increasing homogenisation of markets. In this context, nations need to increase their visibility to attract consumer attention and gain competitive advantage.[9] Just as branding a product increases its desirability by adding

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[7] See Kaneva, 'Toward an agenda,' 119-20.
[8] Fox example, see Anholt, *Competitive identity,* 1; Katja Valaskivi, 'Circulating a fashion: Performance of nation branding in Finland and Sweden,' *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 12, no. 2-3 (2016): 141.
[9] Anholt, *Competitive identity*, 1-2; Keith Dinnie, *Nation branding: concepts, issues, practice* (London: Routledge, 2016), 6-8; Philip Kotler and David Gertner, 'Country

value, studies within this strand argue that branding a nation will increase its visibility on the global stage by creating emotional ties and loyalty between the national brand and its consumers, be they foreign holiday-makers, investors, trading partners, buyers or workers.[10] The ultimate goal of nation branding is thus to increase the competitive edge of a nation that will eventually lead to profit maximisation.

Reducing national reputation to a number of economic functions (visibility, attractiveness and competitiveness) leads many authors to adopt normative approaches to the study of nation branding. They see nation branding as a contemporary necessity and focus on how nations should practice it.[11] Here, nation branding is often conceptualised either as equal or closely related to the country-of-origin effect or as a national equivalent to what is known in the corporate world as 'brand equity.' The idea behind the country-of-origin effect is that a country can improve its exports through nation branding by emphasising its qualities in order to dismantle negative or stereotypical views held by consumers in other countries. In other words, a strong positive nation brand such as that of France, Germany or Italy will favourably affect the buying behaviour of consumers in other countries. As Loo and Davies explain, '[c]onsumers are willing to pay more for products and services from countries that they perceive favorably or as having the expertise to produce those products and services;'[12] therefore, the national brand has a considerable economic value. On the other hand, negative perceptions of a country may unfavourably impact the brand image of products. For instance, Škoda cars were seen for many years as qualitatively inferior to their western European competitors due to their origins in the

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as brand, product and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective,' *Journal of Brand Management* 9, no.4-5 (2002): 253.

[10] For example, see Anholt, *Brand new justice*, 10-3; Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 7; Kotler and Gertner, 'Country as brand,' 254; Olins, 'Branding the nation,' 246-7.

[11] For example, see Anholt, *Competitive identity*; Anholt, *Brand new justice*; Dinnie, *Nation branding*; Ying Fan, 'Branding the nation: What is being branded?' *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12, no.1 (2006): 5-14; Krittinee Nuttavuthisit, 'Branding Thailand: Correcting the negative image of sex tourism,' *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 3, no.1 (2007): 21-30; Kotler and Gertner, 'Country as brand;' Theresa Loo and Gary Davies, 'Branding China: The Ultimate Challenge in Reputation Management?' *Corporate Reputation Review* 9, no.3 (2006): 198-210; Olins, 'Branding the nation;' John O'Shaughnessy and Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, 'Treating the Nation as a Brand: Some Neglected Issues,' *Journal of Macromarketing* 20, no.1 (2000): 56-64.

[12] Loo and Davies, 'Branding China,' 200. For similar argument, see Anholt, *Competitive identity*, 10-2; Anholt, *Brand new justice*, 38 and 104; Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 91-2.

former Czechoslovakia.[13] This negative perception changed when the company was taken over by Germany's Volkswagen in 2000.

The relationship between nation and product image is in fact far more complex and by no means linear. A positive product image can co-exist with a negative nation image.[14] For example, Japanese products remain among the most popular consumer choices in China despite the deep-rooted anti-Japanese sentiments and frequent calls for Japanese product boycotts online.[15] The link between a nation's image and consumer behaviour is thus not as strong as many of the studies within the technical-economic strand believe it to be. Other factors, such as price, functionality, design, quality or how established the brand is within its product category and brand history, affect consumer choices that are not always directly related to the product's country of origin.[16] Therefore, branding a nation is by no means a guarantee that its exports will increase or that a positive balance of payments will be achieved.

Treating nation branding as a strategy to provide a nation with 'brand equity,' an added intangible value of a product or a service or, in this case, a nation,[17] is equally flawed as it offers an overly optimistic and uncritical view of the practice. To achieve national brand equity, nation branding needs to be a coherent nation-wide public-private partnership, where every communication act between the country and the outside world carries the branded message.[18] Inspired by the world of business, where brand value is sometimes believed to account for as much as forty to sixty percent of the company's total value,[19] Anholt claims that nation branding can 'make a huge difference to both the internal confidence and the external performance of a country.'[20] He even suggests that nation branding can promote global justice by reversing contemporary patterns of consumption and creating 'consumerist desires'

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[13] O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 'Neglected Issues,' 56.
[14] Fan, 'Branding the nation,' 9.
[15] Ibid, 9. Also, see Koichi Iwabuchi, 'Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of "international cultural exchange",' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, no.4 (2015): 426.
[16] For a short discussion on how the country-of-origin effect on consumers' product choices may be overrated, see Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 90.
[17] Anholt, *Competitive identity*, 6.
[18] Anholt, *Brand new justice*, 11, 105 and 130.
[19] Christopher S. Browning, 'Nation branding and development: poverty panacea or business as usual?' *Journal of International Relations and Development* 19, no. 1 (2016): 50; Sue Curry Jansen, 'Designer nations: Neo-liberal nation branding – Brand Estonia,' *Social Identities* 14, no.1 (2008): 125.
[20] Anholt, *Brand new justice*, 11.

in rich countries for the poor countries' brands.[21] A problem with technical-economic approaches is the assumption that nations should be branded without considering any implications this process might have on the nations themselves.[22] Although many authors within this strand recognise the complexity of nations, in practice they are still happy to reduce them to a number of economic indicators governed by business-derived reputation management strategies.

Political Strand

Research in Kaneva's political strand, by contrast, suggests that not all nations employ nation branding merely to enhance their global economic standing. For instance, since the early 2000s the Chinese government has invested in nation branding in order to improve China's political standing abroad.[23] Through the process of branding, countries seek to create amicable ties with foreign publics and governments to enhance their political reputation and ascend the global hierarchy of nations.[24] Some studies even suggest that nation branding contributes to greater social cohesion and self-esteem as a positive external image will fill the nation's citizens with feelings of national pride.[25] Studies in political strand see nation branding as a strategy aimed at

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[21] Ibid, 16.

[22] See Kaneva, 'Toward an agenda,' 123. Also see Somogy Varga, 'The Politics of Nation Branding: Collective identity and public sphere in the neoliberal state,' *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 39, no.8 (2013): 828.

[23] Under Jiang Zemin (1989-2002), China's activities were aimed at attracting foreign direct investment and promoting its economic rise abroad. Hu Jintao's administration (2002-2012) invested into developing China's soft power to improve the country's international image. Since 2012, Xi Jinping – China's new Secretary General – has significantly invested in China's public and cultural diplomacy efforts. See Anne-Marie Brady, 'China's Foreign Propaganda Machine,' *Journal of Democracy* 26, no.4 (2015): 51-9; Michael Barr, 'Nation Branding as Nation Building: China's Image Campaign,' *East Asia* 29, no.1 (2012): 81-94; Falk Hartig, 'China's Global Image Management: Paper Cutting and the Omission of Politics,' *Asian Studies Review* 42, no.4 (2018): 703-6.

[24] Christopher Browning and Antonio Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction: Nation Branding and Competitive Identity in World Politics,' *Geopolitics* 22, no.3 (2017): 490.

[25] Aronczyk, *Branding the nation*, 16; Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction,' 492; Christopher Browning, 'Nation Branding, Self-Esteem and the Constitution of Subjectivity in Late Modernity,' *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11, no.2 (2015): 211; Mark Leonard, Catherine Stead and Conrad Smewing, *Public Diplomacy* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2002), 9; Peter van Ham, 'Branding Territory: Inside the Wonderful Worlds of PR and IR Theory,' *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 31, no.2 (2002): 255; Jian Wang, 'Managing national reputation and international relations in the global era: Public diplomacy revisited,' *Public Relations Review* 32, no.2 (2006): 91.

upholding 'the very idea, existence and success' of nation-states.[26] As such, this strand is dominated by international relations, public relations and international communication studies.

Much of the research in the political strand conceptualises nation branding as a tool of soft power – an intangible and co-optive state power that a country employs to make other countries '*want* [original emphasis] what it wants'[27] – that works on the principle of attracting public opinion through positive influence and techniques of persuasion. van Ham even suggests that nation branding signifies a shift from a modern world of geopolitics to a postmodern and peaceful world of geo-economics, where states' success is measured through perceived attractiveness rather than military might.[28] Despite a growing preoccupation with the soft power of persuasion and influence as opposed to the hard power of coercion and military might within the field of international relations, Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira caution that such claims of a paradigmatic shift in world politics are overplayed.[29] Post-Cold War globalisation did not displace traditional geopolitical concerns but rather 'recast them in light of market logic.'[30] In other words, images and influence increasingly matter, not the least because of the new technologies and increased global interconnectedness, but they are not the only or the most important assets in world politics.

Studies within the political strand often provide a more historicised account of nation branding by discussing it in relation to other reputation-based practices, such as propaganda and public diplomacy.[31] This complicates claims made by nation branding consultants and academics in the technical-economic strand, that nation branding is a new and unique practice.[32] There is no clear conceptual distinction

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[26] Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction,' 491.

[27] Joseph Nye, 'Soft power,' *Foreign Policy* 80 (1990): 166.

[28] Peter van Ham, 'The Rise of the Brand State,' *Foreign Affairs* 80, no.5 (2001): 4.

[29] Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction,' 488.

[30] Ibid, 488.

[31] For discussions of propaganda, see Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing dictatorship: propaganda and thought work in contemporary China* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Daniela Stockmann and Mary E. Gallagher, 'Remote Control: How the Media Sustain Authoritarian Rule in China,' *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no.4 (2011): 436-67. For discussions of public diplomacy, see: Leonard et al., *Public Diplomacy*; Bernard L. Simonin, 'Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities,' *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 32, no.3 (2008); Gyorgy Szondi, 'Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual similarities and differences,' in *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy,* eds. Virginie Duthoit and Ellen Huijgh (2008), 1-42, http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20081022_pap _in_dip_nation_branding.pdf; Wang, 'Managing national reputation.'

[32] Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction,' 488.

between public diplomacy, propaganda and nation branding. In fact, none of the three concepts has a historically fixed meaning because states and scholars have used them interchangeably to name the same reputation-based practices.[33] Some studies within the political strand simply treat all three concepts as a form of propaganda. Brady's study of Chinese 'thought work' (sixiang gongzuo) is an example of this approach. She refers to all reputation-based practices, including nation branding, in post-1989 China as 'positive' propaganda and asserts that this form of propaganda is softer and more sophisticated as it employs techniques of persuasion rather than coercion and disseminates positive messages that praise Chinese success, promote discussion and appeal to public emotions.[34] Yet, as Melissen points out, using the term propaganda is often problematic because it comes with negative historical connotations and the popular belief that propaganda is a form of deceit that seeks to narrow and close people's minds in a one-way communication of ideas.[35] Many academics thus conceive of nation branding as a successor to propaganda but keep the two concepts separate.[36] They see propaganda as an ideological smokescreen for the aggressive use of state power at home and abroad, and while they admit that nation branding does not take place in a power vacuum, they see it as devoid of political ideology. In short, they see nation branding as a soft persuasion tool that carries no repercussions for non-compliance.[37] Although nation branding lacks the ideological substance of propaganda, both concepts are myth-creating and aimed at changing people's beliefs and attitudes as well as shaping their actions. Nation branding thus may not be such a benign force as studies within the technical-economic strand often claim.[38] Just like its corporate counterpart, nation branding is often accompanied by various forms of economic, cultural and political hegemony.[39]

Public diplomacy, on the other hand, is a two-way process: a persuasion through dialogue with foreign publics.[40] Melissen and Szondi point out that nation

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[33] Ibid, 489.

[34] See Brady, *Marketing dictatorship*, 65-87 and 188.

[35] Jan Melissen, 'The New Public Diplomacy: Between theory and practice,' in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft power in international relations,* ed. Jan Melissen (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 16-7.

[36] Leonard et al., *Public Diplomacy*, 46; van Ham, 'Branding territory,' 263; Wang, 'Managing national reputation,' 94.

[37] van Ham, 'Branding territory,' 263.

[38] For example, Anholt claims that nation branding can reduce the gap between the first and second world countries making the world a more equal place. For further details, see Anholt, *Brand new justice*.

[39] van Ham, 'Branding territory,' 264.

[40] Melissen, 'New public diplomacy,' 18-9.

branding is a much more ambitious project than public diplomacy since it requires a greater mobilisation of the country's human and arguably financial resources than public diplomacy, which relies on a relatively small and well-defined group of public diplomacy practitioners such as diplomats, NGOs and other non-state actors.[41] Furthermore, Szondi argues that public diplomacy is more elite-oriented in that it targets political and cultural elites or decision-makers with an interest in foreign policy matters whereas nation branding targets mass audiences with diverse interests.[42] Nation branding is also more aspirational, it aims to improve the nation's external image single-handedly, and strategic than public diplomacy.[43] Public diplomacy seeks to create smooth international relations whereas nation branding is about 'reshaping the country's self-image and moulding its identity in a way that makes the re-branded nation stand out from the pack.'[44] Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira thus suggest that the difference between nation branding and other reputation management practices is 'not simply one of scale of ambition or resources, but relates to the fact that reputation management practices are typically driven by varying objectives and are therefore liable to be designed to have different constitutive effects.'[45]

The practical effects of nation branding, such as who and what is included and excluded in the branding process, are typically overlooked by research in the technical-economic and political strands but they have significant socio-political implications for the national realm. National identity and national image are conceptually different. The former refers to how the nation perceives itself while the latter relates to how the nation is perceived by others.[46] Yet, both concepts are rooted in historical and cultural interpretations of the nation's territory, socio-political system, culture and people. As such, they are mutually constitutive and they co-create national reputation. In the process of branding, old interpretations of the nation are replaced with new ones or completely novel interpretations are created, which are then presented as the national brand. There are two important aspects to consider here: agency and ambassadorship.

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[41] Szondi, 'Public diplomacy,' 12; Melissen, 'New public diplomacy,' 19.
[42] Szondi, 'Public diplomacy,' 13.
[43] Melissen, 'New public diplomacy,' 20.
[44] Ibid, 20.
[45] Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction,' 489.
[46] Simonin, 'Nation branding,' 22.

Nation branding is an elitist project that is seldom open to public participation. The creative branding process is often outsourced to private-sector branding or marketing agencies and consultants.[47] In many cases, the agencies or consultants are not local but foreign and far removed from the context that is being branded. For instance, Estonia's 'Welcome to Estonia' brand was designed in a New York office by the British communication company Interbrand, the same company behind 'Cool Britannia.'[48] This detachment means that people within the nation often have little to no direct input in the process of branding, which is carried out by agents who may not have an interest in creating a truly representative brand. Even in cases when governments encourage public participation in the branding process through, for example, focus groups or domestic opinion surveys, this promise of nation brand 'co-creation' is largely illusory as it is the branding consultants who eventually determine the character of the new national brand.[49] Many branding consultants have substantial cultural and historical knowledge of the countries they brand, but they do not strive to capture the nation with all its complexities unless these constitute an added value.[50] The result may be an exclusive rather than an inclusive brand that reinforces essentialist, reified and stereotypical interpretations of the nation, national culture, and its people.[51] This is to be expected, because brands need to be simple and flexible in order to appeal to wide and varied audiences. Brands that try to capture some of the nation's complexities, such as Malaysia's 'Truly Asia' brand, often end up sounding rather vague and, as Roll notes, 'risk becoming a grotesque joke' should ethnic tensions arise.[52] It is here that a core tension of nation branding arises: brands need to be simple and flexible, yet nations are inherently complex and obstinate. What is included or excluded in the process of branding is extremely telling about how governments and their branding agencies/consultants understand branding and what their purposes, goals and expectations are.

Another important aspect of nation branding that has far reaching socio-political implications is ambassadorship. In commercial branding, ambassadorship is

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[47] Melissa Aronczyk, '"Living the Brand": Nationality, Globality, and the Identity Strategies of Nation Branding Consultants,' *International Journal of Communication* 2 (2008): 43 and 45; Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 130.
[48] Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 123.
[49] Zala Volcic and Mark Andrejevic, 'Nation Branding in the Era of Commercial Nationalism,' *International Journal of Communication* 5, (2011): 609-10.
[50] Aronczyk, 'Living the brand,' 55-6.
[51] Kaneva, 'Toward an agenda,' 127.
[52] Martin Roll, *Asian Brand Strategy: How Asia builds strong brands* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 62.

considered a crucial feature of the branding process since customers' perceptions of a product or a service are shaped through the contact with the employees who represent the brand. Many companies thus invest heavily into internal branding to make sure that every employee 'lives the brand' thereby boosting their motivation and morale and creating eager brand ambassadors.[53] The need for internal branding becomes even more imperative in the context of nation branding because public support is vital for the new brand to succeed. Otherwise, nation branding campaigns might backfire as was the case of Brand Estonia, where the campaign was downscaled due to immense pressure from domestic media, or Brand Ukraine, where the government had to abandon certain elements of their branding campaign following fierce public criticism.[54] Domestic audiences and their opinions matter in the process of nation branding.

The importance of domestic audiences in the process of nation branding goes beyond creating a favourable domestic opinion on the new nation brand. As Aronczyk points out, the nation's citizens need to 'perform attitudes and behaviours that are compatible with the brand strategy.'[55] This is especially the case when the new nation brand does not fully reflect the reality on the ground. Nation branding often produces an airbrushed version rather than a truthful reflection of the nation, its people, and socio-political and economic conditions. Although some scholars are deeply sceptical about governments' ability to change citizens' attitude and behaviours through nation branding,[56] it is important to study governments' internal nation branding efforts. Internal nation branding can be particularly revealing about the domestic political processes and tensions by exposing different stakeholders, their vested interests, domestic struggles over power and resources, and the state-society relations.

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[53] Melissa Davis, *The fundamentals of branding* (Worthing: AVA Academia, 2009), 92-3; Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 226-7; van Ham, 'Branding territory,' 255.
[54] Paul Jordan, 'Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism?' *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45, no.3 (2014): 293-5; Paul Jordan, *The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2014), 40; Per Ståhlberg and Göran Bolin, 'Having a soul or choosing a face? Nation branding, identity and cosmopolitan imagination,' *Social Identities* 22, no. 3 (2016): 282.
[55] Aronczyk, *Branding the nation*, 76.
[56] For example, see Ståhlberg and Bolin, 'Having a soul' 283; César Jiménez-Martínez, 'Making Chile Visible: Purposes, Operationalisation and Audiences from the Perspective of Nation Branding Practitioners,' *Geopolitics* 22, no.3 (2017): 512-14.

Cultural Strand

Research within the cultural strand examines the implications nation branding has on what Kaneva calls 'the *politics of identity* [original emphasis]' and how it projects certain representations of the socio-political world veiled in the concept of national identity.[57] Dominated by culture and media studies, the scholarship in this strand treats national reputation as an avenue for international recognition and national self-determination and is influenced by the constructivist thought conceptualising nation-branding as a discourse, which comprises the process of constructing a discourse and its outcome, that is the discourse itself. Both, process and outcome, are subject to existing social and historical contexts of a given society and involve different stakeholders.[58] Here, the purpose of branding is also different from the more gain-oriented technical-economic and political approaches. As Aronczyk suggests, the merit of nation branding is its ability to create discussions about the importance of the nation in the modern world which in turn help to secure its continuity.[59] Nation branding is thus often discussed in relation to nationalism and nation building.

There are two different ways in which studies within the cultural strand approach the relationship between nation branding and nationalism. The first approach understands nation branding as a form of nation building that is conceptually different from nationalism. Here, nation branding is often seen as a more benign form of nation building than nationalism as it 'lacks the deep-rooted and often antagonistic sense of national identity and uniqueness that can accompany nationalism.'[60] In short, nation branding is a soft power tool that disseminates positive national images and enhances the country's reputation but does not lead to aggressive patriotism. This may seem like a plausible approach for countries where nationalism, or more precisely ethnic nationalism, had previously led to political atrocities such as former Yugoslavia or Rwanda. In his 2001 article, van Ham even suggests that nation branding may supplant nationalism altogether.[61] Yet, Volcic and Andrejevic caution against this overly optimistic view of nation branding as there is no evidence that 'nation branding and violent forms of political nationalism are mutually exclusive, nor that the treatment of the state as an enterprise displaces or reduces political violence.'[62] After

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[57] Kaneva, 'Toward an agenda,' 127. Also, see Aronczyk, 'Living the brand,' 46.
[58] Dolea, 'Country promotion,' 282-3.
[59] Aronczyk, *Branding the nation*, 174-6.
[60] van Ham, 'The rise,' 3.
[61] Ibid, 3.
[62] Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 606.

all, both nationalism and nation branding seek to create emotionally-loaded narratives which, in order to find resonance with domestic audiences, need to be rooted in the country's historical and cultural heritage.[63] Moreover, nationalism has not died out in the twenty-first century. For example, the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s resulted in a surge in nationalism across many parts of East Asia and Southeast Asia in the 2000s.[64] The underlying assumption of this approach, that nation branding and nationalism are mutually exclusive, is simply wrong.

The second approach is more complex as it acknowledges the interconnectedness of the two concepts. Yet, the extent to which the two concepts are related is open to contestation. Jordan, for instance, conceptualises Estonia's nation branding as 'a tool of soft nationalism.'[65] He explains that 'Brand Estonia' was based on the same narratives as the nationalist discourse that emerged in the country following its independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.[66] Nation branding thus reinforced Estonia's domestic nationalist discourse at the time. By contrast, Volcic and Andrejevic conceptualise nation branding as an element of commercial nationalism, which is a novel form of nationalism that has been reconfigured for the purposes of global capitalism.[67] They define commercial nationalism as 'the [deliberate] use of nationalism [by commercial entities] to sell (or gain ratings) and the use of commercial strategies by public sector entities to foster nationalism and nationalist agendas.'[68] Nation branding represents the latter element. Volcic and Andrejevic point out that the Slovene government used the '**I Feel S*love*nia** [original emphasis]' branding campaign in the nation's push for self-determination.[69] Since Slovenes are particularly concerned about their international image, not least because

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[63] Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 133.

[64] Richard Stubbs, 'ASEAN Plus Three: Emerging East Asian Regionalism?' *Asian Survey* 42, no.3 (2002): 451.

[65] Jordan, 'Tool for nationalism,' 301.

[66] Ibid, 301. For a similar approach, see Piia Tammpuu and Anu Masso, '"Welcome to the virtual state": Estonian e-residency and the digitalised state as a commodity,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no.5 (2018): 553-6.

[67] Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 614.

[68] In their earlier work, Volcic and Andrejevic argued that nation branding was a complementary process to commercial nationalism, which they defined in much narrows terms as the use of nationalism by private sector to sell products or services. The definition used in this chapter comes from their more recent work where nation branding is already part of commercial nationalism. See Zala Volcic and Mark Andrejevic, 'Introduction,' in *Commercial Nationalism: selling the nation and nationalizing the sell,* eds. Zala Volcic and Mark Andrejevic, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

[69] Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 607.

their country is often confused with Slovakia, branding serves as a reference point against which they can form their national identity, develop feelings of national pride and shape the vision of the future course of their country.[70] Volcic's and Andrejevic's understanding of nation branding relies on the same narrow assumptions about the nature of the world as found in the technical-economic and political approaches. Like van Ham or Anholt, Volcic and Andrejevic believe that capitalist globalisation has re-shaped the nature of loyalties between the state and the people: wealth and commercial success, rather than military might and warfare, are now the primary sources of public loyalty.[71]

For this reason, many academics adopting cultural approaches often disdain all talk of branding which they see as reflecting a neo-liberal agenda. Their criticism of nation branding is typically related to questions of identity commodification, depoliticization and neo-liberal governance. For instance, Jansen argues that nation branding is 'an engine of neo-liberalism' that transforms national identity into a marketable commodity and 'provides new narratives for domestic consumption' for the purpose of advancing economic development premised on the nation's competitiveness and ability to attract capital.[72] Varga sees nation branding as 'an implicit cultural policy' devised by private corporations to encroach on the public and private sphere and to turn the nation's citizens into self-governing entrepreneurs or 'playmakers' who would then form a market-driven society.[73] For Volcic and Andrejevic, nation branding is a technique of neoliberal governance that 'combines obligations of citizenship with the responsibilities and risks of the entrepreneur.'[74] For these academics, nation branding is a potentially undemocratic and self-defeating practice as it is unable to create national solidarity or the cohesion traditionally associated with notions of ethnic kinship and collective belonging.[75]

Although these academics make an important contribution to the literature by focusing on domestic implications of nation branding, they continue to frame nation branding in the language of economic liberalism. As a result, they recast global and domestic power relations in materialist terms thereby reducing their critiques of nation

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[70] Ibid, 605-8.
[71] Ibid, 599.
[72] Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 121-2.
[73] Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 826.
[74] Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 601.
[75] Browning, 'Self-esteem,' 212; Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 135-6; Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 831-6; Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 611. Also see, Kaneva, 'National imagination,' 124.

branding to negative effects of marketization. Yet, despite nation branding's business-derived vocabulary and strategies, I argue that nation branding is not all about economic liberalism and the marketisation of socio-political space. Just as countries are not homogenous entities and different stakeholders within a single country can have different interests and motivations, nation branding can have a mixture of economic (competitiveness and growth), political (international political influence and standing) and cultural (international recognition and national self-determination) motivations at any particular moment in time.[76] As Cornelissen explains, nation branding is one of many different activities undertaken by governments that 'relate to some of the central pillars of power as they aim to provide justificatory basis for power distribution and the actions or policies of incumbents.'[77] In other words, nation branding forms part of the government's legitimation processes and is therefore revealing about domestic power politics and state-society relations.

Political Legitimacy in Non-Democratic Regimes

The right to rule is typically associated with democratic regimes and framed in the language of political liberalism. This often leads to largely normative and procedural accounts of legitimacy that focus on political rights, civil liberties, and democratic principles, such as political participation and representation.[78] As a result, discussions of political legitimacy have until recently been often omitted from research into the survival and stability of non-democratic regimes.[79] In 1991 Adam Przeworski famously suggested that political legitimacy simply did not matter to the sustainability of non-democratic regimes.[80] It was the availability of 'collective alternatives' rather than the breakdown of legitimacy that threatened non-democratic regimes. This,

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[76] Browning and Ferraz de Oliveira, 'Introduction,' 490.

[77] Scarlett Cornelissen, 'National Meaning-Making in Complex Societies: Political Legitimation and Branding Dynamics in Post-Apartheid South Africa,' *Geopolitics* 22, no.3 (2017): 542-3.

[78] Jens Steffek, 'The Legitimation of International Governance: A Discourse Approach,' *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no.2 (2003): 253, 256; Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance: how authoritarian regimes legitimize their rule,' *Contemporary Politics* 23, no.3 (2017): 288; Peter Burnell, 'Autocratic Opening to Democracy: why legitimacy matters,' *Third World Quarterly* 27, no.4 (2006): 548.

[79] von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 287; Burnell, 'Autocratic opening,' 552.

[80] Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the market: Political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54-5.

according to Przeworski, explained why such regimes typically relied on co-optation of strategic elites and repression for their survival.[81]

Yet, there is a growing academic consensus that all regimes need to obtain at least some degree of legitimacy in order to secure their long-term survival.[82] As Gerschewski points out '[t]oday's autocracies cannot rely (at least in the long term) entirely on their abuse of power in a strictly hierarchical, pyramid-shaped political order as the unconstrained tyrants of the past – from whom all power was derived – might have done.'[83] In other words, long-term repression and co-optation of strategic elites without legitimacy is too difficult and a very costly project to sustain.[84] Legitimacy reduces the cost of persuasion and decreases the need for repression in non-democratic regimes. Furthermore, having the right to rule matters to the survival of non-democratic rulers and not just their regimes. As Wu points out, 'authoritarian leaders have to constantly worry about the justification of their position, power and authority' because the rules of political conduct in non-democratic regimes are not institutionalised.[85] In this respect, legitimacy enhances the rulers' sense of security and self-esteem as it justifies their right to domination and prerogatives of power.

To study political legitimacy in the context of non-democratic regimes, such as post-2014 Thailand, it is necessary to move beyond the normative and procedural accounts briefly outlined at the beginning of this section. In an important study of political legitimacy in Southeast Asia, Muthiah Alagappa approaches legitimacy as a 'multi-faceted, highly contingent, and a dynamic feature of government' that consists of four main elements: 'shared norms and rules, conformity with established rules for

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[81] Przeworski, *Democracy and the market*, 55.

[82] For example, see Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, 'How Do Non-Democratic Regimes Claim Legitimacy? Comparative Insights from Post-Soviet Countries,' *GIGA Working Paper No 277* (August 2015): 5, accessed 15 September 2018, https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/system/files/publications/wp-277-online.pdf; Johannes Gerschewski, 'The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes,' *Democratization* 20, no.1 (2013): 18; Guoguang Wu, *China's Party Congress: Power, Legitimacy, and Institutional Manipulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 34; Anne-Marie Brady, 'Mass Persuasion as a Means of Legitimation and China's Popular Authoritarianism,' *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no.3 (2009): 434.

[83] Gerschewski, 'Three pillars,' 18.

[84] Gerschewski, 'Three pillars,' 28; von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 288; von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Non-democratic regimes,' 5; David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xi-xii.

[85] Wu, *China's Party*, 33-4.

acquiring power, proper and effective use of power, and consent of the governed.'[86] Drawing extensively on the work of Max Weber, Alagappa defines legitimacy as 'the belief by the governed in the ruler's moral right to issue commands and the people's corresponding obligation to obey such commands.' [87] Crucially, he points out that legitimacy is an outcome of an interactive process between the ruler and the ruled that is played out at different levels of governance. At the heart of this process is a discourse. As such, legitimacy is a matter of degree (rather than a simple assertion that the rule is legitimate/illegitimate) and it requires constant cultivation.[88]

The question of how non-democratic regimes seek to claim and maintain legitimacy is just as important as the study of legitimacy itself. In fact, recent years have seen an increase in research in this area.[89] Alagappa's observations on the nature of the process of claiming and maintaining legitimacy, or legitimation, provide a useful starting point here. In defining legitimation as a multifaceted multilevel discursive process, Alagappa recognises that legitimation involves a mixture of different claims that seek to legitimate authority of different referent objects – nation-states, regimes and governments – to different critical audiences at any given moment in time.[90] Legitimation is thus an act of communication or, as Steffek puts it, an act of 'explaining and defending' the right to power and authority to the critical audiences.[91] Alagappa identifies five different rationales that regimes use to support their claims to legitimacy, namely 'normative goals, performance, charisma, politically defining moment, and international support.'[92] He suggests that normative

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[86] Muthiah Alagappa, 'The Anatomy of Legitimacy,' in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 11 and 15.

[87] Alagappa, 'Anatomy of legitimacy,' 11.

[88] Alagappa, 'Anatomy of legitimacy,' 11 and 25.

[89] For example, see Gerschewski, 'Three pillars;' von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance;' Peter Burnell, 'Autocratic opening,' 545-62.

[90] It is important to note here that Alagappa believes that individual attitudes of general public have less importance to the durability of non-democratic regimes than those of strategic elites. Yet, Beetham suggests that popular legitimacy matters not the least because it leads to enhanced stability, effectiveness and order. Even some of the most oppressive regimes, such as North Korea, need some level of popular support to survive. See Beetham, *Legitimation of power*, 33. For the discussion of legitimacy, popular support and regime survival in the context of North Korea, see E.J.R. Cho, 'Nation Branding for Survival in North Korea: The Arirang Festival and Nuclear Weapons Tests,' *Geopolitics* 22, no.3 (2017): 594-622.

[91] Steffek, 'International governance,' 258.

[92] Muthiah Alagappa, 'The Bases of Legitimacy,' in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 32.

goals, especially those based on ideology, popular sovereignty or personal authority are often used as primary rationales as they can constitute a political system.[93] Performance, politically defining moments and international support typically play only supplementary roles although performance is often invoked as a primary rationale by non-democratic regimes.

Building on Alagappa and the work of other scholars, such as Easton and Weber, von Soest and Grauvogel classify legitimacy claims as 'output- and identity-based' and expand the list of legitimating rationales to six: 'foundational myth' (identity-based), 'ideology' (identity-based), 'personalism' (identity-based), 'procedures,' 'performance' (output-based) and 'international engagement.'[94] Despite the apparent similarities, von Soest and Grauvogel develop Alagappa's work in a number of important ways. Firstly, their 'foundational myth' rationale incorporates Alagappa's 'politically defining moment' – described as a moment of 'high political consciousness that can generate deep emotion and galvanize enormous support for a cause'[95] – but also the rulers' recurrent references to their role in state-building.[96] In this sense, the ability of the 'foundational myth' to provide a continuous source of legitimacy is greater and does not necessarily weaken in time as Alagappa suggests.

Secondly, von Soest and Grauvogel expand on Alagappa's normative rationales, namely goal-rational ideologies, popular sovereignty and religion.[97] While von Soest and Grauvogel refer to popular sovereignty as procedural rationality and treat it as a separate source of legitimacy claims, they adopt a broader approach to ideology than Alagappa's goal-rational conceptualisation. This allows von Soest and Grauvogel to subsume religion under the 'ideology' rationale and, more importantly, account for nationalism which is an important source of legitimacy claims that

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[93] Ibid, 51-2.

[94] von Soest's and Grauvogel's classification of legitimacy claims as output- and identity-based is derived from David Easton, *A system analysis of political life* (New York: Wiley, 1965) and David Easton, 'A re-assessment of the concept of political support,' *British Journal of Political Science* 5, no.4 (1975): 435-7. Their personalism rationale is based on Weber's work on charismatic authority in Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie [Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology]* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1980) and authority derived from hereditary succession. Procedures or international engagement is neither output- nor identity-based rationale in von Soest and Grauvogel. See von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 289-91

[95] Alagappa, Bases of legitimacy,' 46.

[96] von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 290.

[97] Alagappa, 'Bases of legitimacy, 33-41.

Alagappa mentions only in passing.[98] Thirdly, von Soest and Grauvogel expand on the Weberian notion of charismatic authority that informs Alagappa's views on legitimation through personal authority. For them, charismatic authority is only one source of personalism-based legitimacy claims that non-democratic regimes can use: other claims include 'traditional authority through hereditary succession' and the ruler's 'centrality to certain achievements such as the nation's unity, prosperity and stability.'[99] Last but not least, von Soest and Grauvogel broaden Alagappa's notion of 'international support' to include the regime's international engagement. While Alagappa's notion of international support is largely limited to international norms and their impact on domestic legitimacy discourse,[100] von Soest and Grauvogel suggest that regimes' international activities, such as involvement in regional organisations, may help to enhance their claims to legitimacy at home.[101] Non-democratic regimes are active international actors that seek to shape their international activities in ways that can lend support to their domestic legitimacy claims.

Compared with Alagappa, von Soest and Grauvogel also provide a more detailed evaluation of which legitimation sources non-democratic regimes usually rely on. This reflects the growing academic interest in different varieties of authoritarianism. While all non-democratic regimes rely on performance-based rationales, procedure-based rationales are more pronounced sources of legitimacy in electoral rather than closed political regimes.[102] In the absence of nominal democratic procedures (such as election and political competition), non-democratic regimes with closed systems tend to rely heavily on identity-based rationales such as their ideologies, foundational myths and/or personal traits and qualities (real or construed) of their rulers.[103] In the case of non-democratic regimes with closed systems, these rationales are primary and not supplementary as Alagappa suggests.

Despite the availability of different sources of legitimacy, there is no guarantee that once deployed these legitimacy sources alone will ensure the regime's sustainability in the long-run. Most claims to legitimacy are contestable and carry with them potential risks and vulnerabilities.[104] For example, legitimacy claims based on

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[98] Ibid, 34.
[99] von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 290-1.
[100] See Alagappa, 'Bases of legitimacy,' 48-9.
[101] von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 291.
[102] Ibid, 297.
[103] Ibid, 299.
[104] Alagappa, 'Bases of legitimacy,' 53; von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 299; Beetham, *Legitimation of power*, 205-42.

performance can be greatly weakened if the regime's performance slips or if there is a growing gap between the claimed performance and reality. Legitimacy claims based on personalism rationales are particularly vulnerable to rulers falling out of public favour or passing away without a suitable successor. Legitimacy claims based on procedural rationales, on the other hand, can lead to further popular demands for democratic change.[105] Alagappa distinguishes between 'legitimacy strain,' an erosion of legitimacy that is continuous but has not reached a critical point yet, and 'legitimacy crisis,' a situation in which a breakdown of legitimacy is strongly possible because the bases on which legitimacy has been claimed and/or acknowledged are under severe strain.[106] Similarly, Beetham distinguishes between 'legitimacy deficit,' an erosion of legitimacy due to an increasing inadequacy or inappropriateness of a political system, and 'delegitimation,' a situation in which consent of those critical to the process of legitimation is withdrawn.[107]

Erosions of political legitimacy or legitimacy breakdowns do not automatically lead to regime breakdowns, especially in the case of non-democratic regimes. After all, as Gerschewski concedes, legitimacy is only one of three pillars (the other two being co-optation and repression) that help sustain these regimes.[108] Moreover, Alagappa suggests that erosions or breakdowns of legitimacy might have different effects on different referent objects, that is nation-states, regimes and governments.[109] For example, an erosion or breakdown of legitimacy due to poor performance might be particularly threatening to the survival of governments but has little negative effect on the survival of regimes or nation-states. This is, however, seldom the case in countries where the nation-state, regime and government are fused; here the erosion of or breakdown in legitimacy of one referent object is likely to negatively affect the other referent object(s) too.[110] Erosions of political legitimacy or legitimacy breakdowns might also be caused by factors that are endogenous to non-democratic regimes. As Barker points out, a loss of confidence on the part of the rulers (and governments) in their own authority can contribute to the fall of regimes.[111] Self-

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[105] von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 299.

[106] Muthiah Alagappa, 'Contestation and Crisis,' in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 59.

[107] Beetham, *Legitimation of power*, 207-9.

[108] Gerschewski, 'Three pillars,' 18-23.

[109] Alagappa, 'Anatomy of legitimacy,' 26-8.

[110] Alagappa, 'Contestation and crisis,' 59.

[111] Rodney Barker, *Legitimating Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

legitimation is thus an important, although frequently overlooked, aspect of political legitimation. Rulers and governments 'legitimate their position and power to themselves and to their immediate staff […] at least as much as they do to the mass of those whom they govern and whose support in votes, taxes, and time and effort they cultivate.'[112] Rulers need to believe in their own right to rule and the special status and qualities they possess that distinguish them from those subjected to their rule.[113] Political legitimation is thus a complex, multi-dimensional, discursive process that requires a constant cultivation but its success is never guaranteed.

Nation Branding as a Strategy for Political Legitimation

There are surprisingly few studies that link nation branding to the process of political legitimation.[114] Yet, like political legitimation, nation branding is a primarily discursive and semiotic process that involves the production and dissemination of narratives.[115] Narratives are selective and structured representations of reality; they are a sequence of carefully assembled events.[116] While narratives have been inherent in the study of nationalism, and to some extent nation branding, social sciences have turned its attention to narratives only recently.[117] As Price points out, states are at least in part 'collection[s] of stories connected to power.'[118] These stories, or narratives, are the sources of norms, traditions, values and obligations on and around which state-society relations are built. Price refers to these narratives as 'narratives of legitimacy,' a collection of narratives and ideas used by rulers (or dominant groups) to maintain power.[119] Since contemporary information infrastructure poses constant challenges to political legitimacy by giving rise to competing narratives, the right to rule belongs to

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[112] Barker, *Legitimating identities*, 31.
[113] Ibid, 3.
[114] For example, see Cornelissen, 'National meaning-making,' 525-48; Adrien Fauve, 'Global Astana: nation branding as a legitimization tool for authoritarian regimes,' *Central Asian Survey* 34, no.1 (2015): 111; Erica Marat, 'Nation Branding in Central Asia: A new Campaign to Present Ideas about the State and the Nation,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no.7 (2009): 1126; Cho, 'Nation branding for survival,' 594-622.
[115] Cornelissen, 'National meaning-making,' 526 and 529.
[116] Andreas Antoniades, Ben O'Loughlin and Alister Miskimmon, 'Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives,' *Center for Global Political Economy*, Working Paper No.7 (March 2010): 4.
[117] Michael Morden, 'Anatomy of the national myth: archetypes and narrative in the study of nationalism,' *Nations and Nationalism* 22, no.3 (2016): 448.
[118] Monroe E. Price, *Free Expression, Globalism and the New Strategic Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 41.
[119] Ibid, 13.

those who can come up with the most compelling narratives.[120] Aronczyk even suggests that 'state legitimacy is [now] asserted by a monopoly over information' rather than through repression and military power.[121] Similar to van Ham's assertion of the paradigmatic shift in international politics, Aronczyk's claim here is largely overplayed. It does, however, point towards the increasing importance of strategic communication on the part of the state. As a form of strategic communication, nation branding produces narratives about the nation, its character and its people. Yet, these narratives are '[n]ot merely aimed at projecting certain images to lure transnational capital,' they are tied to 'the larger ambition' of providing stability to the nation-state and its power arrangements in a fast-changing world.[122]

Many critical studies denounce nation branding for treating national identity and culture as assets that can be mobilised for commercial purposes.[123] They point out that nation branding shapes national identity and culture in ways that satisfy global consumerist desires rather than provide feelings of national solidarity and togetherness among the nation's citizens. For example, Kaneva and Popescu argue that nation branding decontextualises, dehistoricises and depoliticises national identity in order to create a flexible and commercially-viable alternative – '*national identity lite* [original emphasis].'[124] Yet, even they admit that nation branding does indeed reproduce some of the 'long-standing [national] meta-narratives.'[125] These national meta-narratives carry in themselves the constitutive norms and justifications of the nation and the state which are meaningful to the domestic audiences.[126] They permeate political discourse and influence public attitudes and expectations. Because of their abstract form and normative character, national meta-narratives are 'robust, structural and resistant to change.'[127] They are what von Soest and Grauvogel refer to

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[120] Melissa Aronczyk, 'Narratives of Legitimacy: Making Nationalism Banal,' in *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging after Banal Nationalism,* eds. Michael Skye and Marco Antonsich (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 249.
[121] Ibid, 249.
[122] Cornelissen, 'National meaning-making,' 527.
[123] For example, see Jansen 'Designer nations,' 121-2; Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 826; Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 601.
[124] Nadia Kaneva and Delia Popescu, 'National identity lite: Nation branding in post-Communist Romania and Bulgaria,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no.2 (2011): 201.
[125] Ibid, 201.
[126] Morden, 'National myth,' 450.
[127] Ibid, 450.

as foundational myths and are often deployed as 'powerful legitimation narratives.'[128] Nation branding thus does not depoliticise, dehistoricise and decontextualize national identity as Kaneva and Popescu and many other critical studies like to suggest.

The legitimating potential of nation branding goes beyond the mere reproduction of foundational myths. Nation branding produces its own narratives or myths about the character of the nation, its territory and its people. Bouchard provides a useful framework for analysing national myths, which he defines as 'distinct type[s] of collective representation.'[129] He proposes that myths have the following four characteristics: 1) hybridity – myths comprise of both fact and fiction; 2) duality – they are contextualised but also assume some universal features; 3) sacredness – myths are deeply emotional and once established, they become accepted truths that are beyond rational examination; 4) energy – myths have power to mobilise individual and collective action and can be used 'to promote or resist social change.'[130] Crucially, Bouchard points out that every society has a set of foundational or 'master myths' that are 'basic, comprehensive, and relatively stable symbolic configurations,' and 'secondary or derivate myths' that are shaped by the foundational myths but are more prone to change.[131] Morden makes a similar distinction but he refers to foundational myths as meta- and secondary myths as micro-narratives.[132] He further points out that micro-narratives are more specific and immediate. Although neither Alagappa nor von Soest and Grauvogel refer to secondary national myths in their analyses of political legitimation, all national myths are 'part of and contingent upon a web of power relations.'[133] Like foundational myths, secondary myths convey beliefs, values, meanings and ideals that shape and are shaped by existing socio-political arrangements. Yet, they are not merely products of these arrangements, they actively co-create them.

Bouchard suggests that national myths (foundational and secondary) are typically produced in a seven-step process: they begin with (1) a 'structuring event or episode' (Bouchard calls it an 'anchor') that leaves (2) a deep emotional 'imprint' in collective memory, which is then translated into (3) principles, ideas, beliefs and

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[128] See von Soest and Grauvogel, 'Identity, procedures and performance,' 290.
[129] Gérard Bouchard, 'The Small Nation with a Big Dream: Québec national myths (eighteenth-twentieth centuries),' in *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*, ed. Gérard Bouchard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 2.
[130] Ibid, 2-3.
[131] Ibid, 4.
[132] Morden, 'National myth,' 450.
[133] Bouchard, 'Small nation,' 5.

values (or 'ethos'); the event, its emotional impact and associated values become part of (4) a constructed narrative and rituals of remembrance aimed at their magnification that overtime become (5) sacralised; the use of (6) 'efficient discursive and communication strategies' to disseminate myths and (7) the interventions of social actors, who use the myths to advance their goals and agendas, are particularly important throughout this mythification process.[134] In other words, the mythification process is a complex strategic endeavour that is initiated and managed by a relatively small group of social actors.[135] Nation branding process shares some similarities with the mythification process, but the two are not identical. Nation branding does not always start with a structuring event although such events might be part of the brand messaging. Similarly, not all nation branding campaigns and their associated myths are aimed at the magnification or remembrance of past events. As Bolin and Miazhevich point out, nation branding is 'more occupied with *the future* [original emphasis]' and its opportunities rather than the nation's past and its problems.[136] Hence, myths produced in the process of nation branding are often more forward-looking, visionary and instrumental and can be used for explicit political purposes. They are specific kinds of applied national myths that I propose to call 'strategic national myths.'

My conceptualisation of strategic national myths draws on Antoniades, O'Loughlin and Miskimmon and their work on strategic narratives.[137] They propose that narratives are strategic insofar as they 'articulate [desirable] end-states and suggest how to get there' and seek to influence 'perception[s] of [elite] interests and how the world works and should work.'[138] In other words, strategic narratives are narratives that 'give determined meaning to past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives.'[139] They are both instrumental and visionary, and they shape expectations of future behaviours.[140] National myths produced in the process of nation branding share these very features: they are selective interpretations of the nation's past and its present character, and contain elements of future vision and aspirations

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[134] Ibid, 5.
[135] Ibid, 6.
[136] Göran Bolin and Galina Miazhevich, 'The soft power of commercialised nationalist symbols: Using media analysis to understand nation branding campaigns,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no.5 (2018): 533.
[137] See Antoniades et al., 'Strategic narratives,' 1-26.
[138] Ibid, 6.
[139] Ibid, 5.
[140] Price, *Strategic communication*, 45.

(implicit or explicit) underpinned by a mixture of political, economic and cultural goals. They seek to shape expectations of future behaviours on both state- and citizen-level. In fact, the success of nation branding largely depends on its ability to produce myths that can alter social attitudes and behaviours of their target audiences.

Antoniades et al. further point out that strategic narratives can be used to 'create or cohere identity groups and establish shared normative orientations.'[141] As such, strategic narratives are important assets to the process of political legitimation. Price even suggests that strategic narratives are simply 'subset[s] of narratives of legitimacy.'[142] Hence, nation branding's legitimating potential resides in its ability to advance strategic national myths that shape legitimation discourses both inside and outside of the nation. However, nation branding is not just about legitimating nations as many studies within the cultural strand seem to assume,[143] but also about legitimating regimes and governments. It provides opportunities for formulating (or re-formulating) identity-based legitimacy claims (cultural goals), claims based on international engagement (political goals), and for supporting output-based legitimacy claims (economic goals). Yet, nation branding does not resolve the inherent problems of political legitimation. As a legitimation strategy based on applied myths, nation branding might be challenged or even ridiculed by target audiences both inside and outside of the nation. It is also prone to problems of consistency and coherence. Infighting and disagreements between different stakeholders might compromise the nation-branding process and undermine its legitimating potential. As such, we need to know more about the myth conceivers, their ambitions and rivalries in the case of post-coup Thailand.

About This Thesis

Despite the growing critical scholarship on nation branding, many people inside and outside of academia continue to perceive nation branding as an externally-oriented, apolitical, business-derived practice that is aimed at increasing a country's global competitive advantage. In fact, most people associate nation branding exclusively with tourism promotion. They do not realise that nation branding pervades many different sectors (public and private) and it is now a central element of nearly all government activities. It is the aim of this thesis to challenge this narrow, yet

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[141] Antoniades et al., 'Strategic narratives,' 5.
[142] Price, *Strategic communication*, 47.
[143] For example, see Aronczyk, *Branding the nation*, 174-6.

pervasive, view by analysing different aspects, roles, functions and expectations of nation branding in the context of post-coup Thailand to reveal important domestic implications.

My analysis of nation branding is framed by the following research question: 'Why do non-democratic states use nation branding?' This question is based on the assumption that nation branding is first and foremost a political act. Despite the general tendency of academic literature to assume that states take up nation branding as a result of outside pressures (such as economic globalisation), I believe that the decision to brand is largely homegrown. After all, it is the national governments consisting of competing elite interests that usually make the decision whether to brand or not, and for what purposes. In order to identify what political aims drive the use of nation branding in a given context, such as post-coup Thailand, five subsidiary research questions need to be asked:

1. How is nation branding understood?
2. How does nation branding operate, what are its objectives, and who are its target audiences?
3. What are the political motivations behind externally-oriented branding (image campaigns)?
4. What are the political motivations behind internally-oriented branding (identity campaigns)?
5. How do domestic audiences react to nation branding?

The chapters that follow show that nation branding is a highly politicised practice that is part of the domestic political legitimation process primarily aimed at changing the social attitudes and behaviours of the nation's citizens in ways that are compatible with the government's goals and agendas. My central argument is that nation branding is a strategy for political legitimation that operates through the production of strategic narratives that I call 'strategic national myths.' This thesis builds on the work of Scarlett Cornelissen (post-apartheid South Africa), Adrien Fauve (Kazakhstan) and E.J.R Cho (North Korea) who examine the relationship between nation branding and political legitimation in the context of non-democratic regimes.[144]

As part of my approach to the study of nation branding, I reject the primordial nature of nations in favour of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' that

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[144] Cornelissen, 'National meaning-making,' 525-48; Fauve, 'Global Astana,' 111; Cho, 'Nation branding for survival,' 594-622.

points to the modern origin of nations dating back to the onset of print capitalism.[145] Since nations are imagined, national identity is also imagined, or constructed, rather than given. National identity is a product of many different narratives that create a sense of commonality and togetherness but also difference and distinctiveness.[146] Put simply, national identity creates the notions of 'us' and 'them.' Yet, national identity is by no means fixed. Forces from inside and outside the nation affect what constitutes the essence of a nation at a particular moment in time.[147] This creates space for branding, as nations and national identity can be imaged and re-imagined in different ways. Whether the nation and its identity will be re-imagined in brand terms, however, depends on whether the community, that is the nation's citizens, start seeing it as such. This points to the significance of internal nation branding and the idea of getting the nation's citizens to 'live the brand.' Who imagines what, how and for whom is thus an important aspect to explore as nation branding operates differently in different contexts and regime types. As much of the nation branding scholarship focuses on the workings of nation branding in a democratic context, I focus on how nation branding works under an authoritarian military regime in post-coup Thailand. Nevertheless, some of the arguments advanced in this thesis could also apply to the use of nation branding in democratic contexts but such claims are outside the scope of my thesis.

Many critical studies tend to reduce nation branding to mere logos and slogans.[148] Yet, this approach to branding is anachronistic. As Davis explains in the context of corporate branding, '[a] brand represents the full "personality" of the company and is the interface between the company and its audience.'[149] A nation brand is a complex system of values, images, messages, associations and actions that serve as a communication point between the nation and its audience. For any brand to succeed, it needs to be flexible and adaptable to keep up with constant changes posed

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[145] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 5-6. See page 25 for the discussion of nation being a modern phenomenon and pages 37-39 for a detailed discussion on the role print capitalism played in the development of national consciousness.

[146] Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 22.

[147] Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 117; Wodak et al., *Discursive construction*, 3-4.

[148] For example, see Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 832; Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 136; Jordan, 'Tool for nationalism,' 291-2.

[149] Davis, *Fundamentals of branding,* 12. Also see Nick Lewis, 'Packaging political projects in geographical imaginaries: The rise of nation branding,' in *Brands and Branding Geographies*, ed. Andy Pike (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 266-7.

by its environment.[150] I approach nation branding as a primarily discursive process of ongoing social and political conditioning in which certain cultural and socio-political symbols, societal attitudes and behaviours are emphasised, at the expense of others, as desirable and constitutive of one's own nationhood.[151] My understanding of nation branding as a discursive process is informed by Laclau's and Mouffe's conceptualisation of a discourse as a combination of linguistic and extralinguistic acts.[152] As such, I do not focus exclusively on linguistic expressions of nation branding, whether in text or in speech, but also on related acts that accompany them. This provides a degree of flexibility to account for any tensions between what is uttered and what is done in the name of nation branding.

The case study selection for this thesis is driven by my academic interests, gaps in the reviewed literature and recent political developments conducive to heightened nation branding efforts. As much of the existing academic literature on nation branding is Eurocentric and there is a strong bias towards the study of democratic countries, I decided to explore how nation branding operates in Thailand, a Southeast Asian country with a troubled political history and frequent authoritarian relapses. Since its transition to constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thailand has seen as many as nineteen military coups (twelve were successful), most recent of which took place on 22 May 2014, and has had twenty constitutions. Its current constitution was promulgated on 7 April 2017 almost three years after the 2014 coup. Thailand is currently facing many problems characteristic of transitory and non-democratic regimes: intra-elite contestation, centralisation, incomplete democratic consolidation, weak civil society, and a high degree of economic and socio-political inequalities.[153] These problems shape how nation branding is understood and practiced. Nation branding in Thailand dates back to the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), a Sino-Thai communications tycoon-cum-politician, who expanded the use of commercial management, marketing and branding techniques to all areas of

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[150] Davis, *Fundamentals of branding,* 12; Andy Pike, 'Introduction: Brands and branding geographies,' in *Brands and Branding Geographies*, ed. Andy Pike (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 11.

[151] Wodak et al., *Discursive construction*, 3-4.

[152] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, 'Post-Marxism without Apologies,' *New Left Review* 166 (1987): 82.

[153] For a detailed account of Thailand's troubled political developments, see Federico Ferrara, *The Political Development of Modern Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

government activities.[154] Under Thaksin's elected government, Thailand formulated its first nation branding strategy that spanned multiple sectors and involved both public and private actors. Since then, all successive governments – civilian or military – have continued to engage in nation branding activities. The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) that seized power in the 22 May 2014 coup was no exception. The NCPO launched its first nation branding campaign, the 'happiness' campaign, within days of the coup. Besides the immediate crackdown on political dissent, the 'happiness' campaign was one of the first activities the NCPO engaged in when in power. To put this in context, Thailand was without an interim constitution for two months and a prime minister or cabinet for three months following the coup. Nation branding thus clearly formed an important part of the NCPO's post-coup activities.

Most English-language academic studies that deal with the topic of nation branding in Thailand fall within Kaneva's technical-economic approach: they see nation branding as a tool for increasing the country's competitive advantage by managing its external image.[155] For example, Krittinee and Suvit et al. analyse Thailand's external image and propose strategies to improve it in order to shore up the county's exports, tourism and foreign direct investment. Other studies are mostly concerned with destination branding and there is a clear bias towards tourism promotion.[156] One study touches upon Thailand's public diplomacy efforts, mainly in the form of gastro-diplomacy, which would fall within Kaneva's political strand.[157] Although studies on Thai nationalism and national identity abound,[158] no acknowledgement is explicitly given to the issue of nation branding, let alone its role

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[154] See Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2005), 77-9.

[155] See Krittinee, 'Branding Thailand,' 25; Suvit Maesincee, Krittinee Nuttavuthisit, Ake Ayawongs and Naphisara Phasukavanich, 'Branding Thailand: Building a Favorable Country Image for Thai Products and Services,' *Sasin Journal of Management* 9 (2003): 22.

[156] Donruetai Kovathanakul, 'Central Northeastern Thailand Tourism Branding, Supporting The ASEAN Economic Community,' *Procedia Economics and Finance* 23, (2015): 291-7; Roll, *Asian brand strategy*, 63-4.

[157] See Juyan Zhang, 'The Foods of the Worlds: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Gastrodiplomacy Campaigns,' *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015): 568-91.

[158] For example, see Michael Kelly Connors, *Democracy and national identity in Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007); Matthew Phillip Copeland, 'Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam' (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1993), Penny van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

in the process of political legitimation. This is rather surprising as Thailand has a long history of national identity formation and reputation management. Historically, the Thai national identity project in which the nation's elites constantly sought to define and redefine the essence of being Thai, so-called 'Thainess,' became a powerful tool of political legitimation at home and abroad.[159] It is therefore important to understand how nation branding relates to and builds upon these practices. The chapters that follow address this gap in academic literature on Thai nation branding by providing a systematic analysis of the phenomenon and its function as a strategy for political legitimation. My analysis specifically focuses on the period from 22 May 2014 coup until 1 December 2016 when Thailand's new king, King Vajiralongkorn or Rama X, officially ascended the throne. Vajiralongkorn's father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej or Rama IX, ascended the throne in 1946 and ruled the country for seven decades before he passed away in October 2016. Vajiralongkorn's accession thus marked the beginning of a new era in Thailand. As such, the accession seemed a suitable point with which to end my analysis of nation branding.

Methodology

In this thesis, I use qualitative approaches to develop an in-depth understanding of nation branding, how it is imagined and constructed by national elites, and how different individuals, groups and/or communities understand and relate to it in the context of post-coup Thailand. Although qualitative approaches do not produce findings that are highly generalisable, there are certain advantages in adopting qualitative as opposed to quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to the study of nation branding. As Mahoney points out, qualitative approaches often yield important 'conceptual distinctions that play a major role in driving theories of comparative politics.'[160] In other words, a researcher's understanding of the theoretical concepts is enhanced and fine-tuned vis-à-vis the generated empirical evidence. This results in the creation of an additional layer of conceptual nuance, which improves general understandings of the researched phenomena. In cases where the studied phenomena lack established definitions and are characterised with fluidity in meaning and scope (such as nation branding), the qualitative comparative enquiry can generate a set of

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[159] Connors, *National identity*, 36-9; van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*, 95.
[160] James Mahoney, 'Qualitative Methodology and Comparative Politics,' *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no.2 (2007): 127. Also see Roger Pierce, *Research Methods in Politics: A practical guide* (London: Sage, 2008), 45-6.

minimum requirements that qualify these concepts to avoid conceptual stretching.[161]
A common critique of qualitative approaches holds that qualitative researchers have
a propensity towards misinterpreting the gathered data as they may impress their own
biases and beliefs on the participants during the research process or on generated data
during the analysis stage.[162] Although complete objectivity cannot be achieved
(whether with qualitative or quantitative approaches), researchers using qualitative
approaches can show an awareness of their position and acknowledge the impact it
may have on the quality of data. Moreover, as Mahoney argues, qualitative
approaches to comparative politics tend to result in less interpretative errors than
quantitative approaches.[163] In-depth understanding of a studied case (or a small
number of cases) decreases the likelihood of data misinterpretation, especially in cases
where the meaning of the studied phenomena is contested. Qualitative approaches
give researchers an opportunity to refine, or even redefine, the core concepts
throughout the research process.

My analysis of nation branding in post-coup Thailand focuses on semiotics,
and individual and collective perceptions, interpretations, expectations of and
reactions towards this practice. To develop the necessary understanding and in-depth
knowledge of nation branding and the context in which it operates, I conducted field
research in Thailand between June and November 2016. My data generation methods
included semi-structured elite interviews, focus groups, and participant observations.
I also obtained a number of promotional materials such as nation branding videos,
booklets and leaflets; and publications by both the military government and the private
sector relevant to the study of nation branding. Some of these materials were provided
by my research participants, others were purchased or obtained free of charge from
publicly available sources. Most of my research activities were based in Thailand's
capital city of Bangkok as this is where all governmental agencies and most major
businesses relevant to the study of nation branding are located. However, I regularly
travelled to towns and cities in other provinces to generate additional data through
focus groups and participant observations.

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[161] For instance, see Collier and Levitsky's 1997 study of democracy in comparative
research. David Collier and Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy with Adjectives:
Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research,' *World Politics* 49, no.3 (1997):
430-51.
[162] For this and other critique of qualitative methodology, see Pierce, *Research
methods*, 46.
[163] Mahoney, 'Qualitative methodology,' 128.

Throughout the period of my doctoral research, Thailand was under the rule of the NCPO, a junta that seized power in a military coup on 22 May 2014. This was a sensitive time to conduct field research on political issues in Thailand. My experience of trying to get an interview with the National Identity Office (NIO) taught me that the word 'politics' was in itself sensitive enough to raise suspicions with some governmental officials. An NIO official reading my official interview request letter became visibly irritated after finding out that my research title contained the word 'politics.'[164] The official gave me a patronising lecture that the work of the Office, which operates from the Government House under the Office of Prime Minister, was only focused on formulating the government's 'policy' which, according to the official, had nothing to do with 'politics.'[165] Although all of my interview questions (supplied as part of the interview request letter) were policy-related, the fact that I used the word 'politics' in my research title was enough for the official to refuse my interview request.

Academic literature typically discusses issues of access in relation to 'gatekeepers' and the lack of time on the part of the elites.[166] For example, Dexter suggests that approaching a well-connected person who can intercede on the researcher's behalf is a useful way to avoid 'gatekeepers' or to convince elites to give an interview.[167] Yet, many elite informants that I approached through well-connected intermediaries still declined my interview request. One well-connected intermediary, who agreed to help me gain access to informants within the government, explained that all informants that they approached on my behalf refused to talk to me on the grounds that I was a foreign researcher representing a western liberal institution. It was my own 'outsider' status rather than 'gatekeepers' or the lack of time that proved to be the biggest challenge to gaining access. Fortunately, not all governmental officials were discouraged by my outsider status. Although I had anticipated that obtaining access to elite informants would be difficult, some of the challenges I faced were closely linked to the unique political situation in Thailand at the time. The death of the deeply revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej on 13 October 2016 further

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[164] The Thai word for politics is การเมือง.

[165] The Thai word for policy is นโยบาย.

[166] For example, see Peter Burnham, Karin Gilland, Wyn Grant and Zig Layton-Henry, *Research Methods in Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 208; Lewis Anthony Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2006), 38.

[167] Dexter, *Interviewing*, 38-9.

complicated my research efforts because of the period of national mourning and the unique restrictions and conventions observed at this time. Nevertheless, the experience of being in Thailand during this time was invaluable. Although I was not able to conduct many more elite interviews (especially with government officers) after this date, I was able to observe and experience the national mourning process first-hand.

I conducted a total of thirty-one semi-structured interviews with elite informants. These included eleven interviews with governmental officials working for the post-2014 military administration, eight interviews with informants working in the corporate world (various sectors, positions and levels of seniority), four interviews with Thai academics, three interviews with former governmental officials (various administrations), two interviews with Thai journalists, one interview with a researcher from a well-known research institute, one interview with a representative of an international organisation, and one interview with an informant working for a non-governmental organisation. Due to the sensitive political situation in Thailand at the time of my field research, many of these interviews were given on condition of complete anonymity. Since the intention of my research was to provide a holistic account of nation branding, I targeted elite informants from different areas of the public and private sector in Thailand. These included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Commerce, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Ministry of Culture, Bangkok Metropolitan Culture Council, Board of Investment, National Economic and Social Development Board, The Government Public Relations Department, Singha Beer, Chang Beer, Thai Airways, King Power, Pranda Group, Thailand Development Research Institute and Chulalongkorn University. I targeted ministries and governmental agencies that deal with domestic as well as international affairs and businesses that are well-known in Thailand and operate internationally. The results of these semi-structured interviews are analysed in chapters 3 to 5.

Besides semi-structured elite interviews, I conducted six focus groups involving a total of thirty-six participants: four focus groups involved university students (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Ubon Ratchathani, Hat Yai); one focus group comprised university lecturers (Ubon Ratchathani), and one with pro-Thaksin villagers (Ubon Ratchathani). I decided to target mostly university students because of ease of access and because they were some of the most vocal critics of the ruling junta following the 2014 coup. They staged a series of public defiance acts and anti-coup demonstrations that worried the junta and became an important target of the

junta's reconciliation and repression efforts.[168] Moreover, there is a historical significance to student activism. University students were once an influential force in Thai politics. Their activism peaked between 1950s and 1970s and although much of it declined by the early 1980s,[169] they continue to present a threat to Thailand's political establishment. The two focus groups involving university lecturers and pro-Thaksin villagers were not part of my initial field research plan. However, a well-connected local lecturer was able to help recruit these participants. I took this opportunity in order to diversify my focus group data and to see whether there are any signs of generational differences in participants' opinions and attitudes towards nation branding.

All focus groups were conducted between October and November 2016. Participation in this study was voluntary but restricted to Thai nationals over the age of 16 years old. Participants were recruited with the help of local lecturers using either recruitment posters or the word-of-mouth method. The average focus group size was six participants; more than 60 per cent of all participants were female. No focus groups were conducted in the three Malay-border provinces, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, due to security concerns. All focus groups followed the same structure: participants were shown four videos (the order of the videos was always the same), and after each video I asked my participants six pre-planned questions and invited them to discuss these in relation to the video they had just seen. I moderated all of my focus groups to ensure that participants stayed on topic and that all important areas of enquiry were covered. As most of my focus group participants were university students themselves, I was able to create an informal and amicable atmosphere. As Burnham points out, an informal and amicable atmosphere is crucial for focus group participants to feel comfortable and to be able to discuss or even challenge the questions and views posed by the researcher.[170] I enlisted an experienced research

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[168] For example, see 'Anti-junta rumblings among students,' Uglytruth-Thailand, 14 February 2015, https://uglytruththailand.wordpress.com/2015/02/14/anti-junta-rumblings-among-students/; Khun Somchai, 'Selfies, "Sandwich Parties" and "The Hunger Games": How Activists Have Challenged Thailand's Martial Law,' *Advox: Global Voices Advocacy,* 1 December 2014, https://advox.globalvoices.org/2014/12/01/selfies-sandwich-parties-and-the-hunger-games-how-activists-have-challenged-thailands-martial-law/.
[169] Prajak Kongkirati, 'Thailand: The Cultural Politics of Student Resistance,' in *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness*, eds. Meredith L. Weiss and Edward Aspinall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 229; Also see, Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 145-82.
[170] Burnham et al., *Research methods*, 109-10.

assistant to help with the data transcription process. The results of these focus groups are analysed in chapter 6.

In addition to semi-structured elite interviews and focus groups, I conducted a number of participant observations at public events such as book fairs, trade fairs, tourism fairs and national celebrations. I visited historical parks and had many informal conversations with members of the public. I took notes on my every-day experiences and observations. These research activities were less structured, and I focused mostly on capturing the general atmosphere, public mood and behaviour. While the data that I generated through these research activities do not form the bulk of my empirical evidence, they are a great source of examples and anecdotes that help to approximate and contextualise my arguments in chapters 3 to 6.

Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into five thematic chapters, each focused on answering one subsidiary research question, followed by one concluding chapter. Chapter 2 addresses the first subsidiary research question: 'How is nation branding understood?' It provides historical and political context to the use of nation branding in Thailand and traces important socio-political developments in regard to different national reputation management practices. As this chapter shows, the way nation branding is understood and used in contemporary Thailand has been influenced by decades of different national reputation management practices used by the country's ruling elites for the purposes of political legitimation. Chapter 3 then explores how nation branding was used following the 2014 coup. It answers the second subsidiary research questions: 'How does nation branding operate, what are its objectives, and who are its target audiences?' The chapter challenges some mainstream readings that portray nation branding as an externally-oriented, business-derived, and apolitical practice primarily aimed at increasing a country's competitive advantage. Instead, it argues that Thailand's post-coup nation branding efforts were part of a wider domestic political project aimed at political legitimation. Chapter 4 analyses the military government's branding efforts across five different sectors (tourism; economy, trade and exports; foreign direct investment; foreign policy; and public relations). The chapter addresses the third subsidiary research questions: 'What are the political motivations behind externally-oriented nation branding (image campaigns)?' It argues that despite their seemingly external focus, nation branding activities in these sectors were a function of domestic power politics and the government's quest for

political legitimacy based mostly on identity and performance rationales. Chapter 5 then examines the government's internal nation branding efforts in order to answer the fourth subsidiary research question: 'What are the political motivations behind internally-oriented branding (domestic identity campaigns)?' The analysis here focuses on education, culture and private sectors. The chapter argues that the military government was using internally-focused nation branding campaigns to diffuse virtue across Thai society in order to create a new base for political legitimacy based on the virtuous self-management of Thai citizens. The last thematic chapter, chapter 6, addresses the final subsidiary research question: 'How do domestic audiences react to nation branding?' It examines public reactions to the post-coup nation branding in Thailand by analysing data that I generated through six focus groups. This chapter argues that the military government's post-coup nation branding efforts did not succeed in changing the pre-existing social attitudes and behaviours of the focus group participants. Chapter 7 summarises the main findings of this thesis and proposes that other instances of nation branding in non-democratic regimes across Asia and beyond should be re-considered as exercises in political legitimacy.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIES OF POLITICAL LEGITIMATION IN THAILAND: FROM NATION BUILDING TO NATION BRANDING

Thailand has a long history of internal and external national reputation management and identity formation. Since the mid-nineteenth century, different ruling elites have frequently redefined Thailand's image and identity in order to justify their right to rule at home and abroad. Thailand's post-2014 coup nation branding efforts thus need to be understood in this broader historical context. Challenges to political legitimacy in Thailand have mostly concerned governments and regimes rather than the nation-state. As Saitip Sukatipan points out, with the exception of the three Malay-Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat (also known as the Deep South) the legitimacy of the Thai nation-state remains largely uncontested.[1] Yet, there have been periodic challenges to the legitimacy of regimes and governments since the end of royal absolutism in 1932 as different strategic groups within the country's elites have competed over political power and access to state resources.

These intra-elite struggles have assumed a distinct cyclical pattern of military coups, new constitutions and general elections, followed by an eruption of political conflict, legitimacy breakdown and the collapse of the government or, in some cases, the entire regime (as in 1973, 1976, 1992, 2006 and 2014). As a result, Thailand has seen as many as nineteen military coups (twelve of which were successful), twenty constitutions, twenty-five general elections, two popular uprisings (in 1973 and 1992) and a decade of recurring mass street protests (2005-2014). The 2014 coup is the latest manifestation of this vicious circle of intra-elite struggles over political power and legitimacy. In this chapter, I examine the different legitimation strategies of the Thai state since the mid-nineteenth century to the 22 May 2014 coup in order to address the following research question: How is nation branding understood? Instead of treating nation branding as a new and unique practice, I argue that nation branding builds upon the long history of different national reputation management (both internal and external) practices that have been used in Thailand for the purpose of political legitimation. As such, nation branding is a highly-politicised, predominantly elite practice that is sustained by domestic political struggles over power and legitimacy.

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[1] Saitip Sukatipan, 'Thailand: The Evolution of Legitimacy,' in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 193. Also see Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 18.

Nation Building and the Origins of the Modern Thai State

The origins of the modern Thai nation-state date back to the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century when the kingdom of Siam (Thailand's former name) was confronted with the threat of western colonialism. Before the encounter with the West, the concept of bordered nation-states was alien to Siam and its Southeast Asian neighbours. The region was a collection of loosely structured, unbounded polities linked through a complex tributary system.[2] It was the British and the French in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who introduced modern geography and mapping to the region and defined much of its present boundaries. As Thongchai Winichakul famously argues, the 'geo-body' of the modern Siamese nation-state was a result of this mapping process rather than a gradual evolution from a traditional to modern state.[3] Although the first Siamese mapping efforts were undertaken by King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868), it was not until the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) that the future Siamese nation-state started to take shape.[4] As the colonial grip tightened in Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, Chulalongkorn swiftly made colonial-like claims to the outlying polities that were left uncolonized by the western powers through a series of administrative reforms, mapping exercises and negotiations with the British and the French.[5] King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-1925) then laid the ideological grounds for the new nation-state.

The British and French colonial rule posed a direct threat to the power and prestige of the ruling Chakri dynasty based on Buddhist and Brahman notions of kingship that dominated the justifications of royal power in Siamese kingdoms since the thirteenth century. The Buddhist notions of kingship are based on the concept of *dhammaraja* or 'righteous king,' whose rule is legitimised by his adherence to the moral principle of the Buddhist law (*dhamma*). On the other hand, the Brahman

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[2] There have been many suggestions of how best to describe the political organization of pre-modern Southeast Asia – mandala, galactic polity or segmentary state – but they all start at the village level and work their way up through multiple levels of loosely organized tributary structure of cities. Many villages were paying tributes to more than one city. For further information, see Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A history of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7-10.

[3] Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 129-31.

[4] Scot Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 7; Connors, *National identity*, 35-6.

[5] Thongchai, *Siam mapped*, 95-112 and 129.

notions of kingship are based on the concept of *devaraja* or 'god-king,' whose rule is legitimised by divine authority. As Jackson points out, the two concepts of kingship are mutually incompatible, but their ideological differences have never been resolved.[6] Both concepts have been used to justify the rule of the Chakri kings (former and present) with the *devaraja* concept experiencing a revival during the reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama XI, 1946-2016).[7]

To avoid forcible colonisation and secure the throne's legitimacy, the Chakri kings embarked upon a modernisation project as they hoped that an image of a more civilised, western-like society would convince the British and the French that Siam need not to be colonised. The kings set to change the appearance, fashion and behaviour of the Siamese society to make Siam look *siwilai*.[8] As Jackson explains this led to the emergence of the 'Thai regime of images,' a dual form of power that exerts strict control over public appearances and presentations but is surprisingly tolerant of private thoughts and conduct.[9] As part of the Chakri modernisation project, King Mongkut invited foreign diplomats to Siam and hired English tutors, such as Anna Leonowens, to teach his children English language and western mannerisms. He exchanged letters and gifts with his European counterparts to gain recognition as their fellow monarch.[10] Under King Chulalongkorn, the aristocracy was taught English and many members of the royal family were sent abroad to study in Britain or France.[11] Chulalongkorn also implemented a number of administrative reforms including the gradual abolition of slavery, the creation of standing armed forces and the expansion of the country's bureaucratic structures. King Vajiravudh introduced the use of surnames, new dynastical names for the Chakri kings (the name 'Rama' with a regnal number), promoted sports (mainly football) and mass education, aspired to elevate the

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[6] Peter A. Jackson, 'Virtual Divinity: A 21st-Century Discourse of Thai Royal Influence,' in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010), 35-6.

[7] Ibid, 29.

[8] *Siwilai* is a Thai transcription of the English word civilised. Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 17-21; Sulak Sivaraksa, 'The crisis of Siamese identity,' in *National identity and its defenders: Thailand today*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2002), 35.

[9] See Peter A. Jackson, 'The Thai Regime of Images,' *SOJOURN* 19, no.2 (2004): 181-5 and 187.

[10] Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 31-2.

[11] Ibid, 34-5.

status of women in Thai society, and sought to revive traditional Siamese art that suffered in popularity when the country opened up to the West.[12]

More importantly, Vajiravudh formulated the basis of Siamese national identity as a triadic expression of the Nation-Religion-King. The key pillar of this triad was the king who was the embodiment of the nation, its protector and upholder of the nation's moral foundations rooted in Buddhism.[13] Vajiravudh emphasised the common history of Siamese people and explained that the durability and independence of the newly-formed Siamese nation depended on people's loyalty to the king and Buddhist faith.[14] He linked the survival of the nation to the people's social attitudes and behaviours. In other words, only those attitudes and behaviours that were in line with the Nation-Religion-King triad would ensure the continued stability and prosperity of the Siamese nation. Vajiravudh's policies were an eclectic mix of western and Siamese cultural elements with the former serving the *siwilai* project and the latter helping to legitimate the continued need for royal absolutism under the newly-formed Siamese nation-state. To instil feelings of loyalty in his subjects, the king utilised different media to spread his nationalistic messages. He wrote poems, plays, songs, created films and flyers, and organised festivals and fundraising events. An important aspect of his endeavours was public visibility.[15] The king was often present at the festivals and fundraising events he promoted, and even participated in his own plays.[16] He effectively became the essence of the new nation and the nation equally reflected his personality not least in the tensions between the modern elements of western and traditional elements of Siamese culture. As Craig Reynolds notes, the king was bicultural as a result of his schooling in England, which left a deep psychological effect on him.[17]

The Chakri modernisation project had some unintended consequences. The exposure of young royals and noblemen to western political ideas and notions of

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[12] Walter F. Vella and Dorothy B. Vella, *Chaiyo!: King Vajiravudh and the development of Thai nationalism* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978), 126-75; Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 27-31. Also see Gary L. Atkins, *Imagining Gay Paradise: Bali, Bangkok, and Cyber-Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 55-66; Handley, *King never smiles*, 36.

[13] Handley, *King never smiles*, 36; Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 31.

[14] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 27.

[15] Ibid, 246.

[16] Atkins, *Gay paradise*, 65; Craig Reynolds, 'Book review: Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism,' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 13, no.1 (1982): 193.

[17] C. Reynolds, 'Book review,' 193.

progress, and the increasing availability of modern education even for commoners started to undermine the legitimacy of royal absolutism based on traditions and religious rituals.[18] The expansion of modern bureaucracy during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh led to the emergence of a new middle class of non-royal bureaucrats. Through their contact with the West, these bureaucrats were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with absolute rule and its limits on their career progression.[19] Demands for constitutionalism first emerged as early as the reign of King Chulalongkorn and intensified in frequency during the reign of King Vajiravudh. The emerging Siamese middle class disliked Vajiravudh on a personal level too due to his lavish spending and the appointment of his lovers (the king was homosexual) to positions of power and authority.[20] Within this context, Vajiravudh's nation building efforts were aimed at increasing his own popularity and creating loyalties to himself and the future Chakri kings. Although Vajiravudh's efforts to preserve royal absolutism largely failed,[21] his nation-building legacy continues to shape Thailand's politics to date.

Despite the constructed nature of the modern Thai nation-state, Thailand's foundational myth is underpinned by assumptions that Thai people and their territory have existed since time immemorial.[22] Sulak Sivaraksa, an influential Thai scholar and social critic, for example, argues that Siamese were aware of their own identity before their encounter with the West.[23] Their identity was formed through comparisons with their neighbours who they referred to as *khaek* (a visitor or a foreigner). Even though the word *khaek* featured in Siamese vocabulary, it is highly unlikely that a sense of collective identity existed in pre-modern Siam.[24] The Chakri-led administrative reforms in the late nineteenth century drew people from different

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[18] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 194; Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 21.

[19] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 22-4; Arjun Subrahmanyan, 'Education, Propaganda, and the People: Democratic paternalism in 1930s Siam,' *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no.4 (2015): 1123.

[20] See Atkins, *Gay paradise*, 59 and 61-2; Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 22-4; Copeland, *Contested nationalism*, 34.

[21] Vajiravudh was subject to an unsuccessful military coup in 1912 and a sustained public criticism until his death in 1925. Furthermore, as Copeland points out, Vajiravudh's nationalism was one of many interpretations of Siamese nationhood at the time, which the king himself was well aware of and even acknowledged in one of his essays. See Copeland, *Contested nationalism*, 33-50.

[22] Thongchai, *Siam mapped*, 13; Connors, *National identity*, 5.

[23] Sulak, 'Siamese identity,' 33; David Streckfuss, 'An "ethnic" reading of "Thai" history in the twilight of the century-old official "Thai" national model,' *South East Asia Research* 20, no.3 (2012), 305-6.

[24] Connors, *National identity*, 5-6.

ethnic backgrounds and joined them together in an integrated territorial unit that became the modern Siamese nation-state.[25] Modern Siam was not ethnically unified. Bangkok was home to a large Chinese community, which was gaining in power and influence through trade. Laotians inhabited the North and Northeast alongside a number of smaller ethnic groups while Malays dominated the South. Thongchai believes that since Siam was never formally colonised, it was possible to create this myth of 'a traditional state which transformed itself into a modern nation, thanks to the intelligence of the [Chakri] monarchs who responded wisely and timely to the threats of the European powers by modernising the country in the right direction at the right time.'[26] As a result, the Thai foundational myth emphasises the 'continuity, homogeneity, and the persistence of traditions, especially Thai Buddhism and Thai monarchy,' and presents them as unique characteristics of the Thai nation, its people and their identity.[27] They are presented as the characteristics that secure Thailand's prosperity and independence against external and internal threats.

Constitutionalism, Military Nationalism and the Incomplete Regime Transition

Siam's transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy in 1932 neither 'summarily removed [n]or slowly discredited' the old royal absolutist regime.[28] It was initiated by a small group of young, foreign-educated military officers and civil servants organised in the People's Party, who were members of a newly emerging commoner-bureaucratic elite. In fact, fewer than five-hundred civilians and military officers in Bangkok took part in the 1932 coup that brought down the royal absolutism.[29] By the time of the coup, the legitimacy of the royal absolutism was seriously undermined among the members of the commoner-bureaucratic elite. However, this was not the case of the majority of people in provinces who had not lived under an alternative rule.[30] Due to the lack of mass popular support, the leaders of the 1932 revolution had to compromise with the royalist-aristocratic elite and 'exploit the prestige of traditional institutions' to help legitimate the new

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[25] Streckfuss, 'Ethnic reading,' 306.
[26] Thongchai, *Siam mapped*, 13.
[27] Ibid, 13.
[28] Chris Baker, 'The 2014 Thai Coup and Some Roots of Authoritarianism,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, no.3 (2016): 394.
[29] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 194.
[30] Ibid, 196.

constitutional regime.[31] As a result, Thailand did not experience an institutional overhaul comparable to other countries in Southeast Asia that emerged out of mass popular struggles against colonial rule following the World War II. The post-1932 constitutional regime was built around the same institutions that underpinned the royal absolutism.[32] As Saitip points out, 'the political change in 1932 was in essence only a transfer of power from the king and his royal circle to the commoner civil-military bureaucrats.'[33] The incomplete regime transition sowed the seeds of Thailand's intra-elite conflict as it led to personal and factional rivalries between the traditional and emerging elites that continue to define Thai politics to the present day.[34]

The transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy led to years of domestic political instability and fears of external intervention as disgruntled royalists sought to restore absolutism by all means. King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1925-1935) repeatedly threatened the People's Party with his abdication and chastised leading members of the Party in public, while the Palace was preparing a military rebellion. In the end, neither the rebellion (1933) nor the king's abdication (1935) managed to delegitimate the newly established constitutional regime.[35] To replace the centuries-old royalist regime based on Buddhist and Hindu notions of kingship, the new civil-military bureaucratic elite sought to base their claims to power on constitutionalism, nominal democratic procedures and limited political contestation.[36]

Luang Wichit Wathakan (1898-1962), historian, politician, prolific writer and playwright, took over Siam's image and identity practices and became the chief ideologue of the post-1932 era. Wichit had been actively involved in the nation-building discourse prior to 1932 through his own writings.[37] Although not personally close to King Vajiravudh, Wichit had close personal ties with other members of royalty. His pre-1932 writings were thus largely supportive of royal absolutism and Vajiravudh's royal nationalism expressed in the Nation-Religion-King triad.[38] However, the monarchy was no longer at the centre of state power under the new constitutional regime. Wichit thus needed to redefine the essence of Siamese national image and identity in ways that would legitimate the new power arrangements. The

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[31] Ibid, 195; Handley, *King never smiles*, 45-8.
[32] Baker, 'Roots of authoritarianism,' 394.
[33] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 199.
[34] Ibid, 194-5; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 32.
[35] For a detailed account of this transition, see Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 63-75 and 81-6.
[36] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 195-6.
[37] See Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 40-57.
[38] Ibid, 51-7; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 112.

Chakri-led modernisation project emphasised the monarchy as a source of the country's progress and modernity. For Wichit, civilisation meant progress that comprised of material advancements as well as advancements in people's behaviour and attitudes.[39] He replaced the monarchy with the country's new constitution as a bearer of Siamese progress and modernity and emphasised the importance of the nation over the king. As Secretary to the Association of the Constitution, Wichit was instrumental in proclaiming the 10 December as a permanent Constitution Day. The first celebrations were held in 1933. Organised almost exactly a month after King Prajadhipok's birthday, the celebrations were much more elaborate than those organised for the king's birthday in order to demonstrate to the Siamese people and the world that the Constitution Day was now the most important day in Siamese calendar.[40] Wichit also revised Vajiravudh's Nation-Religion-King triad by adding the country's constitution as the fourth element of Siamese nationalism. The People's Party-led government even built new Buddhist temples which featured the kingdom's new constitution alongside the traditional representations of the king and Buddha.[41] In some of these temples, the constitution was placed higher than the other representations to assert the nation's dominance over religion and the monarchy.[42] The monarchy's symbolic power and prestige was increasingly marginalised through this new emphasis on constitutionalism.

When Field Marshal Phibun Songkram became the country's prime minister in 1938, he tasked Wichit with creating a new image and identity for the country that would break the link with the country's royalist past once and for all.[43] Frequent royalist challenges to the power and legitimacy of the People's Party throughout the 1930s strengthened the party's military wing and aided Phibun's rise to power in 1938. Phibun personally disliked the monarchy, which he believed was behind a number of attempts on his life.[44] With Wichit's help, he sought to legitimate the military's claims to state power and authority. Trained at France's School of Applied Artillery in Fontainebleau, Phibun was one of the original members of the People's Party who were behind the 1932 coup that brought down the absolute monarchy. Yet, his ideological leanings differed from those of his fellow party men. Inspired by

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[39] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 50-3; Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 126.
[40] Handley, *King never smiles*, 57; Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 112.
[41] Handley, *King never smiles*, 57.
[42] Ibid, 57.
[43] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 139; Sulak, 'Siamese identity,' 40-1.
[44] Handley, *King never smiles*, 60; Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 139.

European fascist movements that glorified powerful and strong-willed leaders, Phibun sought to establish a new leadership cult around himself.[45] Upon assuming office in 1938, Phibun had power but he lacked in popularity even among his own party.[46] Phibun's military nationalism can thus be interpreted, at least in part, as his attempt at self-legitimation. On Phibun's orders, Wichit wrote a series of State Conventions that were aimed at unifying the country and instilling a strong sense of loyalty to Phibun and his government. The first State Convention issued on 24 June 1939, which was the seventh anniversary of the 1932 revolution, changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand. This was a testimony to Phibun's desire to discontinue the country's monarchical tradition. He replaced royal prefixes in the names of many state institutions, such as museums and libraries, with the word 'national.'[47] The name-change from Siam to Thailand also reflected Wichit's own irredentist tendencies. As Barmé points out, it was actually Wichit who lobbied for the country's name to be changed in the first place.[48] Following the change, Wichit amplified his irredentist propaganda by claiming that not just Laotians but also Cambodians were essentially Thai, and that Thailand needed to reclaim its lost territories from the French.[49] Wichit helped to mobilise the country's military capabilities to challenge French rule over Indochina. Although the open conflict was only short-lived, and the outcome was negotiated under Japan's mediation, Thailand managed to achieve some territorial gains. Wichit's irredentist campaign created a strong sense of nationhood in Thailand and provided Phibun's government with an 'unparalleled degree of political legitimacy.'[50]

Besides the Convention on the country's new name, other State Conventions addressed issues such as national duties, language, economy, people's appearance, dress and daily-life routines. They effectively laid down the boundaries of what it meant to be Thai. References to different ethnic origins, such as Lao or Shan, in folk songs were replaced by the word Thai, and the central Thai dialect became the national language that everyone was required to study. Western-style clothes were to

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[45] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 112.

[46] Handley, *King never smiles*, 58.

[47] Sulak, 'Siamese identity,' 41.

[48] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 163.

[49] Ibid, 163-9. Also see Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 114-5; Praornrat Buranamat, หลวงวิจิตรวาทการกับบทละครประวัติศาสตร์ *[Luang Wichit Wathakan and historical drama]* (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1985), 104-10.

[50] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 170.

be worn by both men (socks, long trousers, jackets and hats) and women (high-heel shoes, skirts, shoulder-covering blouses, gloves and hats). More bizarrely, people were also commanded to eat a maximum of four meals a day, sleep around six to eight hours a night, and exercise an hour a day. Although the Conventions were not legally binding, Phibun enforced them via the 1940 National Culture Act. As Barmé explains, '[i]n defining and deploying its own notion of "Thainess", the state was in a better position to exert its influence and control over the population than at any time in the past.'[51]

The era of Phibun's and Wichit's military nationalism, came to a halt with the end of the Second World War. Phibun joined the war in 1942 on the side of Japan and the Axis powers hoping that Thailand would emerge out of the war as the new military superpower in Southeast Asia.[52] When the Axis powers lost the war, Phibun's government and his military nationalism were delegitimated. Moreover, Thailand was at risk of being labelled an enemy-state by the Allied powers potentially facing harsh reparations. In the end, Thailand managed to avoid this fate thanks to the existence of underground resistance groups jointly called Seri Thai (Free Thai). Following Phibun's declaration of war, Seri Thai collaborated with the Allied powers in Thailand and abroad which helped to convince the international community that the majority of Thai population was anti-Japanese.[53] A domestic wing of Seri Thai led by Pridi Banomyong, the intellectual leader of the 1932 regime transition, formed the country's first post-war government. After a royalist-backed coup deposed the Seri Thai-led government in 1947, the coup-makers restored Phibun to the position of Prime Minister in early 1948. Yet, Phibun was no longer able to base his legitimacy claims around the war-time militaristic notions of Thai identity, or Thainess.[54] Following the war, Thailand was in a state of crisis. The country's military elites needed to find Thailand a new role in the international community. The underperforming Thai economy and political volatility fuelled popular fears that 'the country was rapidly slipping down the hierarchy of nations,' whilst other countries in Southeast Asia were emerging out of their colonial pasts as newly independent nations.[55] Phibun needed to improve Thailand's reputation abroad and secure political legitimacy at home. Yet, his tenure as the country's second-time Prime Minister was

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[51] Ibid, 160.
[52] Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 135; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 120.
[53] Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 134-6. Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 126.
[54] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 135.
[55] Matthew Phillips, *Thailand in the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 83.

marred with incessant elite infighting. He lacked real power and became a mere figurehead to the country's military that sought to dominate Thailand's political space.[56] Eventually, a dual military coup carried out, rather ironically, by some of the coup-makers who had reinstated Phibun in 1948 ended his political career in 1957-8. Phibun's downfall marked the end of the twenty-five-year struggle over power and political legitimacy between the royalists and members of the People's Party. In the end, neither constitutionalism nor military nationalism succeeded in creating long-lasting bases for political legitimation for the People's Party and their governments. Although the power and prestige of the Thai monarchy was considerably weakened during this period, the People's Party failed to de-legitimise this institution and the traditional norms and values it represented. As a result, they continue to feature prominently in Thailand's image and identity practices until the present day.

Royal Nationalism and the Monarchy-Military Alliance

Following the dual military coup of 1957-8, the country's new leader Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat needed to justify the overthrow of Phibun's government. Initially, Sarit enjoyed a relatively high degree of political legitimacy due to a wide-spread resentment of Phibun's corrupt government among the educated urban classes.[57] Alagappa explains that military coups can be seen as legitimate under certain circumstances. He refers to this as 'negative legitimacy,' an acquisition of power by military means 'with the declared purpose of saving the country or its revered institutions in order to clean up the mess, to restore law and order, or to protect the country from a security threat.'[58] As soon as the state power was firmly in Sarit's hands, he did away with the country's constitutionalism and nominal democratic procedures and established a despotic military rule. Unlike Phibun, Sarit belonged to the generation of military officers who were fully educated in Thailand and had no exposure to western democratic values.[59] His commitment to democratic procedures or constitutionalism was therefore low. To legitimate his despotic regime, Sarit relied in part on the age-old rationales used by the country's military about protecting the Thai nation and its unity against internal and external threats. These were related to

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[56] Ferrara, *Political development*, 135.
[57] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 203; Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 81.
[58] Alagappa, 'Contestation and crisis,' 61.
[59] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 202; Thak, *Despotic paternalism*, 99.

the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia and a possible threat of a home-grown Communist insurgency.

Faced with an increasingly polarised world driven by the logic of Cold War, Sarit needed to carefully manage US-Thai relations so that he did not arouse fears of US imperialism. Such fears could fuel the spread of Communism at home and directly threaten the legitimacy of Sarit's rule. American funding of Sarit's dictatorship was drawing Thailand ever closer to the US sphere of influence and Thailand was rapidly integrating into the global capitalist system. This provided Sarit with an opportunity to build strong performance-based legitimacy claims. He abandoned the Phibun-era economic nationalism in favour of a more liberal capitalist economic policy and concentrated heavily on developing the country's infrastructure to facilitate economic growth.[60] As a result, Thailand's annual growth rate averaged between 7 and 8 per cent during the 1960s. Yet, Sarit needed to ensure that domestic popular consumption would be largely limited to material rather than ideological aspects of western culture. Improved economic standing and availability of western products, including cinematography and fashion, would be in line with the now almost century-old project of turning Thailand into a civilised, modern and progressive nation. Yet, a proliferation of democratic ideas and liberalism could pose a direct threat to the stability of Sarit's regime. Sarit believed that Thai society did not suit western-style democracy and that western-style economic progress could only be achieved by remaining true to Thailand's history and traditions.[61] Under the tutelage of his newly acquired special adviser and shrewd ideologue, Luang Wichit Wathakan, Sarit sought to legitimate his regime by invoking strong identity-based rationales.

Wichit branded Sarit's military dictatorship as a Buddhist democracy: a *dhammic* rule that preaches unity through compliance with a merit-derived social hierarchisation, and affection for those at the top of the social pyramid. Knowing one's place thus became an essential feature of being Thai. By drawing on an ancient model of paternalistic rule, Wichit presented Sarit as the nation's father who rules over his children with a benign fatherly force. Origins of such paternalist rule go back to King Ramkhamhaeng who ruled in the thirteenth century kingdom of Sukothai. The king, and not a military ruler, was the source of kingdom's paternalism in this Sukothai model. In order for this paternalistic model to work, Sarit realised that he needed to revive the position of the country's monarchy to tap into the institution's

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[60] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 205; Thak, *Despotic paternalism*, 150-5.
[61] See Thak, *Despotic paternalism*, 98-109.

symbolic potential and charisma of the recently ascended young king Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX, 1946-2016).[62] By reintroducing a number of discontinued royal rituals and practices, including prostration and the use of royal language, Sarit managed to elevate the monarchy's position to its pre-1932 levels. He encouraged the king to tour the country in what were highly publicised visits to outlying provinces to establish loyalties between the people, the monarchy and himself. Although Sarit often toured the country himself to increase his own visibility, it was the young king and his beautiful queen who provided added value to Sarit's regime.[63] Sarit also sent the king on a number of foreign trips to build amicable ties with foreign publics and governments and captivate the international press. These trips were highly publicised in Thailand to enhance the prestige of the throne and secure Sarit's legitimacy.[64] Sarit forged a close personal relationship with King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit. As a result, the monarchy stopped trying to restore the royal absolutism, embraced Sarit's military rule and lost all interest in western-style constitutional democracy.[65] It was the beginning of a powerful political alliance between the military and the monarchy, which continues to define Thailand's power arrangements to date.

Sarit re-defined Thailand's national image and identity in direct opposition to Phibun's war-time constructs.[66] If Phibun defined progress in terms of imitating western fashion, habits and behaviour, Sarit constructed a new version of Thainess and presented it to the people as traditional and uniquely Thai. He placed emphasis on cleanliness, purity and discipline.[67] Crucially, he reverted back to Vajiravudh's collective Thai identity expressed through the Nation-Religion-King triad and centred on the monarchy.[68] In Sarit-era notions of Thainess the constitution no longer played a central part. The government used different media channels and propaganda techniques to spread this new ideology in order to ensure wide-spread public compliance. Traditional media channels, such as print and radio broadcasts, used to disseminate propaganda during the Phibun-era were gradually superseded by the ever-expanding popularity and availability of television. The narrow definition of the Thai

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[62] Connors, *National identity*, 49; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 151; Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, country and constitutions: Thailand's political development, 1932-2000* (Richmond: Curzon, 2003), 14.
[63] William Callahan, 'The Ideology of Miss Thailand in National, Consumerist, and Transnational Space,' *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 23, no.1 (1998): 42.
[64] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 154.
[65] Handley, *King never smiles*, 139.
[66] Barmé, *Luang Wichit*, 3-4; Kobkua, *Kings, country and constitutions*, 11.
[67] Thak, *Despotic paternalism*, 108.
[68] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 150-6. Also, see Saitip, 'Thailand,' 203.

nation as a paternalistic Buddhist democracy with a strong focus on the monarchy created opportunities to label enemies of Sarit's regime as enemies of the nation. Social dissent and non-compliance were simply un-Thai.[69] Being Thai meant upholding the Nation-Religion-King triad and subscribing to Sarit's royal nationalism. This, in turn, meant supporting Sarit and his regime as the symbolic father and protector of the Thai nation.

In his assessment of Sarit's regime, Phillips suggests that the 'ideological basis for the Sarit regime was rooted not in an anthropological understanding of Thai cultural character, but rather in the global consumer culture emanating from the United States.'[70] To enjoy US patronage, Phillips explains, Sarit was compelled to imitate 'the constructions that dominated American visions of Thai society.'[71] Yet, such an account of Sarit's relationship with the United States obscures the fact that the image of a culturally-traditional yet economically developing Thailand was a highly pragmatic project devised by Sarit to secure domestic political stability and international support and that the mode of consumerism pursued was largely Japanese.[72] Through the internalisation of Cold War language, Sarit recognised American global superiority and cajoled the US partner to support his authoritarian turn on Thai politics. He created a powerful legitimacy narrative that offered the benefits of western-style economic development in exchange for social and political acquiescence of the Thai citizens.[73] Where the legitimacy narrative failed to achieve its goals, Sarit employed hard power to crush dissent in the total confidence that he had the full support of his US ally. As Ferrara points out, Sarit used Thailand's cultural traditions to legitimate 'the rule of a venal military regime, of which Thailand had little history, that wielded absolute powers of the kind no ruler in Thailand had enjoyed prior to the late nineteenth century.'[74]

The legitimacy of Sarit's military regime started to erode following his death in 1963. This was in part because none of Sarit's successors possessed his force of

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[69] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 156.

[70] Phillips, *Cold War*, 150.

[71] Ibid, 151.

[72] Suphap Phatoong and Kruetsaa Chingchit, 'ภัยเหลือง: การลงทุนของญี่ปุ่นในประเทศไทย [The Yellow Peril: Japanese investment in Thailand], *สังคมศาสตร์ปริทัศน์ [Social Sciences Review]* 10, no.4 (1972): 18; Thak, *Despotic paternalism*, 167-8; Connors, *National identity*, 62.

[73] For a similar argument, see Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 154.

[74] Ibid, 156.

personality.[75] Growing popular dissatisfaction with the military rule culminated in a mass student uprising in 1973, which saw Sarit's three successors, General Thanom, General Praphat and Colonel Narong, flee the country. A brief quasi-liberal democracy interlude was established in the country's otherwise military-dominated political past.[76] Despite the successful overthrow of the military dictatorship, power did not really change hands in Thailand.[77] This was largely due to a skilfully-created national myth that glorified the king's intervention in the 1973 events. The king ordered to open the gates of the royal palace to save fleeing protesters from the soldiers' live ammunition. Hailed as the country's supreme mediator, the king oversaw the political transition as well as the constitution drafting process securing the dominance of conservative over liberal elements. As the monarchy explicitly favoured a military rather than a democratic rule, the potential for a fully democratic political system was seriously compromised.[78] Political cleavages, a deteriorating economy, the rise in political participation that resulted in almost daily trade union strikes, and a radicalising nationalist rhetoric backed by the monarchy gradually shifted popular support away from the members of the 1973 student uprising. The increased radicalisation resulted in a coup that was preceded by the tragic Thammasat University massacre in October 1976, where right-wing para-military groups lynched more than forty students with the tacit approval of the Thai state and its revered institutions.[79]

Hyper-Royalism, Network Monarchy and Virtuous Rule

Following the 1976 Thammasat University massacre, the membership of the Communist Party of Thailand soared as many students fled to the jungle to take part in the guerrilla warfare against the Thai state. A new government led by Thanin Kraivichien, an ultra-conservative supreme court judge and a member of a far-right anti-communist vigilante organisation, placed the restoration of the traditional elites' right to rule at the centre of the post-1976 political efforts. The Thanin government sought to establish broad identity-based rationales to justify the coup and their highly repressive ultraconservative regime. They also needed to tackle the political

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[75] Kobkua, *Kings, country, constitutions*, 11.
[76] For a detailed account of political developments in 1960s and 1970s, see Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 145-82.
[77] Ibid, 170.
[78] Connors, *National identity*, 62-3; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 172.
[79] Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 191-4; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 178-9; Handley, *King never smiles*, 237.

polarisation wrought by the 1973-76 events and the rising threat of domestic communist insurgency.[80] Shortly after the coup, the government launched a 'Project to Promote Identity' and started publishing a new magazine, called 'Thai Identity.'[81] Published from within the Prime Minister's Office, the magazine promoted the state institutions alongside with a need for a strong national culture which, according to the editorial of the magazine's first issue, was under severe threat from foreign influences.[82] The magazine urged its readers to embrace Thai culture – defined as a set of values, religious texts, traditional customs, and Thai art – in order to protect the country's integrity and sovereignty. Thai national identity was once again securitised. In 1977, the government formed a National Identity Board and tasked it with the articulation, planning and promotion of Thai national identity.[83] The Board would become one of the chief state agencies for ideological propagation over the next two decades.

The government, however, realised that it was no longer possible to base their political legitimacy on traditional norms and values. The Thanin government needed to appease, if not accommodate, some of the popular demands for a more liberal and democratic political system that underpinned the 1973-76 events. To this end, the government added democracy to the new national identity mix.[84] Yet, this democratic addition came with an important suffix: a democracy with the king as head of state. As Hewison explains, democracy with the king as head of state denotes a mode of governance 'where average people, politicians, parties and parliament are kept weak and where real power resides with traditional, repressive, and hierarchical institutions: the monarchy, military, and the [senior] bureaucracy.'[85] The roots of this localised expression of Thai democracy go back to the 1935 abdication letter of King

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[80] Connors, *National identity*, 136.

[81] Ibid, 136.

[82] Ibid, 136; Craig J. Reynolds, 'Introduction,' in *National identity and its defenders: Thailand today*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 12.

[83] See Connors, *National identity*, 136. Please note that Connors dates the establishment of the National Identity Board to 1980. The date I use in this thesis comes from the National Identity Board's website, which traces it back to Thanin's government in 1997. See 'เอกลักษณ์ของชาติ [National Identity],' National Identity Board, accessed 21 March 2016. http://www.identity.opm.go.th/identity/content/identity.asp?identity_code=19000001&lang=thai&doc_type=19.

[84] Connors, *National identity*, 93.

[85] Kevin Hewison, 'Weber, Marx and Contemporary Thailand,' *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, no.2 (2013): 177. Also, see Thongchai Winichakul, 'Thailand's Hyper-royalism: Its Past Success and Present Predicament,' *Trends in Southeast Asia*, no.7 (2016): 2.

Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1910-1935) in which he famously stated: 'I am willing to surrender the powers I formerly exercised to the people as a whole, but I am not willing to turn them over to any individual or any group to use in an autocratic manner without heeding the voice of the people.'[86] Although during his reign Prajadhipok was a contingent democrat at best, his abdication statement became an important element of Thailand's foundational myth that describes democracy as a royal gift to the Thai people by the great Chakri kings.[87] The new quasi-democratic national identity thus became a great source of royal prestige and a tool of an aggressive promotion of the monarchy centred on King Bhumibol.[88]

While Sarit revived the lost prestige of the Thai monarchy during the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was not until after the turbulent events of 1973-76 that the monarchy reached a pinnacle of its popularity and political power. This was owing to what Thongchai calls 'hyper-royalism:' an intensive and excessive public promotion of royalism supported by a draconian legislation (Article 112 of the criminal code) that controls public discourse of the monarchy.[89] As Connors points out, '[i]f, in the mid-1970s, the fate of the monarchy seemed uncertain, within less than a decade even progressive intellectuals could not conceive of the "Thai" nation without its wise king.'[90] Education and the media played a major role in building the royal popularity by disseminating images of the royal family, broadcasting the royal rituals, and reminding the population about the royal projects and activities to better the Thai society.[91] Whereas many of the pre-1976 governments tried to rationalise the need for the monarchy by invoking the king's *dhammaraja* qualities, the post-1976 military governments sought to create a cult of personality around the king by emphasising his *devaraja* status.[92] The king became 'the sole source of legitimacy and the determining factor in major political issues.'[93]

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[86] Prajadhipok quoted in Handley, *King never smiles*, 53.
[87] Kevin Hewison and Kengkij Kitirianglarp, '"Thai-Style Democracy": The Royalist Struggle for Thailand's Politics,' in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010), 184; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 80-1; Handley, *King never smiles*, 53.
[88] Connors, *National identity*, 128; Handley, *King never smiles*, 53.
[89] Thongchai, 'Hyper-royalism,' 3.
[90] Connors, *National identity*, 128.
[91] See Sarun Krittikarn, 'Entertainment Nationalism: The Royal Gaze and the Gaze at Royals,' in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010), 68 and 75-6.
[92] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 194.
[93] Thongchai, 'Hyper-royalism,' 5.

The increased politicisation of the monarchy since the mid-1970s could have threatened the institution's perceived inviolateness and moral righteousness in the long run. As McCargo explains, the monarchy needed to reinvent its *modus operandi* so that it could continue to shape the country's political system (directly and indirectly) and reap its benefits without being blamed for its failures.[94] Instead of restoring a hierarchical monarchical rule, the monarchy moved towards a network-based mode of governance. McCargo has famously called it the 'network monarchy.'[95] Network monarchy is an 'inherently illiberal' mode of governance that relies on 'placing the right people (mainly, the right men) in the right jobs' to enhance the position and power of the monarchy that, in turn, enhances the legitimacy of the political system and those associated with it.[96] In other words, it is a mode of governance that operates in the form of direct and indirect political interventions carried out by the king and his proxies. From the 1980s onwards, network monarchy's leading proxy was General Prem Tinsulanonda.

Appointed as the country's prime minister by the king in 1980, Prem placed hyper-royalism at the top of his government's agenda. He increased funding for the royal projects tenfold to establish the king as a protector of ordinary people against the vices of capitalism.[97] He even gave his entire government to be at the king's disposal both in terms of budget and personnel.[98] As Chai-Anan explains, the marketization of Thai society from the 1970s onwards has raised people's aspirations thereby putting the Thai state under an increasing pressure to meet popular demands.[99] While the monarchy was one of the leading capitalist forces in the country, the institution's official image was that of an 'anti-capitalist crusader.'[100] Bhumibol's public calls for sufficiency became an integral part of the legitimacy narrative in this era, which served to reinforce the subaltern position of the Thai peasantry and maintain the prospects of capitalist gain of the traditional elites.[101] Under the call for sufficiency, which was constantly reiterated through the mass media, the country's

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[94] Duncan McCargo, 'Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand,' *The Pacific Review* 18, no.4 (2005): 503.
[95] Ibid, 501.
[96] Ibid, 501 and 503.
[97] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 192.
[98] Handley, *King never smiles*, 290.
[99] Chai-Anan Samudavanija, 'State-Identity Creation, State-Building and Civil Society, 1939-1989,' in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 63.
[100] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 194.
[101] Ibid, 191-3.

peasantry was urged to reject exploitative capitalism, to remain true to traditional ways of life and sources of livelihood, and to stay away from evil and corrupt politicians and their promises of economic and social betterment. Compliance with this call was effectively a matter of demonstrating one's Thainess.

Despite hyper-royalism and personal support of the king and the queen, Prem's semi-democratic military regime faced frequent popular challenges to legitimacy. As an unelected leader, Prem relied heavily on the military to circumscribe the power of elected politicians. His conservative fiscal policies further entrenched social inequality ignoring rural poverty and development needs.[102] The Thai peasantry remained largely ambivalent about the anti-capitalist messages promoted by the government.[103] Under increasing pressure from the press, business and elected politicians, who threatened to expose his homosexuality, Prem dissolved parliament in April 1988 and called an early election in July 1988. The election was won by the Chart Thai party and Chatichai Choonhavan became the country's first elected prime minister in twelve years.

Chatichai assumed office as the Cold War was drawing to an end, the international situation relaxed, and the communist threat to Thailand was long gone.[104] The Chatichai government needed to find a new role for Thailand in the post-Cold War world that would be independent from that of the United States. In his January 1989 speech, Chatichai laid down the basis of the country's new vision as a regional hub for economic development. Encapsulated in a slogan that promised to turn mainland Southeast Asia 'from battlefield to marketplace,' Chatichai made a historic shift in Thailand's policy orientation.[105] It was the first time in the history of the modern Thai state that national security was not the primary domestic and foreign policy concern; regional economic expansion and positioning came to assume its place.[106] The Chatichai government initially enjoyed considerable levels of political legitimacy as the first fully-elected government in over a decade.[107] After assuming

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[102] Paul Handley, 'More of the same? Politics and business, 1987-96,' in *Political Change in Thailand: democracy and participation*, ed. Kevin Hewison (London: Routledge, 1997), 96.

[103] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 193.

[104] By mid-1980s, Prem effectively suppressed Communist insurgency in Thailand. See Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 191.

[105] Chatichai quoted in Arne Kislenko, 'Bending with the wind: The continuity and flexibility of Thai foreign policy,' *International Journal* 57, no.4 (2002): 547.

[106] Leszek Buszynski, 'Thailand's Foreign Policy: Management of a Regional Vision,' *Asian Survey* 34, no.8 (1994), 723.

[107] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 218.

office, Chatichai curbed the power of the military by placing decision-making powers over foreign affairs and national security matters, areas that had been under firm military control for decades, into the hands of elected politicians and hand-picked advisors largely comprised of provincial businessmen and academics.[108] His own advisory board, called Ban Phitsanulok, was actively involved in the country's domestic and foreign policy formulation.[109] However, lacking the support of the traditional elites, Chatichai needed to rely on political patronage and benefit distribution to secure support from Thailand's fractious party system.[110] This eroded the popular support and legitimacy of the Chatichai government. The traditional elites used the government's many corruption scandals as a pretext for a military coup in February 1991.

The 1991 coup group led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon initially enjoyed a high degree of 'negative legitimacy.' Yet, when it became clear that the military sought to perpetuate their hold on power, their legitimacy was seriously undermined.[111] Mass popular demonstrations followed by an intervention from the king eventually toppled the military government in May 1992. It is important to note that the May 1992 events were accompanied by a powerful public and media discourse that portrayed the country's politicians as either 'good' or 'evil' depending on whether they opposed or supported the military dictatorship. As McCargo explains, this idea that politicians, or other leaders, can be simply classified as 'good' or 'bad' goes back to the Buddhist notions of virtuous kingship (*dhammaraja*) and has been 'framed by the moralistic tutelary discourse that characterizes speeches by King Bhumibol and his network.'[112] Under this construct, the legitimacy of rule is inexorably linked to the character of the ruler. As long as the ruler is good, his/her rule is seen as legitimate. McCargo refers to such rule as 'virtuous rule.'[113] Virtuous

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[108] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 205; Hewison, *Politics and business*, 1.

[109] Ban Phitsanulok was a 7-member advisory board that advised Chatichai on the country's foreign policy, economic and legal matters (domestic and international). It comprised Phansak Winyarat (president), Sukhumbhand Paribatra (foreign policy advisor), Dr Narongchai Akrasanee (economic advisor), Dr Chuanchai Atchanan (economic advisor), Dr Bowornsak Uwanno (legal advisor), Dr Surakiat Sathirathai (legal advisor – international law) and Kraisak Choonhavan (researcher), Chatichai's son. See 'ที่ปรึกษาบ้านพิษณุโลก [Ban Phitsanulok Advisors],' Thailand Political Base, accessed 27 February 2016. http://politicalbase.in.th/index.php/ที่ปรึกษาบ้านพิษณุโลก.

[110] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 205-6.

[111] Saitip, 'Thailand,' 220.

[112] Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 15.

[113] Ibid, 15.

rule represents the highly conservative royalist political order centred on King Bhumibol and legitimised through his virtuous *dhammaraja*-like reign. Those supported by Bhumibol are seen as good people who are 'dedicated to the best interests of Thailand as a whole.'[114] Virtuous rule allows for a hierarchical transfer of virtue from the source, that is the King, to the members of his political networks. As such, the continuous legitimacy of virtuous rule depends on the continuous existence of virtuous monarch. However, by the end of 1980s it became clear that none of King Bhumibol's four children would be able to fill his *dhammaraja* role and command the same amount of public respect.[115] The traditional elites needed to find ways how to institutionalise virtuous rule in preparation for post-Bhumibol era.

Once parliamentary democracy was restored following the September 1992 general elections, various civilian governments struggled to establish an effective basis for long-term legitimacy. These governments were weak coalitions of many different parties riddled with factional infighting, frequent corruption scandals and vote buying. They proved to be extremely unstable and highly unpopular earning a derogatory label of 'money politics.'[116] The 1997 Asian financial crisis dealt a final blow to the already strained legitimacy of 'money politics.' Despite being one of the major capitalist forces in the country, the monarchy managed to deflect the blame for the financial meltdown onto the elected politicians. King Bhumibol openly chastised elected leaders for their support of unbridled capitalism and consumerism over his calls for sufficiency.[117] His philosophy of sufficiency economy became the new economic paradigm of the late 1990s and his 'wisdom' was once again publicly celebrated. However, as Ferrara notes, the king failed to understand that his calls for sufficiency 'were at odds with the aspirations of upward mobility harboured by much of the population.'[118] It was just a matter of time until the king's vision would be challenged by a more aspirational and empowering national myth.

Nation Branding and the Challenge of the Traditional Power Arrangements

The 1997 financial crisis aroused nationalist sentiments in many Thais, who blamed the then prime minister Chuan Leekpai and his government for giving in to the

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[114] Ibid, 16.
[115] See Handley, *King never smiles*, 299-327.
[116] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 215; Surin Maisrikrod and Duncan McCargo, 'Electoral politics: Commercialisation and exclusion,' in *Political Change in Thailand: democracy and* participation, ed. Kevin Hewison (London: Routledge, 1997), 137.
[117] Handley, *King never smiles*, 414.
[118] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 219.

demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in exchange for financial assistance.[119] Thai popular culture became saturated with nationalist themes. Films about Thais defending their nation against foreign aggressors became national blockbusters.[120] Thaksin Shinawatra, a Sino-Thai communications tycoon-cum-politician, and his newly-formed Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party successfully capitalised on this public sentiment. McCargo and Ukrist note that from the early 1990s onwards Thailand's political parties started to reinvent their campaigning strategies by using the media and various marketing and advertising techniques.[121] Thai politics was clearly developing a trend towards electoral professional parties. As McCargo and Ukrist explain, an electoral professional party is a marketing-led party that is pragmatic, has little to no ideology (ideology is secondary to its core activities) and is often run by professionals instead of politicians. Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) was the first example of such a party in Thailand. From the start of his election campaign, Thaksin promised to breathe fresh air into Thai politics.[122] He relied heavily on polling, even the party's name came out of a popular poll,[123] and direct consultations with the grassroots which gave him an image of the 'people's man.' He also cultivated the image of an ordinary family man who came from the northern city of Chiang Mai and succeeded in building a big communications empire.[124] In an apparent attempt to distinguish himself from the 'money politics' of the 1990s, Thaksin often professed he did not enter politics to enrich himself but to help the country get out of the economic crisis. Moreover, he emphasised his communications background to demonstrate that he was up-to-date with technology and was ready to think in new ways. 'New' was the party's catchword and this was reflected in the TRT slogan: 'Think new, act new, for every Thai.'[125] Despite all the 'new' talk, Thaksin and his party were in many respects loyal to the old techniques of electioneering, such as vote buying, electoral manipulation, election-related violence and intimidation.[126] Thai Rak Thai won a landslide victory in the country's general election in 2001 and

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[119] McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 5; Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), 16.

[120] Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 261-2; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 77.

[121] McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 77-9.

[122] Ibid, 186; Nichapha Siriwath, *Branding ไทยรักไทย [Branding Thai Rak Thai]* (Bangkok: Higher Press, 2003), 28-31.

[123] Nichapha, *Branding*, 21.

[124] See Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 25; Nichapha, *Branding*, 44-9.

[125] Nichapha, *Branding*, 28.

[126] See McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 99.

Thaksin became the first (and only) Thai Prime Minister elected under the 1997 charter.

The 1997 constitution was the most liberal constitutions in Thai history. Despite its elite origins, the constitution was widely praised as the 'people's constitution.' It was meant to restructure Thailand's political system away from the 'money politics' towards a more robust democratic system based on accountability of power through independent checks and balances, 'clean' and stable party system, and a new rights regime.[127] Crucially, the constitution concentrated the power in the hands of the executive and weakened the legislature. Under the new rules, cabinet members were banned from holding a parliamentary seat, the number of cabinet seats was reduced from 45 to 35 and the government was incentivised to pick a cabinet member from the party list as opposed to a constituency MP. This, the constitution drafters believed, would root out Thailand's factious politics.[128] The constitution also strengthened Thailand's party system by introducing rules that would enhance loyalty and discourage party switching. For example, the ninety-day rule required candidates for the lower house to be members of a political party for a minimum of ninety days before the election registration day while the newly established Electoral Commission of Thailand had to organise snap elections within forty-five days of the House dissolution. As McCargo points out, the 1997 constitution was an attempt at institutionalising virtuous rule by creating a framework for 'good' people to enter politics in order to provide checks and balances on the 'bad' politicians.[129] Yet this strategy did not work. Instead of bringing stability to the Thai politics and securing virtuous rule, the 1997 constitution created conditions for the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra as a powerful prime minister who would dominate Thailand's political processes and challenge the power of traditional elites. As Kuhonta explains, '[n]ot only was political stability overrun by [Thaksin's] political hegemony and authoritarian practices, but ultimately the polity became deeply unstable as Thai society became sharply polarized.'[130]

Thaksin was a successful businessman and a shrewd politician. Upon entering politics in 1994, Thaksin realised that he needed the support of Thailand's traditional

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[127] For a detailed analysis of the 1997 constitution, see Erik Martinez Kuhonta, 'The Paradox of Thailand's 1997 "People's Constitution": Be Careful What You Wish For,' *Asian Survey* 48, no.3 (2008): 373-92.

[128] Kuhonta, 'Paradox,' 380-1; Duncan McCargo, 'Democracy Under Stress in Thaksin's Thailand,' *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.4 (2002): 113-4.

[129] McCargo, *Tearing apart*, 16.

[130] Kuhonta, 'Paradox,' 376.

elites to fulfil his political ambitions. He used his business fortunes to buy support of the monarchy and the military and became close to the then Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn.[131] Thaksin reportedly financed many of Vajiralongkorn's large expenditures during the 1990s, including an expensive palace refurbishment project. This strategy of buying support of the royal family initially paid off. Shortly after the 2001 election, Thaksin was accused of violating a clause of the 1997 constitution and faced a possible disqualification from office. The Supreme Court eventually acquitted Thaksin by one vote despite the evidence suggesting otherwise. It is widely believed that General Prem, by then the President of the king's Privy Council, intervened in the legal process on behalf of the royal family to save Thaksin.[132] Yet unlike Sarit or Prem, Thaksin was a contingent royalist. As Handley explains, Thaksin 'would serve palace needs as long as it served his own, but if their interests did not coincide, he felt no obligation to gratify the palace.'[133] Once he was in power, Thaksin grew increasingly independent from the monarchy and the traditional elites. He quickly sidelined their political networks from the positions of power within both military and bureaucracy and replaced them with his own men. Having won an unprecedented popular mandate, Thaksin did not need to rely on the monarchy as the primary source of his political legitimacy. Aided by the 1997 charter that helped him to avoid the trappings of the factional politics characteristic of the previous decade, Thaksin was able to establish a strong foundation for political legitimacy based on his popular mandate, performance and charismatic authority.

Thaksin approached Thai politics from a corporate management perspective. He argued that running a country was like running a company; he even referred to himself as a 'CEO prime minister.'[134] Thaksin and his policy team, who came from corporate management and academic backgrounds, embarked on a 'Thailand Company' project.[135] This project focused on four major areas: the country's economy, foreign policy, people, and Thaksin himself. When Thaksin assumed office, Thailand was recovering from the worst financial crisis in its modern history. The public mood was low as the crisis had affected almost every Thai. Moreover, the crisis negatively affected the country's international image as Thai and international press

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[131] Handley, *King never smiles*, 424.
[132] Ibid, 426.
[133] Ibid, 425.
[134] Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 102.
[135] Ibid, 101.

largely blamed the crisis on Thailand's corrupt politicians.[136] Thaksin needed to lift the public mood and repair the country's international image in order to successfully restart the economy. It is here where nation branding provided Thaksin with a helping hand.

Thaksin's 'Thailand Company' project was a nation-branding exercise par excellence. It created a new strategic national myth under which Thailand would become a paradigm of economic recovery based on more localised rather than western economic development models. The end-goal was a successful and competitive Thailand enterprise full of business-minded people that would be on par with western industrialised nations.[137] To this end, the Thaksin administration commissioned an international consultant and Harvard professor of business, Michael Porter, to identify key niche sectors which the government should develop.[138] Initially, Porter identified tourism, fashion, food, computer and the automobile sectors where Thailand could develop its competitive advantage. The government further added agricultural and service sectors to Porter's list due to some Cabinet members' vested interests.[139] In the same year as Porter presented the results of his study, the Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration (Chulalongkorn University) and Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University) published a short study titled *Branding Thailand: Building a Favorable Country Image for Thai Products and Services* ostensibly '[a]s a gift' to Thaksin's government.[140] The study explored consumer perceptions of Thailand, its people and products and concluded that Thainess – defined as place, people, products – 'implies a fusion of traits where diversity encompasses harmony.'[141] Businesses and services within three of Porter's key sectors (fashion, food, tourism) were advised to adopt the study's findings when creating their brand strategies.[142] These efforts would aid the government's vision to help Thailand become the 'Kitchen of the World', 'World Health Service Centre', 'Detroit of Asia', 'Asia Tourism Capital' and the 'Asia Tropical Fashion' centre.[143] The government ordered the Board of Investment, Thailand's leading foreign

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[136] Ibid, 17; Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 260.
[137] Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 100-3.
[138] Ibid, 113-4.
[139] Ibid, 114.
[140] Suvit et al., 'Branding Thailand,' 21.
[141] Ibid, 23.
[142] Ibid, 25.
[143] For further details of this vision, see Suvit Maesincee, *Thailand Stand-Up* (Bangkok: BrandAge books, 2005), 60-79.

investment promotion agency, to concentrate on the key sectors in driving economic growth.[144] This was the first time that a Thai government pursued a conscious nation branding strategy across multiple sectors.

As part of the new strategic national myth, Thaksin started a series of growth-oriented economic policies that gradually came to be known under a unified brand name as 'Thaksinomics.'[145] Thaksinomics was a mixture of inward and outward looking economic policies aimed at stimulating domestic consumption, increasing the country's competitiveness, deepening capitalism and driving regional economic integration. They became a synonym for an alternative development paradigm. As Pasuk and Baker note, even the IMF organised a seminar on Thaksinomics as a new paradigm for development in Asia.[146] Thaksinomics was the brainchild of Somkid Jatusripitak, a co-founding member of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party and a Minister of Finance in Thaksin's first administration.[147] Somkid earned a PhD in marketing from the Kellogg Institute at Northwestern University where he met American marketing guru Philip Kotler, who came to have a major influence over Somkid's thinking.[148] Together with Kotler, Somkid co-authored two books: *The New Competitiveness* (1985) on business strategies in Japan and *The Marketing of Nations* (1997), a how-to-guide on applying strategic market management techniques to the administration of a country's economy. A third co-author of *The Marketing of Nations* book was Suvit Maesincee. Just like Somkid, Suvit earned a PhD degree in marketing from the Kellogg Institute at Northwestern University. He became Somkid's advisor in 2004 before holding his own Cabinet positions as Vice Minister of the Office of the Prime Minister (2004-2005) and Vice Minister for Commerce (2005-2006) in the Thaksin administration. Suvit was also a prolific author of marketing books and one of the authors of the 2003 Sasin study on Thailand's nation branding strategy.

Under Thaksinomics, people were urged to increase their spending and become more entrepreneurial. To this end, Thaksin and Somkid implemented a one-million baht scheme, where each village would receive one million baht in development aid.[149] The government hoped that villagers would use the money to

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[144] Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 114.
[145] Ibid, 99.
[146] Ibid, 99.
[147] McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 98.
[148] Ibid, 98; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 66-7.
[149] Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, 'Pluto-Populism in Thailand: Business Remaking Politics,' in *Populism and Reformism in*

modernise their agricultural practices and start producing surpluses in market crops.[150] In another scheme called One Tambon, One Product (OTOP) the government encouraged the country's sub-districts to specialise in a single product type in order to increase the product's competitiveness in national and international markets.[151] Based on a Japanese rural development model (one village, one product), the Thai government provided development loans for OTOP producers, some technology and help with marketing and branding.[152] As Natsuda et al. point out, whereas the Japanese project sought to empower local governments, Thaksin's OTOP was a highly centralised government-controlled project.[153] Thaksin relied heavily on Thaksinomics as a source of his political legitimacy and used it to create loyalties between the people, himself and his government.

Thailand's foreign policy was also subject to Thaksin's branding project. After assuming power, Thaksin set out to revamp the country's Foreign Ministry so that it contributed towards the country's economic growth. Although economically-driven foreign policy was already on Chatichai's agenda (1988-1991), Thaksin took it a step further. He wanted to turn Thailand into a hegemonic power within Southeast Asia. To this end, Thaksin assigned the country's diplomats with a new role: they were no longer merely representing the country and its interests abroad; they were selling it. The role of Thaksin's 'CEO diplomats,' a term Thaksin coined himself, was to increase the country's foreign direct investment and tourism.[154] The government also revisited its relations with important regional players and its Southeast Asian neighbours. Under Thaksin, Thailand strengthened its already close ties with China and became the first Southeast Asian nation to sign a free trade agreement with this Communist nation. Despite this rapprochement, Thaksin also sought to maintain strong relations with the West, especially with the US (Thailand's decades-long ally). After Thaksin joined the Bush administration in its war on terror, Thailand became

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Southeast Asia: The Threat and Promise of New Politics, eds. Eva-Lotta Hedman and John T. Sidel (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Council on Southeast Asia Studies Monograph Series, forthcoming), 9.

[150] Oliver Pye and Wolfram Schaffar, 'The 2006 anti-Thaksin movement in Thailand: An analysis,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no.1 (2008): 48-9.

[151] See Kaoru Natsuda, Kunio Igusa, Aree Wiboonpongse and John Thoburn, 'One Village One Product – rural development strategy in Asia: the case of OTOP in Thailand,' *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 33, no.3 (2012): 369-85; Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 115.

[152] Natsuda et al, 'One village,' 374.

[153] Ibid, 373.

[154] Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *Reinventing Thailand: Thaksin and His Foreign Policy* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 28

the major non-NATO US ally.[155] Within Southeast Asia, Thaksin emphasised the need for closer economic ties and forged friendly relations with Burma, historically one of Thailand's longest regional adversaries.[156] Unlike the previous administrations, Thaksin worked to strengthen regional relations outside the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) framework, which he considered overly bureaucratic and cumbersome. This caused considerable strife within the Foreign Ministry.[157] Thaksin's rapprochement with Burma was also heavily criticised at home and abroad as the promotion of economic relations between the two countries aided the repressive military regime in Burma, possibly delaying the country's transition towards a more democratic governance.[158]

The most successful aspect of Thaksin's 'Thailand Company' branding project was Thaksin himself. His highly personalised nation branding efforts meant that Thaksin soon overshadowed his party and his government. Thailand's politics since 2001 was, clearly, a one-man show.[159] To the dismay of the traditional elites, Thaksin challenged their source of political legitimacy based on the nationalist Nation-Religion-King triad with his own Nation-Economy-Thaksin brand.[160] Thaksin built his own source of charismatic authority that was separate from the figure of the king. As the historically first Thai prime minister, he launched his own weekly radio programme in which he talked about his personal life, his prime ministerial work and any other topical issues of the week. As McCargo and Ukrist note, Thaksin often used the programme to berate his critics and to propose new policy ideas, many of which never materialised.[161] On the economic front, Thaksin started to position himself as the champion of the poor by emphasising the pro-poor elements of his Thaksinomics agenda.[162] In doing so, Thaksin ventured far beyond what the traditional elites deemed acceptable. He effectively hijacked the most important source of political legitimacy – King Bhumibol's charismatic authority based on his rural development activities – that underpinned virtuous rule and that the different military governments had

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[155] N. Ganesan, 'Thaksin and the Politics of Domestic and Regional Consolidation in Thailand,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26, no.1 (2004): 37; Pavin, *Reinventing Thailand*, 3.

[156] Ganesan, 'Thaksin,' 33-4; Pavin, *Reinventing Thailand*, 164-9.

[157] Pavin, *Reinventing Thailand*, 46.

[158] Ibid., 51. Also see Ganesan, 'Thaksin,' 34.

[159] For a good account of this, see McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 108-10.

[160] See Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 233-4.

[161] 168-72.

[162] See Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 115-8; McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 217-8.

painstakingly been building since the early 1960s. Not even a military coup that deposed Thaksin's government on 19 September 2006 managed to delegitimate Thaksin and his new Nation-Economy-Thaksin brand.

A Clash of Two Nation Brands?

The 2006 coup failed to achieve its political objectives. The first post-coup general election took place in December 2007 and was won by the pro-Thaksin People Power Party. Ferrara refers to the period that followed the 2007 general election as 'the politics of identity' as Thai politics became hostage to mass street protests staged in turns by the anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and pro-Thaksin United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD); both movements representing different groups in Thai society.[163] A typical PAD supporter would be either a middle or an upper-class Thai from the Central or the South region. A typical UDD supporter would be a lower-class villager from the North or the Northeast, who most of the year worked and lived in Bangkok. Naruemon and McCargo refer to these UDD supporters as 'urbanised villagers.'[164] The rhetoric of both movements as well as the props used during the protests were symbolic. PAD supporters donned yellow t-shirts as yellow is the colour of the king's birthday (Monday) and became popularly known as 'Yellow Shirts.' They used rhetoric infused first with ultra-royalist and later ultra-nationalist vocabulary. In contrast, UDD supporters, who became known as 'Red Shirts,' wore red t-shirts and used vocabulary of feudal social stratification to challenge the legitimacy of virtuous rule.

I propose that the 2007 general election, the PAD's and UDD's recurring street protests between 2008 and 2014, and the 2014 coup d'état can be seen as a clash of two nation brands that offer alternative presentations of Thailand's strategic national myths, political power arrangements and sources of legitimacy. On the one hand, there is virtuous rule embodied in the traditional Nation-Religion-King nationalist brand. It represents royal conservativism, strict social hierarchisation and limited civic and political rights under the rule of the traditional often unelected elites and their political networks. On the other is Thaksin and his political system embodied in the new Nation-Economy-Thaksin brand. It represents economic progress and the fulfilment of people's aspirations even though Thaksin's policies, in reality, benefited first and

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[163] For further details, see Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 246-59.

[164] Naruemon Thabchumpon and Duncan McCargo, 'Urbanized Villagers in the 2010 Thai Redshirt Protests: Not Just Poor Farmers?' *Asian Survey* 51, no.6 (2011): 1000-9.

foremost his own businesses and the businesses of his cronies.[165] Unlike any other leader since 1932, Thaksin had managed to successfully hijack the main source of legitimacy of the traditional elites and their national brand, and create a strong sense of loyalty between the people, himself and his strategic national myth. In many respect, Thaksin's strategic national myth represented much more than Thaksin really stood for. As McCargo and Ukrist note, the key objective of Thaksin's political project was 'the replacement of the old power group – a network based around the palace, Prem, elements of the Democrat Party, members of prominent establishment families and senior bureaucrats – with his own network of intimates and associates.'[166] In short, Thaksin was neither a committed democrat nor a highly-principled visionary. Yet, the myth he offered to the Thai people 'did not lecture the voters to stay in their place, but encouraged them to imagine a different future for themselves and their families.'[167]

The attempts of the traditional elites to reclaim the right to hegemonic rule over Thai politics and society have so far failed. A series of constitutional court rulings deposed the People Power Party-led government in December 2008. The traditional elites installed a pro-establishment Democrat-led government under the leadership of Oxford-educated Abhisit Vejjajiva. Abhisit struggled to establish his political legitimacy. As soon as he assumed the office, Red Shirt protesters started to mobilise. They staged their first mass anti-government demonstration in April 2009. More mass demonstrations followed in March and April 2010. Eventually, a violent crackdown on Red Shirt protesters in May 2010 that led to more than sixty fatalities dealt the final blow to the legitimacy of Abhisit's government.[168] Early elections held in July 2011 were overwhelmingly won by a pro-Thaksin Phuea Thai Party led by Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. As McCargo notes, an intra-elite deal between Thaksin and the military enabled Yingluck to become the country's first female prime minister in mid-2011.[169] Yingluck based her legitimacy on the continuation of her brother's Nation-Economy-Thaksin brand. She launched Thaksin-style economic policies with a strong pro-poor domestic economic agenda, relied heavily on her popular mandate, and charismatic authority rendered by the Shinawatra surname. To ensure the stability of her government, Yingluck established rapport with

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[165] McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 218.
[166] Ibid, 252.
[167] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 248.
[168] Ibid, 261.
[169] McCargo, 'Thailand in 2014,' 350.

key figures within the traditional elites including the military.[170] However, an ill-advised attempt to push a controversial amnesty bill through Parliament in November 2013 set in motion a string of events that eventually led to the 2014 coup.[171] Although the bill did not pass the Senate, it triggered a wave of street protests that forced Yingluck to dissolve Parliament on 9 December 2013 and call for a snap election on 2 February 2014. The protests peaked on 13 January 2014, when hundreds of thousands of protesters led by the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), a PAD's successor, occupied eleven key locations across the capital city of Bangkok as part of their 'Bangkok Shutdown' campaign. The objective of the campaign was to make the capital city increasingly ungovernable and to prevent the holding of a successful snap election which would help to at least partly re-legitimate the embattled government.[172]

The February 2014 election was marred with problems from the beginning. The ruling Phuea Thai Party was not ready to contest in the polls as they were supposed to be in power for another year. The party's pre-election campaign was half-hearted, and their rallies were poorly attended.[173] The opposition Democrat Party decided to boycott the election even though they had demanded the dissolution of the Parliament in the first place. The newly-appointed Election Commission was also ill-prepared to organise the polls openly favouring their postponement.[174] The PDRC-led protests disrupted the candidate registration process on 26 December 2013 leaving twenty-eight constituencies in the South with no candidates. Protests on 26 January disrupted the advance voting in Bangkok and across the Upper South reportedly allowing only five percent of advance voters to cast their ballots.[175] Finally, the PDRC-led protests disrupted the election-day voting on 2 February in 127 out of 375 constituencies paving way for the Constitutional Court to annul the election on 21 March on the grounds that the voting could not take place in all constituencies on the same day. Yingluck was removed from office (together with nine cabinet ministers) by the Constitutional Court on 7 May for an alleged abuse of power that had occurred

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[170] Ibid, 350.

[171] For a summary of events leading up to the 2014 coup, see McCargo, 'Thailand in 2014,' 336–58; Duncan McCargo and Petra Desatova, 'Thailand: Electoral Intimidation,' in *Electing Peace: Violence Prevention and Impact at the Polls*, ed. Jonas Claes (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2016), 68-75.

[172] McCargo, 'Thailand in 2014,' 341.

[173] Ibid, 342.

[174] Ibid, 340-3; McCargo and Desatova, 'Electoral intimidation,' 78-9.

[175] McCargo and Desatova, 'Electoral intimidation,' 68-9; McCargo, 'Thailand in 2014,' 341-2.

at the beginning of her premiership.[176] Thailand's armed forces led by General Prayuth Chan-o-cha declared martial law and seized control of the country on 20 May. They summoned politicians and protest leaders from both sides (pro- and anti-government) for negotiations. When talks failed on 22 May 2014, General Prayuth declared that he was seizing power in a coup. The 2014 coup and its aftermath have been marked with renewed efforts to remove Thaksin's influence over Thai politics and restore the political legitimacy of virtuous rule and the hegemonic power of the Nation-Religion-King brand.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed the different strategies for political legitimation used by Thailand's ruling elites between mid-nineteenth century and the 22 May 2014 coup. This approach helped me to historicise and contextualise nation branding in relation to a number of important socio-political developments that have shaped the ways in which nation branding is used and understood in contemporary Thailand. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Thailand's national reputation management and identity formation have been an integral part of the state legitimation processes. As a result, they are sustained by domestic power politics and are largely the prerogatives of the ruling elites and their political networks.

Thailand's early image and identity practices were aimed at averting the threats of western colonial rule and securing the continuity of the absolute monarchy under the newly created Siamese nation-state. Their outcome was the shibboleth-like triadic expression of Nation-Religion-King centred on the figure of the king. When the absolute monarchy was overthrown in 1932, the new ruling elite comprising commoner military officers and civilian bureaucrats organised in the People's Party employed image and identity practices to justify the 1932 regime change and their own rule. They sought to marginalise the monarchy's symbolic power and prestige and instead emphasised the country's new constitution and military nationalism. Yet, their efforts failed to create a stable, long-term basis for political legitimation. The power and prestige of the monarchy, and its legitimation potential, were once again revived under the rule of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in the late fifties and early sixties.

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[176] See Thomas Fuller, 'Thai Prime Minister Ordered Removed from Office,' *The New York Times*, 7 May, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/08/world/asia/court-orders-thai-leader-removed-from-office.html.

Sarit forged a power alliance with the then reigning King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) and replaced constitutionalism and military nationalism by royal nationalism to justify his despotic military rule. He defined collective Thai identity around highly-conservative, anti-liberal, paternalist norms and values that were conducive to authoritarian rule. Royal nationalism continued to be the dominant strategy for political legitimation for post-Sarit military regimes until the early 1970s, when it was challenged by popular demands for a more liberal and democratic political system.

Thailand's experiment with liberal democracy proved short-lived and military rule was restored in three years. The Thai monarchy reached the pinnacle of its popularity and its full legitimating potential under the premiership of General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988) and his hyper-royalism that became the chief strategy for political legitimation until the late 1980s. The end of Cold War and the rising demands of global capitalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s ushered in a new era of civilian governments and parliamentary democracy. During this time, Thailand's image practices became more economy-focused. However, hyper-royalism continued to be an important source of domestic identity practices. Buddhist notions of kingship based on royal virtue were especially emphasised giving rise to the concept of virtuous rule that sought to legitimate the right of traditional elites (the monarchy, military, and senior bureaucracy) and their political networks to political power and to counter the rise of career politicians. The rise of Thaksin Shinawatra, a successful telecommunications tycoon-turned-politician, in the early 2000s challenged the legitimacy of Thailand's virtuous rule. Thaksin was the first Thai prime minister to use nation branding. To increase Thailand's global competitive advantage and help the country recover from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, Thaksin created a new strategic national myth for Thailand: an economically successful and competitive Thai nation full of business-minded citizens on par with the developed West. Thaksin used nation branding domestically to create loyalty between the people, himself and his government. To the dismay of the traditional elites, he challenged the central tenet of their legitimacy claims, the Nation-Religion-King triad, with his own brand of Nation-Economy-Thaksin. Not even a military coup that deposed Thaksin and his government in September 2006 was able to delegitimise this new nation brand. The 2014 coup that deposed the government of Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, marked renewed efforts on the part of the traditional elites to remove Thaksin's influence over Thai politics and regain legitimacy for virtuous rule.

As this chapter demonstrated, nation branding does not operate in a socio-political vacuum. It builds on a long and complex history of different image and identity practices that affect the ways in which nation branding is understood and used in contemporary societies. Studies on nation branding in other non-democratic regimes for example, Russia and China, could also benefit from this historicised approach as it results in better and more nuanced understanding of the different contexts in which nation branding operates. The following chapter analyses Thailand's nation branding efforts following the 22 May 2014 coup drawing on empirical data from semi-structured elite interviews, participant observations and campaign materials.

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING THAILAND'S POST-COUP BRAND

The May 2014 coup was Thailand's second coup in a decade and the twelfth successful coup since the country formally transitioned to constitutional monarchy in 1932. Most Thai coups follow the same script: shortly after the military take-over, the junta appoints an interim government headed by a highly respected public figure or a military general, national assembly and a constitution drafting committee, and promises an election within a year.[1] General Prayuth Chan-o-cha and his National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) did not stick to this script. Instead, they cracked down on political dissent in ways not seen in the country since the 1970s and concentrated power in their hands.[2] For example, the interim constitution, promulgated in July 2014, included a controversial provision, Article 44, which granted General Prayuth absolute powers to issue any order to maintain peace, order and public unity and to override any laws and legislations that threatened the NCPO and their political efforts. By the time the National Legislative Assembly (a legislature hand-picked by the junta) appointed Prayuth as the country's prime minister in August 2014, it was clear that the NCPO aimed to stay in power for the long-term.

The 2014 coup was bloodless, and it enjoyed some popular support, but this was not enough to provide the NCPO with lasting political legitimacy. As McCargo aptly put it: 'For every Bangkokian cheering the coup, there [were] at least two Northeasterners looking on in horror.'[3] Although the coup put a halt to a decade-long political conflict, the Thai society remained deeply polarised. The NCPO needed to bridge this social divide and create a widely-accepted base for political legitimation. To this end, the generals launched a hearts and minds offensive in the form of nation branding. This chapter studies the junta's post-coup nation branding efforts between

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[1] Duncan McCargo, 'Thailand's Army Tears Up the Script,' *The New York Times*, 29 May 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/opinion/thailands-army-tears-up-the-script.html; Claudio Sopranzetti, 'Thailand's Relapse: The Implications of the May 2014 Coup,' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no.2 (2016): 299-300; Baker, 'Roots of authoritarianism,' 389.

[2] Within days of the coup, the NCPO issued more than three hundred summonses to former politicians, Red Shirt protesters, pro-democracy activists, academics and journalists to turn themselves over to the military to have their attitudes adjusted (the junta's euphemism for intimidation of their critics and opponents). Many more summonses followed in the weeks and months following the coup. In his 2016 article, Sopranzetti suggests that the junta summoned more than 830 people for these attitude adjustments. See Sopranzetti, 'Thailand's Relapse,' 304.

[3] McCargo, 'Thailand's army.'

the 22 May 2014 coup and the official accession of King Vajiralongkorn to the Thai throne on 1 December 2016. It addresses the following research question: How does nation branding operate, what are its objectives, and who are its target audiences? The chapter challenges the conventional view that nation branding is an externally-oriented, apolitical, business-derived practice aimed at increasing a country's competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Instead, it offers an alternative interpretation of nation branding as a strategy for political legitimation that is primarily aimed at changing the social attitudes and behaviours of domestic citizens through the creation and dissemination of strategic national myths.

Nation Branding Under Military Rule

Following the 22 May 2014 coup, the NCPO scrapped the nation branding strategy of the ousted government of Yingluck Shinawatra. Initiated in 2011, Yingluck's government had hired Winkreative, an international marketing agency owned by Canadian branding consultant Tyler Brûlé, to devise a new nation branding strategy for Thailand ahead of the 2012 World Economic Forum on Asia in Bangkok.[4] The government needed to restore foreign investors' confidence after the severe 2011 floods that affected most of Thailand's 77 provinces including Bangkok. Yingluck's government was not Winkreative's first Thai client. The international agency had done a branding project for Thailand's Central Group before, but this was their first nation branding project.[5] Winkreative cooperated with Bangkok-based marketing agency Verb that served as a cultural check and helped with the production of promotional films and photography. Yet, Verb played no part in the creative thinking process; Thailand's new brand identity was Winkreative's domain.[6] The agency audited existing communication strategies of various ministries and governmental agencies and proposed a unified nation branding strategy under a new 'Modern Thailand' slogan, a country logo featuring an elephant, and a simple set of monochrome sector logos. The main purpose of the branding strategy was to reverse existing preconceptions about Thailand and present it as a modern Buddhist country.[7] Despite the obvious economic focus, Yingluck's branding initiative was not only about increasing foreign investors' confidence but it was also part of a wider effort to

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[4] Interview with Ariel Childs, Managing Director of Winkreative, 12 June 2017.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

restore the government's reputation and domestic legitimacy that suffered badly by their mismanagement of the 2011 floods.

The Modern Thailand branding strategy created a new strategic national myth for Thailand: it was a well-connected, business-oriented, and welcoming country with a good quality of life that was a perfect place for doing business. Winkreative wanted to show that Thailand was not just about Bangkok, tourism, beaches and culture, it was a 'modern […] and connected society.'[8] The agency focused on positive messaging to increase Thailand's international profile, its global competitiveness and its long-term revenue stream from foreign direct investment. The Modern Thailand strategy consisted of a short film series, biannual magazine, TV advertisements, a dedicated website, global print campaign and an international retail concept. In 2013, a shop selling sophisticated Thai design was opened in Tokyo. The campaign was advertised in July/August 2012 issue of Brûlé's *Monocle*, a popular global affairs magazine with international circulation. A number of strategically located advertising billboards representing Modern Thailand also appeared in Bangkok. Following the 2014 coup, the NCPO ended Winkreative's contract;[9] and the project was scrapped altogether.

The Modern Thailand strategy was a text-book exercise in nation branding from within Kaneva's technical-economic strand: there was a global branding consultant, a new slogan, a set of fancy logos, and a global marketing communication strategy with a strong economic objective. As a successful businesswoman, Yingluck approached nation branding from a marketing perspective. Modern Thailand was, first and foremost, about creating brand equity; political reasons, although undeniably present, were secondary. Yingluck's approach to nation branding was part of the established Shinawatra mode of political marketing characterised by an extensive use of the media, public relations campaigns, marketing and branding techniques and a frequent use of marketing and advertising experts.[10] Pioneered by Thaksin during his 2001-2006 premiership, political marketing has significantly changed the nature of Thai politics. Thaksin started to treat Thai citizens as customers, policies as products, and political parties as brands. Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party adopted a flexible, ideology-free, pragmatic approach to politics and policy making. This marked a shift

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 77-9.

towards a post-ideological age in Thai politics, where traditional political loyalties were replaced by emotional ties and politics became increasingly personalised.[11]

The NCPO's approach to nation branding was different to that of Yingluck and her administration. As a government that emerged out of elections, Yingluck's administration relied heavily on their popular mandate and democratic procedures for legitimation. This was not the case for the NCPO that gained power through military means. The post-coup nation branding was thus a function of the NCPO's domestic political needs. The NCPO seemed to have had the following objectives: to undermine the political networks of the Shinawatras; to strengthen the power of traditional elites (the monarchy, military, senior bureaucracy) and their political networks; to re-gain political legitimacy; and to secure the leading position for the NCPO's military faction known as the Queen's Guard. The increasingly imminent royal succession was another source of worry for the NCPO and another reason for the 2014 coup. A decade of political instability and miscalculated palace interventions undermined the monarchy's appeal among some segments of Thai society. Prince Vajiralongkorn, son and heir apparent to then reigning King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1946-2016), had never enjoyed the same levels of popularity as his ailing father. Vajiralongkorn's lavish lifestyle and his reputation as a womaniser contrasted with the image of a righteous Buddhist ruler carefully constructed during his father's reign. In addition, Vajiralongkorn had previously been close to Thaksin, making Bhumibol's demise a real threat to the power of the traditional elites and their political networks.[12] A fully-fledged Vajiralongkorn-Thaksin alliance would change the country's power arrangements and mark the end of virtuous rule, the royalist political order that benefited the traditional elites.

The Prayuth administration did not follow the conventional nation branding model: they did not hire an international branding consultant, nor did they create a new country slogan or a logo. It is here that Varga's assumption that the governments use nation branding to advance the global market agenda might be called into question.[13] The use of nation branding in post-coup Thailand was motivated by domestic power politics, and not the logic of economic liberalism. The Prayuth administration's ability to achieve their post-coup political objectives depended on their internal and external image just as much as on the success of their policies and

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[11] Ibid, 77-9.
[12] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 234.
[13] Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 837.

repressive measures. The generals were aware that excessive use of hard power could undermine their political efforts. However, combined with nation branding as a soft power tool, the generals hoped to make people's attitudes and behaviours more malleable and in line with their strategic national myth: a creatively modernising yet socially traditional and culturally unique Thailand consisting of people that will reject the Shinawatras once and for all, abandon their provincial identities and democratic and social aspirations in exchange for a semi-authoritarian rule under the traditional elites.

The generals' understanding and approach to nation branding was informed by the military concept of information operations (IO) that were combined with modern marketing techniques and age-old national myths. In fact, there was no official talk about nation branding in the Prayuth administration between 2014 and 2016.[14] The generals referred to all communication activities, including nation branding, as forms of 'IO.' Yet, Thailand's post-coup nation branding cannot simply be reduced to the notion of IO. Defined by Armistead as a coordinated use of psychological operations, military deception, electronic warfare, computer network operations and operational security,[15] IO combines soft power and military propaganda. This fits to an extent within Kaneva's political strand. However, there is an important difference between soft power under the IO doctrine and soft power based on Nye's definition as a co-optive state power working on the principles of attraction, positive influence and persuasion.[16] The IO doctrine presupposes the existence of an enemy or an adversary; in this context, soft power is used as a coercive rather than co-optive tool forcing the enemy to either carry out or not carry out a particular action.[17] Under the IO doctrine, soft power is essentially a zero-sum game and it is closely linked to propaganda.

Unlike nation branding, IOs have a long tradition of use in Thailand. While the first official use of nation branding dates back to the Thaksin administration (2001-2006), the Thai military has been using IOs to counter real or perceived national security threats since the beginning of its communist counter-insurgency operations

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[14] I interviewed eleven governmental officials across different ministries between June and November 2016. None of the interviewed officials had heard of the term of nation branding in relation to the Prayuth administration.
[15] Leigh Armistead, *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2004), 19-20.
[16] Nye, 'Soft power,' 166.
[17] Armistead, *Information operations*, 16.

in 1965.[18] The negative approach to soft power is thus firmly entrenched in the Thai military practice. It is important to note that the Thai use of the IO differs from the classic western doctrine. As Yin and Taylor explain, the Thai use of the IO is often limited to psychological operations (PSYOP) – activities that seek to influence social attitudes and behaviours in line with a particular (military) agenda both in time of peace and during a war – because the Thai military lacks advanced military technology capabilities and human resources necessary to conduct other forms of IOs.[19] The primary targets of Thai PSYOP are not foreign countries and their citizens, which are the traditional targets of IOs under the western doctrine, but rather domestic populations. Traditionally, the Thai PSYOP include political propaganda, promotion of the country's monarchy, economic and reconciliation projects, media control and censorship. Since its inception in 1965, the Communist Suppression Operations Command (renamed the Internal Security Operations Command in 1974) has deployed PSYOP in campaigns first against the Communist Party of Thailand and then against the Malay-Muslim insurgents in the three southern-most provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.[20] Since the early 2000s, Thai PSYOP have become increasingly politicised and used by the country's military to influence people's views of politics, politicians and elected governments in favour of the rule of traditional, often unelected, elites.[21] PSYOP were deployed to pave the way for both the 2006 and the 2014 coups by demonising the country's elected politicians and building support for the coups. The use of PSYOP in Thailand's political conflict mimics the military counter-insurgency mindset and is underpinned by a belief that IOs could provide a quick fix to the country's political problems by targeting the Shinawatra political networks and their rival IO capabilities.[22]

The ability to control Thailand's information environment was high on the NCPO's political agenda after the 2014 coup. As one official at the Government

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[18] James Yin and Philip M. Taylor, 'Information Operations from an Asian Perspective: A Comparative Analysis,' *Journal of Information Warfare* 7, no.1 (2008): 12-3.

[19] Ibid, 12-3.

[20] Ibid, 13.

[21] See 'สุรชาติ บำรุงสุข: ปฏิบัติข่าวสาร (IO) ในไทย ไม่มีอะไรเกินกว่าปฏิบัติการจิตวิทยาใน อดีต [Surachat Bamrungsuk: Information operations (IO) in Thailand are nothing more than psychological operations of the past],' *Prachatai*, 30 November 2016, https://prachatai.com/journal/2016/11/69069.

[22] See Kajohnrit Nilkamhaeng, 'การปฏิบัติการข่าวสารกับความมั่นคงแห่งชาติ [Information Operations and National Security],' *The National Defence College of Thailand Journal 58*, no. 3 (2016): 72 and 75.

Public Relations Department (PRD) explained, the PRD had to analyse the content of print and online media, report directly to the prime minister and attend meetings about IOs on a daily basis.[23] In August 2016, PRD even organised an internal workshop on IOs to improve their officials' understanding and ability to use this military practice.[24] Coupled with media censorship and crackdown on dissent, the junta was clearly aiming to establish information superiority defined as the ability to 'collect, process, disseminate an uninterrupted flow of information, while exploiting or denying an adversary's ability to do the same.'[25] The junta's obsession with IOs reflects a fundamental problem in the traditional elites' approach to Thai politics: instead of accepting socio-political changes triggered by Thaksin, and allowing Thai politics to structurally adjust to them, the traditional elites are desperately trying to reverse them.[26] The country's military, monarchy and senior bureaucracy do not want to give up their power and privileges guaranteed under the current, albeit dysfunctional, political system which they are trying to preserve at all costs.

Operating under the IO framework, Thailand's post-coup nation branding shared the Thai IO's domestic focus and enemy element. While nation branding is conventionally used to dismantle negative perceptions of a country held by its external stakeholders, the NCPO often used nation branding to target those who opposed the junta and the country's military regime at home.[27] This approach expands on some of the assumptions made in the academic literature that nation branding motivates national pride, greater social cohesion, and advances the government's domestic legitimacy.[28] While the academic literature treats these aspects of nation branding as by-products, they were at the centre of the junta's nation branding efforts. It is here that Thailand's post-coup nation branding receives its most important influence from the Thai IO: contrary to the conventional belief of externally-oriented and apolitical nation branding, Thailand's post-coup nation branding was primarily internally-focused and distinctly political. Even ostensibly external campaigns, such as the 2015 Discover Thainess tourism campaign, had a strong domestic component as the

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[23] Interview with an official working for the Government Public Relations Department (PRD), 21 November 2016.

[24] 'PRD holds Information Operations workshop,' *NBT World NNT*, 17 August 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTmQHSGtnMA.

[25] Armistead, *Information Operations*, 16.

[26] See Michael Peel and David Pilling, 'Salute to the past: Thailand,' *The Financial Times*, 12 June 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/0a34455e-f147-11e3-9fb0-00144 feabdc0.

[27] These mostly included students and pro-Thaksin supporters.

[28] For an example of this, see van Ham, 'Branding territory,' 255.

generals needed Thai people to fully subscribe to their strategic national myth in order to legitimate their rule.

Academic literature on nation branding pays little attention to the area of internal branding despite its importance. This is likely a result of the dominant influence of the technocratic approaches within the field of nation branding. Although an increasing number of studies acknowledge that nation branding speaks to internal and external audiences, they often reduce internal nation branding to domestic communication acts.[29] Yet, internal branding can take the form of full-fledged branding and can be launched either in support of or in addition to an external branding campaign. It is within the domestic realm, where nation branding, or more precisely internal nation branding, is most likely to be deployed as a strategy for political legitimation. This is especially the case in non-democratic regimes such as post-2014 coup Thailand that rely heavily on identity- and output-based legitimation rationales.

Thailand's external reputation mattered to the NCPO,[30] but mostly when it affected the ways in which Thai people viewed their country and the domestic power arrangements.[31] The generals were much more concerned about their domestic reputation. They sought to project a particular self-image based on an age-old national myth of a prosperous country under a strong but benevolent leader, where all people were happy and had good lives, everybody was honourable and those in power were innately good people who would never do bad things.[32] On the other hand, bad people would always be bad and being bad was inherently un-Thai. In many ways, this was a very simplistic view of Thailand infused with a nostalgia for the 'good old times' that had never truly existed.[33] Since the early 1960s, the Thai military has intervened in Thai politics under the pretext of saving the country from 'bad people' who threatened the unity and integrity of the Thai nation. Over the years, these included communists, corrupt politicians, Thaksin, his political networks and supporters. Thailand's traditional elites have used this national myth to help legitimate virtuous rule, a highly-centralised political order with a rigid social hierarchy system presided over by a charismatic king. In a well-argued analysis of Thailand's royalist political

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[29] See Jordan, 'Tool for nationalism,' 283-303; Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 598-618; Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 825-45.
[30] Interview, PRD.
[31] Interview with a representative of a western international organisation, 11 July 2016.
[32] See Hewison and Kengkij, 'Thai-style democracy,' 187.
[33] Interview with a Thai journalist and a former political blogger, 11 October 2016.

system, Űnaldi points out that royal charisma has been an important source of legitimacy for the traditional elites and members of the country's monarchical networks.[34] However, royal charisma is not a given: it depends on people's recognition of the monarchy's qualities and special status, and their ability to benefit from such recognition.[35] Thaksin's populist economic policies challenged royal charisma by providing benefits to Thailand's rural populations whose needs had been customarily overlooked by the traditional elites. Some members of the monarchy, such as Queen Sirikit and Princess Chulabhorn, further undermined royal charisma by openly supporting anti-Thaksin forces following the 2006 coup; many rural Thais loyal to Thaksin and his political networks grew disillusioned with these partisan royals. Following the 2014 coup, the NCPO needed to restore the legitimacy of the highly-centralised, royalist political order in order to protect the source of their power and benefits. As Varga points out, the solution that nation branding offers is in '[t]he correction of collective identity' rather than in 'the restructuring of political, social, or economic conditions.'[36] Contrary to Varga, however, this study argues that the NCPO's use of nation branding to correct collective identity of Thai people was motivated by domestic power politics rather than the logic of economic liberalism.

The NCPO's Nation Branding Strategy

In the two-and-a-half years following the coup, the Prayuth administration did not have a clear and unified nation branding strategy. There was no lead ministry in charge of a clearly formulated nation branding project as was the case for Yingluck's Modern Thailand.[37] As a result, many governmental officials believed that the junta was not branding Thailand even though they were directly involved in nation branding activities.[38] For example, Sugree Sithivanich, the then Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications at the Tourism Authority of Thailand, stated in 2016 that 'Thailand was unable to have its own [national] brand as the [country's] vision was not continuous.'[39] Sugree believed that Thailand was sending an unclear country

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[34] Serhat Űnaldi, *Working towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 49-50.
[35] Ibid, 37.
[36] Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 837.
[37] Interview with an official working for the Board of Investment (BOI), 16 November 2016.
[38] Ibid; Interview with Mr Sugree Sithivanich, 8 September 2016.
[39] Interview, Sugree.

image: one moment the government wanted Thailand to be seen as an agrarian country, the next moment as an industry leader.[40] Sugree seemed confused by branding in individual sectors without grasping the junta's overall brand where the traditional co-existed with the modern. The absence of a new country logo and a slogan might have made the junta's branding efforts less visible and, arguably, less recognisable across the country's bureaucratic levels. It is here that Govers's argument about national logos and slogans having limited effects on nation branding might be called into question.[41] Although Govers is right in claiming that countries do not need additional symbols of recognition as they already have their names and national symbols, new national logos and slogans might play a role in creating awareness and coordinating actions across the country's bureaucratic structures.

Due to the absence of a clear and unified strategy, nation branding in post-coup Thailand was policy-based. On 12 September 2014, the NCPO published an eleven-point policy framework for all ministries to follow when formulating their respective post-coup agendas. The framework outlined eleven areas of national concern:

1. Protecting and respecting the monarchy;
2. Maintaining national and international security;
3. Decreasing social inequality and creating opportunities of access to governmental services;
4. Improving education and preserving religion, arts and culture;
5. Improving the quality of public health services and citizens' health;
6. Developing the country's economic potential;
7. Supporting the role and using the benefits of ASEAN;
8. Supporting science, technology, research and development, and innovation;
9. Preserving the security of natural resources and creating a sustainable balance between their conservation and use;
10. Promoting good governance and preventing corruption and misbehaviour in the public sector;
11. Improving laws and judicial processes.[42]

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Robert Govers, 'Editorial: Why place branding is not about logos and slogans?' *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 9, (2013): 71.

[42] 'คำแถลงนโยบายของคณะรัฐมนตรี [The Cabinet Policy Statement],' Office of the Higher Education Commission, accessed 15 January 2017, http://muabudget.buu.ac.th/uploadfiles_new/e55857cee78453562c97403fcd6b4a9b.pdf.

Although the junta's policy framework did not explicitly refer to national reputation management, the monarchy, education, culture and the economy were the main policy areas for nation branding. They were the areas for building identity- and output-based legitimation rationales. As a government that came to power through undemocratic means, the generals needed to base their political legitimacy on shared norms and values, and good administrative and economic performance. The junta's policy framework was a product of Thailand's post-ideological era. It was a pragmatic mixture of protective and progressive single-issue policy statements, some of which reflected the junta's own political desires while others paid lip service to people's needs. Many of them were simply irreconcilable. For example, the NCPO set to improve the country's education so that everyone could 'develop to their full potential' but at the same time they vowed to 'instil good values and consciousness' into people, and to spread a 'correct and true understanding of the monarchy.'[43] Nation branding was well-suited to this post-ideological context as it could incorporate the NCPO's mutually irreconcilable policies and political interests into a seemingly coherent strategic national myth.

Since Thailand's post-coup nation branding was policy-based and there was no single lead ministry in charge, the NCPO's nation branding efforts were much more fragmented than those under the Shinawatras as different ministries formulated their own branding campaigns. Nevertheless, all campaigns had to adhere to the NCPO-defined policy framework that guaranteed at least some level of consistency. The NCPO's post-coup nation-branding efforts were driven by a belief that they were the sole and righteous guardians of the Thai nation and its identity. In the context of Thai cultural politics, Surichai Wan'gaeo refers to a similar phenomenon as 'cultural elitism:' a belief that there is a 'good' and 'bad' culture and only a small group of people in the society can distinguish between the two.[44] I propose to extend Surichai's concept to Thailand's post-coup nation branding, where a small group of mostly military generals and senior bureaucrats decide what aspects of national identity are desirable, or in Surichai's words 'good,' and worth promoting. I conceptualise the junta's post-coup nation-branding efforts as a form of 'identity elitism.'

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[43] 'Policy statement,' 6, 7 and 3.
[44] Surichai quoted in Michael K. Connors, 'Ministering Culture: Hegemony and the Politics of Culture and Identity in Thailand,' *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no.4 (2005): 541.

Certain ministries were more active at branding than others. For example, the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports were particularly active in the more conventional, externally-oriented branding activities. Yet, these activities were not simply aimed at enhancing Thailand's competitiveness, but rather creating international acceptance of, if not an outright support for, the Prayuth regime. Despite their seemingly external focus, many activities contained strong internal messaging and some, especially in the tourism and economy-related sectors, were accompanied by domestic branding campaigns that sought to establish the regime's legitimacy on identity- and performance-based rationales. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Education, were active in internally-oriented branding activities. They focused on establishing the regime's legitimacy on shared norms and values by disseminating the junta's notions of Thainess and good citizenship. Three departments under the aegis of the Office of the Prime Minister, the National Economic and Social Development Board, Board of Investment, and the Government Public Relations Department, were also actively involved in nation branding. The Board of Investment was branding to attract foreign direct investment thereby strengthening junta's performance-based rationales, while the Government Public Relations Department was engaged in largely domestic PR activities aimed at identity-based legitimation. The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) was an important policy coordinating body within the Prayuth administration.

Established in 1959 as the National Economic Development Board (renamed the NESDB in 1972), the NESDB has been a key economic policy-planning body in Thailand: its primary responsibility is to publish a new national policy plan every five years called the National Economic and Social Development Plan. NESDB representatives also attend policy planning meetings at different ministries to ensure that the ministries follow the objectives set out in the National Economic and Social Development Plan. At the time of the coup, the country was following the eleventh development plan drafted by the Yingluck administration for the 2012-2016 period. Although the generals did not scrap the plan, the NESDB together with the Bureau of the Budget had powers to scrutinise policy programmes proposed by the ministries before any budget was released.[45] The Board could have requested programme changes including exclusions of specific projects that it deemed unrelated to the

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[45] Interview with an official working at the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 18 November 2016.

NCPO's policy framework or having no obvious impact. Through NESDB, the generals were able to monitor the whole executive branch and its policy programmes and activities.

Besides these ministries and governmental agencies, the junta set up a special parliamentary committee to exalt the country's monarchy. Called the Special Commission for the Protection and Worship of the Monarchy,[46] the committee was populated by high-ranking military generals and staunch royalists. It comprised three-subcommittees that had different duties and agendas, such as:

- to study the monarchy (its history, activities, speeches, guidance and initiatives) and formulate communication policies, social orders and projects aimed at supporting and building 'correct' understanding of the monarchy;

- to instil loyalty to the monarchy into children, the youth, pupils, students, teachers, lecturers and others involved in education;

- to monitor all governmental agencies that were given state budget for activities related to protecting and worshiping the monarchy and to make suggestions to increase efficiency;

- to study laws related to the monarchy, monitor their enforcement and make suggestions on how to improve them;

- to study and monitor the use of communication and information technologies including those whose behaviour presents danger to the monarchy;

- to formulate rebuttal strategies against those whose behaviour presents danger to the monarchy;

- to use communication and information technologies to protect the monarchy, or to eliminate problems that negatively impact the monarchy.[47]

The committee's work combined elements of IO (mainly in the form of propaganda) and nation branding. The junta tasked the committee to make the monarchy more palatable to all sections of the deeply-divided Thai society and to closely control

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[46] The Commission's name in Thai is คณะกรรมาธิการวิสามัญการพิทักษ์และเทิดทูนสถาบันพระมหากษัตริย์.

[47] 'คณะอนุกรรมาธิการ [Sub-committees],' Special Commission for the Protection and Worship of the Monarchy, accessed 29 April 2017, http://w3c.senate.go.th/comm.php?url=subcommittee&comm_id=2374.

Thailand's information environment, swiftly eliminating any information about the monarchy that the Prayuth regime deemed unacceptable. The committee played an important role in re-engaging Thai people with the monarchy and the royalist political order it represented. As such, it targeted mainly young people and the education sector. For example, in August 2016, the committee organised a three-day training course titled 'New-Age Youth Leaders Love the Nation, Religion, King' in Nonthaburi, where around 115 youth leaders were instructed on children and youth laws, safe use of information and communication technologies, and the junta-defined understanding of the monarchy.[48] The committee was also actively supporting Village Scouts by attending and promoting their activities.[49] The Village Scout Movement was originally established in the early 1970s by the Border Patrol Police to combat communism. Operating under the royal patronage, the movement was advancing radical rightist and royalist ideologies bordering on fascism. It played an important role in suppressing popular calls for political and social change throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[50] Although the movement lost much of its momentum after the 1980s, Prayuth's administration seemed keen to revive it to help maintain the post-coup status quo. The Village Scout Movement might have also served as a source of inspiration for the generals, who launched Village Reconciliation Schemes targeted at pro-Thaksin villages mainly in the North and the Northeast. The reconciliation schemes employed similar techniques to the recruitment strategies of the Village Scout Movement in the 1970s: villagers were invited to attend camps with a heavy military presence where they were exposed to nationalist lectures, royalist talks and

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[48] 'พลอากาศเอก ชาลี จันทร์เรือง ประธานคณะกรรมาธิการวิสามัญ เดินทางเป็นประธานในพิธี เปิดโครงการฝึกอบรม "ผู้นำเยาวชนยุคใหม่ รักชาติ ศาสน์ กษัตริย์" [Chief Air Marshal Chali Chan, Vice-president of the Special Commission presides over the opening ceremony of the training project 'New-Age Youth Leaders Love the Nation, Religion, King'],' Special Commission for the Protection and Worship of the Monarchy, accessed 29 April 2017, http://w3c.senate.go.th/comm.php?url=view&comm_id=2374&content_id=6158.

[49] For example, see 'คณะกรรมาธิการวิสามัญการพิทักษ์และเทิดทูนสถาบันพระมหากษัตริย์ เดินทางไปร่วมกิจกรรมลูกเสือชาวบ้าน ณ จังหวัดระนอง เพื่อเฉลิมพระเกียรติสมเด็จพระนางเจ้า ฯ พระบรมราชินาถ [The Special Commission for the Protection and Worship of the Monarchy joins activities of Village Scouts in Ranong province to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen],' Special Commission for the Protection and Worship of the Monarchy, accessed 29 April 2017, http://w3c.senate.go.th/comm.php?url=view&comm_id=2374&content_id=6143.

[50] Handley, *King never smiles*, 222-4, 229-33, and 360.

group games aimed at increasing their loyalty to the monarchy and Prayuth's regime.[51] These activities were important aspects of the junta's internal branding.

The junta's emphasis on the monarchy was not new. The Thai military has a long tradition of drawing political legitimacy from the country's monarchy. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat was the first Thai general who used the monarchy as a source of political legitimacy to justify his dual military coup of 1957-8. Since then, many other army generals have used the royal charisma to justify their coups such as in 1976, 1991 and 2006. In fact, the legitimacy of Thailand's virtuous rule very much depends on the figure of the king and his *dhammaraja* status. Following the 2014 coup, the NCPO found it more difficult to reproduce this model because the royal charisma has been in decline since 2006. A decade of political instability and miscalculated palace interventions undermined the monarchy's appeal among Thailand's populous northern and northeastern provinces. As such, the monarchy is no longer a universally-accepted legitimacy source.[52]

General Prayuth's military government was not the only nation branding actor in the post-coup Thailand. In 2016, a group of big Bangkok-based businesses, local NGOs and public organisations with links to the military government and traditional elites organised the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign in Siam Paragon, one of Bangkok's biggest and most popular shopping malls. The campaign was very much in line with the government's nation branding strategy and comprised an opening gala event, a number of promotional videos, campaign t-shirts, posters and leaflets, and engagement activities on different social media platforms.[53] These private corporations and non-governmental organisations were essentially helping the military government disseminate their strategic national myth and the underlying objectives of undermining the political networks of the Shinawatras, strengthening the position of traditional elites and regaining political legitimacy. As Űnaldi explains, these organisations support the highly-centralised, royalist political order represented by traditional elites because they are directly benefitting from it.[54] He refers to this

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[51] See 'Reconciliation trainings target northeastern villages,' *The Isaan Record*, 28 September 2014, https://isaanrecord.com/2014/09/28/reconciliation-trainings-target-northeastern-villages.

[52] For example, see Ünaldi, *Working towards*, 212-18; Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 244.

[53] Field notes, August – October 2016.

[54] Űnaldi, *Working towards,* 65.

phenomenon as 'working towards the monarchy.'[55] In many respects, Űnaldi's argument is a re-branding of McCargo's 'network monarchy.'[56]

The junta's post-coup nation branding strategy was a function of domestic political struggle over power and legitimacy as most of the early nation branding campaigns had a strong domestic focus and were aimed at undermining the political networks of the Shinawatras. The generals used nation branding to create notions of peace and order, 'correct' social behaviours, and re-educate sections of Thai population in order to demonstrate the benefits of military over civilian rule. Most of the nation branding campaigns in 2014 targeted primarily young people as the junta strived to manage political dissent and shore up its own popularity following the coup. The generals experienced strong opposition to the coup and their regime from Thai students,[57] which made students the primary target of the junta's branding efforts but also their repression, surveillance and coercion. Campaigns focused on social values, the country's history and everyday life, sought to build the junta's legitimacy on shared norms and values. They also contained elements of self-legitimation pointing towards the regime's insecurities. The generals used festivals, songs, advertising and social media as the main strategic tools to deliver the brand messages to their target audiences. The types of activities and channels used by the junta were those that were particularly appealing to the younger generations. Most campaigns were participatory to encourage unity and create a sense of belonging.

The junta's main objectives behind the 2015 and 2016 nation branding campaigns were to strengthen the position of traditional elites (the monarchy, military and senior bureaucracy) and to regain political legitimacy through international engagement, identity- and performance-based rationales. Nation branding campaigns in 2015 and 2016 targeted both international and domestic audiences. The junta's internal branding activities targeted all segments of Thai society, although the young generations still remained an important social segment. Campaigns focused on reinforcing the social values introduced by the junta in 2014, exalting the monarchy, preserving Thai traditions and culture, emphasising nationalism, and creating understanding among foreign and domestic audiences. The generals used advertising, songs, videos, websites, competitions, public relations campaigns and newly-built

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[55] Ibid, 38.
[56] See McCargo, 'Network monarchy,' 501-3.
[57] For example, see 'Police to summon "sandwich protest" student activists for attitude adjustment,' *Prachatai,* 1 July 2014, https://prachatai.com/english/node/4180.

national monuments to deliver their branded messages to their target audiences. Repetition became one of the main strategies that the generals used in their 2015 and 2016 branding efforts.[58] In line with their 11-point policy agenda, the junta devised a number of talking points that different ministries and representatives of the regime would constantly repeat. Happiness, protection of the monarchy, the junta's commitment to democracy, Thainess and Thai values were some of the themes the regime was keen to emphasise to their internal and external audiences.

Branding in 2014: Happiness, History and Values

Following the May 2014 coup, the NCPO first launched a 'happiness' campaign to soften domestic and international opposition towards the coup and strengthen the well-known association of Thailand as 'the Land of Smiles.'[59] The campaign consisted of General Prayuth's weekly address to the nation, happiness festivals and a happiness song. The generals' choice of happiness as the campaign's core theme was not coincidental. Free from political ideology, happiness had a potential to appeal to all sections of Thailand's deeply-divided society and to foreigners who had been discouraged from engaging with the country because of the coup. The happiness campaign contained a strong legitimation element. It sought to create loyalties not only to the country but also to General Prayuth, his military regime, and the traditional elites they represented. Although the campaign contained some external messaging, its focus on domestic audiences was prevalent. In other words, it was an exercise in internal nation branding. Prayuth's weekly TV and radio address to the nation titled 'Returning Happiness to the People' is a good example to illustrate this. Broadcasted every Friday night during prime time on all Thai TV channels (public and private) and radio stations, Prayuth's programme was the first product of the junta's happiness campaign. In the inaugural broadcast on 30 May 2014, Prayuth introduced the happiness theme:

> 'I believe that every Thai person, just like me, was not happy for the past nine years [but] now everybody lives in a lot of peace and happiness. […] The NCPO did not have to move towards seizing the power […] but the nation could not progress had the military and the bureaucracy done

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[58] Interview, western international organisation.
[59] Kate Hodal, 'Thai junta 'brings happiness to the people' with parties and selfies,' *The Guardian*, 4 June 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/04/thailand-to-bring-happiness-to-the-people.

nothing. Who would look after you? Who would solve your problems? […] The NCPO understands the feelings of foreigners […] but we are asking for time to adjust attitudes, values and all the other things in order to rectify Thai democracy […] if everybody joins hands we will take the country forward in a secure, safe and long-lasting way. […] From there, the military will return back to our duties and we will watch the nation and Thai people progress to the future with long-lasting happiness [and] following the path of His Majesty the King who is greatly loved by all Thai people.' [60]

In his inaugural broadcast, Prayuth placed a lot of emphasis on justifying the actions of the military. Although he did not directly attack Thaksin and his political networks, he linked happiness to the NCPO rule and contrasted it with nine years of frequent political conflicts mostly under the Shinawatras. For Prayuth, happiness simply meant the absence of political conflict rather than its resolution. He branded the NCPO as reluctant saviours who were left with no other choice but to interfere in the country's political affairs. Prayuth's saviour narrative followed the established military tradition of justifying coups by invoking Thailand's foundational myth, under which the military is seen as the protector of nation's unity and territorial integrity, and a secondary myth of a good and prosperous Thailand ruled by traditional elites that dates back to the rule of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963). He even revived the paternalistic tone of Sarit's regime to evoke feelings of nostalgia across his audiences for the 'good old times' before Thaksin. The inaugural broadcast was trying to justify the military's intervention in Thai politics by invoking age-old identity-based rationales. Yet, the broadcast was not just a mere reproduction of Thailand's national myths. It also hinted on the desirable future political arrangements. In fact, Prayuth was very clear on the future role of the Thai military: they would be the guardians of Thai politics, prepared to intervene whenever the people and the politicians challenge the legitimacy of virtuous rule. Prayuth's inaugural broadcast was seeking to establish the future shared normative orientations that would bring people in line with the demands of virtuous rule. Yet, the broadcast also reflected the fundamental problem in the traditional elites' approach to Thai politics: the belief that

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[60] My translation; for the full script of Prayuth's inaugural broadcast in Thai, see Prayuth Chan-o-cha, 'คืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ [Returning Happiness to the People],' Royal Thai Government, 30 May 2014, http://www.thaigov.go.th/index.php/th/program1/item/83635-83635.

resolving Thailand's political conflict does not require deep structural changes but rather 'time to adjust attitudes, [and] values.' The junta's use of nation branding was motivated by this very logic.

Prayuth continued to address the Thai nation every Friday until King Bhumibol's passing on 13 October 2016. After he resumed his weekly address on 19 October, the happiness theme was dropped, marking the end of the junta's longest-running campaign. Many of Prayuth's Friday broadcasts lasted for over an hour to the frustration of local soap opera fans, who had to wait to watch their favourite series.[61] Except for the first few weeks following the coup, the programme lost popularity over time despite some format changes and restrictions to its air time.[62] It is important to note that Prayuth's broadcasts were conspicuously similar in style, timing and format to Thaksin's weekly radio programme during his 2001-06 premiership.[63] Inspired by the American presidential tradition, Thaksin was the first Thai prime minister to give weekly addresses to the nation in order to maintain public support for himself, his government, policies and projects. All ensuing governments, whether military or civilian, pro- or anti-Thaksin, upheld this tradition albeit with some minor format alterations to make it suitable for TV broadcasting. For Prayuth and his NCPO, the weekly broadcasts were an opportunity to gain public approval, enhance his regime's legitimacy and promote his strategic national myth. However, the declining popularity of Prayuth's broadcasts indicated that they might have failed to deliver just that.

In early June 2014, General Prayuth penned a happiness song. Called 'Returning Happiness to Thailand,' the song sought to reinforce the junta's legitimacy based on the saviour myth. The song promised that the military would take care of the Thai nation, the king and the people, and that it would restore the country so that it was 'good' again. Thai people just needed to leave things to the generals to sort out

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[61] Kasamakorn Chanwanpen, 'Not every TV viewer is happy with Prayut "Returning Happiness to the People",' *The Nation*, 31 May 2015, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/national/aec/30261309.

[62] For example, see '"รายการคืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ" เปลี่ยนรูปแบบ แต่เรทติ้งยังตก [The "Returning Happiness to the People" Programme changes format but ratings continue to fall],' *Thai PBS*, 9 April 2015, http://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/78; Saksith Saiyasombut, 'Infographic: Thai junta leader to cut short 'boring' Friday night rants,' *Asian Correspondent*, 1 June 2015, https://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/06/infographic-thai-military-junta-leaders-weekly-tv-address-to-reduce-air-time/.

[63] For further information, see McCargo and Ukrist, *Thaksinization*, 168-72.

and to give them a 'little more time.'[64] The song never specified how much more time the generals needed or what the promised 'good' country would look like, but the saviour myth was firmly established here. It presented the country's military as acting in the interest of ordinary people; the language it used was soft and polite. The song was asking people for their permission rather than ordering them around. This was a stark contrast to Prayuth's tough image, coarse leadership-style, and the junta's merciless crackdown on political dissent. The song was a prime example of soft power at work. It became an instant YouTube hit attracting more than 200,000 views in few days since its official release.[65] Since then, many more versions of the song were added on YouTube with some attracting more than million views and hundreds of positive comments. By October 2015, the song became the most played song across all Bangkok radio stations turning it into a number one hit in the Thai music charts.[66] Although this might seem like an extraordinary success for a song written by a military general, it is worth noting that the NCPO did control the media and that not all of the public interest in the song was a sign of support for Prayuth and the NCPO.[67] For example, one online user commenting on YouTube described the song as a 'waste' and an act of 'brainwashing.'[68]

Shortly after Prayuth released his happiness song, military-organised happiness festivals flooded the streets of Bangkok. The festivals offered free music, food, medical check-ups, haircuts and the spectacle of scantily-clad female dancers in camouflage mini-skirts to those who took part. The festivals were symbolic both in their meaning and location: Bangkok's streets were once again clogged but this time with revellers, not protesters. Through the festivals, the junta wanted to show the world and Thai people that life under the NCPO, and the traditional establishment it

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[64] For the song, including the original lyrics in Thai and English, see 'Returning Happiness to Thailand,' YouTube, published 10 September 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpFYaHTvFFo.

[65] 'Prayuth's ballad viewed by over 200,000 times on YouTube,' *The Nation*, 9 June 2014, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/national/aec/30235811.

[66] 'Dark times: Prayuth's "Return Happiness" song tops Thai radio chart,' *Coconuts Bangkok,* 18 November 2015, https://coconuts.co/bangkok/lifestyle/dark-times-prayuths-return-happiness-song-tops-thai-radio-chart/.

[67] For a good assessment of the freedom of press in post-coup Thailand, see 'Thailand,' Freedom House, accessed 15 November 2018, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/thailand.

[68] See comments by a user called 'Mas Ssa;' 'เพลง "คืนความสุขให้ประเทศไทย" โดย พล.อ.ประยุทธ์ [The "Returning Happiness to the People" song by General Prayuth Chan-o-cha],' YouTube, published 6 June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t314ruDt6c.

represented, had many benefits. Above all, it was happy, peaceful and orderly. The festivals, and the whole happiness campaign, were saturated with the strong sense of nostalgia for the 'good old days' of the 1960s and 1980s when the country was governed by the paternalistic military rulers and Thai populace was apolitical. This was the model of political rule that the NCPO wanted to restore. A second-round of happiness festivals took place in late July 2014. This time, they were organised by the country's Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) ostensibly to restore foreign tourist-confidence in the country.[69] The festivals were communicating the same messages as those organised by the military one month earlier. Held in the central shopping district from Siam Paragon to the Ratchaprasong intersection, they were targeting Thai just as much as foreign audiences.

The happiness campaign was accompanied by a fierce suppression of political dissent that, together with the coup, created superficial notions of peace and order by temporarily suspending the country's political conflict. The country was under strict martial law since the coup under which gatherings of five or more people were banned with the exception of the junta's happiness festivals. The generals used this semblance of normalcy as a key ingredient to their happiness campaign and positioned it as an antithesis to the 'messy' years under the Shinawatras and participatory democracy. The NCPO sought to establish happiness as a source of their political legitimacy by convincing its domestic audiences that Thailand under the military rule was an inherently better place than under participatory democracy. Although it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the junta's campaign, the UN World Happiness Reports suggest that Thailand's happiness index increased periodically between 2013 and 2017. Despite the coup, Thailand ranked as the 32 happiest country in the world in 2017, a result based on data collected during 2014-2016, outperforming almost all of its Southeast Asian neighbours except Singapore.[70] This was an increase of four places compared to Thailand's pre-coup rank of 36 in 2013, based on data collected during

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[69] 'TAT to organize "Thailand Happiness Street Festival" on July 25-26,' *Pattaya Mail,* 11 July 2014, http://www.pattayamail.com/business/tat-to-organize-thailand-happiness-street-festival-on-july-25-26-39464.

[70] The UN Happiness Report is based on data primarily obtained from the Gallup World Poll and it explains differences in happiness levels across countries through six key variables: GDP, healthy life expectancy, social support, perceptions of corruption, prevalence of generosity and freedom of life choices. See John Helliwell, Haifang Huang and Shun Wang, 'The Social Foundations of World Happiness,' in World Happiness Report 2017, eds. John Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey Sachs (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2017), 20-22, https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2017/HR17.pdf.

2010-2012.[71] Although the increase in Thailand's happiness index might seem to indicate that the junta's happiness campaign, propped up by the 'peace and order' rhetoric, resonated with Thai citizens at large, it is by no means a direct evidence of growing public support for the generals. Nevertheless, the campaign has important implications for the broader nation branding theory as it demonstrates that nation branding is a highly-politicised practice that can be used for the purpose of political legitimation.

Besides trying to convince Thai people that Thailand was a happier place without the Shinawatras, the generals decided to attempt to rewrite the country's history. History re-writing is a common practice in Thailand, where history books have always been written with a particular political agenda in mind.[72] Together with media censorship, history re-writing was part of the junta's wider post-coup IO strategy to control the country's information environment and to establish information superiority. Since nation branding is rooted in the country's historical and cultural heritage, history re-writing and nation branding can work in a mutually reinforcing relationship as they both attempt to re-define the people's collective identity. In the post-coup Thailand, both practices worked towards de-legitimating the Shinawatras and their political networks. In August 2014, the Ministry of Education ordered all Thai high schools to use a new history textbook, which would instil pride and patriotism into students. The new history textbook, however, conveniently omitted Thaksin's name in its account of modern Thai history.[73] Thaksin's premiership between 2001 and 2006 was described on four pages without mentioning Thaksin by name; the text book used phrases such as 'the government' or 'the prime minister' instead.[74] The new textbook made international news and raised speculations of whether the NCPO had ordered Thaksin's name to be removed. In the end, Thanom

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[71] John F. Helliwell and Shun Wang, 'World Happiness: Trends, Explanations and Distribution,' in *World Happiness Report 2013*, eds. John Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey Sachs (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2013), 21, http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/09/World HappinessReport2013_online.pdf.

[72] For examples of history re-writing, see Baker and Pasuk, *History,* 111-2 and 177.

[73] Thomas Fuller, 'Loved and Hated, Former Premier of Thailand Is Erased From Textbook,' *The New York Times*, 15 September 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/ 09/16/world/asia/loved-and-hated-thaksin-shinawatra-former-premier-of-thailand-is-erased-from-textbook.html?_r=1.

[74] 'กางตำราเรียนประวัติศาสตร์ ฉบับ "มี" และ "ไม่มี" คนชื่อ "ทักษิณ ชินวัตร" [Opening the history text book edition, which "has" and "does not have" a person called "Thaksin"],' *Matichon*, 18 September 2014, http://www.matichon.co.th/news_detail. php?newsid=1411009830.

Anamawat, the text book's author, confirmed in an interview for a Thai newspaper that the editorial board removed Thaksin's name when the book was first published in 2010 under the Abhisit government to prevent further tensions in the deeply-divided Thai society.[75] Although the NCPO was not responsible for removing Thaksin's name, their decision to use this book was likely based on the very fact that it did not mention Thaksin by name.

On 20 April 2015, the Ministry of Culture ordered the Fine Arts Department to write a new history book to 'build correct knowledge and understanding about Thai history, to bring about love, national pride, and to create love and unity among Thai people.'[76] Titled *The History of the Thai Nation* (see Illustration 3.1), the book is written on 208 pages with a page-long preface by General Prayuth, in which he praises great Thai kings for preserving the integrity of the Thai nation, saving people from hardship and bringing them happiness. The book presents a linear and biased account of Thai history focused on the glorious and heroic deeds of the past kings and the kings of the current Chakri dynasty. The most recent history is mentioned only in passing on four pages at the end of the book under a heading 'The Era of Reforming Thai Politics: 2535[1992] – Present.' The book describes Thaksin as a populist politician supported by the rural masses of the North and the Northeast and accuses him of human rights abuses, abuse of state power, embezzlement, electoral corruption and conflict of interest,[77] which is rather ironic considering the junta's own political record. In a few paragraphs, the book briefly mentions the 2006 coup as an attempt to restore 'true democracy' to Thailand, the 2007 constitution and elections won by a pro-Thaksin party, PAD protests and Abhisit's premiership, and the violent events of May 2010, which the book implicitly blames on UDD protesters.[78] The book makes it clear that Thaksin, his political networks and supporters are responsible for all of Thailand's political ills. On the other hand, the traditional elites are the saviours; the benevolent leaders who have the nation's best interests at heart. Then the book addresses the rise and fall of Yingluck's government following the July 2010 snap election.[79] Interestingly, the book never refers to Yingluck by her name. She is either

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Fine Arts Department, ประวัติศาสตร์ชาติไทย *[The History of Thai Nation]* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, 2015), 204.

[77] Fine Arts Department, *History*, 193.

[78] For a non-partisan discussion of these events see Federico Ferrara, *Thailand Unhinged: The Death of Thai-Style Democracy* (Singapore: Equinox Publishing, 2011), 145-80.

[79] Fine Arts Department, *History*, 194.

referred to as 'Thaksin's younger sister' or collectively as 'the government.'[80] The junta seemed to have believed that leaving out the Shinawatra name would somehow help to reduce their political significance.

Illustration 3.1: *The History of the Thai Nation* book.
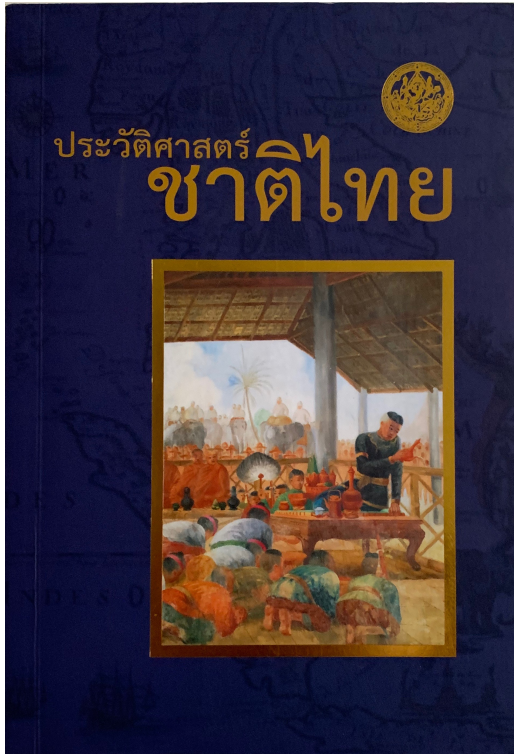
Photo credit: Petra Desatová

Similarly to the happiness campaign, the book brands Prayuth and the NCPO as the saviours of the Thai nation who have rescued Thailand from the clutches of the evil Shinawatras and are leading the country towards 'true democracy.'[81] What the book means by 'true democracy' remains unexplained. Thailand's democracy myth is, however, well established and can be explained. Following the popular challenges to the military rule in the 1970s, the Thai military expanded the traditional definition of Thai identity (Nation-Religion-King) with the concept of 'democracy with the king as head of state' to appease popular demands for democracy.[82] It was the mode of governance where people, political parties and democratic institutions were subordinate to the power of traditional elites. Prayuth's 'true democracy' was arguably just a re-branded version of this old national myth. The Ministry initially

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[80] Ibid, 194-5.
[81] Ibid, 195.
[82] Connors, *National identity*, 128-9.

printed 10,000 copies of this book and launched it at a national book fair in Bangkok in October 2015. Twenty copies of the book signed by General Prayuth were sold within hours of opening.[83] The Ministry also distributed one hundred copies of the book to the schools and public offices across the country. Although this was not an impressive distribution record, the book is an important reflection on how the country's traditional elites seek to justify their right to rule.

When General Prayuth became the country's prime minister in August 2014, he complained about the lack of Thainess, the vague concept of what makes Thai people Thai, around him.[84] To counter the perceived deficiency, Prayuth formulated twelve values of Thainess and made it compulsory for schoolchildren to recite them on daily basis. These values were a peculiar mix of nationalism, political conservativism and religious moralism conducive to legitimating an authoritarian rule (see Table 3.1). For example, they promoted loyalty to the Nation-Religion-King triad, deference to one's elders and/or superiors, honesty, generosity, pursuit of greater social good over individual's interests, frugality, upholding the philosophy of sufficiency economy of King Bhumibol, and learning the true meaning of the democracy with the king as head of state.[85] Prayuth included his twelve values of Thainess into the government's eleven-point policy agenda for the post-coup Thailand and Thainess became one of the core themes of the junta's nation branding between 2014 and 2016. Posters and signs listing the 12 values of Thainess appeared around schools and other education institutions all across the nation. Prayuth declared 2015 the 'Discover Thainess' year with a matching tourism campaign and many ministries included promotion of Thainess and Thai manners into their policy programmes.[86] Thainess became one of the country's chief nation branding themes.

The junta's Thainess campaign was aimed at restoring political legitimacy of the traditional elites on shared norms and values and re-engaging Thai people with virtuous rule. Prayuth converted his 12 values into a short rhyme that was published

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[83] Kongpob Areerat, 'Thai junta coins new history book to legitimise its rule,' *Prachatai,* 30 October 2015, http://prachatai.org/english/node/5576.

[84] The Thai word for Thainess is ความเป็นไทย. Interview with an official A working at the Ministry of Interior, 17 September 2016.

[85] For the full list of values (both in English and Thai), see '12 Thai Values,' National News Bureau of Thailand, accessed 15 February 2017, http://thainews.prd.go.th/banner/en/Core_Values/.

[86] For example, the Bangkok Metropolitan Culture Council that falls under the Ministry of Culture organised competitions in Thai manners at schools across Bangkok. Interview with Mr Chanarong Luckshaniyanavin, Bangkok Metropolitan Culture Council, 20 September 2016.

by the Ministry of Education in September 2014 and later musicalized. Many schools recorded their own versions of the 12 values-song and posted them on YouTube. On 6 December 2014, the Office of the Prime Minister published twelve short films, called Thai Niyom (Thai Doctrine), promoting the 12 values ostensibly in honour of the king's birthday. The films were made by different directors giving each film its unique style. Some films were more upbeat than others, some were fairly shocking, while others were outright disturbing. For example, a film promoting moral and religious standards contained murder and rape scenes with one perpetrator sprayed with bullets and the other one hit by a lorry when trying to flee the police at the end of the film.[87] In another case, a film promoting education and the sovereignty of people showed, rather paradoxically, a schoolboy eagerly applauding his friend who had painted a portrait of Adolf Hitler. Following fierce international criticism, the junta called the Hitler scene a misunderstanding and ordered its removal. Most of the Thai Niyom films were confusing and unclear.

On 30 December 2014, the junta released 12 values-themed stickers on a popular instant messaging mobile phone app LINE. NCPO presented the stickers, which cost the Thai taxpayers 7.1 million Thai baht, as their New Year's gift to the Thai people.[88] The stickers could be downloaded for free from the day of the release until 28 January 2015 and would last for three months. The junta produced altogether sixteen stickers: 12 were meant to represent the junta-defined Thai values while the remaining 4 were general occasion stickers. The general occasion stickers contained a mixture of messages, such as 'Good Morning,' 'Good Night,' 'Happy New Year,' and 'Roger That,' leaving few clues as to what intentions the generals had in choosing them. With the exception of 'Happy New Year,' none of these messages are commonly used phrases in Thai language. The remaining twelve 12-values stickers contained three explicitly moralistic messages: 'Do Not Tell Lies' to promote morality, 'Be Conscious' to advance self-awareness and King Bhumibol's teachings, and 'Sufficiency' to promote king's philosophy. A number of stickers had no obvious connection to the values they represented. 'Do Not Forget Me' promoted the junta's version of democracy with the king as head of state, 'Miss You All' was to remind

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[87] For the full video, see 'ภาพยนตร์ไทยนิยม เรื่อง BANGKOK 2014 [Thai Doctrine Movies: the Bangkok 2014 story],' YouTube, published 23 December 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMk_p6GxBiU.

[88] 'Critics come unglued over "12 values" Line stickers,' *Bangkok Post*, 17 December 2014, http://www.bangkokpost.com/tech/local-news/450424/critics-come-unglued-over-12-values-line-stickers.

Thai people to put public interests first while 'Like So Much' prompted people to be disciplined and abide the laws.[89] The stickers were clearly the junta's attempt to appear modern and to appeal to almost 30 million LINE users in Thailand.

Even before their launch, the stickers attracted a lot of online attention but not the kind the NCPO would have wanted. A short post inviting public discussion of the stickers on Pantip, a popular online forum, on 22 December 2014, resulted in fierce criticism and mockery of the junta.[90] Most forum members criticised the cost of the stickers, their unattractive designs and limited use. Some members even suggested that the junta's LINE sticker project was a complete 'nonsense.'[91] One member posted an image of alternative stickers in an apparent attempt to mock the junta. Called 'Returning Happiness in the New Year together with Mr Leader,' the stickers showed General Prayuth in fifteen different situations.[92] There was, for example, a Hitler-themed Prayuth with a 'Have you heard who I am?' caption, Geisha-themed Prayuth with a 'Let's go change attitudes' caption or Fairy Godmother-themed Prayuth with a 'Who has been a good kid?' caption. Instead of turning Prayuth's twelve values into shared norms, the 12-value stickers created more opportunities for people to question (and mock) the NCPO, their intentions and abilities to govern Thailand.

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[89] For the full set of LINE stickers, see 'ชมชัดๆ LINE Sticker ภาพเคลื่อนไหวค่านิยมหลัก ของคนไทย 12 ประการ ที่พร้อมให้ดาวน์โหลดฟรี 30 ธันวาคมนี้ [Admire very clear LINE Stickers, the promotional images for the 12 Core Values of Thai People, which are ready to download for free from 30 December],' *Flashfly*, 22 December 2014, http://www.flashfly.net/wp/?p=109055.

[90] See 'เผยโฉมแล้ว! Sticker Line ค่านิยม 12 ประการราคา 7.1ล้าน ดูแล้วชอบมั้ยครับ [The appearance revealed! The 12 values LINE Stickers that cost 7.1 million. Have a look – do you like them?], Pantip, 22 December 2014, https://pantip.com/topic/33013334.

[91] The Thai word for nonsense is ไร้สาระมาก.

[92] The name of this alternative sticker-set in Thai is คืนความสุขปีใหม่กับท่านผู้นำ; for the full post including the image, see comments by used called 'ซาลาแปงงอง [Salapaengngong]' in 'Appearance revealed,' Pantip.

Table 3.1: Twelve values of Thainess.

Values in Thai	English Translation[93]
1. มีความรักชาติ ศาสนา พระมหากษัตริย์	1. Love the nation, religion and the king.
2. ซื่อสัตย์ เสียสละ อดทน มีอุดมการณ์ ในสิ่งที่ดีงามเพื่อส่วนรวม	2. Be honest, willing to sacrifice, patient and uphold principles of common good.
3. กตัญญูต่อพ่อแม่ ผู้ปกครอง ครูบา อาจารย์	3. Be grateful to your parents, guardians and teachers.
4.ใฝ่หาความรู้ หมั่นศึกษาเล่าเรียนทั้ง ทางตรง และทางอ้อม	4. Seek knowledge and be diligent in studying directly and indirectly.
5. รักษาวัฒนธรรมประเพณีไทยอัน งดงาม	5. Preserve beautiful Thai culture and traditions.
6. มีศีลธรรม รักษาความสัตย์ หวังดีต่อ ผู้อื่น เผื่อแผ่และแบ่งปัน	6. Be moral, truthful and wish well to others, be generous and share with others.
7. เข้าใจเรียนรู้การเป็นประชาธิปไตย อันมีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุขที่ ถูกต้อง	7. Learn to understand the true meaning of democracy with the king as head of state.
8. มีระเบียบวินัย เคารพกฎหมาย ผู้น้อย รู้จักการเคารพผู้ใหญ่	8. Be disciplined, respect the law and inferiors should know how to respect their superiors.
9. มีสติรู้ตัว รู้คิด รู้ทำ รู้ปฏิบัติตามพระ ราชดำรัสของพระบาทสมเด็จพระ เจ้าอยู่หัว	9. Be self-aware, think and act in accordance with HM the king's words.
10. รู้จักดำรงตนอยู่โดยใช้หลักปรัชญา เศรษฐกิจพอเพียงตามพระราชดำรัสของ พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว รู้จักอด ออมไว้ใช้เมื่อยามจำเป็น มีไว้พอกิน พอใช้ ถ้าเหลือก็แจกจ่ายจำหน่าย และ พร้อมที่จะขยายกิจการเมื่อมีความ พร้อม เมื่อมีภูมิคุ้มกันที่ดี	10. Learn to uphold the sufficiency philosophy of HM the king, learn to save money for rainy days, have enough to live on and if you have something left give it to others and expand your business when you are ready and have immunity.
11. มีความเข้มแข็งทั้งร่างกาย และ จิตใจ ไม่ยอมแพ้ต่ออำนาจฝ่ายต่ำ หรือ กิเลส มีความละอายเกรงกลัวต่อบาป ตามหลักของศาสนา	11. Be strong in body and mind, do not succumb to evil powers or desires, be ashamed and fearful of sin according to religious principles.
12. คำนึงถึงผลประโยชน์ของส่วนรวม และของชาติมากกว่าผลประโยชน์ของ ตนเอง	12. Consider the common good and good towards the nation more than your personal gains.

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[93] All translations in the table are my own.

Branding in 2015: Thainess, Bikes and Kings

While internal nation branding dominated the junta's efforts in 2014, the junta's branding efforts in 2015 were more balanced. In his 'Returning Happiness to Thai People' programme broadcasted on 16 January 2015, General Prayuth announced that 2015 was going to be a 'Discover Thainess' year centred on tourism promotion. Launched by the country's main tourism promotion agency, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the Discover Thainess campaign targeted both international and domestic tourists. The campaign for international tourists was known under the 'Discover Thainess 2015' name, whereas the domestic campaign was called '2015 – The Year of Travelling the Thai Way.' Both campaigns comprised a number of short videos and promotional print materials, there was a dedicated English-language Discover Thainess website, and a branded Discover Thainess Air Asia aircraft operating domestic and regional flights. The Discover Thainess tourism campaign demonstrates that internal nation branding is not necessarily a by-product of externally-oriented nation branding campaigns; it is a branding strategy in its own right.

Thai people and Thainess were the primary selling points of the international campaign while the junta-defined 12 values were the core focus of the domestic campaign. Both campaigns created expectations about Thai people, their social behaviour, culture and the way of life that were irreconcilable with people's everyday lives. As Phillips points out, TAT's interpretations of Thainess are based on orientalist assumptions and colonial stereotypes of happy, hospitable, self-sufficient, and peaceful Thais.[94] Yet, these seemingly superficial interpretations are highly politicised because they are underpinned by assumptions that Thai people are conservative, subservient and apolitical.[95] The hegemonic character of these interpretations is reinforced through tourism promotion and nation branding. The domestic and international versions of the 'Discover Thainess' campaigns sought to enforce the junta-defined modes of behaviour by encouraging people to participate in tourism-related activities. For example, one of the campaign videos for domestic market urged Thai people to travel by Thai transport, eat Thai food, drink Thai coffee,

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[94] Matthew Phillips, 'Grieving as Thainess in 2017,' *New Mandala,* 17 February 2017, http://www.newmandala.org/grieving-thainess-2017/.
[95] Phillips, 'Grieving'.

wear Thai clothes, and pay respect to the Thai national anthem.[96] Here, nation branding comes close to what Volcic and Andrejevic termed 'commercial nationalism,' where commercial techniques are used to instil feelings of national pride.[97] Yet, the NCPO's use of nation branding was not just about creating national pride; it was motivated by the generals' desire to gain political legitimacy and strengthen the power of traditional elites. Encouraging Thai people to act Thai, to do and buy Thai things was thus aimed at re-engaging Thai people with virtuous rule, the royalist political order that the traditional elites were desperate to maintain.

Besides Thainess, Thailand's monarchy was another dominant theme of the NCPO's nation branding activities in 2015. According to Thomas Fuller of the New York Times, the NCPO spent $540 million on their 'Worship, protect and uphold the monarchy' branding campaign in 2015.[98] This, as Fuller points out, was more than the entire operational budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NCPO's spending might indicate that the generals sought to use this campaign to consolidate their own position with the palace and to prepare the country for the increasingly imminent royal transition. Despite the popular view, the Thai monarchy is not a unified force. Over the years, relations between individual family members, including King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, grew strained.[99] By the end of the 1970s, Queen Sirikit became a political force of her own. She started surrounding herself with ambitious young military generals, which generated rumours that tarnished her public image. Princess Ubolrat, Bhumibol's and Sirikit's eldest child who also used to be Bhumibol's favourite, was disowned in 1972 for marrying an American. Then Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, who was officially designated as Bhumibol's heir in 1972, became a serial womaniser with a lavish lifestyle who had little interest in official royal duties. Princess Sirindhorn was made eligible for the Thai throne in 1977 to secure the future of the Chakri dynasty in case Vajiralongkorn died prematurely without an heir. Sirindhorn's promotion led to a bitter competition between the two

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[96] For the full video, see 'ท่องเที่ยววิถีไทย เก๋ไก๋ไม่เหมือนใคร (Discover Thainess) - version 2 นาที [Travelling the Thai Way Cool Unlike Everyone (Discover Thainess) – 2-minute version],' YouTube, published 18 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vrhzcHBOOg&feature=youtu.be.

[97] Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 600.

[98] Thomas Fuller, 'With King in Declining Health, Future of Monarchy in Thailand is Uncertain,' *The New York Times*, 20 September 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/world/with-king-in-declining-health-future-of-monarchy-in-thailand-is-uncertain.html?_r=0.

[99] See Handley, *King never smiles*, 299-327.

siblings. Sirindhorn, had a closer relationship with Bhumibol, was more popular and also more active in her royal duties than her brother. Princess Chulabhorn, Bhumibol's and Sirikit's youngest child, was the most over-indulgent royal of all. She was also frail and frequently ill and, as Handley notes, 'very uncomfortable around peasants and reluctant to visit the countryside.'[100]

Over these years, at least four monarchical networks have formed around the key royals: Bhumibol, Sirikit, Vajiralongkorn and Sirindhorn. All four networks had their supporters in the military. Those loyal to Bhumibol supported Princess Sirindhorn to inherit the Thai throne, while Sirikit's network endorsed the crown prince. However, the king's deteriorating health, formation of the Red Shirt movement and growing anti-monarchical sentiments following the 2006 coup gradually weakened the appeal and influence of the king's network.[101] The queen became more politically active between 2006 and 2012, in part to relieve the ailing king, and her network's influence grew as many of her supporters rose to positions of power, including in the military. General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, and most of his fellow 2014 coup-makers, were members of the twenty-first Infantry Regiment also known as the Queen's Guard. They were the queen's loyalists and Vajiralongkorn's supporters. It was the queen's rather than the king's network that dominated Thai politics between May 2014 and December 2016.

According to a source close to the palace, it was Vajiralongkorn who came up with the two major nation branding events of 2015: the 'Bike for Mom' and the 'Bike for Dad' events.[102] This indicates that Vajiralongkorn was aware that his unflattering reputation might be a problem in the wake of his succession claim and he decided to work on his public image. The Bike for Mom event took place on 16 August 2015, four days after Queen Sirikit's birthday, Thailand's Mother's Day, while the Bike for Dad event was a three-day event from 11 December to 13 December 2015 following the king's birthday, the nation's Father's Day. Officially, the events were organised to: show loyalty to the monarchy; show love, respect and gratitude to one's mother/father and the nation's mother (queen) and father (king), unite Thai people; and improve the physical health of Thai population. Unofficially, the events were unabashed exercises in self-promotion by the then Crown Prince, who is a keen cyclist and owns a bicycle shop called 'Healthy Person Bike Shop' near the Dusit Palace

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[100] Ibid, 306.
[101] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 235 and 244.
[102] Anonymous interview, 26 June 2016.

grounds in Bangkok's old town.[103] The military junta was also to benefit. The events were yet another opportunity for the generals to publicly display their loyalty to the crown, which has been an important source of political legitimacy for military generals since the rule of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat.

Both events were heavily marketed. Vajiralongkorn designed bespoke 'Bike for Mom' and 'Bike for Dad' logos: 100,000 participants received event t-shirts in royal colours (blue for 'Bike for Mom' and yellow for 'Bike for Dad'), commemorative pins, wristbands and even branded bottled water, which according to the English version of the 'Bike for Dad' website represented 'an oasis of kindness from his Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn.'[104] Imitation goods, especially faux 'Bike for Mom' and 'Bike for Dad' t-shirts, were widely sold commercially. Each event also had a catchy song, although the 'Bike for Dad' song was essentially an altered and expanded version of the 'Bike for Mom' song. Both events were hugely popular and attracted considerable global media attention. The 'Bike for Mom' attracted close to 300,000 participants in Thailand while the 'Bike for Dad' attracted more than 600,000 people worldwide.[105]

The events sent out a particularly strong message that the monarchy was still the pivot of Thai people's lives and the event t-shirts became an everyday attire. Many Thais were still wearing the event t-shirts (or their faux versions) months after the events ended.[106] The t-shirts became part of people's personal brands and the events inspired a number of spin-off activities. For example, on 3 July 2016 I saw a small peloton of perhaps thirty cyclists dressed in yellow t-shirts holding royal flags and pedalling across Bangkok's old town possibly to show off their loyalty to the monarchy. Few weeks later on 7 August 2016, the Old England Student Association

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[103] "ร้านจักรยานสุขสำราญ" พระมหากรุณาธิคุณสมเด็จพระบรมฯ ทรงมีต่อนักปั่น ["Healthy Person Bike Shop," the royal grace the Crown Prince gives to the cyclists],' *The Manager Online*, 2 August 2015, http://www.manager.co.th/CelebOnline/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9580000086211#.

[104] 'Bike for Dad Emblem,' Bike for Dad, accessed 26 April 2017, https://www.bikefordad2015.com/logo.php.

[105] These figures are based on official registration numbers. See 'พลังประวัติศาสตร์ "Bike for Mom ปั่นเพื่อแม่" ขี่จักรยานพร้อมกันมากที่สุดในโลก 1.46 แสนคัน [Historical force at the "Bike for Mom" event. The biggest number of bicycles in the world ridden simultaneously: 1.46 hundred-thousand],' *Sanook!*, 17 August 2015, http://news.sanook.com/1848534/; 'พระบรมฯ ทรงนำขบวน 607,909 คน ปั่นเพื่อพ่อ [Crown Prince leads a procession of 607,909 people to Bike for Dad],' *Komchadluek*, 11 December 2015, http://www.komchadluek.net/news/royal/218429.

[106] Field notes, 12 June – 1 December 2016.

under Royal Patronage held a 'Run for Mom' event in Lumpini Park to commemorate Queen Sirikit's birthday (see Illustration 3.2).[107] The two bike events were examples of successful internal nation branding that found resonance among large segments of Thai populations. The two events could be seen as examples of Űnaldi's model of 'working towards the monarchy,' defined as a reciprocal relationship between the monarchy and its supporters, where the supporters recognise the monarchy's special status in exchange for personal benefits.[108] Those wearing the event t-shirts became 'brand ambassadors' for the Thai monarchy, helping to strengthen its special status and omnipresence in Thai society, which are the key ingredients behind its legitimating force. In exchange, they were able to use the institution's special status to enhance their own social capital and to justify their actions.

Illustration 3.2: Participants at the opening ceremony of the 'Run for Mom' event.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

The opening of the Rajabhakti Park, presided over by then Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn in September 2015, was another occasion for the prince to promote himself and the junta to drive home the importance of the country's monarchy and their unparalleled loyalty to this institution. The generals announced the plans for building the park near the royal town of Hua Hin in October 2014 as the Royal Thai Army initiative. Led by General Udomdej Sitabutr, the junta used 63 million Thai baht from the government budget alongside generous public donations to finance this

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[107] Field notes, 7 August 2016.
[108] Űnaldi, *Working towards,* 38.

project.[109] Building new physical symbols of the nation constitutes a common nation branding strategy. For example, countries such as Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Burma have substantially re-built their capital cities or built new capital cities to support their strategic national myths and, arguably, to strengthen the legitimacy of their regimes.[110] Although the generals did not set to re-build Thailand's capital city of Bangkok, building a historic park has a special political significance. As Peleggi points out, Thailand's traditional elites have been using historic parks to instil loyalty in Thai people since the 1970s.[111] They have been part of what Peleggi describes as 'politics of public memory,' in which public memory can be manipulated through carefully developed historic parks that perpetuate national myths.[112]

Rajabhakti Park is a tangible symbol of the junta's nation branding efforts to remind Thai people of their duty of loyalty to the monarchy and those who protect it – the military. Yet, it is also a symbol that the junta can use to flaunt Thailand's alleged love for the monarchy to the foreigners. I visited the park on 22 August 2016, less than a year since its official opening. Spreading across 222 rai (approximately 35,5 ha), the park was an apt reflection of the military's stiffness. There were two wide four-lane roads leading to the park, one was for the incoming vehicles, the other one for outgoing, with military check points both at the top and bottom of the roads. The military presence was palpable. Each check point was manned by 3 to 4 soldiers who checked incoming vehicles. At the entrance to the park, soldiers were carrying out unusually thorough bag searches for Thai standards. One possible explanation for the high military presence and relatively rigorous security checks might be that I visited the park less than two weeks after a series of bomb explosions went off in five popular tourist destinations in the South, including in the royal town of Hua Hin. Hua Hin is home to the royal family's seaside Klai Kangwon Palace, where King Bhumibol spent much of his time following his semi-withdrawal from public life in 2000.[113] These

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[109] Saksith Saiyasombut, 'Rajabhakti Park: The corruption case the Thai junta doesn't want you to talk about,' *Asian Correspondent*, 17 December 2015, https://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/12/rajabhakti-park-controversy/#WStsKFxwZXatvI64.97.

[110] Andrew Graan, 'Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia,' *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no 1. (2013): 161-79; Fauve, 'Global Astana,' 110-24; Sarah Moser, 'Putrajaya: Malaysia's new federal administrative capital,' *Cities* 27, (2010): 292-3; Donald M. Seekins, '"Runaway chickens" and Myanmar identity,' *City* 13, no.1 (2009): 65.

[111] Maurizio Peleggi, *Thailand: The Worldly Kingdom* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007), 171.

[112] Ibid, 172 and 176-84.

[113] See Handley, *King never smiles*, 427.

explosions happened only few days after the country's constitutional referendum and coincided with Thailand's Mother's Day on 12 August 2016, which is also Queen Sirikit's birthday. Although no one claimed responsibility for the bombings, it was widely believed that they were related to the ongoing insurgency in southern Thailand and that they represented a direct challenge to the NCPO's power and political legitimacy.[114] Following these events, the NCPO tightened security across the country.

The park itself was a large concrete-clad area surrounded by a well-trimmed lawn and a few palm trees. Seven heroic bronze statues of the past Thai kings from Sukhotai to Rattanakhosin era were towering high over the concrete area (see Illustration 3.3).

Illustration 3.3: Heroic bronze statues of seven Thai kings at Rajabhakti Park.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

They were the statues of King Ramkhamhaeng (Sukothai), Naresuan (Ayutthaya), Narai (Ayutthaya), Taksin (Thonburi), Yodfa (Rama I and founder of the current Chakri dynasty; Rattanakhosin); Mongkut (Rama IV; Rattanakhosin) and Chulalongkorn (Rama V; Rattanakhosin). According to the official park website,

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[114] Anna Fifield, 'With bombings, Thai militants appear to be sending a message to the junta,' *The Washington Post*, 28 August 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/with-bombings-thai-militants-appear-to-be-sending-a-message-to-the-junta/2016/08/26/8e3abb48-6978-11e6-91cbecb5418830e9_story.html?utm_term=.c282a096f24b; 'วิเคราะห์เหตุบึ้มป่วนใต้ คนการเมืองเสียประโยชน์ประชามติจริงหรือ? [Analysing the tumultuous southern explosions: Have the politicians lost the real referendum?],' *Thairath*, 13 August 2016, https://www.thairath.co.th/content/688792.

these kings were chosen due to their significant contributions to the Thai nation.[115] To the side of the statues were four tents, one of these tents was devoted to the country's history presented as a linear narrative centred on the life and deeds of Thailand's great kings.

The park was a physical representation of the junta's royalist history narrative outlined in 'The History of the Thai Nation' book published earlier in the year. In front of another tent, there was a table with a donation box and a book for well-wishers. Although admission to the park was free, visitors were expected to offer donations. There were quite a few Thai tourists in the park but none of them spent too much time there: most of them did not stop at the history tent, they signed the well-wishers book and donated some money, took few selfies with the statues in the background and left. There was nothing else to do. The park was designed to pay respect to the country's monarchy and every visitor needed to comply. The heavy military presence made it clear that non-compliance was not an option. Quoting Cohen, Pellegi argues that visiting historic parks 'constitute a form of pilgrimage [for Thai people], during which obeisance is made to the politico-religious symbols of the realm.'[116] Although true for some, this would hardly apply to all Thais visiting the Rajabhakti Park. Rather, it was the country's military that saw the park as a symbol of obeisance which would explain why the junta was keen to prevent people harbouring anti-junta sentiments from entering the park. For example, at least two groups of anti-coup student activists were detained en route to the park in December 2015.[117] The student activists were on a mission to find out about the cost of the park following allegations of widespread corruption. These allegations threatened to undermine the junta's claims to political legitimacy based on their self-presentation as good and selfless saviours. As such, the generals worked hard to supress any attempts to uncover the truth behind the Rajabhakti Park controversy.

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[115] See 'วัตถุประสงค์การจัดสร้าง [Building objectives],' อุทยานราชภักดิ์ [Rajabhakti Park], accessed 1 March 2017, http://www.rajabhaktipark.in.th/.

[116] Maurizio Peleggi, 'National Heritage and Global Tourism in Thailand,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 23, no.2 (1996): 437.

[117] Philip Sherwell, 'Thai junta detains student activists amid deepening corruption scandal,' *The Telegraph*, 7 December 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/thailand/12037592/Thai-junta-detains-student-activists-amid-deepening-corruption-scandal.html.

Branding in 2016: Politics, Thailand 4.0 and the Passing of King Bhumibol

The junta's branding efforts in 2016 were more conventional than those of 2014 and 2015. This was partly due to the August 2015 cabinet reshuffle that brought in two marketing experts Somkid Jatusripitak and Suvit Maesincee to head the country's economic team; and partly due to Thailand's G77 chairmanship, and the government's bid to secure the UN Security Council non-permanent seat reserved for the Asia-Pacific Group. In the first few months of 2016, the junta's nation branding efforts were focused on improving the country's global political and economic profile. On 13 January 2016, Thailand took over the South Africa to chair the G77 group for a one-year term. This was a good opportunity for the junta to show to the world and to Thai people that Thailand was a worthy international leader. The government's theme for the G77 chairmanship was 'From Vision to Action: Inclusive Partnership for Sustainable Development' that contained five strategic goals: implementing agendas for sustainable development, strengthening South-South cooperation, improving the Group's working efficiency, promoting the Group's interests, and promoting the king's sufficiency economy.[118] In other words, the G77 chairmanship was the junta's opportunity to promote Thailand internationally as a beacon of sustainable development that was bestowed on Thai people by their great king. Now the whole world could benefit from the king's immense wisdom. The military government sought to use the G77 chairmanship to gain international acceptance, if not support, for their regime. Domestically, this would help the generals to further justify their rule and the virtuous royalist political order they represented. It is difficult to assess whether or not these efforts were successful, but the generals' failure to secure the non-permanent UN seat a year later indicates that much of their branding efforts might have been futile.

In the first half of 2016, Thailand was competing against Kazakhstan for the Asia-Pacific non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2017-2018 term. Led by Virachai Plasai, the Thai ambassador of the permanent mission to the United Nations, the campaign sought to emphasise Thailand's contributions to the UN peace keeping missions while obfuscating political problems and issues at home.[119] Despite

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[118] 'Thailand's Theme for the Chairmanship of the Group of 77,' The Government Public Relations Department, 29 November 2015, http://thailand.prd.go.th/ewt_news.php?nid=2416&filename=index.

[119] See Pavin Chachavalpongpun, 'Is Thailand's UN Security Council Bid Dead on Arrival?' *The Diplomat,* 7 May 2016, http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/is-thailands-un-security-council-bid-dead-on-arrival/.

the junta's efforts, Thailand's bid was unsuccessful: in the UN election on 28 June 2016 the country lost to Kazakhstan by 55 to 138 votes. Kavi Chongkittavorn, a Thai journalist and foreign policy expert, believed that there were at least three main reasons behind Thailand's unsuccessful bid: the short campaign, insufficient financial backing, and Thailand's tarnished international image.[120] Although Thailand's candidature campaign was officially launched in 2007, the proper campaigning started only after the government officially announced its bid in February 2015. The delay in official campaigning was due to Thailand's domestic political instability and frequent changes in government.[121] Kazakhstan had campaigned for the seat since its official bid announcement in 2013 and reportedly spent more than twice as much as Thailand on its campaign.[122] Perhaps the most important factor in Thailand's loss, however, was the country's deteriorating democracy and human rights record. While Kazakhstan's political record was no better than Thailand's, it was never known as 'a bastion of democracy and human rights.'[123] The loss of the UN Security Council bid was a massive blow for the generals who were hoping to shore up the regime's popularity by winning the UN seat. The seat symbolised the much-needed recognition of the regime by the international community that had imposed sanctions on Thailand following the 2014 coup. It was a missed opportunity for the generals to legitimate their rule based on international engagement.

The most important political test of the Prayuth regime and its legitimacy came on 7 August 2016 when the junta's draft constitution was voted on in a popular referendum. The referendum was part of the junta's broader political efforts to emphasise its commitment to democracy following the 2014 coup. It mattered for the regime's international and domestic image alike. The referendum was also a test of the people's support and loyalty or, in nation branding terms, the junta's 'brand resonance.' Following the 2014 coup, the junta's reluctance to quickly return power to civilian government and the increasingly elusive election date have seriously undermined the generals' claims of their democratic commitment. Holding a constitutional referendum thus offered the much-needed veneer of procedural legitimacy for the junta. At the same time, the generals were extremely anxious that the referendum could provide an opportunity for the pro-Thaksin's supporters to re-

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[120] Interview with Kavi Chongkittavorn, 22 July 2016.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 'Aftermath of Thailand's failed UNSC bid,' *Bangkok Post*, 8 July 2016, http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/1030265/.
[123] Ibid.

group and reignite the country's political conflict. Similarly, the junta's claims to political legitimacy would be seriously compromised if the draft constitution was rejected. Under the pretext of peace, unity and reconciliation, the junta outlawed all criticism of the draft constitution and used marketing techniques to promote the draft charter ahead of the referendum. For example, the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) released a music video in a popular country style (*luk thung*) to encourage people to take part in the referendum.[124] Songs seemed to be the junta's favourite tools of persuasion in post-coup Thailand. Yet the music video attracted considerable criticism for its highly biased lyrics that were derogatory towards Thaksin supporters.[125] The ECT also published a six-page leaflet that marketed the draft constitution to the voters. It was a short summary of all the things the Thai people would get under the draft constitution conveniently overlooking all the details and contentious issues.[126] The ECT constitution leaflet was clearly partisan.

The referendum contained two questions: Question 1 asked voters to approve the draft constitution while Question 2 asked them, in a very convoluted way, to endorse a method of prime ministerial selection that would allow for a non-elected prime minister. Despite the perfunctory referendum process, the Thai electorate approved Question 1 by 61.35 per cent to 38.64 per cent and Question 2 by 58.07 per cent to 41.93 per cent. Five traditionally pro-Thaksin provinces in the North and Northeast approved the charter even though the constitution would make it considerably difficult for any pro-Shinawatra party to return to power. Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a respected Thai academic, explained this as a fall in popular support for the Shinawatras.[127] It would seem that the NCPO's nation branding efforts achieved its objective to undermine the Shinawatras and their political networks. However, only the next general election will provide a true indication of the Shinawatra popularity and the success of the junta's nation branding. In 2007, the Thai electorate also approved a military-drafted constitution yet voted overwhelmingly for a pro-Thaksin party in the general elections that followed. It might well be the case that many pro-Thaksin supporters voted for the 2016 draft

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[124] For a detailed account of the referendum process including an analysis of the results, see Duncan McCargo, Saowanee T. Alexander and Petra Desatova, 'Ordering Peace: Thailand's 2016 Constitutional Referendum,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia 39,* no.1 (2017): 72-3.

[125] Ibid, 73.

[126] Ibid, 73.

[127] Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 'Thailand's changing political narrative,' *Bangkok Post*, 9 September 2016, http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/1081620/.

constitution in the hope of quick election rather than as a sign of the support for the military regime.[128]

When the junta seized power in 2014, they promised to heal Thailand's dwindling economic performance. Thailand's economy had suffered badly as a result of the political crisis that preceded the coup. The country's GDP growth rates fell from 7.2 per cent in 2012 to 2.7 per cent in 2013, and to 0.8 per cent in 2014.[129] Although the coup put a stop to political protests and restored superficial notions of peace in the country, it sent further shockwaves through many sectors of Thailand's already fragile economy. Compared to 2013, international tourist arrivals were down by 8.7 per cent while foreign investment contracted by 10 per cent in the first ten months of 2014.[130] The NCPO fiercely criticised Yingluck's fiscal policies, especially the controversial and costly rice-pledging scheme where the government bought rice from farmers at rates 50 per cent higher than average market prices and then struggled to re-sell it.[131] Nevertheless, they continued many policies from Yingluck's 2014 budget and supplemented them with their own public spending stimulus packages and infrastructure projects.[132] These measures proved insufficient to redress the country's falling economic performance and economic forecast remained bleak throughout 2015. Increasing household debt, falling exports, low consumer and foreign investor confidence risked undermining the junta's support among those who had originally endorsed the 2014 coup.

In August 2015, the NCPO reshuffled the cabinet and brought in Somkid Jatusripitak as the new Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, and Suvit Maesincee as the Deputy Commerce Minister. Bringing in Somkid and Suvit was a tactical move on the junta's side as Somkid was behind many popular economic policies of Thaksin's government that came to be known as 'Thaksinomics' while Suvit was a nation branding expert and a former cabinet minister under Thaksin. Once

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[128] McCargo et al, 'Ordering Peace,' 81.

[129] 'Thailand Data,' The World Bank, accessed 5 June 2017, http://data.worldbank.org/country/thailand.

[130] See 'Thailand Year in Review 2014,' *Oxford Business Group*, 29 January 2015, http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/thailand-year-review-2014-0; 'Growth momentum remains weak in Thailand,' *DW*, 1 December 2014, http://www.dw.com/en/growth-momentum-remains-weak-in-thailand/a-18103869.

[131] Asit K. Biswas, Matthew J. Kastner and Cecilia Tortajada, 'The Rice and Fall of Yingluck Shinawatra,' *The Diplomat*, 21 May 2015, https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/the-rice-and-fall-of-yingluck-shinawatra/.

[132] Anthony Kleven, 'Thailand's Military Junta is Clueless about Economic Policy,' *The Diplomat,* 25 September 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/thailands-military-junta-is-clueless-about-economic-policy/.

in office, Somkid launched more stimulus packages aimed at Thailand's rural populations, increased incentives for foreign investors, endorsed junta's infrastructure projects and prepared strategies for strengthening Thailand's private sector through a creation of specialist manufacturing hubs and new tourist destinations.[133] Suvit came up with the junta's flagship branding project of the year: Thailand 4.0. Launched in April 2016, Thailand 4.0 promised an economic upgrade that would align the country with the new digital age. The project seemed like an exemplary nation branding exercise from within the Kaneva's technical-economic strand and it contained many traditional branding elements that the junta's previous campaigns lacked: a new catchy slogan and a marketing expert. Despite all the economic claims, Thailand 4.0 was an exercise in internal nation branding that was trying to convince the Thai people to support the military government in exchange for an appealing vision of their own future.

The most significant event of 2016 was the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej on 13 October. Although the king's health had been deteriorating for over a decade, his demise came as a shock to many. By the time of his death, Bhumibol had been on the throne for seven decades making him the longest-reigning monarch in Thailand and the world. Most Thais had never lived under king other than Bhumibol. The Thai monarchy was revived under Bhumibol's reign becoming one of the most powerful institutions in all aspects of the country's life. Following the official announcement of the king's passing, national and global news channels were dominated by images of weeping Thais. For few hours, the generals had almost complete control over the Thai information environment. With the exception of the internet, it was impossible to access any other news, international or local, besides Bhumibol's passing. All TV channels in Thailand (Thai and foreign) were showing a rolling video footage about Bhumibol's reign and the life of the royal Thai family, and scores of Facebook users inside and outside of the country turned their profile pictures black. Foreign tributes started pouring in, many praising Bhumibol's contributions to Thailand's development through thousands of royal development projects. All Thai government, newspaper and business websites turned monochrome redirecting their visitors to specially created, often bilingual landing pages with condolence messages. Many clothes stores rearranged their display windows overnight and moved all their black and white attire to the front sections of their stores

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[133] Kleven, 'Thailand's Military Junta.'

(see Illustration 3.4).[134] Thai government had ordered all civil servants to wear black or white clothes for one year, which was the full period of mourning, and asked all Thai citizens to do the same for the first thirty days. For the generals, it was important to make the national grief visible to reassert the popular love and respect for the Thai monarchy. As colour gradually faded away from Thai streets, more people stocked up on black clothes or dyed their everyday clothes black. A thirty-day ban on entertainment underlined the sombre atmosphere of Thai streets lined up with billboards displaying condolence messages and images of the late king. Many branding campaigns and events were discontinued (such as those in tourism sector), paused or toned down (such as Thailand 4.0) out of respect for the late king. Bhumibol's dynastic number nine soon became a supplementary grief symbol as did the black ribbon that the government had originally sanctioned as an acceptable grief symbol in lieu of black clothes. Many people competed with one another by wearing multiple grief symbols or by mourning in novel ways in order to show how much love and respect they had for Bhumibol. Yet, national mourning also developed a sinister side as reports started to resurface about people being harassed for not wearing black clothes or paying appropriate respect to the late king.[135]

Illustration 3.4: A fashion store in Ubon Ratchathani on 14 October 2016.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

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[134] In Thai culture, both black and white are colours of mourning.
[135] Teeranai Charuvastra, 'Ultra-royalists guilt-shame people who don't wear mourning black,' *Khaosod English*, 16 October 2016, http://www.khaosodenglish. com/politics/2016/10/16/ultra-royalists-guilt-shame-people-dont-wear-mourning-black/.

To any outside observer, the entire country was mourning its widely-revered and much beloved king, while the world was paying respect to the longest reigning and deeply-admired monarch. However, beneath this mass display of grief was a troubling reality of a deeply divided kingdom embroiled in a decade-long political turmoil and faced with uncertain future under an increasingly protracted military rule. In the wake of Bhumibol's passing, Vajiralongkorn asked for time to mourn his father's death before ascending the throne. In an unprecedented move, Prem Tinsulanonda, the President of Privy Council, was appointed as the country's regent even though the eligible heir apparent was of age and in residence in the country. Vajiralongkorn's decision to delay the royal succession seemed like a tactical move: he was waiting for the right time to ascend the throne acting as a devoted son who was deeply affected by his father's death. The junta spent the fifty days between the king's death and Vajiralongkorn's accession to the throne on 1 December 2016 by carefully managing public displays of grief and preparing the country for the royal transition. With Vajiralongkorn at the helm, the future of the Thai monarchy and the traditional elites was uncertain at best. This was a critical time for the generals as they needed to wind down Bhumibol's reign without dismantling virtuous rule. Information operations were in full force. The extended mourning period of one year allowed the generals to continue branding the monarchy, and Thailand, in traditional ways. Following his official accession, Vajiralongkorn was often depicted by the country's press as a loyal, dutiful son and a military king ready to defend the country.[136] The former depictions sought to transfer some of Bhumibol's charisma onto his son and successor, while the latter served to justify Vajiralongkorn's suitability for the Thai throne. In the long term, however, these depictions of Vajiralongkorn might be unsustainable. Despite the junta's concerted efforts at information control, controversial images from Vajiralongkorn's private life flooded the international media and Thailand's social media platforms in the wake of his official succession. It remains to be seen whether Vajiralongkorn's action will undermine the legitimating foundations of virtuous rule, the royalist political order the traditional elites have been so keen to preserve.

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[136] Peter A. Jackson, 'A Grateful Son, a Military King: Thai Media Accounts of the Accession of Rama X to the Throne,' *Perspective* 2017, no.26 (2017): 1-7.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I challenged some of the mainstream readings that portray nation branding as an externally-oriented, business-derived, and apolitical practice primarily aimed at increasing a country's competitive advantage. Using the example of military-ruled Thailand between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016, I argued that the country's military government used nation branding as a strategy for political legitimation. Thailand's post-coup nation branding did not follow the conventional nation branding model. It was informed by Thailand's framework of information operations. As a result, many post-coup nation branding efforts were internally-oriented and targeted those who opposed the country's military regime. For this reason, I made a case for expanding the conventional understanding of internally-oriented branding by conceptualising it as a strategy in its own right. This was demonstrated in the different nation branding campaigns that the government launched between the May 2014 coup and Vajiralongkorn's accession to the Thai throne in December 2016.

Crucially, I argued that the Thai government's use of nation branding was motivated by domestic power politics rather than the logic of economic liberalism. In other words, Thailand's post-coup nation branding was sustained by the intra-elite conflict over power and legitimacy rather than the government's market agenda. Following the 2014 coup, the junta's nation branding efforts were mainly driven by the generals' desire to delegitimate the Shinawatras and their political networks. As a result, most of the early nation branding campaigns were internally focused and targeted younger segments of Thai society. Happiness, history and social values were the central themes of these campaigns in 2014 as the generals sought to establish their legitimacy mostly on performance and identity-based rationales. Branding campaigns launched in 2015 and 2016 were aimed at increasing the junta's legitimacy and strengthening the power of traditional elites, the monarchy, military and bureaucracy. To this end, the junta targeted both international and domestic audiences. The junta's international activities and the August 2016 constitutional referendum were a testimony to the general's desire to expand the base of their legitimacy rationales to international engagement and quasi-democratic procedures. Thainess, monarchy, politics and the economy were thus the lead branding themes of the 2015 and 2016. The junta's branding efforts were interrupted by the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in October 2016. Following the king's passing, the generals needed to

focus on winding down Bhumibol's reign without dismantling virtuous rule. Only time will show whether these efforts were successful.

Thailand's post-coup nation branding efforts have important implications for the broader study of nation branding in non-democratic regimes as they demonstrate that governments' use of nation branding can be motivated by domestic power politics. It is therefore important that scholars writing on nation branding pay more attention to internal power dynamics, such as intra-elite struggles and state-society relations, because they affect the ways in which non-democratic regimes understand and use nation branding. As this chapter demonstrated, political legitimation plays an important role in the activities of non-democratic regimes as they cannot rely on political oppression alone to sustain their rule. They need to appear legitimate. In the absence of democratic processes, these regimes often rely on performance and identity-based rationales for legitimation. Since these are the areas commonly associated with nation branding, scholar studying nation branding in non-democratic regimes need to pay more attention to questions of political legitimation and its relation to nation branding. The following chapter analyses Thailand's post-coup nation branding efforts across five different sectors (tourism; economy, trade and exports; foreign direct investment; foreign policy; and public relations) by deconstructing the junta's strategic national myth.

CHAPTER 4: THAILAND'S EXTERNAL NATION BRANDING

Thailand's external image suffered badly as a result of the 2014 coup. When the NCPO overthrew the elected government of Yingluck Shinawatra on 22 May, Thailand became the only country in the world under fully-fledged military rule.[1] Even neighbouring Burma was no longer under such a tight military grip at the time of the Thai coup. Burma started to slowly open up its political system in 2011 after five decades of an absolute military rule and was preparing for its landmark 2015 general elections. The Thai coup, which was the second such military intervention in the country's political affairs in less than a decade, together with Prayuth's erratic leadership style, the NCPO's crackdown on political dissent, their reluctance to hold elections and the country's worsening human rights record hardly made for an attractive nation brand. This was no longer the happy, easy-going 'Land of Smiles' but rather a troubled Southeast Asian nation in the midst of a complex political crisis.[2]

According to Anholt and Hildreth, countries communicate their identities with the outside world through a 'hexagon' of communication channels.[3] These channels include (1) 'tourism,' (2) 'export brands,' (3) 'foreign and domestic policy,' (4) 'investment and immigration,' (5) 'culture and heritage,' and (6) 'people.'[4] It is a combination of communication efforts across these six channels that over time creates a country's brand image. To influence their brand image, countries need to be clear about who they are and what they stand for and communicate it 'clearly and consistently through some or all points of the hexagon.'[5] In short, countries need to have a clear and coherent communication strategy across multiple sectors in order to establish a strong nation brand. In this chapter, I examine the junta's nation branding efforts between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016 across five different sectors: tourism, economy and trade, foreign direct investment, foreign policy and public relations. These sectors are broadly aligned with Anholt's and Hildreth's brand

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[1] Zoltan Barany, 'Exits From Military Rule: Lessons from Burma,' *Journal of Democracy* 26, no.2 (2015): 86.

[2] For example, see 'Thai coup dims tourist allure of "Land of Smiles",' *South China Morning Post*, 7 June 2014, https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1527423/thai-coup-dims-tourist-allure-land-smiles; Robert Kennedy, 'Coup in the Land of Smiles,' *Aljazeera*, 31 July 2014 https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2014/05/99026.html.

[3] Simon Anholt and Jeremy Hildreth, 'Let freedom and cash registers ring: America as a brand,' *Place Branding* 1, no.2 (2005): 167.

[4] Ibid, 166.

[5] Ibid, 167.

hexagon. I address the following research question: What are the political motivations behind externally-oriented branding? I argue that despite the ostensibly external orientations, branding in these five sectors was part of the junta's broader political project aimed at undermining the political networks of the Shinawatras, strengthening the power of the country's traditional elites and gaining political legitimacy. I argue that nation branding across these five sectors had two distinct domestic functions: (1) a social engineering function that was aimed at changing the social attitudes and behaviours of Thai people; and (2) an identity reminder function aimed at re-engaging the Thai society with virtuous rule.

Tourism

Tourism is one of the most visible sectors of nation branding.[6] In many countries, tourism promotion (or destination branding) pre-dates nation branding and branding in other sectors such as trade or investment. As such, many countries already have established tourism brands. In Thailand, tourism has been the leading sector in shaping the country's external image since the rule of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963), who established the country's first independent tourism promotion body, the Tourism Organisation of Thailand, in 1959. Renamed the Tourism Authority of Thailand in 1979, TAT launched its first ever tourism promotion campaign called 'Visit Thailand Year' in 1980. Due to its success, the campaign was re-launched again in 1987. In 1998-9, TAT launched its third tourism campaign but this time under a re-branded 'Amazing Thailand' slogan. According to Pradech Payakavichien, the campaign's then project manager and later TAT Governor, the 'Amazing Thailand' slogan was hotly debated at the time because the word 'amazing' had both positive and negative (or satirical) connotations.[7] Some domestic media used it to ridicule the then government of Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (1996-7) and its mismanagement of growing economic and political problems in the country following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.[8] Nevertheless, TAT decided to go with the Amazing Thailand slogan. As Pradech explained, they needed an attractive slogan for marketing purposes and decided to prove that Thailand was 'amazing in the good

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[6] Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 25; Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 44.
[7] Interview with Pradech Payakavichien, 30 September 2016.
[8] For example, see 'Economy cannot bear Chavalit's torture team,' *The Nation,* 20 July 1997, https://www.nexis.com/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23_T26350687575&format=GNBFI&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=0_T26350701130&backKey=20_T26350701131&csi=220765&docNo=7.

ways.'[9] The Amazing Thailand slogan presented TAT with a common branding dilemma: Thailand as a country was inherently complex, while Thailand as a brand needed to be simple and flexible. The Amazing Thailand campaign proved successful: tourism arrivals rose by 7.53 per cent to 7.76 million in 1998 and by a further 10 per cent to 8.58 million in 1999.[10] As a result, TAT has been using the Amazing Thailand slogan for most of its campaigns ever since. By the time of the 2014 coup, Thailand's tourism brand was thus firmly established.

Thailand's tourism industry suffered badly as a result of almost six months of anti-government protests that preceded the May 2014 coup. International tourist arrivals were down from 26.5 million in 2013 to 24.8 million in 2014 (see Figure 4.1). This was a serious 6.5 per cent drop in an industry that accounts for approximately 10 per cent of Thailand's GDP.[11]

Figure 4.1: Thailand's international tourist arrivals (2000-2016).
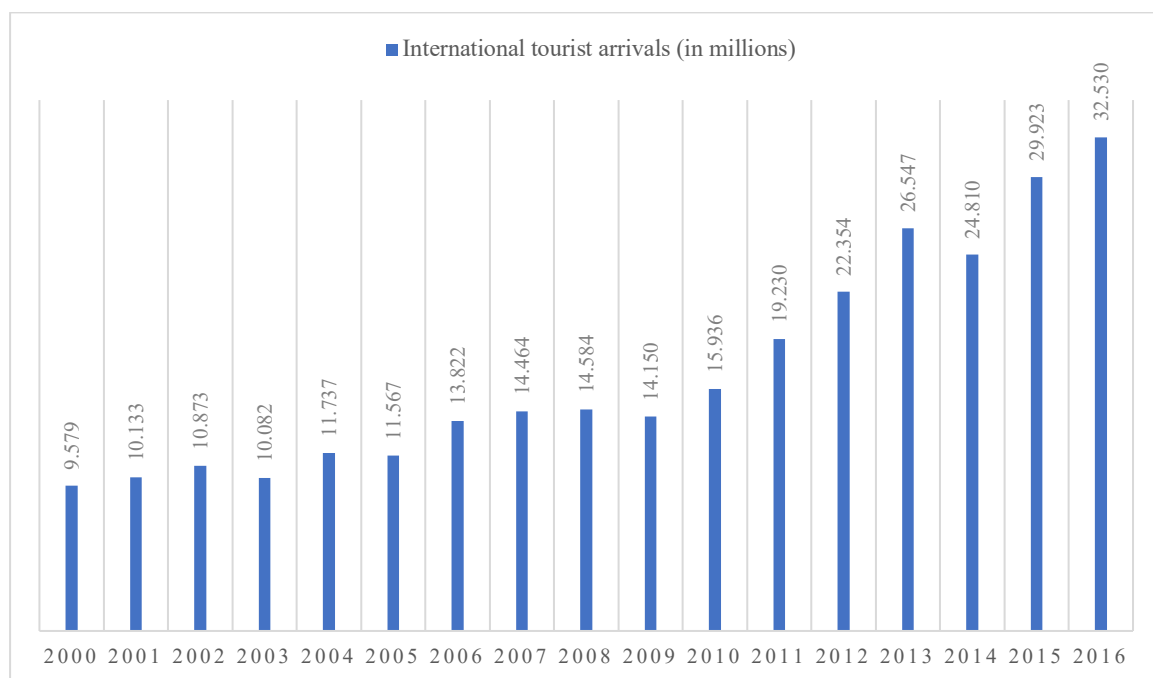
Source: 'International tourism, number of arrivals,' The World Bank, accessed 15 September 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?end=2016&locations=TH&start=2012.

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[9] Interview, Pradech.

[10] See 'History: Tourism Authority of Thailand,' *TAT News*, accessed 7 September 2016, http://www.tatnews.org/history/.

[11] Gabriel Dominguez, 'Growth momentum remains weak in Thailand,' *DW*, 1 December 2014, https://www.dw.com/en/growth-momentum-remains-weak-in-thailand/a-18103869.

The 2013-2014 political protests affected much of Thailand's high tourist season that runs from November to February. The May 2014 coup put even more pressure on the already struggling industry. For example, figures released by the Pacific Asia Travel Association showed that airline bookings to Thailand collapsed following the May 2014 coup.[12] They went from approximately twenty-eight thousand inbound bookings on 19 May to five thousand cancellations on 23 May 2014. Although the junta-imposed post-coup curfew was quickly lifted from the popular tourist areas, this failed to prevent falling tourism numbers.[13] Thailand's reputation as a safe and welcoming tourist destination was further compromised in September 2014 when two young British tourists were murdered on the popular island of Koh Tao.[14] These events threatened to further undermine Thailand's reputation and the junta's claims to political legitimacy based on restoring national happiness, peace and order.

The commercialisation of Thai culture and collective Thai identity for tourism purposes is not new. For over five decades, TAT has been branding Thailand as an ideal tourist destination where modernity coexists with cultural and social traditions that preserve Thailand's exotic appeal. As Phillips points out, since the early 1960s 'the commodification of everyday Thai life [has been] tied to assertions about the character of the Thai people' as a happy, hospitable, peaceful and united nation.[15] Yet, these seemingly superficial traits are underpinned by highly-politicised, deep-seated assumptions that Thai people are inherently conservative, subservient and apolitical.[16] These shared norms and values of passivity can thus be mobilised in support of virtuous rule and authoritarian governments.

At the time of the 2014 military coup, TAT was branding Thailand under the 'Amazing Thailand: It begins with the people' campaign. Launched in November 2013 under the Yingluck administration, the campaign sought to promote Thailand as a unique, quality tourist destination with an added value of Thainess defined as happiness, smiles, culture and the Thai way of life.[17] The main campaign video was

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[12] 'พาต้าแฉ รปห.ทุบเที่ยวไทยทรุดหนัก [PATA reveals that the coup brought Thai tourism to its knees],' *Thairath*, 3 June 2014, https://www.thairath.co.th/content/426922.

[13] Josh Halliday, 'British tourists murdered in Thailand,' *The Guardian*, 16 September 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/15/british-tourists-murdered-thailand-koh-tao.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Phillips, 'Grieving.'

[16] Ibid.

[17] Tourism Authority of Thailand, 'Message From the Governor of Tourism Authority of Thailand,' *Annual Report 2014: Touch of Thainess*, 6-7.

an unobtrusive collection of snapshots from Thailand's four main regions focused on nature, culture, people and places as seen through the eyes of foreign tourists.[18] The video was not all about tradition and Thailand's exotic appeal though. In line with Yingluck's 'Modern Thailand' project, it also showed the country's infrastructure and the more luxurious side of Thai tourism. For example, Bangkok was presented as a modern city with wide roads, glass skyscrapers, luxurious shopping malls, connectivity and hip culture. Although the video showed Bangkok's historical heritage of temples and royal palaces, they were presented as pockets of antiquity in an otherwise modern city. Tradition and exoticism were not over-emphasised. Just like Yingluck's 'Modern Thailand' project, the TAT's campaign was officially discontinued shortly after the coup.

In their critique of nation branding, scholars such as Jansen and Varga point out that in the process of branding the state relinquishes its authority over the (re-) definition of national identity in favour of private companies.[19] While this might have been the case for Yingluck's 'Modern Thailand' project, the post-coup military government was doing the opposite. The generals were reclaiming the state's authority over the definition of Thai national identity in order to re-establish their hegemony (discursive and actual), and the hegemony of traditional elites over the Thai socio-political space. They seemed keen to remove any projects, campaigns and linguistic markers popularised by or related to the Shinawatras including some of their business and marketing jargon. Nevertheless, TAT's post-coup campaigns re-used some of the materials from the pre-coup 'Amazing Thailand: It begins with the people' campaign. This might have been due to purely pragmatic reasons, such as budget and time constraints.

Under the NCPO rule, much of the post-coup tourism campaigns were constrained by the generals' political agenda to undermine the Shinawatras, strengthen the power of traditional elites, gain political legitimacy, manage the royal transition and secure military interests. Speaking at a tourism talk organised by the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand on 16 November 2016, Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, the then Minister of Tourism and Sports, described the government's objectives behind tourism promotion as follows:

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[18] See 'Amazing Thailand: It Begins with the People (full length),' YouTube, published 15 August 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-M9Z2RJIUE.
[19] See Jansen, 'Designer nations,' 132; Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 827.

'The true beauty of tourism is not the figures […] at the end of the day it must be friendship, and unity, and peace […] we have to make sure that everyone coming to Thailand understands us, love[s] us for what we are and who we are and return[s] so Thailand will continue to be the Land of Smiles, the second home for everyone.'[20]

Based on Kobkarn's description, it is clear that the military government did not perceive tourism only in economic terms. Of course, tourism revenue mattered but the government knew well that tourism was an important soft power tool. Kobkarn's emphasis on creating understanding and acceptance indicates that the military government sought to use tourism as part of their legitimation processes. It was about making people understand, and ultimately accept, the rationales behind the coup and the military rule and buy into the junta's strategic national myth, its underlying norms and values. Post-coup tourism thus became an avenue for creating public compliance and preventing transgression.

Building on the work of Foucault, Volcic and Andrejevic argue that nation branding is 'a form of governance *via* market imperatives [original emphasis]' that 'combines the obligations of citizenship with the responsibilities and risks of the entrepreneur.'[21] The end goal of nation branding is to achieve a self-management of citizens in line with the economic logic of liberal capitalism. Foucault describes this type of a self-managing citizen as 'homo œconomicus' or the economic man: a rational actor 'who accepts reality' and responds to changes in his environment 'in a non-random [or systematic] way.'[22] Although driven by self-interest, his conduct inadvertently leads to public good as his self-interest spontaneously aligns with interests of others.[23] Although Volcic's and Andrejevic's interpretation of nation branding as a form of governance is useful, it continues to define state-society relations in the language of economic liberalism. I propose to redefine Volcic's and Adrejevic's interpretation in terms of domestic power politics. As such, nation branding can still be seen as a form of socialising power under Foucault's concept of governmentality, which appears consensual and is 'experienced as free and

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[20] For the video from the event, see '11 November 2016 Changing Times Thailand's Incredible Tourism Industry,' YouTube, published 29 November 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZH-iNjWhcF8.

[21] Volcic and Andrejevic, 'Commercial nationalism,' 602 and 601.

[22] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, ed. Michel Senellar, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 269.

[23] Ibid, 270.

responsible subjectivity,'[24] but its purpose is to connect with and mobilise the self-conduct of citizens for the purpose of political legitimation. It is this conceptualisation that I apply to the study of TAT's post-coup tourism campaigns.

In July 2014, TAT launched its first tourism campaign under the NCPO: 'Amazing Thailand: Happiness Within.' This campaign was followed by the 2015 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess' campaign and the 2016 'Amazing Thailand: Quality Leisure Destination Through Thainess' campaign. All three campaigns placed much emphasis on promoting the highly-conservative junta-defined 12 values of Thainess. For the purpose of post-coup tourism campaigns, TAT defined collective Thai identity as aspects of Thai culture and life that had been passed on from generation to generation.[25] Sugree Sithivanich, the then Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications at TAT, added that Thainess was also about flexibility of Thai people and Thai identity.[26] For him, Thainess incorporated 'non-authentic' culture, such as fusion food, because appropriation of other cultural influences was Thailand's historic trait.[27] Sugree's view was partly reflected in the January-March 2015 issue of the Thai-language *TAT Review* magazine, which defined Thainess as a mixture of contemporary and traditional Thai culture.[28] Yet, few pages later, the same magazine offered a less flexible definition of Thainess and revealed a degree of tension between the more progressive and conservative forces within the Thai bureaucracy. It defined Thainess as a 'thinking frame' that Thai people use to make sense of the surrounding world.[29] This frame was based on learning from one's own experiences but sometimes, as the magazine explained, direct experience was not necessary. People could learn from knowledge passed onto them by others. Underneath this definition was a picture of a masked *khon* dancer, one of the most traditional and conservative symbols of Thai culture. The definition was a vague reassertion of the state's right to define the boundaries of Thainess. As a result, many

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[24] Jan Rehman, 'The Unfulfilled Promises of the Late Foucault and Foucauldian "Governmentality Studies",' in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, eds. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 138.

[25] Interview Sugree.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Tourism Authority of Thailand, '2015 Discover Thainess/ท่องเที่ยววิถีไทย ๒๕๕๘ [2015 Discover Thainess/Travelling the Thai Way 2558],' *TAT Review* 1, no.1 (2015): 20.

[29] The Thai word for thinking frame is กรอบความคิด. See Tourism Authority of Thailand, 'ความเป็นไทย [Thainess],' *TAT Review* 1, no.1 (2015): 30.

of the post-coup tourism campaigns served as a source of behavioural guidance for the Thai people by encouraging public compliance with the junta-defined norms and values.

A good example to illustrate this point is the TAT's video provocatively titled 'I hate Thailand' that was released in November 2014 and has since generated almost four-and-a-half million views.[30] Uploaded on YouTube initially without any association with TAT, it attracted a lot of online attention in Thailand as many Thais believed the video was real. When TAT finally confirmed the video was part of their tourism campaign, it became clear that the video was intended as a source of behavioural guidance to the Thai people and to repair Thailand's external image that suffered badly as a result of Koh Tao murders.[31] In the video, British tourist called James has his bag with money and passport stolen whilst holidaying on a Thai island. Following this misfortune, James meets a beautiful Thai girl who enlists what seems to be almost the entire local population of the island in the search for his bag. Other friendly locals offer James free lodging and introduce him to the local ways of life. At the end of the video, James's bag is miraculously recovered, with a surprise revelation that the bag had been stolen by monkeys, and James decides to stay in Thailand indefinitely as he is charmed by the warmth and friendliness of Thai people.

The video speaks about generous, sharing, hospitable and flexible Thais who would go out of their way for the greater good – in this case, to help an unlucky foreigner. All locals in the video are smiling and look content with their lives and their possessions because stealing is a very 'un-Thai' thing to do. Hence, it could only have been monkeys that took James's bag. Sugree explained that TAT 'needed Thai people to understand the meaning of Thainess, being hospitable to foreigners [because] this [was] more important than tourist locations.'[32] This indicates that Thainess does not come to all people naturally, but it needs to be worked on or somehow attained. The 'I hate Thailand' video was educating Thai people on how to behave and even though most of the video was in English, the messages it sought to communicate resonated

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[30] For the video, see 'I hate Thailand,' YouTube, published 18 November 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54uzEouACYs.

[31] 'คลิป I hate Thailand ฝรั่งเกลียดเมืองไทย เฉลยแล้วที่แท้เป็นผลงาน ททท.[Video clip 'I hate Thailand' in which a white foreigner hates Thailand has been disclosed to be a work of TAT],' *Kapook!*, 1 December 2014, https://travel.kapook.com/view105950.html.

[32] Interview, Sugree.

with many Thai viewers. For example, a member of a popular online Thai forum wrote about the video:

> '[The video] is very cute. Thailand really has this [good] side, which is easy to get. As for the bad side, which is being discussed, [Thailand] really has this side too. One thing that this [video] clip does very successfully is that it presents a perspective for people to comply with. It is telling and teaching [people] in an effective way to help instil consciousness.'[33]

Many other Thais commenting on the same online forum expressed similar feelings about the video. They seemed very fond of it, found it 'cute,' or said it made them smile. Some even posted very patriotic comments, such as 'I love my country' or 'I feel love […] towards my home country.' Similar responses can be found among the many comments left by Thais on YouTube. A lot of comments on YouTube sought to reassure others that the majority of Thai people are good and behave like those in the video. One comment even blames a few bad people for creating a negative image for the country. The video was clearly a thinking frame that TAT sought to impose on Thai people and, indirectly, on foreign tourists by setting their expectations of Thailand and Thai people.

TAT's engineering of Thainess went beyond tourism videos. TAT lobbied other ministries, such as the Ministry of Culture or Ministry of Education, and governmental agencies to promote Thainess in order to achieve 'a continuous inculcation.'[34] As Sugree explained, tourism promotion was about changing people's behaviours and creating lasting social trends.[35] For example, one of the post-coup domestic campaigns 'Travelling the Thai way, chic unlike everyone' encouraged Thai people to wear traditional Thai clothes to work every Friday and when going on holiday in Thailand.[36] TAT's focus on Thai people and Thainess as the country's unique selling proposition is a product of the national myth on Thai exceptionalism according to which Thai people, their culture and way of life are unique because of the country's history (Thailand has never been formally colonised) and political system centred on the deeply loved and revered monarchy. This was well-reflected in Sugree's words: 'Our beaches are perhaps not as beautiful as Caribbean beaches, our royal palaces are

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[33] My translation. See the comment of a user called 'JaeLuv' in 'I hate Thailand,' Pantip, 19 November 2016, https://pantip.com/topic/32875655.

[34] Sugree's exact words were: ให้มีการปลูกฝังความเป็นไทยอย่างต่อเนื่อง. Interview, Sugree.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

perhaps not as large and beautiful as royal palaces in the United Kingdom, but things like people [and] the way of life makes us different.'[37] TAT's commodification of Thai national identity has been tied to these hegemonic interpretations, which are flexible enough to accommodate capitalist interests so long as they do not threaten the power of the traditional elites.[38] Commenting on the Thai state's promotion of Thainess in general (and not just in the tourism sector), Connors argues that it has been 'a low-cost investment to ensure that when storms of political change assault the political establishment, strategic groupings of people who identify themselves as good Thai citizens can be called forth to support and protect dominant power blocs.'[39] On a few occasions, Sugree even referred to Thainess as *khwam pen khon thai* (being a Thai person) instead of the conventional *khwam pen thai* (being Thai).[40] Sugree's choice of words is significant here because it reflects the performative character of Thai identity. As Farrelly argues: 'Being born Thai is a good start, although that does not always guarantee lifelong connection to the Thai ideal. Some fall out of favour; their Thainess can be questioned.'[41] In other words, Thai identity is not simply given: due to its performative character, Thai people need continuously to reassert their Thainess through their actions. For example, Thais need to reassert their love and respect for the country's monarchy, both in speech and personal conduct, as this is one of the core pillars of Thainess. Otherwise they risk being labelled un-Thai. The government's use of nation branding as a social engineering tool encourages people in a fairly unobtrusive way to reassert their Thainess by 'living the national brand.' Beyond these idealised notions of Thainess, the reality is much more complex and contested.

Economy, Trade and Exports

The economic function of nation branding is often defined either in terms of the country-of-origin effect, brand equity, or a mixture of both.[42] The dominant, technocratic view of nation branding is based on the assumption that a strong and

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[37] Ibid.
[38] For example, see Phillips, 'Grieving.'
[39] Connors, 'Ministering,' 525.
[40] Interview, Sugree.
[41] Nicholas Farrelly, 'Being Thai: A Narrow Identity in a Wide World,' in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, eds. Malcolm Cook and Daljit Singh (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 332.
[42] See Kaneva, 'Toward an agenda,' 120-4.

positive country image is an asset for the country and its businesses, while negative country image is a considerable economic disadvantage. [43] When the NCPO seized power in 2014, they promised to improve Thailand's economic performance. Thailand's economy suffered badly following months of anti-government street protests that preceded the May 2014 coup. Although the coup put a stop to political protests and restored superficial notions of peace in the country, it sent further shockwaves through many sectors of Thailand's already fragile economy. According to the World Bank, Thailand's annual GDP growth rate dropped from 7.2 per cent in 2012 to 2.68 per cent in 2013 and to 0.98 per cent in 2014 (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Thailand's annual GDP growth (2000-2016).
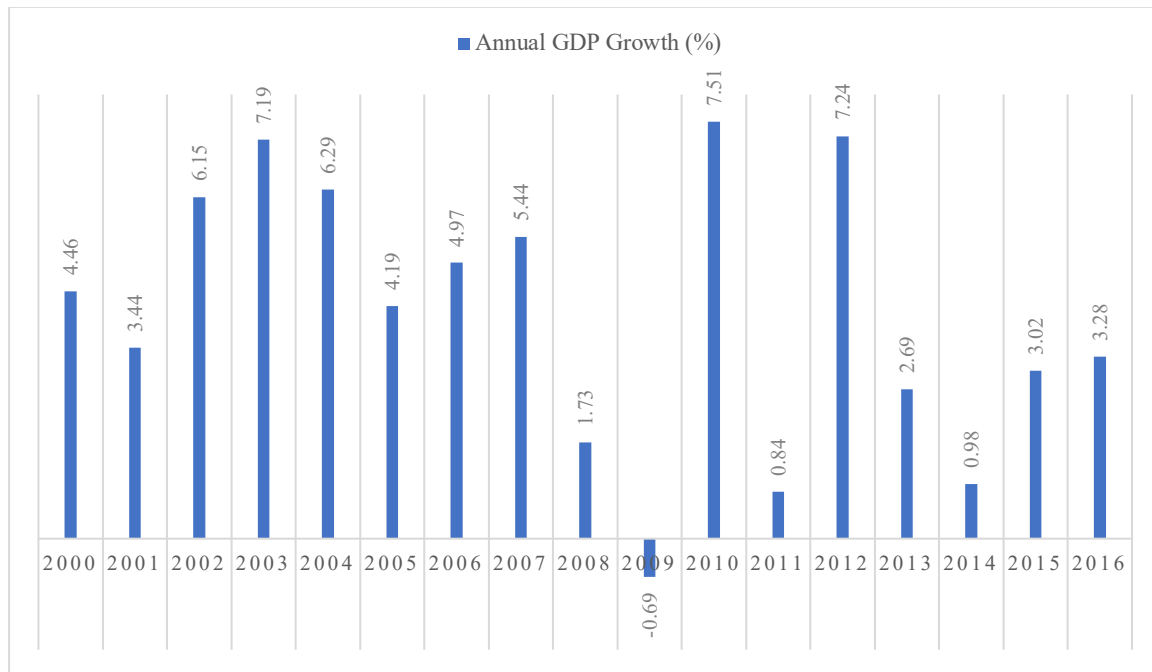
Source: 'GDP growth (annual %),' The World Bank, accessed 29 August 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2017&locations=TH&start=2012.

Meanwhile, annual export growth rates for goods and services were down from 4.91 per cent in 2012, to 2.69 per cent in 2013, and to 0.16 per cent in 2014.[44] The country's political problems were not the only factor responsible for the economic slowdown. Decreasing global demand for Thai export goods and rising regional competition were

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[43] For example, see Loo and Davies, 'Branding China,' 200; Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 10-2; Dinnie, *Nation Branding*, 91-2.
[44] See 'Thailand: Exports of Goods and Services (annual % growth),' The World Bank, accessed 15 September 2017, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.KD.ZG?end=2016&locations=TH&start=2012.

other important factors that contributed to the dire economic situation in post-coup Thailand.[45]

Despite the junta's fierce criticism of the Yingluck administration and its handling of the country's economy – especially the controversial and costly rice-pledging scheme where the government bought rice from farmers at rates 50 per cent higher than average market prices and then struggled to re-sell it[46] – the generals kept many fiscal policies of the ousted government alongside their own public spending stimulus packages and infrastructure projects.[47] As McCargo notes, the generals 'adopted very similar approaches to the use of public funds [to the ousted Yingluck administration], throwing money at problems in a transparent attempt to purchase public support.'[48] For example, within the first two months of seizing power the generals spent as much as US$4.3 billion on mega projects and approved a US$75 billion infrastructure programme.[49] The generals also unveiled what was meant to be their key economic plan: turning Thailand into a digital economy. The brainchild of Pridiyathorn Devakula, the then Deputy Minister for Economic Affairs, the plan promised to create a digital base for Thailand's future economic growth by introducing a nationwide broadband network, creating big data centres and digital gateways, encouraging online transactions and e-commerce, and increasing the digital knowledge and skills in all sectors of Thai society.[50] In January 2015, the junta-appointed National Legislation Assembly (NLA) passed ten new bills to kick start Thailand's digital transformation. Yet, these bills were fiercely criticised as they seemed to have focused more on cyber-surveillance than digital transformation.[51]

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[45] See 'Thailand Economic Monitor: Ageing Society and Economy,' The World Bank, accessed 30 June 2016, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/830261469638 312246/pdf/107267-WP-PUBLIC-Thailand-Economic-Monitor-2016.pdf.

[46] Biswas et al., 'Rice and fall.'

[47] Kleven, 'Thailand's Military Junta.'

[48] McCargo, 'Thailand in 2014,' 348.

[49] Ibid, 348; Warangkana Chomchuen and Wilawan Watcharasakwet, 'Thai Military Approves $75 Billion Transport Plan,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 July 2014, https://www.wsj.com/articles/thai-military-approves-75-billion-transport-plan-14066 36237.

[50] See Audray Souche, Kaisorn Rueangkul, Kunal Sachdevand Kayla Moore, 'Thailand's Implementation of a Digital Economy,' *Thai-American Business* 4, (2015): 10-2, https://www.dfdl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/T-AB_Magazine_ Issue_4_2015__DFDL__Article_Thailands_Implementation_of_a_Digital_Econom y.pdf.

[51] Ibid, 10; Shawn W. Crispin, 'The Trouble with Thailand's Economy,' *The Diplomat*, 31 July 2015, https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/the-trouble-with-thailands-economy/.

In August 2015, the NCPO reshuffled the Cabinet and brought in Somkid Jatusripitak as the new Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, and Suvit Maesincee as the Deputy Minister of Commerce.[52] Somkid was a former Minister of Finance (2001-2003) and Minister of Commerce (2005-2006) in Thaksin's cabinet, while Suvit worked as Somkid's advisor (2004) before holding his own cabinet positions in the Thaksin administration as Vice Minister of the Office of Prime Minister (2004-2005) and Vice Minister of Commerce (2005-2006). Somkid and Suvit were also prominent members of Thaksin's intellectual circle. As none of the earlier measures proved sufficient to redress the country's falling economic performance, the generals needed Somkid and Suvit to help develop their economic strategy and give it some Thaksin-era appeal. The generals seemed to have hoped that Somkid's and Suvit's credentials and reputation would improve the country's economic profile and the regime's acceptance at home, especially among the Shinawatra supporters in the North and Northeast.

Somkid's post-coup economic strategy was aimed at reducing economic inequalities, improving quality of workforce, and increasing the country's competitiveness.[53] High-value products and services, innovation and creativity became the new economic buzzwords. Somkid's strategy was based on government-subsidized loans to small- and medium-sized companies, specialist manufacturing hubs and new tourist destinations, sector integration into the six main 'Super Clusters' (Automotive and Parts; Electrical Appliances, Electronics and Telecommunication Equipment; Eco-friendly Petrochemicals and Chemicals; Digital-based; Food Innopolis; Medical Hub), and new target sectors for foreign direct investment (robotics, aviation, medical technologies, bio-chemistry and digital technologies).[54] Somkid provided the junta with a new economic plan that would in theory turn Thailand into a high-income, hi-tech country that was on par with some of the biggest economic power houses in Asia such as Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore or Taiwan. Yet, the new economic plan was not all that new. It merely reproduced many

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[52] Following another cabinet reshuffle in December 2016, Suvit became a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. He was moved to his current position of the Minister of Science and Technology in yet another cabinet reshuffle in November 2017. Somkid has retained his position of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs up to this date.

[53] Michael Peel, 'Thailand economic tsar pumps in billions and hopes for hit sequel,' *Financial Times*, 4 October 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/6ac7077c-6747-11e5-a155-02b6f8af6a62.

[54] Ibid; 'Cluster Plan Approved,' *The Nation*, 23 September 2015, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Cluster-plan-approved-30269341.html.

of Thaksin-era economic policies that focused on 'directing capital and providing packages of assistance to priority sectors, projects, and firms.'[55] For example, Somkid's reproduced the Thaksin-era 'dual-track' strategy of separating domestic from foreign capital. This entailed protecting Thailand's service sector and domestic SMEs while further integrating the country's manufacturing sector into the global market. In Somkid's own words, he was simply continuing his 'unfinished homework.'[56] Yet, Somkid's calls for innovation, creativity and increased competitiveness were subordinate to the junta's political agenda of building a society consisting of people that would reject the Shinawatras once and for all, abandon their provincial identities, democratic and social aspirations in exchange for a semi-authoritarian rule under the traditional elites. The government's talk of modernity was thus mostly confined to the economic sector. In other non-economic sectors, the government was fervently advocating for social and cultural conservativism.

While Somkid was hired to provide the junta with the much-needed economic facelift, his past association with Thaksin and Thaksinomics was a double-edged sword. Thailand's traditional elites had branded Thaksin-era domestic economic strategy as populism. They criticised Thaksin (and later Yingluck) for using pro-poor economic policies, such as the one million-baht village fund, to secure the rural vote and guarantee him continuous electoral success. In fact, the traditional elites had been working hard to present populism as the country's single biggest evil: both the 2006 and 2014 juntas used populism to justify their military coups. When Somkid reintroduced Thaksin-era economic policies in 2015, the NCPO could not afford to be associated with the word 'populism' as this would undermine their claims to political legitimacy. On 20 September 2015, Prayuth officially introduced Somkid's domestic economic strategy to the Thai public under a new re-branded name *pracharath*, which translates as 'the state of the people,' and emphasised that *pracharath* was not a form of populism.[57] Few days later, he discussed *pracharath* in his weekly broadcast 'Returning Happiness to the People.' He explained that

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[55] Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin*, 129.
[56] Somkid quoted in Peel, 'Economic tsar.'
[57] Patsara Jikkhamdumrongkiat and Malaaekarach Sattaburuth, 'PM launches "people's state" policy,' *Bangkok Post*, 21 September 2015, https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/700048/pm-launches-people-state-policy; '"นายกฯ ตู่" จวกนโยบายประชานิยม ย้ำประเทศไทยเป็นประชารัฐ ["Uncle prime minister" cuts off populist policy, insists Thailand is *pracharath*],' *Thairath*, 20 September 2015, https://www.thairath.co.th/content/526569.

pracharath was about the 'joining of forces of all sectors' – public, private and government – and that it was qualitatively different from populism because where populism was creating 'too much dependency' on the state, *pracharath* offered a 'cooperation between the government and the people.'[58] Under the *pracharath* strategy, the government would act as 'a facilitator supporting and opening opportunities for the private sector and the people that would take part in this process in line with democratic principles.'[59] In practice, *pracharath* worked on the same principle as any of Thaksin's populist policies: the military government would give money to the people, who would use it for their own economic development. The private sector would provide the necessary know-how and technologies to help the people turn their products and services into viable and competitive market commodities.

The junta's re-branding of populism reached new heights on 23 February 2016 when the Government Public Relations Department placed a special advertising supplement to two English-language newspapers, *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*, and two Thai-language newspapers, *Thai Post* and *Post Today*, explaining the government's policy.[60] It seems that the junta's efforts to convince the Thai public and the international community that *pracharath* did not equal populism might not have been that successful. In fact, since General Prayuth first introduced this concept in September 2015, some national (Thai and English) and international news outlets and online magazines continued to run articles that compared the junta's economic policies to populism.[61] The special advertising supplement was thus another attempt

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[58] For the full script, see Prayuth Chan-o-cha, 'คืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ [Returning Happiness to the People],' *Royal Thai Government*, 25 September 2015, http://www.thaigov.go.th/index.php/th/program1/item/95825-id95825.

[59] Ibid.

[60] See Saksith Saiyasombut, 'Unfolding and unscrambling the Thai military junta's policy advertorial,' *Asian Correspondent*, 26 February 2016, https://asiancorrespondent.com/2016/02/unfolding-and-unscrambling-the-thai-military-juntas-policy-advertorial/#5FKZOGlCY3btXQbd.97.

[61] For example, see Suthichai Yoon, 'Pracharath vs prachaniyom: 50 shades of populism,' *The Nation*, 1 October 2015, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/Pracharath-versus-prachaniyom-50-shades-of-popular-30269906.html; M.H. Burton, 'Thailand: Prayuth's Pipe Dream,' *International Policy Digest*, 13 March 2016, https://intpolicydigest.org/2016/03/13/thailand-prayuth-s-pipe-dream/; Khine Thant, 'Will the Thai Military's Populist Agenda Work?' *cogitAsia*, 15 December 2015, https://www.cogitasia.com/will-the-thai-militarys-populist-agenda-work/; Kleven, 'Thailand's military junta;' 'ถ้อยคำ พัฒนา จาก "ประชานิยม" สู่ "ประชารัฐ" [Evolution of words: from "populism" to "pracharath"], *Matichon*, 26 January 2016, https://www.matichon.co.th/columnists/news_13816.

of the increasingly anxious junta to differentiate themselves from the very concept they had so frequently used to demonise Thaksin and his economic strategy. One section of the supplement was devoted to explaining how populism differed from *pracharath*. It explained that populism aimed 'to make the state popular with the people' while under the *pracharath* 'the state acts for the benefit of the people.' Populism was about 'quick fixes' making the society depend on the state while *pracharath* was about 'collective action' and solving problems at their cause. Populism thus led to the reinforcement of vertical powers and the creation of passive citizenship under 'pseudo-democracy' while *pracharath* resulted in the reinforcement of horizontal powers and the creation of active citizenship under, what the supplement termed as, a 'genuine democracy.'[62] In other words, populism under Thaksin was evil whereas populism under the junta was good. It was the honourable *pracharath*.

Even Somkid himself became a target of the junta's re-branding at times. For example, when Somkid used the Thaksin-era word 'grassroots' during one of his press interviews, a general who was sitting in on the interview panel swiftly corrected Somkid and offered a more 'suitable' wording: 'the common people that form the foundation of [the] country.'[63] The junta's approach to the Thai economy reflects the popular belief among the country's traditional elites that money was the main source of Thaksin's rural appeal and, ultimately, his political legitimacy.[64] The generals hoped that by re-branding Thaksin-style populist policies, they could entice people away from the Shinawatras and make them forge loyalties with the traditional elites. It was the domestic power politics rather than the logic of economic liberalism that sustained the NCPO's nation branding efforts in Thailand.

While the junta was re-branding Somkid's domestic policies, Suvit was in charge of branding the more externally-oriented economic policies. Suvit was not new to nation branding. In the early 2000s, he was the driving force behind Thaksin's strategy to brand Thailand as the 'Kitchen of The World,' World Health Service Centre,' 'Detroit of Asia,' 'Asia Tourism Capital,' and the 'Asia Tropical Fashion' centre.[65] In many respects, Suvit, just like Somkid, merely continued his unfinished work from the Thaksin era. As a result, none of the ideas Suvit presented during his

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[62] Saksith, 'Unfolding and unscrambling.'
[63] Peel, 'Economic tsar.'
[64] For a discussion of vote-buying, money politics and their impact on Thai democracy, see Thongchai Winichakul, 'Toppling Democracy,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no.1 (2008).
[65] Interview, NESDB.

2015 and 2016 tenure as a Deputy Commerce Minister were particularly new. Much of his post-coup work was based on ideas that were discussed in his publications, such as the 1997 *The Marketing of the Nations*, a book co-authored with Somkid and Philip Kotler, the 2003 collaborative journal article 'Branding Thailand: Building a Favorable Country Image for Thai Products and Services' or the 2005 *Thailand Stand-Up* book.[66]

Suvit's branding strategy for post-coup Thailand meant extending the nation beyond Thailand's physical borders and positioning Thailand as a regional hub and gateway. As Suvit explained, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam were all to become part of Thailand's 'home' market emphasising inter-regional cooperation.[67] This was exactly what Chatichai Choonhavan proposed in his 1989 speech when he set out to turn mainland Southeast Asia 'from battlefield to marketplace.'[68] This strategy had an apparent economic advantage as Thailand would tap into the competitive advantage of its neighbours without losing much of its own revenue. Over the past decade, many of Thailand's neighbouring countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia or Myanmar, became increasingly attractive outlets for foreign direct investment mainly due to cheap labour.[69] However, the strategy also had important political implications. Thailand has always aspired to become the Southeast Asia's political and economic leader. An economic strategy that positioned Thailand as a driving force behind the region's economic integration would increase the country's importance in the eyes of Thai citizens and boost the NCPO's claims to legitimacy through their international engagement.

According to Suvit, nation branding was also about striking a balance between commonality and difference.[70] Suvit understood nation branding as a spectrum: if Thailand wanted to succeed, it needed to share a degree of commonality with other countries whilst maintaining a level of difference or uniqueness. Sharing a degree of commonality meant that Thailand needed to follow the global sustainability trend and to comply with international norms and expectations of sustainable development.[71]

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[66] Philip Kotler, Somkid Jatusripitak and Suvit Maesincee, *The Marketing of Nations: A strategic approach to building national wealth* (London: Free Press, 1997); Suvit et al., 'Branding Thailand;' Suvit, *Stand-Up*.
[67] Interview with Dr Suvit Maesincee, 25 July 2016.
[68] Chatichai quoted in Kislenko, 'Bending with the wind,' 547.
[69] 'Foreign investment plummets 78% in junta-ruled Thailand,' *The Straits Times*, 13 January 2016, http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/foreign-investment-plummets-78-in-junta-ruled-thailand.
[70] Interview, Suvit.
[71] Ibid.

This presented the NCPO with an opportunity to promote King Bhumibol's philosophy of sufficiency as Thailand's unique contribution to sustainability. At the same time, Thailand needed to differentiate from other countries and this differentiation came from, what Suvit called, the 'Thainess DNA.' Suvit defined 'Thainess DNA' as consisting of five characteristic features: fun, friendliness, fulfilment, flexibility and favour.[72] These features – or 5Fs in Suvit's marketing jargon – provided the grounds for Thailand becoming a creative economy. Thai fighting (*muay* Thai), festivals and films (including animation and gamification), were added to the DNA mix following the 2015 cabinet reshuffle. Just like in the tourism sector, the Thainess DNA concept linked economic development to the collective Thai identity and particular behavioural traits of Thai people. It was yet another iteration of the Thai exceptionalism national myth re-packaged for market consumption. Not only success of tourism but also the success of the entire Thai economy was presented as directly dependent on the 'right' behaviour and social attitudes of Thai people. However, the data generated from my six focus group sessions and discussed in chapter 6 indicate that these notions are often contested. Many participants, especially those in the North and Northeast, were not ready to change their social attitudes and behaviours, just because the government wanted them to do so.

Suvit translated his nation branding vision into the junta's flagship project of 2016 called 'Thailand 4.0.' The project promised an economic transition towards the digital 4.0 age characterised with high-value added production and the development of new digital technologies. It was a way for Thailand to overcome the middle-income trap and become a high-income country. The project was accompanied by an aggressive promotion – soon the whole country was talking about Thailand 4.0, but no one seemed to have known what the project was about or how Thailand would achieve its objectives.[73] In some respects, Thailand 4.0 was an expanded and better-marketed version of Pridiyathorn's digital economy plan. Yet, it was Suvit and his Thailand 4.0 project that formalised the economic element of the junta's strategic national myth. Branding Thailand as a creatively modernising country on the path toward the 4.0 age created a degree of commonality with the developed countries within the wider region such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore or China. At the same time, strengthening the traditional and conservative elements

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Field notes, August – November 2016.

of Thainess was justified on the basis of Thailand's need to differentiate itself in the global marketplace.

Foreign Direct Investment

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is often one of the key focus areas for nation branding as many countries rely heavily on foreign direct investment for their economic growth.[74] FDI has always been an important driver of economic growth in Thailand. It propelled the country's boom years of the late 1980s and 1990s, and helped to restore the Thai economy following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.[75] However, a decade of political instability that followed the 2006 coup gradually undermined foreign investors' confidence in Thailand and the country's FDI inflows became increasingly volatile (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Thailand's foreign direct investment net inflows (2000-2016).
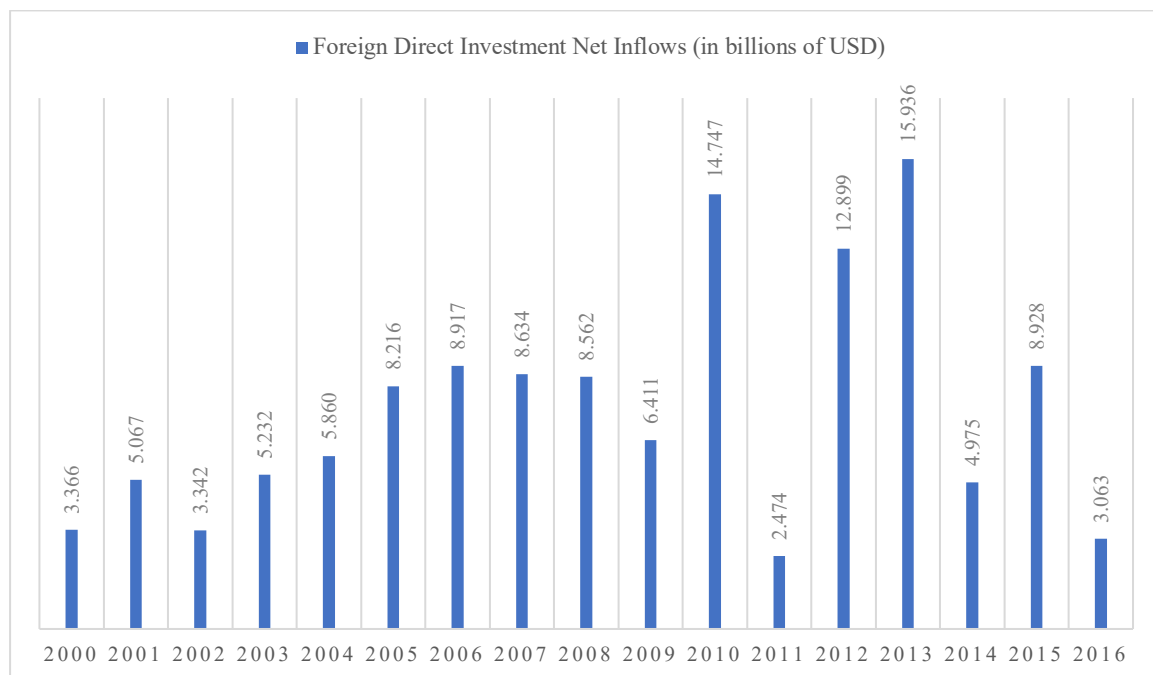
Source: 'Thailand: Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US$),' The World Bank, accessed 15 September 2017, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.CD.WD?end=2015&locations=TH&start=1985.

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[74] Aronczyk, *Branding the nation*, 96.
[75] Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 257-9.

The May 2014 coup put a further strain on Thailand's FDI inflows that plummeted from $15.94 billion in 2013 to $4.98 billion in 2014 (net value).[76] This was a decrease of almost 70 per cent. The junta's peace and order rhetoric seemed to have done little to alleviate the foreign investors' concerns about the long-term investment prospects in Thailand. Even though the FDI inflows increased in 2015 to USD 9 billion, there was yet another sharp decrease in FDI in 2016 when the net value of inflows dropped to USD 1.71 billion.[77] This was an 81 per cent decrease compared to 2015 and an almost 90 per cent decrease compared to the pre-coup values. Growing political uncertainty ahead of the 7 August 2016 constitutional referendum, growth slowdown in some of the major investors in Thailand such as China and Japan, the Brexit referendum in Europe, and the rise of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar as the regional FDI outposts were responsible for much of this decline.[78]

Restoring foreign investors' confidence in Thailand also had important political ramifications. The NCPO based much of their legitimacy claims on reviving the country's economic performance. The generals wanted to prove that Thailand under the military rule was an inherently better and a more prosperous place than under the Shinawatras. Restored foreign investor confidence would provide the much-needed evidence of the country's material betterment and boost the generals' claims to power and political legitimacy. The political significance of FDI was reflected in the NCPO Bill 100/2557 [2014]. Published on 30 July 2014, the bill moved Thailand's Board of Investment (BOI), the country's leading investment promotion agency, from the Ministry of Industry to the Prime Minister's Office.[79] Following the move, Prayuth became the Board's chairman directly overseeing the BOI's promotional activities. Somkid and Suvit joined the Board after the 2015 cabinet reshuffle. As with many other ministries and governmental agencies, there was no official talk of nation branding at BOI between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. An interviewee from the BOI pointed out the Prayuth administration did not have a centralised nation

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[76] See 'EC_XT_057 Foreign Direct Investment Classified by Country (US$) 1/ 2/,' Bank of Thailand, accessed 15 September 2017, http://www2.bot.or.th/statistics/ReportPage.aspx?reportID=654&language=eng.

[77] Ibid.

[78] 'Foreign direct investment collapses,' *Bangkok Post*, 2 August 2016, http://www.bangkokpost.com/archive/foreign-direct-investment-collapses/1050453.

[79] For the full bill in Thai, see 'ประกาศคณะรักษาความสงบแห่งชาติ ฉบับที่ ๑๐๐/๒๕๕๗ [The National Council for Peace and Order Bill number 100/2557],' National Reform Steering Assembly, accessed 23 July 2017, http://library2.parliament.go.th/giventake/content_ncpo/ncpo-annouce100-2557.pdf.

branding strategy and that every ministry and governmental agency was pursuing their own branding strategy after the 2014 coup.[80] Although the junta's nation branding efforts were fragmented, they were not completely arbitrary. The junta's strategic national myth together with their policy framework provided an important point of reference for all branding activities. The BOI official admitted that their work on improving Thailand's image was in line with the government's policy.[81]

Thailand's external image had a negative impact on foreign direct investment.[82] Because of this, the BOI official explained, the Board invested considerable time into explaining to potential investors that Thai economy was resilient to political upheavals.[83] They presented the military government as business-friendly and supportive of FDI emphasising that Thailand's position on FDI had never changed. According to the official, policy changes in this area were dictated by the country's changing economic realities rather than political problems. Despite Thailand's grim economic performance following the May 2014 coup, the official claimed that Thailand's 'political problems had never impacted businesses [and that] businesses have been able to operate as usual.'[84] Thailand's economy used to have a remarkable ability to quickly bounce back following the many political crises and natural disasters that plagued the country throughout 2000s and early 2010s earning it a 'Teflon Thailand' moniker. Yet, Thailand's 'Teflon' layer seemed to have been wearing thin since the 2014 coup.[85] This did not stop the BOI from painting a more positive image of Thailand. For example, the Board's website as of April 2016 still listed social and political stability as one of the main reasons why foreign investors should consider investing in Thailand.[86] Whether or not this was an oversight, the information conformed to the junta's peace and order rhetoric. The information disappeared when the website was updated in October 2016, presumably following Bhumibol's death.

In the year of the coup, the BOI's branding campaign was called 'Your Chance to Win It All,' which was a rather ironic title considering the year's events. This

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[80] Interview with an official working for the Thailand Board of Investment (BOI), 16 November 2016.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Joshua Kurlantzick, 'Thailand's Teflon Economy Is Imploding,' *The National Interest*, 25 March 2015, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/thailands-teflon-economy-imploding-12481.
[86] Field notes, April 2016.

campaign was followed by the 2015 'Plant Your Investment in the Right Climate' campaign and the 2016 'New Growth, New Heights' campaign. All three campaigns were launched under the BOI's thematic slogan 'Think Asia, Invest Thailand: An Asian Hub, a World of Opportunity' which has been in use since 2009. Following the appointment of Somkid and Suvit in August 2015, the BOI's investment promotion strategy changed. Prior to the 2015 cabinet reshuffle, BOI had a broad approach to foreign investment: it supported investment in a wide range of industries and business activities as long as these provided an added value of 20 per cent or more and the value of investment was no less than one million Thai Baht. After the cabinet reshuffle, however, the Board cut support for all low value added and non-high-tech investment and business activities, shifting its focus to the ten priority industries known as the 'First S-Curve' and 'New S-Curve.'[87] The 'First S-Curve' industries were the Thaksin-era industries of automobile, electronics, tourism, agriculture and bio-technology, and food. The 'New S-Curve' industries were the new industries of robotics, aviation, bio-economy (such as bio-energy or bio-chemicals), digital economy, medicine and health. The BOI official summarised the new investment policy as follows: 'Everything that we support has to be [about] technology innovation.'[88] The official purpose of the investment policy shift was to help Thailand to transition from upper-middle income to high-income country. The government prepared attractive incentive packages for potential investors in a form of tax exemptions and allowances, and financial grants tied into a new 'merit' scheme. The merit scheme would reward those investors who would contribute to the technological developments and competitiveness of Thai economy by, for example, investing into research and development, donating money for research purposes, providing training in hi-tech areas, purchasing copyrights or enhancing the country's competitiveness.[89] Those who invested in priority industries would receive some additional benefits, such as fast-tracking of visas and work permits.[90]

These incentives were the basis for the 2016 'New Growth, New Heights' campaign represented by an image of a man wearing a pair of hi-tech mechanical wings and goggles ready to fly off into the sky. Through the BOI policy shift, the military government was sending a signal to the international investor community that

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[87] Interview, BOI.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Thailand Board of Investment, *A Guide to the Board of Investment 2016* (Bangkok: Thailand Board of Investment, 2016), 14-7.
[90] Interview, BOI.

Thailand was moving ahead with its industrial and economic development. It was to show that the military government was serious about Thailand's development and that it had a long-term macro-economic strategy. Although Thailand's economic indicators between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016 showed little real improvement,[91] the campaign made it feel like Thailand was already moving ahead and improving its economic situation. The campaign also seemed to have shifted some of the government's responsibilities for the country's economic development onto their potential investors through the workings of the BOI's merit scheme. Similarly to the junta's branding of Thai citizens, none of this was coercive but compliance was duly incentivised. In other words, the merit scheme sought to change attitudes and behaviours of potential investors in exchange for economic benefits. If successful, these investors would, consciously or not, participate in strengthening the junta's power and political legitimacy by working towards, and materialising, the junta's strategic national myth. Thailand's post-coup nation branding was thus about engineering social compliance and preventing transgression through softer means. This did not, however, mean that the junta eschewed political coercion and the use of hard power. In fact, as McCargo et al. note, '[t]he NCPO leadership was the most hardline group of coup-makers since 1976.'[92]

The Board's investment promotion activities became much more targeted under the Somkid-Suvit leadership. The government believed that it would be able to cherry-pick investors by identifying high-performing countries for each of the ten target industries and concentrating their promotional activities on them. Countries such as Japan, Germany and Sweden became the main targets of BOI's activities following the 2015 cabinet reshuffle. Attracting investment from these high-profile countries would not only bring substantial economic benefits but also boost the junta's political profile and legitimacy at home and abroad as the government could use these investors as their brand ambassadors. In 2015, the BOI released a series of videos in which some of their existing big-name foreign investor clients, such as BMW, Rolls Royce, Michelin and Ducati, talked about the advantages of investing in Thailand.[93]

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[91] Some sectors, such as tourism, recorded renewed growth in both 2015 and 2016 but the overall economic situation remained bleak. See The World Bank, 'Thailand Economic Monitor.'

[92] McCargo et al., 'Ordering peace,' 66.

[93] For the Michelin video, see 'Michelin: Thriving in Thailand,' YouTube, published 26 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXYPqLaG2cE; for the BMW video, see 'BMW: Thriving In Thailand,' YouTube, published 27 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IUJa6ETfzM; For the Rolls Royce video, see

These investor-ambassadors praised the Thai government for their support of FDI and they even alluded to some of the popular country stereotypes, such as Thai serviceability and smile. They helped the military government to appear more legitimate by letting the generals take advantage of their companies' reputation. This example shows that the concept of brand ambassadorship needs to be extended beyond the citizens of the branded nation to incorporate strategic foreign endorsement.

Just like Suvit's Thailand 4.0 project, the BOI's post-coup investment promotion strategy contained references to King Bhumibol's philosophy of sufficiency economy. The Board's 2016 FDI guide formulated the government's investment vision as follows: 'To promote valuable investment […] to enhance Thailand's competitiveness, to overcome the *"Middle Income Trap"* and to achieve sustainable growth in accordance with the sufficiency economy philosophy [original emphasis].'[94] Although the king's sufficiency philosophy was clearly featured in the Board's vision statement, the rest of the guide made no further reference to it. It outlined the six investment promotion policies consisting of enhancing Thailand's competitiveness, promoting redistributive economic growth and environmental sustainability, driving cluster development, encouraging investment in Thailand's border areas and the Deep South (for economic and security reasons), and promoting Thai investment overseas.[95] Where and how sufficiency would come into this remained unclear. The BOI official explained that they were not enforcing sufficiency onto foreign investors.[96] It was down to individual investors and their 'willingness' whether they would follow the king's philosophy. The official added that sufficiency was mostly related to corporate-social responsibility, which was outside of the BOI's remit.[97] BOI was concerned with the benefits that the investment would bring to Thai economy, its added value, utilisation of raw materials and technology, and overall competitiveness. The Board did not seem to take sufficiency too seriously: instead it focused on profit generation. This tokenistic approach suggests that Bhumibol's sufficiency economy is a faltering political tool rather than a viable economic strategy.

'Rolls Royce,' YouTube, 2 March 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KO6fHU6QYQI; For the Ducati video, see 'Ducati,' YouTube, published 2 March 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HgGc5qA7gA.
[94] Thailand Board of Investment, 'A Guide,' 7.
[95] Ibid, 7.
[96] Interview, BOI.
[97] Ibid.

It is an integral part of the Nation-Religion-King brand that helps to justify the hierarchical and highly unequal political order under virtuous rule.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is an important area for nation branding. Often conceived as a one of the many communication channels for the country's brand identity,[98] it is at the centre of focus for studies within Kaneva's political strand. However, as Browning notes, foreign policy is not merely about creating amiable ties with foreign countries and publics, but it also communicates 'values and identity narratives to [the nation's] citizens.'[99] Thailand's external political image suffered badly as a result of the May 2014 coup. Since the early 1990s, Thailand had been building an image of a bastion of democracy, political freedoms and human rights in a region otherwise dominated by authoritarianism. Although Thailand's political actions were not always in line with the democratic image the country's elites sought to promote, Thailand had succeeded in maintaining a relatively favourable external image of its royalist political order or virtuous rule until the 2006 military coup that ousted the elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra. The coup was a major setback in Thailand's modern political history. The junta claimed that they had seized power to protect Thailand's democracy from the rampant corruption of the Thaksin government.[100] Yet, it soon became clear that the coup was a reassertion of power by Thailand's traditional elites rather than a moral crusade against corrupt politicians.[101] Despite the relatively swift return to civilian rule in 2007, Thailand's political image was tarnished.[102] The mass street protests of pro-Thaksin and anti-Thaksin forces that turned violent between 2008 and 2010 and again between 2013 and 2014 further undermined Thailand's image as the regional bastion of democracy, freedom and human rights.

The 2014 coup was very different from the 2006 coup: it soon became clear that the NCPO was in no rush to restore civilian rule.[103] The reactions of the

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[98] For example, see Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 41.

[99] Browning, 'National self-esteem,' 198.

[100] 'Old soldiers, old habits: The land of smiles is back to being the land of coups,' *The Economist*, 21 September 2006, http://www.economist.com/node/7944306.

[101] Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 'Thailand Since the Coup,' *Journal of Democracy* 19, no.4 (2008): 140.

[102] Pavin Chachavalpongpun, 'Diplomacy under Siege: Thailand's Political Crisis and the Impact on Foreign Policy,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 31, no.3 (2009): 448.

[103] For a good assessment of the differences between the 2006 and 2014 coups, see McCargo, 'Thailand's army.'

international community varied. Thailand's traditional western allies swiftly deplored the coup and called for a quick return to democratic rule. Some adopted more concrete measures in addition to the harsh rhetoric, aimed at increasing the political and economic pressure on the ruling junta. By the end of June 2014, the European Union (EU) suspended all official visits to Thailand and halted ongoing free-trade pact negotiations while the United States Obama administration announced it was making a 4.7 million US dollar cut to its annual military assistance to Thailand.[104] This included the downscaling of the annual Asia-Pacific Cobra Gold military exercise traditionally held in Thailand; an act that symbolised the cooling off of the relations between the US and Thailand as the major US ally in the Southeast Asian region.

Thailand's regional partners and ASEAN members remained mostly silent due to ASEAN's doctrine of non-interference. China, on the contrary, was quick to express support for and strengthen ties with the junta.[105] This has left the Prayuth administration leaning towards China and deepening the economic and political ties between the two nations. For example, the two nations held their first joint air force exercise in November 2015 followed by a joint naval exercise in May 2016. In 2016 Thailand also ordered twenty-eight battle tanks and outlined plans to purchase three submarines from China.[106] The Prayuth administration's approach to Thai foreign policy was not new. Thailand is well-known for its flexible diplomatic tradition, commonly referred to as 'bamboo bending in the wind,' which is based on a paradigm of 'switching support from one power to balance another' for the maximum benefit.[107] The Prayuth administration was playing the 'China card' to decrease its economic dependency on the West but also to dissuade its traditional western allies from taking further actions against the junta. Thailand's rapprochement with China threatened western economic and political interests in the region. As Pavin noted, any further

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[104] See Pavin Chachavalpongpun,'Leaning on Thailand's Junta,' *The New York Times*, 30 June 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/01/opinion/leaning-on-thailands-junta.html.

[105] See 'Roundup: International responses towards Thai situation,' *Prachatai*, 25 June 2014, https://prachatai.com/english/node/4172; 'Thai army delegation visits China amid Western reproach of coup,' *Reuters*, 11 June 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-politics-china-idUSKBN0EM0FO20140611.

[106] Shawn W. Crispin, 'Thailand's Post-Coup Foreign Policy: Omnidirectional or Directionless?,' *The Diplomat*, 10 June 2016, http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/thailands-post-coup-foreign-policy-omnidirectional-or-directionless/.

[107] Pongphisoot Busbarat, '"Bamboo Swirling in the Wind": Thailand's Foreign Policy Imbalance between China and the United States,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no.2 (2016): 236.

deterioration in Thailand's relationship with the West could have had dire economic consequences, especially had the threats of the US and EU boycotts of Thai products materialised, which would in turn undermine the junta's claims to power and political legitimacy at home.[108] Thailand's post-coup foreign policy was thus a function of the junta's domestic political needs. As a result, Thailand's post-coup foreign policy efforts seemed often contradictory: the government frequently chastised the West for failing to understand the coup and their mode of governance, yet at the same time the generals were eager to reiterate their commitment to maintaining strong relationships with Thailand's traditional allies.[109]

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is Thailand's leading foreign policy and public diplomacy body. The Ministry had been known for foreign policy prowess, both domestically and internationally, making it one of Thailand's most prestigious ministries.[110] However, a number of MFA officials confirmed that following the May 2014 coup the NCPO kept the Ministry under strict control.[111] As a result, the MFA's foreign policy activities between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016 were constrained by the coup and the increasingly protracted military rule. The MFA's 2014 Annual Report listed improving foreign confidence in Thailand and the country's international image as one of their top policy priorities for 2015-2018.[112] Scholars writing on Thailand have long noted the importance of surface appearances over substance in Thailand's public domain.[113] As a result, Thai politics is very performative, and the use of political power is often motivated by 'an intense concern to monitor and police surface effects, images, public behaviours, and representations.'[114] On the contrary, there is 'a relative disinterest in controlling the private domain.'[115] This often results in disparities between the surface image and

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[108] Pavin, 'Leaning on.'
[109] Interview, Thai journalist.
[110] Pavin, *Reinventing Thailand*, 44.
[111] Interview with an official A working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 November 2016; Interview with an official B working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 November 2016; Interview with an official C working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 July 2016.
[112] See 'รายงานประจำปี ๒๕๕๗ [Annual Report 2557],' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 2015, http://www.mfa.go.th/main/contents/files/policy-20160217-164259-899002.pdf.
[113] For example, see Jackson, 'Regime of Images,' 181-218; van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*; Larry S. Persons, *The Way Thais Lead: Face as Social Capital* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2016).
[114] Jackson, 'Regime of Images,' 182.
[115] Ibid.

reality and explains, at least in part, why the NCPO was keen to continue branding Thailand as a democratic country that respected political freedoms and human rights even in the light of the coup, the ensuing crackdown on political dissent, the worsening human rights record and the constant postponing of elections.

The MFA's branding activities differed from those of other ministries and governmental agencies with image-building responsibilities (such as TAT). Instead of launching branding campaigns, the MFA relied on traditional diplomatic channels to communicate Thailand's post-coup brand. In the two-and-a-half years following the coup, the MFA held numerous bilateral meetings and political consultations with foreign dignitaries. Thai ambassadors held pre-departure dinners for foreign representatives due to visit Thailand.[116] These meetings and dinners were used to explain the coup and demonstrate the government's commitment to democracy.[117] The MFA also held meetings with Thais living overseas. As Dinnie points out, diasporas present a 'key opportunity to enhance the nation brand' as networks of citizens living abroad can act as the nation's brand ambassadors.[118] This is especially the case where the diaspora members hold important positions of power in, for example, big businesses that can then lobby on the country's behalf. Importantly, Thailand's diaspora consists of different categories of Thai citizens and their relationship with the Thai state varies. For example, there is a considerable number of mostly middle-class, wealthy Bangkokians studying at different schools and universities all across the world. Many of these students study in the fields of business or science and support the country's traditional elites. They were the likely primary target audiences of the MFA meetings. On the other hand, there are the *mia farang* or Thai women who are married to foreigners and live with them abroad. These women are often of less privileged backgrounds and come from the North and Northeast. As such, they are often supporters of the ousted Shinawatras and would be much harder to mobilise by the MFA.

Explaining the coup and demonstrating the government's commitment to democracy took up most of the MFA's post-coup foreign policy activities.[119] A leaked MFA document provides a good insight into what junta-sanctioned explanations of Thailand's political situation looked like. Produced in April 2016, the six-page brief titled 'Thailand – Towards Reform and Sustainable Democracy: "The Need for Public

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[116] Interview, western international organisation.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Dinnie, *Nation Branding*, 227.
[119] Interview A, MFA.

Order and Social Harmony"' was a summary of talking points for the MFA officials and Thai diplomats to use when interacting with foreign publics and dignitaries.[120] The brief described the 2014 coup as an 'intervention' aimed at 'stopping the violence; restoring order; and ensuring stability' pointing out that '[n]ot a single bullet was fired' and that '[t]he public welcomed this intervention as a chance for the country to move on.'[121] It presented post-coup Thailand as a country undergoing a rigorous political reform process that would lead to 'a strengthened and sustainable democracy, with a government that upholds the rule of law, good governance, transparency as well as respects and protects human rights and freedoms.'[122] The brief claimed that the military government took a 'people-centric approach' to governance that would 'enhance [people's] well-being in line with the Government's goal of making Thailand [a] secure, prosperous and sustainable [country].'[123] It implored the international community to 'recognise the progress Thailand has made – and will continue to make – on [the] journey to a strengthened and sustainable democracy that truly meets the needs and aspirations of Thai people.'[124]

The brief was the junta's attempt at exporting their strategic national myth abroad by presenting the coup as a goodwill intervention to save the country from the brink of the civil war. The generals sought to convince the international community that they were the good leaders who cared about Thailand, Thai people and democracy. Although the brief did not explicitly mention Thaksin and his political networks, it blamed Thailand's many political problems on 'unscrupulous politicians' and implied that without the military intervention Thailand would have possibly become a destabilising force in the region.[125] In other words, the generals wanted to persuade the international community that the 2014 coup and the junta-governed Thailand was in their best interest. However, the international political community did not seem to easily buy into the junta's brand messages. As one representative of a western international organisation explained, he was growing increasingly frustrated with the Thai diplomats and the military government who were constantly relaying

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[120] The document was leaked by the Royal Thai Consulate in Chicago.
[121] 'Thailand – Towards Reform and Sustainable Democracy: "The Need for Public Order and Social Harmony",' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 April 2016, http://www.thaiconsulatechicago.org/uploads/Thailand%20Towards%20Reform%20Apr%202016.pdf.
[122] Ibid, 1.
[123] Ibid, 2.
[124] Ibid, 5.
[125] Ibid, 1 and 5.

the same 'brand pitch' that was inconsistent with Thailand's post-coup realities.[126] He saw the government's reluctance to adhere to the truth as the single biggest problem and the most detrimental aspect of their branding efforts.

Bilateral meetings, political consultations and pre-departure dinners were not the only strategies the MFA deployed to disseminate government-sanctioned brand messages about the coup and Thailand's political situation. Shortly after the coup, the MFA sent letters to editors of three English-language foreign newspapers with global circulation, the *Financial Times*, *China Post* and the *Global Times*, to 'explain and create correct understanding' about Thailand and its political situation.[127] This was the MFA's attempt at extending information control beyond Thailand's borders. Yet, the Ministry's choice of newspapers was somewhat peculiar. While the *Financial Times* was an obvious choice – it is a reputable international paper owned by Japanese Nikkei Inc. since 2015 with a circulation of 850,000 across its print and digital platform (as of 2016)[128] – it is less clear why the MFA targeted the *China Post* owned by a Taiwanese newspaper group and the *Global Times* owned by the People's Daily, the official newspaper group of the Communist Party of China. One possible explanation might be that the MFA perceived these two papers as less critical than some other well-established western papers, such as *The Guardian* or *The New York Times*, and therefore more likely to accept the junta's interpretations of the coup and post-coup political developments.

Besides branding Thailand as a democracy, the MFA placed great emphasis on King Bhumibol's philosophy of sufficiency economy. This was in line with branding in other sectors, such as trade and investment. Bhumibol's philosophy featured prominently on Thailand's G77 chairmanship agenda in 2016 and in the country's unsuccessful bid for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat. An MFA document

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[126] Interview, western international organisation.

[127] 'รายงานผลการดำเนินงานตามนโยบายรัฐบาลและการสั่งการของนายกรัฐมนตรี พลเอก ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา นายกรัฐมนตรี กระทรวงการต่างประเทศ ระหว่างวันที่ ๑๒ กันยายน – ๓๑ ตุลาคม ๒๕๕๗ [Report on Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha government's policy and order outputs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 12 September – 31 October 2014],' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 15 September 2017, http://www.mfa.go.th/main/th/policy/2751/51053-รายงานผลการดำเนินงานตามนโยบายรัฐบาลและ การสั่งการขอ.html.

[128] Prior to Nikkei Inc, *Financial Times* was owned by Pearson, a multinational education and publishing company based in London. See 'Nikkei to buy FT Group for £844m from Pearson,' *Financial Times*, 23 July 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/d7e95338-3127-11e5-8873-775ba7c2ea3d.

summarising the country's G77 chairmanship presented sufficiency economy as 'Thailand's gift to an unsustainable world' that was 'the saving grace of the [Thai] Kingdom through the adverse impacts of globalization.'[129] The document went on to explain that it was the king's philosophy that had 'catapulted Thailand to the upper middle-income country' and that it was 'one of [the king's] enduring legacies.'[130] In order words, the document presented sufficiency as Thailand's biggest achievement. Yet, the government's principal motivation behind the promotion of sufficiency was not to share its benefits with the wider world. It was an opportunity to generate international respect for the Thai monarchy and, in so doing, improve Thailand's external image. It was also an opportunity for the junta to publicly reassert its loyalty to the institution, tap into its royal charisma and induce feelings of national pride. A keen international interest in Bhumibol's philosophy would have undoubtedly boosted the junta's claims to power and political legitimacy at home.

As one MFA official explained, the government wanted to make the philosophy of sufficiency economy more relevant to the modern world by integrating in into the 'Thailand 4.0' project.[131] It is important to note that the traditional elites have been trying to promote this philosophy for over twenty years without any real success. As Walker explains, sufficiency economy is not compatible with the economic realities and livelihood strategies of most Thais.[132] In the area of Thailand's foreign policy, the king's philosophy thus served as a distraction from domestic political problems due to its seemingly apolitical nature and a broad resemblance to the global sustainability trend. This was indirectly corroborated by another MFA official, who acknowledged that the Ministry tried using soft power for these purposes.[133] The Ministry even considered hiring consultants from the private sector who would help them create a soft power strategy, but no such consultants were hired between 22 May 2014 and 1

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[129] 'Thailand 2016. From Vision to Action: Inclusive Partnership for Sustainable Development,' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 14 October 2017, 10 http://tica.thaigov.net/main/contents/files/business-20170218-151452-603151.pdf.

[130] Ibid, 10.

[131] Interview B, MFA.

[132] Andrew Walker, 'Royal Sufficiency and Elite Misrepresentation of Rural Livelihoods,' in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager, (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010), 244. Also see Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager, 'Strengthening the Moral Fibre of the Nation: The King's Sufficiency Economy as Ethno-politics,' in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, eds. Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager, (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010), 232-4.

[133] Interview A, MFA.

December 2016.[134] The official explained that MFA's interest in the use soft power was not directly related to the negative international backlash following the coup; they had been using soft power for years.[135] However, the fact that the MFA considered hiring a consultant indicates that their use of soft power might have been limited or that it did not deliver the desired outcomes.

The government's focus on both democracy and the philosophy of sufficiency economy sent out confusing messages both at home and abroad. An MFA official explained that the Ministry had a sense of Thailand's brand but they were not yet clear what that brand was.[136] Kavi Chongkittavorn, a respected Thai journalist and foreign policy expert, claimed that King Bhumibol's philosophy of sufficiency economy was likely to become Thailand's dominant global brand over the next few years as the military government was finding it increasingly difficult to sustain Thailand's democratic image.[137] However, this might not be the case. Following Bhumibol's death, Vajiralongkorn has proved to be a more independent monarch than many Thais had thought.[138] He might not want to continue promoting his father's reign and instead concentrate on building his own identity as Thailand's new monarch that would go beyond his principal identity of a son of highly revered and much beloved King Bhumibol.

Public Relations

The academic literature on nation branding often overlooks the area of public relations (PR) or only mentions it in passing as part of the nation branding mix.[139] For example, Dinnie discusses PR in a single paragraph, concluding that PR 'should be integrated with other elements of the [nation branding] strategy, rather than merely being resorted to as a crisis management tool.'[140] Yet, public relations have played an important role in the junta's nation branding efforts following the 2014 coup. As a

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[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Interview B, MFA.

[137] Interview, Kavi.

[138] Jackson, 'Grateful son,' 6; Michael Peel, 'Thailand's monarchy: where does love end and dread begin?' *Financial Times*, 12 October 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/149d82a4-ae17-11e7-beba-5521c713abf4.

[139] Gyorgy Szondi, 'From image management to relationship building: A public relations approach to nation branding,' *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 6, (2010): 337-8.

[140] Dinnie, *Nation Branding,* 224.

government that seized power through undemocratic means, the Prayuth administration sought to use PR to generate domestic support and legitimacy for the military regime and the royalist political order they represented. Much of the post-coup PR activities were thus aimed at building a positive image of General Prayuth, who was the official 'face' of the coup, his military regime and authoritarian rule. This was a fairly narrow approach to PR. As Szondi points out, relationship building rather than image management should be the core function of PR.[141] The relationship building approach to nation branding is based on a reciprocal communication model characterised by balanced power relations where the resultant nation brand is a product of a continuous negotiation between all stakeholders and target publics who co-create and maintain the national brand.[142] By adopting this approach to nation branding, countries can create stronger and more sustainable nation brands.

Although rather idealistic in nature, the relationship building approach to nation branding would have been more suitable to Thailand's post-coup context than the image management approach adopted by the junta as it would have signalled that the generals were serious about resolving the country's socio-economic and political problems. Yet, building popularity was not the only motivating factor behind the junta's use of PR in post-coup Thailand. As Toledano and McKie point out, PR activities also seek 'to integrate the individual into the collective in a form of social engineering.'[143] In other words, PR activities have socialisation capabilities as they communicate social values, moral codes, and desired forms of behaviour to the citizens. As such, they can help to create new or strengthen the existing shared norms and values that constitute one of the four key elements of political legitimation.

The junta's use of PR in post-coup Thailand seemed to have had two main functions: self-legitimation and socialisation. Despite some initial public support of the coup, the NCPO' continuing popularity was never guaranteed. As examples from the Thai history show, military governments in both 1973 and 1992 were brought down by popular movements. In the latter case, the military suffered a significant loss of 'face' that took years to recover.[144] Following the 2014 coup, Prayuth sought to cultivate an image of a benevolent yet all-powerful paternalistic ruler that was modelled on Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. While Sarit claimed the role of the

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[141] Szondi, 'Image management,' 336.
[142] Ibid, 339.
[143] Margalit Toledano and David McKie, *Public Relations and Nation Building: Influencing Israel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 15.
[144] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 211.

country's father (*pho*), a position later assumed by King Bhumibol, Prayuth's supporters endowed him with the nonetheless paternalistic title of an 'uncle' (*lung*).[145] The use of nicknames is common in Thailand. In fact, very few Thais use legal names in their daily lives. The Thai-language media (and the Thai public) often refer to Prayuth by his nickname 'Tu,' which rather ironically translates as 'to usurp' – from there 'Uncle Tu,' or 'Lung Tu' in Thai. However, it is important to note that most Thais are given their nicknames in early childhood. The link between Prayuth's nickname and his role as the leader of the 2014 coup is thus purely coincidental.

Prayuth's post-2014 coup 'Uncle Tu' nickname was reflective of the patronising tone he used during his 'Returning Happiness to the People' broadcasts. He seemed to have believed that it was his duty to singlehandedly improve the moral standards of the Thai nation. For example, in his broadcast on 8 August 2014, Prayuth reproached Thai people for littering and implored them to follow his example of collecting and disposing waste left behind by others.[146] In another broadcast, on 13 February 2015, Prayuth complained about language standards of Thai children instructing them not to use 'new' words they saw on Facebook or the Internet because these words were undermining the 'beautiful Thai culture and traditions.'[147] Yet, Prayuth's paternalism was more than just a constant moralistic lecturing. It was an attempt at maintaining his 'face' and the 'face' of the military regime.

The concept of 'face' is immensely important in Thai culture. As Persons explains, having 'face' means 'possess[ing] an unquantifiable amount of social power.'[148] This is especially important for Thai leaders who could use their 'face' to 'gain things of great value' such as power, influence or respect.[149] While 'face' is difficult to gain, it can be lost easily and, as Persons argues, '[f]or most Thais, but especially for leaders, *loss of face under any circumstances is flatly unacceptable*

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[145] For example, see 'นายกฯลุงตู่สุดยอด "ป๋าเปรม" ชม กล้ารัฐประหาร ทำประเทศมีความสงบเรียบร้อย ['The wonderful Prime Minister Uncle Tu!' 'Father Prem' praises the brave coup that made the country peaceful and orderly],' *MGR Online*, 29 December 2014, https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9570000149747.

[146] For the full script, see Prayuth Chan-o-cha, 'คืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ [Returning Happiness to the People],' Royal Thai Government, 8 August 2014, http://www.thaigov.go.th/index.php/th/program1/item/85258-id85258.

[147] For the full script, see Prayuth Chan-o-cha, 'คืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ [Returning Happiness to the People],' Royal Thai Government, 13 February 2015, http://www.thaigov.go.th/index.php/th/program1/item/89963-id89963.

[148] Persons, *Face*, 15.

[149] Ibid, 55-6.

[original emphasis].'[150] Hence, Thais would do anything to prevent 'face' loss. The concepts of 'face' and 'face' loss seemed to have played an important role in Prayuth's post-coup PR activities. This was mainly because Prayuth and the NCPO promised in the wake of the coup that they would solve the country's socio-economic and political problems. But the deteriorating economy, the constant postponement of elections, international and domestic criticism of his regime (including some sporadic anti-junta protests) threatened to damage Prayuth's 'face' and the 'face' of the military regime. In this context, PR became Prayuth's self-legitimation tool as he needed to feel secure about his own position and power. Not surprisingly then, there was an increase in PR activities following the 2014 coup.[151]

A growing theme of Prayuth's post-coup PR activities was that Thailand was losing something very important and valuable, its Thainess (and also its ailing king), and the military government was working hard to prevent that from happening. This was yet another variation of the age-old national myth of the military as the nation's saviour. It seems that Prayuth sought to create a degree of social anxiety that would help to justify the coup and his military regime. To this end, he wrote a series of songs: the 2014 'Returning Happiness to Thailand,' the 2015 'Because You Are Thailand,' and the 2016 'Hope and Faith.'[152] These songs were played endlessly on Thai TV and radio. They were uploaded on YouTube and other social media channels accompanied by lyrics and unofficial videos. Some were even uploaded in popular karaoke formats for people to enjoy. Explicitly nationalist and social anxiety-inducing, the three songs contained the recurring themes of unity in the times of hardship, visions of a better and brighter future and notions of good citizenship. The sense of loss was vaguely implied. For example, the 'Returning Happiness to Thailand' song portrays Thailand as a nation that is in danger from frequent unrests and needs saving.[153] This is in direct opposition to the notions of Thais as peace-loving, united and apolitical citizens under

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[150] Ibid, 58.

[151] Interview with Tippatai Saelawong, 26 October 2016.

[152] Versions of all three songs are available on YouTube. For example, see 'Return Happiness To Thailand (คืนความสุขให้ประเทศไทย) [Returning Happiness to Thailand],' YouTube, published 26 March 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g7D-HCg7JM; 'Prayuth Chan-o-cha: "Because You Are Thailand",' YouTube, published 31 December 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz02ziF-Eec&t=15s; 'ความหวังความศรัทธา [Hope and Faith],' YouTube, published 26 October 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FekmQL5EZmQ.

[153] For the full lyrics in Thai, see 'เพลงคืนความสุขให้ประเทศไทย ฮิตข้ามคืน [The Returning Happiness to Thailand song is an overnight hit],' K@pook!, accessed 13 April 2018, https://musicstation.kapook.com/view90179.html.

the concept of Thainess. The 'Because You are Thailand' song paints a similar picture as it reminds Thai people that their nation has to endure and that they should all come together to jointly restore it.[154] This once again implies that Thais are damaging their nation by acting 'un-Thai,' namely by being disunited and not caring about the fate of their nation. Finally, the 'Hope and Faith' song tells Thai people to work together for the sake of Thainess again implying that Thainess is under threat – this time as a result of King Bhumibol's passing (Prayuth released this song after 13 October) and the end of his 'virtuous' era.[155] Prayuth's use of PR seemed to have reflected his desire to preserve his 'face' as a leader. By inducing notions of social anxiety, Prayuth appeared to have wanted to re-direct people's attention away from the nation's economic and political problems towards the problems of collective identity. It was the disunity, lack of Thainess and patriotism the Thai people needed to worry about.

While paternalism worked relatively well for Sarit back in the 1960s, it did not seem to work well for Prayuth between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. Unlike Sarit, Prayuth was not an accomplished speaker. His weekly broadcasts were often too long, he regularly veered off the script and people grew tired of his constant lecturing.[156] Tippatai Saelawong, a researcher at Thailand Development Research Institute, pointed out that more than 90 per cent of people did not watch Prayuth's broadcasts by 2016.[157] This was despite a change in format that turned Prayuth's monologues into Q&A sessions with three female presenters in an apparent attempt to make the broadcasts more appealing.[158] Tippatai explained that the broadcasts were unnecessary and a 'lost opportunity cost' because the government forced them onto all TV channels not just the government-owned ones.[159] Yet, keeping the Friday broadcasts despite their low ratings was also a way for Prayuth to show off his power.

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[154] For the full lyrics in Thai, see 'เนื้อเพลง เพราะเธอคือประเทศไทย - พงศธร พอจิต [The Because You are Thailand lyrics – Phongsathorn Phojit],' Meemodel, 1 January 2016, https://เพลง.meemodel.com/เนื้อเพลง/เพราะเธอคือประเทศไทย_พงศธร%20พอจิต.

[155] For the full lyrics in Thai, see 'นายกฯ แต่งเพลง "ความหวังความศรัทธา" ให้กำลังใจ ประชาชน [Prime Minister composes a song "Hope and Faith" to increase people's morale],' *MThai*, 27 October 2016, https://music.mthai.com/hotissue/250339.html.

[156] For a detailed analysis of Prayuth's speeches, see Boyne Narongdej, 'The Ideology and Translation of the Thai Prime Minister's Weekly Address (2014-2016)' (PhD diss., University of Leeds, forthcoming).

[157] Interview, Tippatai.

[158] 'People no longer happy with PM's weekly TV show,' *The Nation*, 17 May 2016, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/People-no-longer-happy-with-PMs-weekly-TV-show-30286083.html.

[159] Interview, Tippatai

Here, Prayuth's use of soft power in the form of broadcasts did not displace other, more coercive forms of power. It was the coercive power that enabled Prayuth to push the Friday's broadcasts onto Thai commercial TV channels. As Tippatai noted: 'If it was done by a regular government, no one would accept this for sure.'[160] This example shows that nation branding does not supplant the use of hard power. Instead, it can co-exist with it.

Besides Prayuth, the Government Public Relations Department (PRD), which falls under the Office of the Prime Minister, was the main PR agent in post-coup Thailand. A PRD official explained that the Department's post-coup PR strategy was largely the same as any of their pre-coup strategies but the Prayuth administration placed more emphasis on information control.[161] The Department's long-term strategy under the military government was to become a trustworthy communications centre that would 'develop the citizen's quality of life and build a positive image for the country.'[162] The monarchy was an area of heightened PR activity between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. Monarchical PR is nothing new in Thailand and every year different celebrations are held to commemorate significant royal dates, such as the king's or queen's birthday. Yet, the Prayuth administration put much more effort into these events both in 2015 and 2016. The 2015 'Bike for Mom' and 'Bike for Dad' were the two biggest monarchical PR events organised to commemorate the king's and queen's birthdays in recent years. The impact of these two events was felt long after they ended. For example, 'Bike for Dad' and 'Bike for Mom' posters continued to adorn a number of billboards in Bangkok, especially along the downtown Ratchaprasong area for more than a year. They were only taken down following Bhumibol's death in October 2016.

Bhumibol's death meant that the PRD needed to rethink its existing PR strategy and reallocate the budget as much of its PR activities until the end of the year were related to Bhumibol's passing.[163] As Tippatai pointed out, there had always been a problem with this monarchical PR in Thailand and the resources governments spent on it because Thailand had no laws that would regulate this public expenditure.[164] Yet, no one would dare to question it because monarchical PR was the sign of loyalty.[165]

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Interview, PRD.
[162] Strategy diagram provided by the PRD informant on 21 November 2016.
[163] Interview, PRD.
[164] Interview, Tippatai.
[165] Ibid.

This at least partly explains why the military government engaged in so much monarchical PR following the 2014 coup. These activities followed a simple, linear logic: the bigger and more expensive the PR events are, the more loyalty they convey. Tippatai felt that volume of the post-coup monarchical PR was excessive; the public money spent on these events could have been used for other purposes that the public might benefit from more, such as HIV campaigning. However, such use of PR was in line with the junta's broader political objectives to undermine the political networks of the Shinawatras, strengthen the power of traditional elites, and to gain political legitimacy as these events served as identity reminders for the Thai people of their duty to revere the royal institution.

The junta-defined 12 values of Thainess were another area of heightened PR activity in post-coup Thailand. The PRD even created a dedicated webpage for the promotional activities in this area.[166] Although the website was very rudimentary and dysfunctional at times, it contained links to many videos, infographics, press releases and competition calls all related to the topic of 12 values. One of the competition calls was for an essay writing contest that the Department organised in 2014. It invited Thais 'to learn about and understand the 12 main values of Thai people and to gather opinions of how these […] values […] can be applied to everyday life.'[167] The competition was open to all Thai students from elementary school to higher education (including vocational students), who were asked to write a two-page essay on any one or more of the junta-defined 12 values. Prizes ranged from twenty-thousand to fifty-thousand baht for the winning essays depending on the educational level (the higher the level, the higher the prize). This would have been a considerable amount of prize money for students from poor backgrounds and is yet another example of the junta using material incentives to re-engage Thai people with norms and values that help legitimate virtuous rule.

The PRD served as a mere communication intermediary between the government and Thai people.[168] Communicating government policy and gathering popular feedback were the two main day-to-day activities carried out by the PRD.

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[166] For the website, see ค่านิยมหลักของคนไทย 12 ประการ ตามนโยบายของ คสช. [The 12 main values of the Thai people according to the NCPO policy], accessed 25 August 2017, http://flagship.prd.go.th/main.php?filename=index_announced.

[167] See 'หลักเกณฑ์การประกวดเรียงความ เรื่อง "ค่านิยมไทย ๑๒ ประการ" [Essay writing competition rules for the topic "12 Thai values"],' The Government Public Relations Department, accessed 25 August 2017, http://www.prd.go.th/download/dock.pdf.

[168] Interview, PRD.

Because of this, the PRD's public relations work was very narrow, largely domestically-focused and closely related to the NCPO's political agenda. Besides policy communication and feedback collection, the PRD also acted as the main public relations advisor to all ministries and governmental agencies. Yet, many ministries and governmental agencies chose to outsource their public relations work to professional agencies because the PRD lacked the necessary skills and capabilities to create effective public relations campaigns. Despite the great popularity of social media, most of the Department's PR activities took form of domestic advertisements on television and radio.[169] However, the PRD skill- and capability-shortage was not a direct result of the coup and the military-dominated cabinet. The department already struggled to meet the needs of the Yingluck administration. One National Economic and Social Development Board official revealed that the Yingluck administration first tasked the PRD to come up with Thailand's global branding project but because of the Department's skills gap and narrow domestic focus, Yingluck had to outsource the project to Winkreative.[170]

When asked what the PRD was doing to improve Thailand's image, the official said that they were not doing anything because it was not in their powers to decide what to do.[171] It was the prime minister who needed to order action. The PRD's lack of proactivity and bureaucratic inertia did not bode well for Prayuth and his military government as Prayuth's public mishaps often led to domestic and international mockery and PR disasters. For example, Prayuth made international news in September 2014 for suggesting that Thailand might not be a safe place for attractive female tourists if they wear bikinis.[172] He made these comments only a few days after two British tourists, one of them an attractive-looking female, were murdered at a popular tourist island of Koh Tao. His comments draw harsh criticism both in Thailand and abroad, and he had to publicly apologise. In March 2015, Prayuth made international news for threatening Thai and foreign journalists, who did not

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[169] Ibid.

[170] Interview, NESDB.

[171] Interview, PRD.

[172] For example, see Natasha Culzac, 'Thailand beach murders: Thai PM suggests "attractive" female tourists cannot expect to be safe wearing bikinis,' *The Independent*, 17 September 2014, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/thailand-beach-murders-thai-pm-suggests-attractive-female-tourists-cannot-expect-to-be-safe-in-9737016.html; 'Thai PM apologises for bikini warning after Britons' murder,' *The Guardian*, 18 September 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/thai-prime-minister-apologises-bikini-comments-murder.

adhere to the government's official line, with executions.[173] Once again, his comments were widely criticised and condemned both in Thailand and abroad. In February 2016, Prayuth was publicly lambasted, this time mostly by national media (both English and Thai language), for his misogynist comments after he opined that the Thai society would be worse off if men and women were equal.[174] Saksith Saiyasombut, a well-known Thai political journalist, mocked Prayuth for his tendency to go off script and say something inappropriate by referring to his speech style as 'compulsive loquaciousness,' while the English-language *Khaosod* online newspaper compiled a tongue-in-cheek list of Prayuth's best public gaffes.[175] Prayuth did not escape international mockery either. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* published a chart of five humorous things Prayuth had said or done by May 2015, while an article in the *Guardian* made some gently satirical and sarcastic comparisons between Prayuth, his regime and his techniques of governance to those of George Orwell's 'Big Brother' in his *1984* novel.[176] Although acutely aware of his PR disasters, Prayuth's aides and advisors did not dare to advise him on how to behave in public.[177]

The post-coup PR activities did not seem to work well in regard to the junta's self-legitimation and socialisation objectives. General Prayuth and his military regime were often subject to open criticism and satire both at home and abroad. Prayuth's public conduct characterised by regular ill-tempered outbursts seemed to indicate that

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[173] For example, see 'Thai PM Prayuth warns media, says has power to execute reporters,' *Reuters*, 25 March 2015, https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-thailand-junta-media/thai-pm-prayuth-warns-media-says-has-power-to-execute-reportersidUKKBN 0ML0RL20150325; 'Thai prime minister threatens to "execute" journalists,' *Aljazeera*, 25 March 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/thai-prime-minister-threatens-journalists-150325153930665.html.

[174] See 'Misogynist military boss: Prayuth says gender equality "will make Thai society deteriorate",' *Coconuts Bangkok*, 1 February 2016, https://coconuts.co/bangkok/news/_misogynist-military-boss-prayuth-says-gender-equality-will-make-thai-society-deteriorate/.

[175] See Saksith Saiyasombut, 'Compulsive loquaciousness: Thai junta PM goes off script at media gala dinner,' *Asian Correspondent*, 30 April 2015, https://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/04/compulsive-loquaciousness-thai-junta-pm-goes-off-script-at-media-gala-dinner/#PUD8jvLBQbVwmqOx.97; '2016's Most wtf and very Prayuth stories,' *Khaosod*, 27 December 2016, http://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2016/12/27/2016s-wtf-prayuth-stories/.

[176] James Hookway, '5 Things Thailand's Gen.Prayuth Has Said or Done,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 May 2015, https://blogs.wsj.com/briefly/2015/05/07/5-things-thailands-gen-prayuth-has-said-or-done/; Abigail Haworth, 'Bangkok's Big Brother is watching you,' *The Guardian*, 22 March 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/22/bangkok-big-brother-politics-ruling-party-democracy.

[177] '"The boss knows best",' *The Nation*, 16 October 2014, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/The-boss-knows-best-30245569.html.

his sense of security and self-esteem did not improve over time. His Friday broadcasts quickly declined in popularity as people grew tired of Prayuth and his constant moralising. Yet, rather surprisingly, Prayuth's three songs turned out to be public hits. This indicates that some of the government's softer strategies might have found some resonance with the Thai population. The role of the PRD in the junta's post-coup branding activities was more of a communications intermediary rather than an active campaigner. The Department was helping the government to disseminate the junta's shared norms and values, such as the 12 values of Thainess, and to engage in monarchical PR activities. Yet, it did not act of its own accord or offer PR advice to the prime minister. This at least partly explains why the junta's post-coup PR results were at best mixed.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine the junta's nation branding efforts across five different sectors: tourism, economy and trade, foreign direct investment, foreign policy, and public relations. The chapter argued that despite their ostensibly external orientations, these five sectors were part of the junta's broader political project aimed at undermining the political networks of the Shinawatras, strengthening the power of the country's traditional elites and gaining political legitimacy. Contrary to the assumption of some critical studies that nation branding transfers the state's authority over national identity to private corporations, the junta's branding efforts in the tourism and foreign direct investment sector indicated that the junta was re-claiming the state's right to define the boundaries of Thainess. Thainess was the main vehicle for nation branding across many different sectors, such as tourism, economy and trade, and public relations. It was used by the military government and their political networks as a social engineering tool aimed at shaping social attitudes and behaviours of the Thai citizens and setting foreign visitors' expectations. However, these efforts were not entirely successful. Some were met with subtle resistance, for example, in the form of negative online comments, while others became subject of media mockery.

Many branding campaigns produced in the five sectors contained a considerable degree of governmentality, such as the 'I hate Thailand' campaign in the tourism sector or the Thainess DNA concept in the economy, trade and exports sector. In these sectors, economic success was linked to highly-politicised and conservative behavioural traits and social attitudes of Thai citizens promoted under the auspices of

Thainess. Yet, these behavioural traits and social attitudes were not aimed at driving the 'neoliberal economisation' of the Thai society as many critical scholars, such as Varga or Jansen, would assume. Instead, they aimed for the depoliticization of Thai society. King Bhumibol's sufficiency economy was another recurring theme of branding activities across many different sectors. The economy, trade and exports, foreign direct investment, and foreign policy sectors all contained references to sufficiency. Even though sufficiency was an integral part of the two explicitly economic sectors (foreign direct investment and economy, trade and exports), its function was primarily symbolic and political as demonstrated by the BOI half-hearted attempts at its promotion. The junta used sufficiency as a soft power tool to distract international attention from the country's domestic socio-political and economic problems. At the same time, sufficiency served as a reminder for the Thai people to respect and revere the monarchy before and during the crucial period of the royal transition.

In relation to the broader academic discourse on nation branding, this chapter demonstrated that non-democratic regimes might use nation branding as part of their legitimation processes. Through nation branding, governments in these regimes might seek to reassert their authority over the definitions of collective identity. Instead of transferring this authority to private sector, these governments use nation branding to disseminate their own notions of collective identity in order to shape social attitudes and behaviours of domestic citizens and manage expectations of foreign publics and governments. Through the use of nation branding, they create and disseminate new strategic national myths that contain strong elements of governmentality, work as social engineering tools and identity reminders. As the case of post-coup Thailand showed, this is true even for branding in ostensibly externally-oriented sectors such as tourism, foreign policy and foreign direct investment. The following chapter examines how nation branding operates in more internally-focused sectors, namely education, culture and private sector. The data analysed include semi-structured elite interviews and campaign materials.

CHAPTER 5: THAILAND'S INTERNAL NATION BRANDING

For the National Council for Peace and Order's post-coup nation branding efforts to succeed, they needed to find resonance with the Thai citizens themselves. As Aronczyk explains, 'the primary responsibility for the success of the nation brand lies with individuals: the nation's citizens, members of the diaspora or even non-citizens […] who wish to have a stake in its success.'[1] The citizen buy-in was especially important for the Thai generals who used nation branding as a strategy for political legitimation. When they seized power on 22 May 2014, the virtuous reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the central legitimating source of virtuous rule, was nearing the end. By the time of the coup, the then eighty-six-year-old monarch had largely withdrawn from Thailand's public and political life. Except for a handful of increasingly rare public appearances, Bhumibol had relinquished almost all of his public duties and had spent most of the previous eight years in-and-out of hospital. He did not publicly intervene in the events preceding the 2014 coup. There was no royal call to action similar to his 25 April 2006 televised speech to the country's constitutional judges, which is widely believed to have led to the annulment of the April 2006 snap election won by Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party.[2] Although it is unclear whether Bhumibol really favoured a military takeover, his actions helped to pave the way for the September 2006 coup.[3] By the 2014 coup, Bhumibol was no longer an active political force. The same was true for Queen Sirikit, who withdrew from public life following a stroke in 2012.

The cult of personality built around King Bhumibol had allowed the country's traditional elites to continue using the king and his virtuous reign to legitimise their actions even after the king retreated from the public life.[4] However, the years of political conflict that followed the 2006 coup undermined the royal charisma among some pro-Thaksin supporters, who grew disillusioned with the palace that openly sided with the anti-Thaksin forces. Queen Sirikit significantly contributed to the

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[1] Aronczyk, 'Living the brand,' 54.

[2] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 238.

[3] Ferrara notes that the 2006 coup-makers sought to secure the support of Queen Sirikit rather than King Bhumibol ahead of the coup. In the early 2000's, Bhumibol decided to leave Bangkok and its politics behind and go into semi-seclusion at his Hua Hin palace. Sirikit then became the most influential political figure in the palace. It might well be the case that Sirikit, rather than Bhumibol, sanctioned the 2006 coup. See Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 235.

[4] Thongchai, 'Hyper-royalism,' 26-7.

decline of royal charisma among the pro-Thaksin supporters when she presided over the funeral of a female PAD protester in October 2008 who died during street protests against the then pro-Thaksin government of Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat (Thaksin's brother-in-law). Many Red Shirts refer to this as the moment that opened their eyes to the monarchy's partisan role in Thai politics.[5] Coupled with the prospects of Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn being a significantly less popular and virtuous monarch than Bhumibol, the NCPO (and the traditional elites) needed to look for alternative sources of legitimacy to keep the increasingly fragile virtuous rule alive. They found sources of legitimacy in notions of Thainess and collective national identity that were still associated with the Thai monarchy but did not require the continuation of the virtuous reign.

This chapter examines the junta's internal nation branding efforts between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016 in the education, culture and private sectors and addresses the following research question: What are the political motivations behind internally-oriented branding (identity campaigns)? The chapter argues that the Prayuth administration was using internally-focused nation branding campaigns to diffuse virtue across Thai society in preparation for the post-Bhumibol era. Yet, these efforts did not fully succeed in motivating Thai people to work towards strengthening virtuous rule. The following sections present evidence based on empirical data generated through semi-structured elite interviews, focus groups, participant observations and campaign materials.

Education

Education does not feature prominently in the conventional literature on nation branding. Most studies across Kaneva's three strands do not address the question of education and the role it plays in the process of nation branding. The few studies that mention education only do so in passing. For example, Dinnie commends South Korea for grasping '[t]he internal education aspect of nation branding' but he does not elaborate on the concept any further.[6] Aronczyk discusses 'brand education' in the context of Polish nation branding but her analysis is brief and confined to two paragraphs only.[7] Anholt, an independent policy advisor and a self-professed father of nation branding, writes about this topic in one of his well-known nation-branding

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[5] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 244.
[6] Dinnie, *Nation branding*, 15.
[7] Aronczyk, *Branding the nation*, 93-4.

books, but he devotes less than two pages to it.[8] Although he acknowledges that education 'plays an important role in establishing the image of the country' as well as in creating 'a better informed, more enthusiastic and prouder' citizens,[9] his analysis of how education supports the nation branding process is very simplistic and overly optimistic.

Despite years of heavy public investment and relatively high student participation rates, the quality of Thailand's educational system is low.[10] Poor teaching standards (especially outside Bangkok and other major cities), teacher-centred rote-learning, corporal punishment, high cost of schooling, routinised bribery of teachers, and a highly-centralised decision-making system have resulted in Thailand repeatedly scoring badly in the global education ranking by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). For example, PISA 2012 ranked Thailand as the fiftieth out of the total of sixty-five countries for its overall scores in reading, maths and science.[11] This was a very poor result for Thailand compared to the performance of some of its neighbours such as Singapore and Vietnam that ranked second and seventeenth respectively. Three years later, PISA 2015 ranked Thailand as the fifty-fourth out of seventy countries marking a further drop in the country's education system quality while Singapore and Vietnam had both improved their rankings.[12] Singapore ranked first with top scores across all three disciplines. Whereas Vietnam, despite lower levels of economic development than Thailand, rose by nine places making it the eight-highest performing country in the overall rankings.

When the NCPO seized power in May 2014, improving the country's education was high on the generals' agenda. General Prayuth Chan-o-cha addressed the need for a nationwide education reform for the first time in his 'Returning Happiness to the People' broadcast on 13 June 2014. He approached education reform in his own paternalistic way by repeatedly telling Thai people to *jai yen yen* (calm down) because the NCPO was already working on improving the dire state of the Thai

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[8] Anholt, *Competitive identity*, 107-8.

[9] Ibid, 107.

[10] For example, see OECD/UNESCO, *Education in Thailand: An OECD-UNESCO Perspective, Reviews of National Policies for Education* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), 19, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264259119-en.

[11] See 'Pisa 2012 results: which country does best at reading, maths and science?' *The Guardian*, accessed 20 November 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/dec/03/pisa-results-country-best-reading-maths-science.

[12] 'PISA 2015: PISA Results in Focus,' OECD, accessed 20 November 2017, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf.

education system.[13] Prayuth outlined his reform plans as follows: '[We] will improve the entire education system [by] concentrating on the promotion of the national Thai history, discipline, virtue, moral standards, […] consideration of national interests, knowledge of one's [civic] rights and duties.'[14] Instead of setting out clear educational goals and structural aims, Prayuth's reform plans comprised a vague set of behavioural and attitudinal objectives. Patriotism, discipline, civic duties, goodness and morality were the central pillars of Thailand's post-coup education strategy. How the NCPO wanted to tackle the pressing educational problems the country was facing remained unclear.

More comprehensive reform plans started to emerge in September 2014. The NCPO-appointed National Legislative Assembly (NLA) published a national education reform agenda on 5 September. The agenda set out 'to develop [Thai] students so that they are able to think, analyse and learn independently, have desirable qualities and skills that are suitable for the twenty-first century' by: (1) integrating the entire education system; (2) reforming teacher training and development; (3) introducing communication technologies into learning; (4) improving vocational education to meet international standards and Thailand's economic needs; (5) encouraging institutions of higher education to focus on the quality rather than quantity of degree provision; (6) encouraging private sector to get involved in and support the education system; (7) increasing and expanding educational opportunities; and (8) improving education in the three Malay-Muslim provinces (the Deep South).[15] Although the NLA reform agenda did not make a reference to Prayuth's behavioural and attitudinal objectives, goodness and morality were once again emphasised as Thailand's post-coup educational goals in the NCPO's eleven-point policy framework published on 11 September.[16] In fact, the framework clearly laid out that the junta would 'indoctrinate good values and consciousness' into Thai people as part of their education policy.[17] By the time the September policy framework was published, the Ministry of Education had already started revising the

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[13] For the full script, see Prayuth Chan-o-cha, 'คืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ [Returning Happiness to the People],' Royal Thai Government, 13 June 2014, http://www.thaigov.go.th/index.php/th/program1/item/83942-id83942.

[14] Ibid.

[15] 'กมธ. ศึกษาฯ ติดตามความคืบหน้า "ปฏิรูปการศึกษาไทย" [Education commissioners progress steadily towards the "Thai education reform"],' National Legislative Assembly, 5 September 2014, http://click.senate.go.th/?p=5214.

[16] 'Policy statement,' 6-7.

[17] Ibid, 7.

Thai curriculum based on the NCPO's demands of patriotism, civic duties, discipline, goodness and morality with the new curriculum coming to use in the second semester of the 2014 school year.[18] According to this new curriculum, Thai students were to study a new school subject on civic duties that was extracted from a broader topic of social sciences to become a subject in its own right.[19] They were also required to recite Prayuth's 12 values of Thainess in addition to the daily morning rituals of national anthem singing and flag raising.[20] This was a quick delivery on the junta's demands considering the customary rigidness of Thailand's bureaucratic structures.

In the Thai context, education has always been an important tool of socialisation and political indoctrination.[21] As Tan points out, the greater the insecurity of the Thai ruling elites, the more indoctrinating the state education system is.[22] This was definitely the case of the Prayuth administration and its approach to education between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. The generals treated Thai education as a function of their domestic political needs. They sought to detach virtuous rule from the figure of the king in preparation for the post-Bhumibol era. Their post-coup education policy was aimed at shifting the onus of virtue onto Thai people. In other words, virtue was no longer to be located in the concept of *dhammaraja* but rather in the notions of Thainess and collective national identity, which were still associated with the Thai monarchy but did not require the continuous presence of a virtuous monarch. The junta's narrow and conservative interpretations of Thainess and collective national identity were the new grounds for political legitimation based on shared norms and values. The junta's post-coup education

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[18] 'Education ministry to integrate junta's 12 Thai values into education curriculum,' *Prachatai*, 13 July 2014, https://prachatai.com/english/node/4215.

[19] The project was first piloted in BKK before being rolled out nationally in November 2014. See 'กทม.เพิ่ม "วิชาหน้าที่พลเมือง" ให้โรงเรียนในสังกัด 438 แห่ง [Bangkok adds subject on 'civic duties' to 438 schools],' *Thairath*, 14 October 2014, https://www.thairath.co.th/content/4566 78; 'ประกาศกระทรวงศึกษาธิการ เรื่องการเพิ่มวิชาหน้าที่พลเมืองเป็นวิชาเพิ่มเติมในหลักสูตร แกนกลางการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน พุทธศักราช ๒๕๕๑ [Announcement of the Ministry of Education on adding the civic duties subject as an additional subject to the 2008 school curriculum for basic education],' Secondary Education Service Area Office 38, accessed 20 September 2018, http://www.spm38.go.th/home/attachments/article/ 1052/1.pdf.

[20] 'Students to recite '12 national core values' daily,' *The Nation*, 17 September 2014, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/breakingnews/30243485.

[21] Connors, *National identity*, 2.

[22] Michelle Tan, 'The Politics of the Decentralisation of Basic Education' (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2007), 2.

policy thus focused on changing the social attitudes and behaviours of Thai students rather than making deep-structural changes to the country's education system. As such, the junta's post-coup education policy is an example of internal nation branding aimed at achieving a society-wide virtuous self-management of the Thai citizens. The ultimate goal of the junta's education policy was to create a deferent, docile, and above all apolitical Thai citizenship that would not challenge the semi-authoritarian rule by the traditional elites. Varga's assertion that governments choose to use nation branding because it promises to correct 'inadequate self-management of the citizens' and their collective identity without the need for structural reforms thus also applies to the junta's post-coup branding efforts in the area of education policy.[23] Just like in the tourism sector, the junta's internal branding efforts in the education sector can be conceptualised in Foucauldian terms as techniques of control that seek to connect with and mobilise the self-conduct of Thai citizens for certain purposes.[24]

It is important to note that Thailand's post-coup education policy was not all about state-led indoctrination of shared norms and values. Between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016, the Ministry of Education initiated a number of policies and projects that were aimed at increasing the overall quality of Thai education. For example, the 2014 'DLTV (Distance Learning Television)' and 'DLIT (Distance Learning via Information Technology)' projects were to tackle the lack of teachers and improve accessibility of education in remote areas.[25] The 2015 'Moderate Class, More Knowledge' policy cut down the number of class hours by two to allow more time for extra-curricular activities.[26] The 2016 '*Pracharath* school' project sought to develop a select number of primary and secondary schools with the joint help of the government, public and private sectors to achieve a better-quality market-oriented

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[23] Varga, 'Politics of nation branding,' 837.

[24] Rehman, 'Unfulfilled Promises,' 135-6.

[25] 'การพัฒนาคุณภาพการศึกษาด้วยเทคโนโลยีการศึกษาทางไกลผ่านดาวเทียม (DLTV) [Developing the quality of education with distance learning television technology],' DLThailand, accessed 15 September 2018, http://www.dlthailand.com/kar-cadkar-suksa-thang-kil-phan-dawtheiym.

[26] 'ศธ.ประกาศนโยบาย "การลดเวลาเรียน เพิ่มเวลารู้" และ "การประดับธงชาติให้ใหม่และมีสี สดใสเสมอ" [Ministry of Education announces the "Moderate Class, More Knowledge" and "Redecorating the national flag so that it always looks as new and has fresh and vibrant colours" policies],' Ministry of Education, 27 August 2015, http://www.moe.go.th/moe/th/news/detail.php?NewsID=42691&Key=news_act.

education that would drive national economic growth and global competitiveness.[27] Following the launch of the Thailand 4.0 project in April 2016, the Ministry of Education started formulating their own 'Education 4.0' strategy. Speaking at an educational festival 'Think Beyond 4.0' in Bangkok in November 2016, Dr Teerakiat Jareonsettasin, the then Minister of Education, outlined that under its 'Education 4.0' strategy the Ministry would focus on the development of critical thinking skills, English-language skills and STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and maths) to achieve creativity and innovation[28] – the key drivers of the new 4.0 age Thailand was aiming for.

The government's post-coup education policy was contradictory. On the one hand, it emphasised the need for innovation and creativity while, on the other, it strove for more state-led indoctrination of students. As such, the policy was a good reflection of the NCPO's legitimation needs based on both economic performance (output-based rationales) and traditional norms and values (ideology-based rationales). It resulted in notions of bounded creativity and innovation, where creativity and innovation were desirable only in those areas of education that did not threaten the power and legitimacy of the traditional elites and their political networks. This aligned comfortably with the junta's strategic national myth of an economically modernising, yet socially traditional and culturally unique country. Not surprisingly, then, the government's post-coup education policy was criticised for making only superficial changes compared to the much-needed overhaul of the entire education system.[29] As one teacher in the Northeast pointed out, the military government had not consulted teachers before making any of these changes.[30] For example, the new curriculum

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[27] For example, see 'โรงเรียนประชารัฐ (VTR) [Pracharath school (VTR)],' YouTube, published 30 May 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jpdavg51GI.

[28] 'การศึกษาในยุค Thailand 4.0 [Education in the Thailand 4.0 age],' *Chiang Mai News*, 22 November 2016, https://www.chiangmainews.co.th/page/archives/540859.

[29] Daniel Maxwell, 'Education in Thailand: Changing times?,' *Asian Correspondent*, 17 October 2014, https://asiancorrespondent.com/2014/10/education-in-thailand-changing-times/#kdSY3GudQA02IXO9.97; 'Education Reform: Cuts in class hours and beyond,' *Bangkok Post*, 4 September 2015, https://www.nexis.com/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23_T27054369998&format=GNBFI&startDocNo=1176&resultsUrlKey=0_T27054405394&backKey=20_T27054405395&csi=410348&docNo=1196; 'ประเมิน 4 ปีรัฐบาล "บิ๊กตู่" "เกือบตก" ปฏิรูปการศึกษา [Evaluating 4 years of "Big Tu's" government that "nearly failed" to reform the education],' *Matichon*, 24 May 2018, https://www.matichon.co.th/education/news 969432.

[30] Focus group with Red Shirt villagers, Ubon Ratchathani, 14 October 2016.

introduced even more memorisation and the reduced class hours were a nuisance for working parents.[31]

The private sector was instrumental in supporting the junta's internal nation branding efforts. In 2015, Amarin Printing and Publishing, a Bangkok-based publishing house known for its affiliations to the monarchy,[32] published a short Thai-language guide entitled *Civic Duty* in its '100-page genius' book series (see Illustration 5.1). The book was sold by all major booksellers and at book fairs in Bangkok.[33] Written as a series of short infographics organised in eight chapters, the book promises to introduce the readers to the junta-defined 12 values of Thainess, ASEAN civic duties and other 'interesting information that will help [Thai people] better understand [their] civic duties.'[34] Similar to Prayuth's Friday broadcasts, the book's tone is distinctly didactic and paternalistic. Even the more general discussions and definitions of civic duties and good citizenship are permeated with references to social unity, peace, order, and King Bhumibol's philosophy of sufficiency economy. For example, a section on page 8 titled 'Why we need to be good citizens' explains that good citizens 'do not cause turbulence or trouble in order to preserve order and peace in society' and they 'live their lives according to the main principles of the [king's philosophy of] sufficiency economy' so as to contribute to the country's self-development.[35] Contrary to this emphasis on unity, peace, order and the sufficiency economy, the book pays very little attention to citizens' political rights and duties which it narrowly defines in terms of participation in elections. It even links the breakdown of democracy to the citizens' (mis)conduct rather than elite behaviour or weak institutional design. For example, page 33 warns the readers that 'if [they] use [their individual rights and freedoms] in careless and unbounded ways, [this] might have a very big impact on the society and the country.'[36] Page 35 then reminds the readers that good citizens 'should not get involved in vote buying and should not use political power to dominate over others,' cause social divisions or use their freedoms

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[31] Focus group – villagers, Ubon Ratchathani.

[32] Amarin has published literary works of King Bhumibol, Princess Sirindhorn and Princess Galayani Vadhana, Bhumibol's older sister. See 'Publishing,' Amarin, accessed 3 December 2017, http://www.amarin.co.th/corp/en/Products.aspx.

[33] Field notes, June-December 2016.

[34] Thotsamon Chanadisay, อัจฉริยะ *100 หน้า หน้าที่พลเมือง* [*100-page Genius: Civic duty*] (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2015).

[35] Ibid, 8.

[36] Ibid, 33.

arbitrarily and selfishly.[37] In deploying the same language the traditional elites have used to discredit the Shinawatras, their political networks and supporters, the book makes it clear what classifies as 'good' and 'bad' citizenship.

Illustration 5.1: *Civic Duty* book.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

Civic Duty is an example of what Connors calls a strategy 'of citizen construction, the creation of a self-governing subject, which is simultaneously a component of the broader hegemony sought by the [Thai] state.'[38] The constant emphasis on unity, peace and order works contrary to the democratic principles based on the institutionalisation of conflict. The book creates unrealistic expectations about democracy and democratic governance that are irreconcilable with the realities of everyday politics. How does the *Civic Duty* book define good citizenship? Pages 42 and 43 outline a total of nineteen duties that good citizens should uphold in relation to the Thai national triad of Nation-Religion-King (see Table 5.1). Out of the nineteen duties, seven are linked to upholding the Thai nation, five to religion which is narrowly defined in terms of Buddhism, and seven to the monarchy. None of the duties requires political participation. The duty requiring citizens to participate in the country's elections that is mentioned on few occasions throughout the book does not

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[37] Ibid, 35.
[38] Connors, *National identity,* 8.

appear on pages 42 and 43. The nineteen duties limit the concept of good citizenship to ethnic Thais who are Buddhists and royalists leaving out a considerable portion of Thai society including Malay Muslims in the Deep South, members of ethnic hill tribes in the North, or Red Shirt villagers and pro-Thaksin supporters in the North and Northeast. In many respects, the book reverts to more illiberal interpretations of Thai citizenship that dominated state discourse prior to the 1990s.[39]

Table 5.1: Duties of good Thai citizens according to the *Civic Duty* book.[40]

Nation	Religion	King
• Be compassionate towards fellow citizens and love [national] unity. • Be a good citizen. • Sacrifice for the society and the public. • Protect [national] sovereignty and the country, not letting anybody invade or destroy [the country]. • Preserve the wealth of the nation, public wealth, ancient locations and the environment. • Strictly follow the law. • Be proud of Thainess and preserve the beautiful Thai culture and traditions.	• Preserve Buddhism. • Participate in religious ceremonies. • Respect Lord Buddha, the Lord Buddha's teachings, [and] monks. • Study diligently and follow the Lord Buddha's teaching in Buddhism. • Do good and refrain from committing sins, use wisdom to understand the world, nature and life.	• Worship and display loyalty to the king. • Do not insult or intend evil to the king and members of the royal family. • Protect the king and members of the royal family from harm and insult. • Study royal development projects in order for them to be a method for constituting the society. • Study the royal words and guidance in order to implement them in [your] daily life. • Study and seek knowledge on the institution of the monarchy both in the past and present. • Be a good person in the society.

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[39] For a more detailed discussion of the different developments of state discourse on Thai citizenship, see Connors, 'Ministering Culture,' 526-32.
[40] All translations in this table are my own. See Thotsamon, *Civic duty*, 42-3.

It seeks to extend and institutionalise 'Thainess Deficiency Syndrome,' a feeling described by Kasian among the Sino-Thais of having to prove one's Thainess by behaving more 'Thai' than Thais due to different ethnic, cultural and/or linguistic background.[41] Therefore, it is no longer just the ethnic Sino-Thais who need to prove themselves as 'good' citizens but also everybody else who does not fit this narrow definition of a royalist, Buddhist, ethnic Thai.

The book's narrow definition of religion within the Thai national triad is reflective of renewed efforts to institutionalise Buddhism as the national religion in the post 2014-coup era. Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang, a Thai constitutional law scholar, points out that constitution drafting committees in 1997 and 2007 were facing demands from Buddhist fundamentalists to grant Buddhism the official status of national religion.[42] These demands were unsuccessful as all Thai constitutions from 1997 onwards required the Thai state to protect and promote Buddhism alongside other religions.[43] The abrogation of the country's constitution following the 2014 coup opened up yet another opportunity to turn Buddhism into the official state religion. Although this did not happen, Article 67 of the 2017 constitution recognised Buddhism as the religion of 'the majority of Thai people' that needed to be fostered and protected.[44] McCargo et al. note that this was a compromise that satisfied nobody: the constitution 'inflamed minority sentiments without actually granting Buddhism national religion status.'[45] As a result, the 2017 constitution was rejected in the August 2016 referendum in the three Malay-Muslim provinces in the Deep South. This example indicates that nation branding's identity elitism might in some cases backfire as it creates environments in which minority interests are easily overlooked.

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[41] Kasian Tejapira, 'The misbehaving jeks: the evolving regime of Thainess and Sino-Thai challenges,' *Asian Ethnicity* 10, no.3 (2009): 271.

[42] Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang, 'Buddhist politics and Thailand's dangerous path,' *New Mandala*, 15 January 2016, http://www.newmandala.org/buddhist-politics-and-thailands-dangerous-path/.

[43] Ibid.

[44] See 'รัฐธรรมนูญแห่งราชอาณาจักรไทย พุทธศักราช ๒๕๖๐ [Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017],' National Legislation Assembly, accessed 22 August 2018, http://click.senate.go.th/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/รัฐธรรมนูญ-2560.pdf; For an unofficial English translation, see 'Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand,' Constitutionnet, accessed 22 August 2018, http://www.constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/CONSTITUTION%2BOF%2BTHE%2BKINGDOM%2BOF%2BTHAILAND%2B%28B.E.%2B2560%2B%282017%29%29.pdf.

[45] McCargo et al., 'Ordering Peace,' 87.

The book's definition of good citizenship is predicated on such norms and values that form an ideological basis of virtuous rule.[46] Before the 2014 coup, virtuous rule was legitimised through the Buddhist notions of *dhammaraja*. The concept of legitimacy through goodness, however, is not exclusively linked to the Thai state's justification of kingship but it also extends to include the country's politics. Thongchai points out that this creates a political culture where moral authority is superior to democratic processes.[47] A clear example of this was the official discourse advanced by the traditional elites that sought to legitimise the 2006 coup by describing Thaksin as *mara* (Buddhist evil) and contrasting him with the king and his *dhammaraja* status.[48] However, this discourse of political legitimation was becoming increasingly volatile in the wake of an approaching royal transition and the post-2014 military government needed to detach virtuous rule from the figure of the king in order to secure its longevity beyond Bhumibol.

Civic Duty was not the only book in support of the junta's political project that Amarin published following the May 2014 coup. There was a series of English-Thai bilingual children's books titled *Civic Duty for Children*, including titles such as *Good Kids Love Democracy*, *Good Kids Salute the National Flag*, *Good Kids Queue Up*, *Good Kids Know How to Use Public Property* and *Good Kids Respect Traffic Regulations*, to promote the junta-defined 12 values.[49] A book entitled *Thailand Only: These stories only exist in Thailand* also sought to lecture the Thai readership but this time about patriotic values (see Illustration 5.2). The back cover of the book declares that 'Thailand Only will invite you to examine every quarter of an inch of the Thai way of life guaranteeing that [you] will be [left] speechless, surprised [and] deeply impressed and [you will] love the Thai nation more than ever before.'[50] Inside, the book covers topics such as Thai beliefs, customs, traditions, culture but also Thai idioms, manners, food, superstitions, or dress code. For example, pages 176-7 explain to the readers the story behind *pad thai*, a national noodle dish that was created by the

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[46] McCargo, *Tearing apart*, 16.

[47] Thongchai, 'Toppling,' 28.

[48] For example, see Pattana Kitiarsa, 'In Defence of the Thai-Style Democracy,' *Asia Research Institute*, National University of Singapore, 12 October 2006, https://ari.nus.edu.sg/Assets/repository/files/events/pattana%20paper%20%20edited..pdf.

[49] Field notes, November 2016.

[50] Wethin Chatkun and Pakhin Likhitthonkun, *Thailand Only* เรื่องแบบนี้ มีแต่ไทยๆ [*Thailand Only: These stories only exist in Thailand*] (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 2015).

government of Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkram. At the end, the story invites the reader to 'fall in love' with this dish.[51] If *pad thai* is such an important national dish, one might wonder why the book tries to call on Thai people to fall in love with it. This is because many Thais are not very fond of *pad thai* although the dish is very popular with foreigners. The book seeks to attract Thai people to this dish by emphasising its historical roots and inherent patriotic values. It is implicitly telling Thais that it is their national duty to like *pad thai*.

Illustration 5.2: *Thailand Only: These stories only exist in Thailand* book.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

Another section in the *Thailand Only* book describes the traditional collective games that the old generations of Thais used to play when they were young. Described with an air of nostalgia, the book tries to persuade the readers that many of these old games are similar to some of the new, high-tech games young Thais like to play these days. For example, a short section on page 36 compares the 'old' game of hide-and-seek with 'Call of Duty,' a popular video game series that simulates historical (World War II) and contemporary warfare.[52] Yet unlike these popular video games, as the section notes, hide-and-seek does not contain any violence. This unusual comparison points to a somewhat clumsy attempt of the traditional elites and their networks at

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[51] Ibid, 177.
[52] Ibid, 36.

connecting the young generations of Thais with the conservative values of Thainess. It also indicates that the young generations might have been the intended target audience for this book. This would at least partly explain why a two-page-long side-to-side quasi-technical comparison of an iPad and a chalkboard was included in the book on pages 40 and 41.

The junta's post-coup nation branding activities in the education sector and the activities of the private sector between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016 were, in most parts, aimed at the young generations of Thais. The military government and the traditional elites were trying hard to make the Thai youth responsive to their socio-political agenda. This helps to explain why the government and Amarin were so fond of infographics. They hoped that visually appealing messages will attract the young. It is here that the marketing-side of nation branding becomes clear as the military government and the traditional elites used some modern marketing techniques to re-package the old ideas on individual and collective identity and 'sell' them back to Thai people in the form of Thailand's new strategic national myth.

Culture

The literature on nation branding sees culture as vital part of the nation branding matrix: it adds value and helps to differentiate the branded nation from other nations.[53] In this respect, nation branding drives the commodification of culture: it gives it a monetary value and 'sells' it to target audiences. The Prayuth administration understood culture's economic value well. In 2014, the Ministry of Culture launched the 'Cultural Product of Thailand' (CPOT) project under the junta's broader economic 'Security, Wealth, Sustainability' slogan. An official working at the Ministry explained that the idea behind CPOT was to get every province to produce a product or provide a service that would reflect the province's cultural identity.[54] The Ministry's definition of a cultural product comprised products and services in the following five categories:

1. Food;
2. Fabric (including clothes);
3. Jewellery/accessories;
4. Utensils and decorations;

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[53] For example, see Dinnie, *Nation Branding,* 68-70; Anholt, *Competitive identity*, 97-9.

[54] Interview with an official working for the Ministry of Culture, 6 October 2016.

5. Performative and martial arts, entertainment.[55]

In many respects, CPOT was a carbon copy of Thaksin's still very popular One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project overseen by the Ministry of Interior. Keen to make a distinction between the two projects, an official working for the Ministry of Culture explained that CPOT was specifically about cultural products and not just any products.[56] However, there was no clear distinction between CPOT and OTOP product in practice. Most, if not all, OTOP products would easily qualify for CPOT. A good example of this is a special in-flight magazine that I picked up on a Thai Smile flight (owned by Thai Airways) in September 2016 (see Illustration 5.3). Called 'OTOP Prestige' and distributed between August and November 2016, the in-flight magazine was advertising various OTOP products to both Thai and international travellers. The products included Thai jewellery, handbags and purses, handmade tableware, lacquerware, ceramics and porcelain, silk and fabrics, and herbal and beauty products. If it was not for the magazine's name, it would be impossible to tell whether the advertised products were OTOP or, indeed, CPOT.

Illustration 5.3: Thai Smile in-flight magazine.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

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[55] 'ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับผลิตภัณฑ์วัฒนธรรมไทย [Information about the Cultural Product of Thailand],' CPOT, accessed 1 February 2016, http://www.cpot.in.th/cpot/about.php.
[56] Interview, Ministry of Culture.

Despite launching their CPOT project, the military government continued to promote OTOP. The in-flight magazine even contained a short message from General Prayuth Chan-o-cha that reaffirmed the government's commitment to this Thaksin-era project. This raises an important question: why did the military government launch CPOT in the first place? One possible explanation might be that the military government simply wanted to come up with a re-branded version of OTOP as part of their efforts to purge Thaksin and his influence from Thai politics. Similarly to *pracharath* in the economic sector, CPOT was part of the junta's new 'brandspeak.' Yet, it is difficult to see how CPOT could succeeded. Its obvious similarities with the more established OTOP project were more likely to cause public confusion rather than to present a viable challenge to OTOP. For example, two videos posted on YouTube in June 2016 that promoted CPOT managed to amass only a few hundred views between them.[57] By contrast, a single YouTube video promoting OTOP products posted in August 2016 attracted over ten thousand views.[58] In the two years since its launch, CPOT did not seem to gain much public resonance.

Nation branding across Thailand's culture sector was about more than just adding extra value to cultural products and services. Just like in the education and tourism sectors, the generals were keen to use culture as a vehicle to spread virtue across Thai society in the form of behavioural guidance, Thainess and notions of individual and collective identity. As Connors observes in his 2005 article on Thai cultural policy, '[f]rom early [sic] last century to the present day Thai elites have shown an abiding concern for the well-being of Thai identity and culture, or "Thai-ness".'[59] For them, 'Thai-ness […] always seems to be under threat or in a state of distress, something officials have to minister back to good health.'[60] As Connors

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[57] By the time of writing (September 2018), one of the videos had 219 views, while the other managed to amass 990 views. See 'โครงการผลิตภัณฑ์วัฒนธรรมไทย CPOT 1 กระทรวงวัฒนธรรม [The Cultural Product of Thailand Project, CPOT 1, Ministry of Culture],' YouTube, published 1 June 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-IBzSHahGo and 'VTR ผลิตภัณฑ์วัฒนธรรมไทย (CPOT) และหมู่บ้านวัฒนธรรมสร้างสรรค์ ประจำปี พ.ศ.๒๕๕๙ กระทรวงวัฒนธรรม [VTR Cultural Product of Thailand (CPOT) and the Creative Cultural Village, Year 2016],' YouTube, published 1 October 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6cZXiNRNzc.

[58] See 'OTOP ไทย จากท้องถิ่น บินสู่ท้องฟ้า [Thai OTOP: From a local area to the sky],' YouTube, published 17 August 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJCUmp5FLmw&t=3s.

[59] Connors, 'Ministering culture,' 523.

[60] Ibid, 523.

explains, the elite concern for the survival of Thainess goes beyond its aesthetic and emotional value since Thainess constitutes 'the central ideological resource of the ruling elite – an all-encompassing ideology that aims to create a nationally identifying citizenry that can be mobilized for productive purposes.'[61] The use of cultural policy for political purposes is thus not new to Thailand.

Even before the introduction of nation branding in the early 2000s, the Thai state had been using cultural policy to sustain its power. Until the early 1970s, Thai cultural policy was based on narrowly defined notions of Thainess rooted in ethno-nationalism with no regard for different regional and cultural identities. Following the breakdown in legitimacy of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's despotic paternalism and the turbulent events of the mid-1970s, Thai cultural policy became gradually more pluralised and localised.[62] From the 1980s until the 2006 coup, Thailand's cultural policy grew more liberalised although it was still anchored in the country's monarchy.[63] This period also saw a growing tendency towards the commodification of Thai culture and identity for economic purposes, especially during the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-06). However, the 2006 and 2014 coups put a halt to this liberalisation process as many traditional and conservative notions of Thai culture and identity have been reintroduced. This was especially the case following the 2014 coup. The NCPO reverted back to more narrow and ethno-nationalist notions of Thainess and its historical function of creating productive and loyal citizens. Connors refers to this as 'a policy of cultural security.'[64] Unsurprisingly then, Thailand's post-coup cultural policy placed much emphasis on national unity and discipline.

The Ministry of Culture's quarterly *Culture* magazine is a good reflection of the junta's nation branding efforts across the culture sector between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. While each of the 2014 issues was devoted to one of the four main regions in Thailand, the January-March 2015 issue made it clear that the Ministry of Culture was following the junta's policy framework. The central theme of this issue was captured in the magazine's headline: '[You] can build a good [Thai] citizen.'[65] Inside the issue, there was an article that detailed the process of 'building a good [Thai] citizen' from Field Marshal Phibun Songkram and his State Conventions to

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[61] Ibid, 524.
[62] Ibid, 531.
[63] Ibid, 531.
[64] Ibid, 527.
[65] 'พลเมืองดีสร้างได้ [You can build a good Thai citizen],' วัฒนธรรม *[Culture]* 1, January-March (2015), http://magazine.culture.go.th/2015/1/mobile/index.html.

General Prayuth and his 12 values of Thainess.[66] A full set of the 12 values-themed LINE stickers, released by the junta in December 2014, adorned one whole page of the article. The April-June issue celebrated Princess Sirindhorn, the July-September issue was promoting creative economy, while the final October-December issue discussed 'Thai charm on the international stage.'[67] Issues in 2016 were just as conservative and reflective of the junta's policies. The first issue (January-March) of the year was devoted to celebrating ASEAN and its 'Unity in Diversity' motto, the second one (April-June) exalted the royal development projects, the third one (July-September) was about Thai food and the final issue (October-December) was devoted to the *khon* dance. All issues published from 2015 onwards had a very conservative approach to Thai culture that was in line with the junta's Nation-Religion-King brand and virtuous rule. Even the issue celebrating ASEAN culture did so in a very conservative way. Instead of capturing the cultural diversity of ASEAN, the issue's main article was about the religious similarities between Thai culture and the cultures of other neighbouring Buddhist countries, such as Myanmar, Laos or Cambodia that were all influenced by Hinduism, Brahmanism and Buddhism.[68] It might well be the case that this topic was chosen as it does not threaten the hegemony of the junta's Nation-Religion-King brand and virtuous rule.

Culture magazine is not mass-produced. The Ministry publishes only around ten thousand print copies of each issue.[69] They are distributed based on a subscription system that consists of the Ministry's own culture network and other culture enthusiasts.[70] The Ministry's culture network includes local culture councils and provincial culture offices across the country. In this respect, the magazines serve the function of an internal culture newsletter. For general public, the magazine is accessible online free of charge. An official working for the Ministry explained that the Ministry promotes the magazines on its official Facebook page, which means that the magazine's reach goes beyond the ten thousand subscribed print copy holders.[71]

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[66] Ibid, 4-17.

[67] To access all magazines, see 'หนังสืออิเล็กทรอนิกส์ (E-Book) [Electronic books (E-Book)],' Department of Cultural Promotion, accessed 12 June 2018, http://magazine.culture.go.th/.

[68] 'ร่วมราก ร่วมนครา สานศรัทธา "อาเซียน" [Joint roots, joint cities, ASEAN faith],'

วัฒนธรรม [Culture] 1, January-March (2016): 12-25, http://magazine.culture.go.th/2016/1/index.html.

[69] Interview, Ministry of Culture.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

The magazine's significance is not in its readership, which is very small, but in that it disseminates government messages to the members of its cultural network and other culture enthusiasts who spread them within their communities. Connors identified the importance of such cultural networks in his study of the Cultural Surveillance Bureau, which is a governmental agency under the Ministry of Culture.[72] He argued that the role of these networks was the dissemination of official agendas and the self-regulation of behaviour.[73]

The Ministry's culture network played an important role in the dissemination of virtue following the 2014 coup. For example, Chanarong Luckshaniyanavin, president of the Bangkok Metropolitan Culture Council, explained how the Council got involved in organising school competitions in Thai manners:

> 'Many people in the parliament have been talking about culture [and] Thai manners that are disappearing. We have taken that information [on board]. The Ministry of Culture has also been trying to promote [Thai manners]. Schools have already been organising [competitions] like that but we have taken over to make [these competitions] bigger, to create a [social] trend. […] We have set the standard in Bangkok – there are prizes to be given out, it looks meaningful for the schools. The stage is also gradually bigger, we have to look for sponsor [sic]. When the Council organises [these competitions], the government will also sponsor some things.'[74]

As a response to the junta's cultural policy, the Council decided to get involved in organising school competitions in Thai manners in order to make them more prominent. However, the Council's involvement went beyond the mere organisation of these events; it provided training in Thai manners for all participating students and participating schools.[75] The schools were then expected to pass this training onto non-participating students too. According to Chanarong, these Council-organised competitions were in their third year in 2016. By that time, the Council had also managed to get some universities involved and Chanarong considered extending these competitions by inviting schools from adjacent provinces.[76] Although these competitions were not new to post-coup Thailand, the Bangkok Metropolitan Culture

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[72] See Michael K. Connors, 'Cultural policy as general will and social-order protectionism: Thailand's conservative double movement,' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 24, no.3 (2016): 7-11.
[73] Ibid, 10-11.
[74] Interview, Chanarong.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

Council brought them under the governmental control by taking over their organisation and providing the participating students/schools with the Thai-manner training. The Council increased the competitions' reach and influence by drawing in more funding and increasing their prestige by lending them the government's support. The Council was helping to disseminate the junta-defined norms and values that would lead to greater discipline and a more docile citizenry.

The emphasis on Thai manners was a steady feature of the Ministry of Culture's activities between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016. Besides promoting Prayuth's 12 values of Thainess, the Ministry also launched a number of spin-off campaigns that focused on manner-indoctrination but were not directly linked to the 12-value brand. One of these campaigns was a 'Smile, *Wai,* Hello, Thank You, Sorry' campaign that consisted of TV adverts, vinyl posters and billboards in all provinces. I saw one of the billboards produced for this campaign in Ubon Ratchathani in October 2016. The billboard, which was situated on one of the main junctions, read: 'Join together to build Thainess.'[77] Underneath the text were five cartoon-like characters, two girls and three boys, representing the following manners: 'Smile,' '*Wai* [a Thai greeting gesture]' 'Hello,' 'Thank You,' and 'Sorry.'[78] The Ministry also published an article discussing these five Thai manners and the history behind them in the January-March 2016 issues of the 'Culture' magazine. The article concludes that 'if [Thai people] use [these manners] until they become a habit, Thai society will surely have only peace.'[79] This is another example of how the military government attempted to use nation branding to disseminate virtue across Thai society. Although there is nothing wrong in promoting these manners, they are part of the junta-defined conservative notions of Thainess, of happy, smiling, docile and apolitical Thais who are not too ambitious and who know their place within the country's rigid social hierarchy system. By behaving according to all these idealised notions, Thai people would become model citizens working towards strengthening the power and political legitimacy of virtuous rule.

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[77] Original text: ร่วมกันสร้างความเป็นไทย; Field notes, Ubon Ratchathani, 14 October 2016.

[78] Original text: ยิ้ม ไหว้ สวัสดี ขอบคุณ ขอโทษ; Ibid.

[79] Original text: ถ้าปฏิบัติจนติดเป็น นิสัยสังคมไทยจะมีแต่ความ สงบสุขอย่างแน่นอน; See 'Joint roots, joint cities' 11.

Another spin-off campaign with similar intentions and messages was the Ministry's 2016 'Drive with Generosity, Create Traffic Discipline' campaign.[80] According to one official working for the Ministry of Culture, the reason why the Ministry decided to focus on promoting traffic discipline was: 'We believe Thai people needed this [traffic] topic the most, which also leads to the theme of unity. It is here [that we] correspond with the government policy.'[81] Considering the dire state of Thai traffic, launching a traffic education campaign makes sense. However, it is less clear why the traffic education campaign was launched by the Ministry of Culture instead of, for example, the Ministry of Transport and Communications and why the Ministry of Culture felt the need to link traffic discipline with national unity. One possible explanation might be that a better traffic self-management of Thai people would lend support to the junta's claims for bringing peace and order to Thailand. Although it would not solve Thailand's traffic issues, such as overcrowding, it would create the all-important notions of peace, order and discipline under the military rule. The generals might have been inspired by Singapore, one of Thailand's Southeast Asian neighbours, where notions of peace, order and discipline render the country's soft authoritarian rule more favourable.

For the purpose of this traffic education campaign, the Ministry of Culture commissioned a series of different videos: some aimed at Thai children, others at the general public. The video series titled 'Ordinary Thai Household: all about Thai,' which were shown on the military-owned Thai television channel, Channel 7, seemed to have targeted mostly young audiences.[82] The videos were around one-minute long cartoon stories depicting different members of a family engaging with Thai traffic rules. In each of the videos, one family member, usually the most senior one, explains the application of traffic rules to the other members of the family. As such, the videos contain other messages besides traffic education, such as family relations, appropriate manners and social values. The same applied to the other video series for the general public, which depicted real-life situations and the appropriate 'Thai' ways of handling them. For example, one of the videos encouraged Thais to smile at their fellow road users when stuck in a major traffic jam on their way to work in the centre of

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[80] The original Thai name of the campaign is ขับขี่มีน้ำใจ สร้างวินัย การจราจร.

[81] Interview, Ministry of Culture.

[82] The original name of the video series in Thai is 'ไทยสามัญประจำบ้าน All about Thai.' The videos can be accessed at 'กระทรวงวัฒนธรรม [Ministry of Culture] Ministry of Culture, Thailand,' YouTube, accessed 22 August 2018, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChQSAhhFhcDCQbil8CjVaNg.

Bangkok.[83] Another video urged Thais to help their fellow road users when in need.[84] In some respects, promoting traffic education was not the main purpose of these videos. Just like other nation branding campaigns launched under the military government, this campaign was about the dissemination of virtue across Thai society veiled in the ostensible topic of traffic education. The Ministry's culture campaigns were examples of internal nation branding aimed at changing the social attitudes and behaviours of the Thai citizens by disseminating notions of good citizenship, appropriate manners and Thainess. These notions of individual and collective identity would become the main source of legitimacy of virtuous rule filling the void left behind by the end of the virtuous reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The junta's internal nation branding campaigns were part of ongoing political efforts by the traditional elites to solve what Connors terms 'the people-problem.'[85] As he explains, Thailand's political discourse has been influenced by theories of political development that focus on preserving order and stability through a managed socio-political change.[86] These theories objectify people as something that needs to 'be worked upon and reformed' through carefully developed strategies of, for example, nation building, national integration and socialisation.[87] Thailand's ruling elites have been using different image and identity practices to manage socio-political changes and various external and internal threats to their power since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Nation branding is thus one of the most recent iterations of these efforts to fix Thailand's 'people-problem.' Considering how long these efforts have been going on, it might seem that they have been largely unsuccessful but this is not necessarily true. In 1932 Thailand embarked on a transition towards constitutional monarchy. Eighty-four years later, the intra-elite struggle over political power and legitimacy that the 1932 events triggered still has not been resolved.

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[83] See '(MINISTRY OF CULTURE) ความเป็นไทย สร้างวินัยจราจร ตอน ยิ้ม [Thainess, Creating Traffic Discipline, Part: Smile],' YouTube, published, 7 October 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1-Fz2Fz3dM.

[84] See '(MINISTRY OF CULTURE ความเป็นไทย สร้างวินัยจราจร ตอน ช่วยเหลือ [Thainess, Creating Traffic Discipline, Part: Help],' YouTube, published 7 October 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-dcN5zCL-c.

[85] Connors, *National identity*, 9.

[86] Ibid, 7.

[87] Ibid, 8 and 9.

Private Sector

Dinnie points out that '[s]ecuring internal buy-in to the nation brand is an important component of nation branding.'[88] Yet, it is not just the nation's citizens that need to 'live the brand.' The government also needs the support of the private sector, especially big businesses, because businesses, just like the nation's citizens, can act as powerful brand ambassadors for their nations.[89] Big businesses, on the other hand, have vested interests in nation branding due to the country-of-origin effect. Although the link between the country's reputation and consumer buying behaviour is not linear, positive country image is arguably more conducive to business activities than the negative one which often carries the risk of, for example, product quality misconceptions or boycotts. Negative country image might simply become a liability for business. Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, the then CEO of a Thai auto parts manufacturing business, revealed that some foreign businesses were wary of doing business with Thai companies following the 2014 coup.[90] They perceived Thailand and Thai businesses as untrustworthy and doubted whether Thai businesses 'would honour trade contract[s] when [Thailand] still did not honour constitution[s].'[91] As Thanathorn noted, 'in one way it would have been better to say that the business had no nationality.'[92] For Thanathorn, Thailand's post-coup image was clearly a liability rather than an asset because businesses can be perceived as an extension of their country of origin and thereby sharing some of their country's traits.

Following the 2014 coup, there was a clear indication that Thai businesses with international operations understood that they were representing Thailand through their products, services, brands and business conduct.[93] There was also a clear

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[88] Dinnie, *Nation branding,* 70.

[89] Ibid, 70.

[90] Interview with Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, 25 October 2016. In March 2018, Thanathorn co-founded a new political party called the Future Forward Party or อนาคตใหม่ in Thai. He was elected the party leader in May 2018. The Party has built its platform on a progressive anti-junta agenda. For more information, see the party website 'เกี่ยวกับเรา พรรคอนาคตใหม่ [About us the Future Forward party],' Future Forward, accessed 15 December 2018, https://futureforwardparty.org/about-fwp/future-forward-party.

[91] Interview, Thanathorn.

[92] Ibid.

[93] I interviewed a total of five informants from some of Thailand's most well-known businesses with international operations. These businesses included Chang Beer (ThaiBev), Singha Beer (Boon Rawd Brewery), Pranda Group, King Power and

indication that these businesses had an interest in Thailand having a positive image and a strong national brand. Some businesses, such as Kasikorn Bank or Singha Beer, had started promoting Thailand long before the concept of nation branding was first introduced by Thaksin Shinawatra in the early 2000s. For example, Kasikorn Bank (then known as Thai Farmers Bank) produced a 192-page English language travel guide called the 'Highlights of Thailand' and distributed it free of charge to foreign tourists and investors during the TAT's 1987 'Visit Thailand Year.'[94] Singha Beer used 'Amazing Thailand – never without Singha Beer' slogan in its TV and radio advertising during the 1998-9 'Amazing Thailand' tourism campaign.[95] Both Kasikorn and Singha Beer joined the Thai state in re-packaging Thai identity for foreign consumption. At the same time, their efforts were driven by the need for self-promotion that went beyond the immediate products or services they had on offer.

Most of Thailand's big businesses are owned by a handful of influential Sino-Thai families that have close links to the country's traditional elites. In fact, nineteen out the top twenty wealthiest Thai families that appeared on the *Forbes* 2014 rich list were Sino-Thais.[96] Most of these families benefitted from the capitalist development initiated by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (under US patronage) in the early 1960s and built close relationships with the country's military, monarchy and senior bureaucracy through complex patronage networks, intermarriage and backdoor deals.[97] They used their money and influence to build monopolies, gain countless privileges and access to power. Although they did not seek a direct political role, their interests dominated the parliament in the 1980s and 1990s.[98] By the early 2000s, these Sino-Thai families were firmly entrenched in the top echelons of Thailand's virtuous rule.[99] Many of these families openly supported Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai party in

Kasikorn Bank. All informants confirmed that these businesses were representing Thailand. Some even referred to the businesses as Thailand's brand ambassadors.

[94] I would like to thank Mrs Wiwan Tharahirunchot for providing the 'Highlights of Thailand' book for research purposes.

[95] Patrick Jory, 'Thai identity, globalisation and advertising culture,' *Asian Studies Review* 23, no.4 (1999): 485.

[96] For a good analysis of the inequality of Thai wealth, including the rich Sino-Thai families, see Pasuk Phongpaichit, 'Inequality, Wealth and Thailand's Politics,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, no.3 (2016): 414.

[97] Baker, 'Roots of authoritarianism,' 400-1. Also see Pasuk, 'Inequality,' 413; Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, 'Introduction,' in *Unequal Thailand*, eds. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 20.

[98] Baker, 'Roots of authoritarianism,' 396.

[99] For example, see Joseph Harris, 'Who Governs? Autonomous Political Networks as a Challenge to Power in Thailand,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 45, no.1 (2015): 8-9; Baker, 'Roots of authoritarianism,' 397.

the run up to the 2001 general elections and during the first few years in the office. Some even took an active role in politics by becoming Thai Rak Thai party-list MPs, senior party officials and/or members of Thaksin's cabinet between 2001 and 2006.[100] However, as Ukrist notes, most of the big business Sino-Thai families 'had distanced themselves from Thaksin by the time of the [2006] coup or soon after.'[101] These families withdrew their support for Thaksin because he challenged the power and legitimacy of virtuous rule – the system they continued to rely on for business protection and profits.[102]

Through his pro-poor economic policies Thaksin empowered large segments of the Thai electorate, who discovered the power of popular vote to demand a more equal distribution of state power and resources.[103] Yet, such a re-distribution of state power and resources would require the removal of patronage-based networks, and state and royal privileges that form the bedrock on which the power, status and wealth of these Sino-Thai families is built.[104] These families thus have vested interests in sustaining Thailand's virtuous rule. As Pasuk explains, [m]oney played a large role in the agitation that led to the 2014 *coup* [original emphasis]' and the junta's rollback on democracy and their electoral system reforms.[105]

Nation branding offers these big Sino-Thai businesses an opportunity to work towards strengthening the power and legitimacy of the socio-political system they benefit from. By presenting themselves as good and patriotic Thai businesses, they seek to enhance their social capital and create justifications for their privileged status. It is a form of protection for patronage-based businesses that rely heavily on inside connections. For example, in 2014, Kasikorn Bank produced an emotionally-loaded advert '*rak…jak pho* [Love… from dad]' to mark King Bhumibol's birthday and the national Father's Day both celebrated on 5 December. The advertisement is a story narrated by a young Thai girl whose dream is to become a ballerina. The girl explains that she has been training very hard since young age to make her dream come true and that her dad has always been by her side supporting her endeavours. Then the viewer is shown the girl's ballet auditions followed by a snapshot of her reading an

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[100] See Ukrist Pathmanand, 'Network Thaksin: Structure, Roles and Reaction,' in *Unequal Thailand: Aspects of Income, Wealth and Power*, eds. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 140-2.
[101] Ibid, 150.
[102] Pasuk, 'Inequality,' 420.
[103] Ukrist, 'Network Thaksin,' 152-4; Baker, 'Roots of authoritarianism,' 397.
[104] Pasuk, 'Inequality,' 419-20.
[105] Ibid, 421.

acceptance letter. As the girl rushes to share the good news with her father, the viewer finds out that the girl's father is a businessman who has his own dream of expanding the business. Yet, he is unable to do so because no one in his family is willing to help. With his daughter pursuing her own dreams, his dream of expanding the business is in danger of remaining unfulfilled. Then the girl's narration resumes, and she explains how her dad has always told her to never give up her own dream, so she says: 'I will never give up the dream… my dad's dream.' The advert makes it clear that the girl joins her father's business instead of becoming a ballerina because, as the girl reminds the viewer, '[w]hen we only listen to our own dreams, we forget about the dreams of those who love us.'[106] The advert finishes with a final take-away message by Kasikorn: 'Family businesses are built on love.'

Although family love and sacrifice are the central themes of this advert, its content is very political. Launched on the king's birthday in the year of the coup, the advert is full of analogies that go beyond the family business context. The girl who wants to become a ballerina represents Thai people and their dreams and aspirations. The girl's father represents the nation's father, that is King Bhumibol, while the father's business is a symbolic portrayal of the Thai nation. It is no coincidence that the girl's father is portrayed as a loving and benevolent parent that supports his child's ambitions as these qualities are commonly used to describe Bhumibol as the country's paternalistic ruler. It is also no coincidence that the advert implicitly reproaches the girl for wanting to pursue her own dream which it portrays as an inherently selfish act. Since the 2006 coup, the country's traditional elites, their networks and the Yellow Shirts have frequently described the popular support of the Shinawatras as acts of selfishness. Based on a pervasive official state narrative that the rural electorate is uneducated, parochial and money-focused, they accused the Shinawatra supporters for being self-interested and pursuing short-term benefits instead of acting in the interest of the nation as a whole.[107]

The Kasikorn advert served as a soft reminder to the Thai people to work toward the greater good by staying loyal to the king and the Thai nation and giving up their selfish dreams and aspirations. It contains at least four of Prayuth's twelve values of Thainess: loyalty to Nation-Religion-King (1); willingness to self-sacrifice

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[106] My translation. See, 'รัก...จากพ่อ KBank [Love… from dad KBank],' YouTube, published 3 December 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq7-jbwMwaU&t=18s.

[107] See Andrew Walker, 'The Rural Constitution and the Everyday Politics of Elections in Northern Thailand,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no.1 (2008): 85.

for the common good (2); gratitude towards one's parents (3); and attending to the needs of others and the nation before self (12). Kasikorn released the advert through their own online media channels, such as YouTube, indicating that they sought to target a more specific audience of existing customers or young Thais. The advert amassed over 250,000 views,[108] which is a considerably modest number compared to some other popular Kasikorn videos published on the same channel that attracted over twenty- or forty-million views. It might well be the case that Thai people are getting tired of these moralising videos. As I discuss in chapter 6, participants of the six focus groups that I conducted between October and November 2016 also favoured the least moralising video out of the four videos shown.

The existing literature on nation branding does not help to explain the business behaviour of big Sino-Thai businesses. These businesses are more than just brand ambassadors because their role in nation branding goes beyond shaping the country's external image through interactions with foreigners, be it their business partners or customers. Instead, these businesses actively partake in the process of internal nation branding by reproducing national myths, government-sanctioned notions of good citizenship and by acting as model 'citizens.' King Power, Thailand's largest duty-free retailer founded by the late Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha, who was the head of one of the richest Sino-Thai families and owner of the Leicester City Football Club, is a good example of a Sino-Thai business that acts as a model Thai 'citizen.' The business lists 'retaining Thainess,' whether by 'Thai' smile, greeting (wai) or manners, as one of its main corporate values.[109] Although all Thai King Power employees know these markers of culturally appropriate conduct well, they are told to pay special attention to them or to perform them a 'little bit more.'[110] Every new employee goes through a training where they learn how to smile, wai, greet and dress properly.[111] The business makes Thai employees behave more Thai by enforcing the traditional state-defined notions of Thainess onto them.

King Power is an outwardly royalist business. When I visited its flagship store in downtown Bangkok in June 2016, it was a physical tribute to the country's monarchy. Instead of the company's logo, its side entrance bore the royal Garuda emblem and a golden-gilded *rao* ♥ *phra chao yu hua* or 'we love the king' slogan (see Illustration 5.4). This was the only visible entrance from the street and the main point

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[108] As of the time of writing, August 2018.
[109] Interview with a King Power employee, 12 October 2016.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

of entry to the store. The main entrance that is at the front of the building and bears the King Power logo was not in use at the time of my visit; it was also shielded from public view by thick green vegetation. Next to the side entrance was a monumental image of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit. Besides a small sign on the side of the driveway, there was nothing to indicate that this was the entrance to the King Power store.[112] One could have easily mistaken it for a recently-built royal museum. The pro-royalist theme also featured heavily in the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes between May 2014 and December 2016 that seemed to have mostly focused on Thai children and youth. For example, following Bhumibol's death in October 2016 King Power Foundation joined hands with Air Asia and organised 'trips' for schoolchildren from different provinces to come and pay their respects to the deceased king at the Grand Palace.[113]

Illustration 5.4: King Power store entrance.

Photo credit: Petra Desatová

Since royalism is an important pillar of Thai nationalism, King Power is also an outwardly nationalist business. When in 2010 Vichai bought Leicester City FC, an

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[112] Field notes, 5 July 2016.

[113] See 'พาน้องกราบพ่อ โดย มูลนิธิ คิง เพาเวอร์ และไทยแอร์เอเชีย [Leading minors to pay respects to dad by King Power Foundation and Thai Air Asia],' King Power Foundation, accessed 15 September 2017, http://kingpowerfoundation.com/news_detail.aspx?newsid=30.

English football club, he claimed he did it to publicise Thailand abroad.[114] When Leicester unexpectedly won the English Premier League in 2016, it was presented as Thailand's win and Thai people's pride. As one King Power employee explained 'people felt that it was Thai people's football team therefore [they] felt [they] had a part.'[115] The employee herself 'felt proud because since the first time when our boss bought [the club], many complained that the boss invested money in a foreign country but when they succeeded I was proud.'[116] Effectively, Leicester City became the source of Thai national pride and a unifying force in a deeply-divided nation. As the employee summarised: 'All employees were happy, the owner was also happy, it was everyone's pride.'[117] It is here that King Power's actions go beyond the framework of commercial nationalism. Although Leicester's win boosted King Power's sales by riding on the wave of commercial nationalism, many King Power stores quickly sold out of Leicester merchandise,[118] I argue that it is primarily non-material rather than material gains that motivate King Power's royalist and nationalist behaviour. By presenting itself as a royalist-nationalist business firmly rooted in Thainess, King Power enhances its social capital and creates justifications for its privileged status. At the same time, it helps to sustain virtuous rule by disseminating state-defined notions of Thainess through its business conduct and activities.

It is important to note that Vichai, the late King Power's owner, received his Srivaddhanaprabha surname from King Bhumibol in 2013 in recognition of his contributions to the country. As Handley explains, King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit started to give out royal honours in the 1960s in order to build a strong base of non-royal elite supporters.[119] These typically included upper-class Thais of non-royal descent, senior military officers and bureaucrats as well as Thailand's leading capitalists. It seems that Vichai and his King Power business might have been part of King Bhumibol's and Queen Sirikit's patronage networks. However, the relationship

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[114] See 'บอสใหญ่ "คิง เพาเวอร์" วิชัย รักศรีอักษร เปิดเบื้องลึกซื้อ "เลสเตอร์ ซิตี้" ซื้อทำไม สโมสรเล็กๆ [King Power's Big boss, Vichai Raksriaksorn reveals reasons behind the "Leicester City" purchase - why did he buy a small club?],' *Prachachat thurakit*, 18 August 2010, https://www.prachachat.net/news_detail.php?newsid=1282109512.
[115] Interview, King Power.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Handley, *King never smiles*, 150.

between the palace and King Power seemed to have grown more complicated following Bhumibol's death.[120]

While acting as a patriotic and royalist business is beneficial in the Thai socio-political context, such corporate brand identity might not work well in the global market. Hence, many big Sino-Thai businesses with international operations try to avoid branding that might seem overly nationalistic. For example, when Chang Beer launched their first international Thai festivals in 2016, called 'Chang Sensory Trails,' these festivals were aimed at presenting Thailand as a modern, vibrant, trendy, hip nation to match the Chang Beer's brand identity. An informant working for the Chang Beer marketing explained: 'We represent Thai beer. We try to explore what is Thai in terms of international perspective.'[121] In other words, the company is receptive to foreign perceptions of Thailand and works to further reinforce the positive country stereotypes. Yet, they are not promoting intangible Thai values, such as Thai smile, because these could prove elusive over time.[122] The informant pointed out that 'Thai smile' might not be relevant to Thai identity in ten-years' time but Thai food, muay Thai (Thai boxing), beaches and various tourist attractions were more permanent.[123] The informant likened their country promotion efforts to those of TAT.[124] In short, Chang Beer was promoting Thailand as a tourist destination. Their approach to country promotion was pragmatic and profit-driven.

Even businesses such as Singha Beer, well-known for their traditional Thai identity and nationalist advertising, feel the need to globalise their corporate brand identities. An informant working for Singha Beer explained that the company was still

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[120] In July 2017, King Power faced a lawsuit on corruption charges. Although the lawsuit was dismissed by the Thai courts in September 2018, it brought the company's name into disrepute both in Thailand and abroad. In November 2018, King Power lost its bid for a retail and services concession at an upcoming U-Tapao International Airport to Thailand's Central Group. This marked the break in King Power's monopoly over all major airports in Thailand. Furthermore, King Power's most lucrative concession at Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok is due to expire in 2020 and auctions are due to begin soon. For example, see 'Thai court dismisses case against Airports of Thailand, King Power,' *Reuters*, 18 September 2018, https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-thailand-king-power/thai-court-dismisses-case-against-airports-of-thailand-king-power-idUKKCN1LY0FI and 'Thailand's King Power loses retail bid in U-Tapao airport concession,' *Reuters*, 19 November 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/thailand-kingpower/thailands-king-power-loses-retail-bid-in-u-tapao-airport-concession-idUSL4N1XU31D.
[121] Interview with an informant working for the Chang Beer marketing team, 14 July 2016.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

using Thainess as their advertising theme 'but perhaps the difference [between the current and earlier advertising] is in the degree [because contemporary Thai] values, the way of life [and] beliefs need to be extended to the markets in the foreign countries.'[125] This indicates that there might be a tension between the business and socio-political functions of nation branding in Thailand. Nevertheless, big businesses such as Chang or Singha Beer do not completely eschew their patriotic identities. These seemed to be reasserted mostly through CSR programmes or day-to-day business conduct. For example, Chang Beer's parent company ThaiBev supported government-led Thai festivals abroad as part of their CSR programme in 2015.[126] Organised by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these festivals were aimed at promoting traditional Thai culture and arts which are miles apart from Chang beer's hip corporate brand identity. Singha Beer, on the other hand, decided to unilaterally extend the 30-day advertising ban imposed by the junta in the wake of Bhumibol's death to the entire period of mourning.[127] This decision may have resulted in the loss of some revenue as Singha Beer's competitors resumed their advertising as soon as the ban was lifted.

Not all businesses support the royalist political order and the aggressive promotion of Thainess. For example, Thanathorn Juangroongruankit, the then CEO of a Thai auto parts manufacturing business believed that it was the promotion of Thainess that 'makes Thai society fall behind.'[128] He further explained that the brand identity that the Prayuth government was building through the promotion of traditional and highly-conservative norms and values stripped Thai society of upward mobility by teaching Thai people not to have ambitions and aspirations.[129] Thanathorn compared Thainess to a fairy tale that was designed to make '[Thai] society live in harmony [and] have no one rise up in search for what is right.'[130] He concluded that these values were unable to strengthen Thailand's competitive advantage in the global world. There was a clear tension between economic and socio-political needs of nation branding in the post-coup Thailand. While the government's economic needs and the needs of the private sector required more flexibility, adaptability and

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[125] Interview with an informant working for Singha Beer, 24 November 2016.
[126] See 'Always with you: Sustainability Report 2015,' Thai Bev, accessed 11 April 2017, 111-123, http://thaibev.listedcompany.com/misc/SR/20160408-thaibev-sr2015-en.pdf.
[127] Interview, Singha Beer.
[128] Interview, Thanathorn.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

innovation, the junta's attempts to preserve virtuous rule required the preservation of traditional norms and values and their indoctrination. As such, the junta's post-coup strategic national myth was full of contradictions that led to confusing messaging in both public and private sectors.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine the junta's internal nation branding efforts in the areas of education and culture, and those pursued by businesses in Thailand's private sector. I argued that the generals used internal nation branding to disseminate notions of Thainess, morality, discipline, appropriate manners and good citizenship across Thai society. These were the new notions of virtue that the generals hoped would fill the legitimacy void left behind by the virtuous reign of King Bhumibol and secure the political power and legitimacy of virtuous rule into the post-Bhumibol era. Thainess and the junta-defined notions of good citizenship were the main branding themes in the education sector. To this end, the Ministry of Education enacted a number of new policies that resulted in an increased indoctrination of Thai students in these norms and values. The objective was to achieve a society-wide virtuous self-management of Thai citizens. Yet, this clashed with the objectives of the government's economic policy that required increased innovation, creativity and critical thinking. Instead of resolving these contradictions, the Ministry of Education enacted another set of policies that were aimed at improving the overall quality of Thailand's education system in line with the junta's economic needs. As such, these policies resulted in notions of bounded innovation and creativity, where innovation and creativity were desirable in areas that would help Thailand's economy (such as science) but not in those that could challenge the legitimacy of the military government or virtuous rule. As a result, the junta's promises of a proper educational reform never truly materialised. Branding in the culture sector was focused mostly on disseminating Thai manners and increasing public discipline. The Ministry of Culture and its cultural networks launched billboard campaigns and organised competitions in Thai manners to help achieve the junta's objective of virtuous self-management of citizens. The Ministry also launched a traffic education campaign to enhance public discipline. However, as I argued, none of these efforts were isolated attempts at managing social attitudes and behaviours of Thai citizens. They were part of long-term efforts of Thailand's ruling elites to preserve their political power and legitimacy in the face of different internal and external threats.

Thailand's private sector played an active role in supporting the military government's internal nation branding efforts. For example, a well-known Bangkok-based publishing house published a series of mostly infographic books aimed at disseminating the junta-defined notions of Thainess and good citizenship among the younger generations of Thais. Other businesses such as Kasikorn Bank, Singha Beer, Chang Beer or King Power supported the junta's branding efforts through their corporate advertising and business activities, which were full of identity reminders and junta-defined notions of Thainess. However, similarly to the education sector many big businesses in the private sector found that there was tension between their economic and socio-political needs. Overt patriotism and adherence to the state-defined notions of Thainess clashed with their internationalisation objectives. This contradiction was not resolved during the post-coup period examined in this chapter. It seemed that the businesses tried to assert their patriotism mostly through their domestic corporate activities, while they continued to maintain their global image and external outlook.

Thailand's post-coup nation branding efforts in the education, culture and private sector indicate that nation branding might contain a number of contradictions that can be difficult to reconcile. This is especially true for those non-democratic regimes that seek to use nation branding as a strategy for political legitimation. These regimes often rely on performance and identity-based rationales for their legitimation. While performance-based rationales require a degree of innovation and modernity, identity-based rationales are usually based on traditional and conservative values. Non-democratic regimes such as China or Russsia seem to pursue this strategy of economic modernisation and development on the one hand, and social traditionalism and conservativism on the other. Not only these strategies result in mixed branding messages, they can also put additional pressure on domestic businesses with international operations that see themselves as their nation's brand ambassadors. The following chapter examines how a number of focus group participants from different geographical locations reacted to Thailand's post-coup branding efforts.

CHAPTER 6: PUBLIC REACTIONS TO NATION BRANDING

To better understand the reactions of the Thai public to different nation branding campaigns, I conducted six focus group sessions across the four main regions in Thailand: the North (Chiang Mai), Northeast (Ubon Ratchathani), Centre (Bangkok), and the South (Hat Yai – Upper South).[1] Three focus groups were conducted in Ubon Ratchathani, one in Chiang Mai, one in Bangkok, and one in Hat Yai. Most focus group participants were university students, one group consisted of university lecturers (Ubon Ratchathani), and one of pro-Thaksin Red Shirt villagers (Ubon Ratchathani). The participants were recruited with the help of local lecturers, recruitment posters and word-of-mouth methods. The participation was limited by age and nationality: only participants aged over sixteen years old and of Thai nationality were able to take part in the study. There were no further restrictions on participation. All focus groups were conducted between October and November 2016.

All focus group participants were shown four pre-selected videos – the 'Thailand 4.0' video by the Ministry of Commerce, the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign video by the National Identity Foundation, Siam Piwat and Iconsiam, the official *Phrik Kaeng* (Senses from Siam) movie trailer by Wandee media, and Tourism Authority of Thailand's 'Travelling in Thailand is Fun' video – that were released in the weeks and months before the focus group sessions. The four videos were selected on the basis of their 2016 release and because they represented different sectors across which the government was branding. I decided to include only recent videos so that the participants could reflect on and relate to the concurrent political developments. Nevertheless, most participants had not seen all four videos before they took part in the study. The videos were shown in the following order: 'Thailand 4.0,' 'Pride of Thailand,' *Phrik Kaeng*, and 'Travelling in Thailand is Fun.' After each video was played, the participants were asked to discuss what the video was about, why the government/private sector made such a video, who the target audiences were, and how the video made them feel.[2] This chapter analyses the content of the four videos and participants' reaction to them by maintaining the order in which the videos were shown. It addresses the following research question: How do domestic audiences react to nation branding? The sections that follow show that participants' reactions to the

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[1] No focus groups were conducted in Thailand's Deep South – the three Malay-Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat – due to security concerns.
[2] For the full list of focus group questions, see Appendix A.

four videos varied both geographically and generationally. Participants in the South were more likely to perceive the four videos in a positive light, while participants in the North and Northeast were, on the other hand, lot more critical and apprehensive of them. Many participating students, especially in the North, Northeast and Bangkok, also found it difficult to relate to those videos that were based on old, conservative, junta-defined notions of Thainess. These students enjoyed all things modern; they did not dwell on traditions and were open to change. Overall, the videos seemed to have made little change to participants' existing social attitudes and behaviours. Instead, they often reinforced the existing cleavages (political, economic and social) and feelings of alienation among the focus group participants.

Thailand 4.0

Launched in April 2016 by the Ministry of Commerce (MoC), Thailand 4.0 was the junta's flagship economy-oriented nation branding project. It promised an economic upgrade that would align the country with the new digital age. An infographic video produced by the MoC explained that Thailand's economic development started in the 1.0 age of agriculture, followed by the 2.0 age of light industry and the current 3.0 age of heavy industry. Having reached the 3.0 age two decades ago, Thailand had not been able to move on and was now trapped at the middle-income level with an annual economic growth of only 3-4 per cent.[4] How can Thailand escape the middle-income trap? According to the video, Thailand needed to enter the digital 4.0 age to become a high-income country. To transition from 3.0 to 4.0, Thailand needed to have an innovation-driven value-based economy in the spirit of 'work less, get more.' The video then outlined five key areas of focus – (1) food, agriculture and bio-technologies; (2) public health and medical technologies; (3) robotics and smart technologies; (4) digital technologies; and (5) culture, creative industries and high-value services. After illustrating how life in the 4.0 age would improve, the video ended by asking: 'We have already started – will you?'[3]

On the surface, Thailand 4.0 was an example of nation branding from within Kaneva's technical-economic strand as it offered an attractive vision of the country moving towards economic prosperity. Moreover, the project had a strong Shinawatra appeal as it placed people at the centre of economic development. First introduced by

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[3] Original text: เราเริ่มแล้ว คุณเริ่มหรือยัง; See 'Thailand 4.0 by MOC,' YouTube, published 30 June 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEfY3rQZpNo&t=2s.

Thaksin during his 2001-2006 premiership, this people-centric approach was especially popular with Thailand's often-marginalised rural populations in the North and Northeast.[4] Suvit Maesincee, the then Deputy Minister of Commerce and the brain behind the Thailand 4.0 project, described Thailand 4.0 as Thailand's economic nation branding project that aimed to improve the country's global economic position.[5] The idea behind the project was to help differentiate Thailand from its neighbours when competing for foreign investment and to overcome the middle-income trap. Value creation, distributed capitalism and sustainable development were the project's three main buzzwords. In short, Thailand 4.0 was the country's new brand equity.

Despite the apparent focus on the country's economic positioning, foreign investors were not the primary target audience of the Thailand 4.0 project, and nor was the upgrading of the country's industrial and service sectors the project's top priority. As Suvit explained, this branding project was aimed at Thai people since to get to Thailand 4.0, the country needed to first have Thai People 4.0.[6] What would Thai People 4.0 look like? According to Suvit, they would be global, digital, capable, and socially responsible. To achieve this, a society-wide education reform was needed to make Thai people purposeful, innovative, resourceful and mindful, the four key skills that would characterise Thai people in the 4.0 age. Suvit concluded that it was Thai people rather than the Thai economy that would differentiate Thailand from its neighbours and the rest of the world. Suvit's vision of Thai People 4.0 once again points to the tension between the junta's economic and socio-political needs that are reproduced in the nation-branding process. The society-wide education reform that Suvit mentioned as necessary to turn Thai people into Thai People 4.0 clashed with many of the NCPO's post-coup educational objectives based on conservative notions of patriotism, moralism, civic duties and good citizenship. However, this contradiction did not seem to matter to the generals whose attempts to reform the country's education system resulted in notions of bounded creativity and innovation. For the generals, imagining a different kind of socio-political reality was not a sign of innovation or creativity but rather evidence of unpatriotic behaviour and social disunity.

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[4] Ferrara, *Modern Thailand*, 246-7.
[5] Interview, Suvit.
[6] Ibid.

At its core, the Thailand 4.0 project was an exercise in internal nation branding. It was a modern rendition of the age-old national myth of a prosperous Thai nation under the benevolent paternalistic leadership: it was 'selling' an appealing vision of their future selves to the Thai people in exchange for their support, trust and loyalty to the military government. A series of infographics titled 'Thailand 4.0 Policy for Easy Comprehension' that were posted on Suvit's public Facebook page on 28 January 2017, made this core message even more explicit: a Thai man who looks conspicuously like Prayuth was visited by his future self who came from the Thailand 4.0 era and told him that the country's future depended on him (see Illustration 6.1).

Illustration 6.1: Thailand 4.0 infographics.

Source: Dr Suvit Maesincee, 'Thailand 4.0 Policy for Easy Comprehension,' Facebook photos, 28 January 2017, https://www.facebook.com/drsuvitpage/posts/ thailand-40-ในมิติเศรษฐกิจ-version-เข้าใจง่ายๆ-ผมพบว่ามีเพจหนึ่งชื่อ- infographic/1426880360952023/.

This Future Prayuth then described Thailand 4.0 as an age of security, wealth and sustainability, showing present-day Prayuth images of Thai farmers with iPads, old people aided by robots and a society of smart-looking entrepreneurs and neatly-dressed high-skilled workers. If progress, innovation and improved quality of life were the true objectives behind the Thailand 4.0 project, it would be difficult to fault the project except that it was initiated by an unelected government.

The Thailand 4.0 infographics were yet another reproduction of the old national myth dressed up in marketing jargon and disseminated through modern marketing techniques, with Prayuth represented as the selfless saviour who would restore the country's prosperity. Beneath the surface the Thailand 4.0 branding project was an exercise in internal nation branding by the ruling Thai junta aimed at changing Thai people's attitudes towards the military government and the political order they represented. As a skilled marketing professional, Suvit was employed to deliver and promote the junta's economic vision and that was exactly what he did. The generals needed to create an image of the country's economy under long-term strategic control, despite their poor macroeconomic record. They hoped that Thailand 4.0 would strengthen their claims to power and political legitimacy. When asked about examples of actual policies that would underpin the Thailand 4.0 project, Suvit did not have concrete answers; he added that policy creation was the responsibility of individual ministries.[7] Yet, many government officials across different ministries were themselves confused about what Thailand 4.0 was and how to achieve it.[8] Despite all the talk of Thailand 4.0 bringing the country firmly into the digital age, faxing was still a popular mode of communication at different ministries and various governmental agencies in 2016.[9] Yet, by presenting their strategic national myth of a creatively modernising Thailand, the NCPO wanted to show Thai people the benefits of military over civilian rule. Under an elected government, the Thailand 4.0 project would be at risk every time a new government came to power. However, long-term prosperity would be guaranteed under the junta and the traditional elites. The NCPO integrated the Thailand 4.0 project into their 20-year National Reform Strategy, the first twenty-year strategic plan ever drafted by a Thai government. The 20-year National Reform Strategy was a collection of vague socio-economic plans and developmental goals that the NCPO set out for Thailand to achieve in the next two

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Interview with an official B working at the Ministry of Interior, 28 September 2016; Interview, Ministry of Culture; Interview B, MFA.
[9] Field notes, June-December 2016.

decades. The generals enshrined the strategy in the country's 2017 constitution that makes it binding for future elected governments to follow.[10] As such, this strategy prevents any elected governments from setting its own policy agendas and goals, effectively extending the military's control over the course of Thai politics for the next twenty years.[11]

Thailand 4.0 was designed to strengthen the power of traditional elites by presenting them as saviours who were delivering progress and economic development after years of political stagnation and frequent economy-crippling street protests. However, modern digital capitalism was not the only thing Thailand 4.0 had to offer: the country would also follow King Bhumibol's philosophy of sufficiency economy described as one of the key drivers of Thailand's future economic development. Through the inclusion of the king's sufficiency economy, the junta wanted to differentiate Thailand 4.0 from similar-sounding Shinawatra-era projects. Due to the strict lese majesté laws, there had always been little open criticism of Bhumibol's ideas in Thailand. However, one critical informant working within Thailand's private sector argued that the sufficiency economy was merely a political tool of the traditional elites aimed at maintaining the country's rigid social hierarchy system.[12] Bhumibol's calls for sufficiency based on personal moderation, prudence and frugality are hardly aspirational values when it comes to modern economic development, especially in the digital 4.0 age. Yet, located in the Buddhist merit-derived social hierarchy system, they effectively justify and normalise economic and social inequality. After all, Bhumibol's calls for sufficiency had always been rather paradoxical given that he was ranked as the world's richest monarch with an estimated wealth of 30 billion US dollars in 2011.[13] The junta's decision to promote economic development in tandem with sufficiency economy thus sought to contain people's economic and socio-political aspirations, such as participatory democracy, that have frequently threatened the power of the traditional elites over the past decade.

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[10] Interview, NESDB.

[11] McCargo et al., 'Ordering Peace,' 69.

[12] Anonymous interview, 25 October 2016.

[13] Forbes assumed that the Crown Property Bureau was the king's personal property, which was a contentious question at the time. See 'The World's Richest Royals,' *Forbes*, 29 April 2011, https://www.forbes.com/sites/investopedia/2011/04/29/the-worlds-richest-royals/#1dc3da1e739f; Also see 'The King is not rich,' *Prachatai,* 25 February 2011, https://prachatai.com/english/node/2329.

What did a sample of Thai people think about the Thailand 4.0 video (see Table 6.1)?[14]

Table 6.1: Participants' views of the 'Thailand 4.0' video.

Focus Group	Mostly Positive Views of Thailand 4.0	Mostly Negative Views of Thailand 4.0	No Views of Thailand 4.0
FG1 (South)	67%	33%	
FG2 (North)	33%	67%	
FG3 (Centre)		100%	
FG4 (Northeast) - students		67%	33%
FG5 (Northeast) - lecturers		100%	
FG6 (Northeast) - villagers	67%		33%

Most participants of the six focus groups that I conducted between October and November 2016 had not heard of Thailand 4.0 before despite the junta's dissemination efforts. Besides the MoC Thailand 4.0 video and the infographics, there were plenty of other videos and infographics produced by other ministries and governmental agencies. Suvit was giving talks and interviews about the project, many of which were accessible on YouTube, and he was actively promoting the project on his public Facebook page that had over forty-thousand likes as of December 2016. PM Prayuth regularly talked about Thailand 4.0 in his weekly broadcasts while many Thai national newspapers ran articles on the project.[15]

As a result of the decade-long political conflict, I expected to receive more critical responses to the project in the North and Northeast (Shinawatra strongholds) and fewer in the Upper South (traditional elites' stronghold) given the regions' political orientations. I did not, however, anticipate that such responses would hold true for all participants in these regions. Although focus group participants in the Upper South (see data for FG1 in Table 6.1) were most inclined to view the project in a positive light, they expressed some doubts about the project's feasibility. Their doubts were mostly related to the length of time necessary for this project to succeed and the limited time the junta had in power. Questions of political legitimacy did not concern the participants in the Upper South as they were supportive of the military

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[14] For the full list of 'Thailand 4.0' focus group questions, see Appendix A.

[15] 'ไขรหัส "ประเทศไทย 4.0" สร้างเศรษฐกิจใหม่ ก้าวข้ามกับดักรายได้ปานกลาง [Explaining the "Thailand 4.0" code: building new economy, overcoming the middle-income trap],' *Thai Rath*, 2 May 2016, https://www.thairath.co.th/content/613903.

government and traditional elites. One participant did not like the project as she believed the digital age was not suitable for Thailand. The participant explained that Thailand needed to follow the sufficiency path of King Bhumibol by focusing on agriculture instead of modern technologies.[16] This was despite the video making explicit references to sufficiency. The participant's reaction might be, at least in part, a reflection of heightened royalism following the death of King Bhumibol Adulyadej as I conducted this focus group during the official thirty-day mourning period. However, her response also indirectly highlighted the lack of ideology on the part of nation branding, which differentiates it from propaganda, in that Thailand 4.0 essentially combines two contradictory approaches to economic development. The participants in the Upper South were also most inclined to express hope in the video and the government: one female participant suggested that Thai people needed to help the government achieve Thailand 4.0 through self-development. The video's final call for action clearly resonated with this participant.

Participants in the Upper South were not the only ones inspired by the video and its notions of future prosperity. Rather surprisingly, a group of pro-Thaksin villagers in the Northeast (see data for FG6 in Table 6.1) were also inspired by the video and expressed similar attitudes to the participants in the Upper South: they too felt that they should start with self-development and were keen to spread the video's messages to their fellow villagers.[17] The participants' unexpected enthusiasm was likely a result of Thailand 4.0 having similar appeal to the Shinawatra-era economic policies that were widely supported by Thailand's rural populations in the North and Northeast. However, unlike the participants in the Upper South, the villagers in the Northeast did not express any hope in the military government. Their motivation to take up action was, on the contrary, based on their mistrust of the military government and their commitment to returning power to civilian rule. One female participant aptly captured the general mood by saying: 'We can do this ourselves, we cannot wait for the [civilian] government or election. If we wait, when will we get it?'[18] There was a sense of frustration among the villagers about the course of Thai politics even though the video struck all the right chords. Ultimately, the video did not do enough to legitimise the country's military rule in the eyes of villagers in the Northeast: who was behind the video mattered more than its content. Despite the junta's branding

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[16] Focus group, Hat Yai, 11 November 2016.
[17] Focus group with Red Shirt villagers, Ubon Ratchathani, 14 October 2016.
[18] Ibid.

efforts, participants in the Northeast were not prepared to subscribe to the junta's strategic national myth of a creatively modernising yet socially traditional and culturally unique country.

The most negative feelings towards the video were expressed by participating students in Bangkok (see data for FG3 in Table 6.1), and students and lecturers in the Northeast (see data for FG4 and FG5 in Table 6.1) who described Thailand 4.0 as mere propaganda and a political necessity for the junta to maintain power. Students and lecturers in the Northeast also expressed feelings of alienation as they believed the project would benefit mainly the government, technocrats, big businesses and middle- and upper-class urban Thais who are the junta's main support groups.[19] Here, the participants were referring to Thailand's history of unequal economic development and benefit distribution, which did not extend much beyond the capital city of Bangkok.[20] There was a sense of disenchantment among the participants in the Northeast. They complained that the government had never asked people in the provinces what they actually needed. One lecturer thought that the junta was pursuing the Thailand 4.0 project because of an international trend. The project did, indeed, resonate with Klaus Schwab's influential theory of the fourth industrial revolution – a rapid development of digital technologies across all industries that had changed modes of production, consumption, service provision but also the way people live, work and relate to each other[21] – that found resonance within the Asia-Pacific region. For example, Japan launched a similar initiative in 2015 called 'Industry 4.0.'[22] It may well be the case that Suvit was aware of the Japanese initiative as his public Facebook page reveals that he actively follows economic trends in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, which he then shares with his followers. Although the participants from these three groups were not strictly against the ideas presented in the video, they were sceptical about the junta's sincerity. Participants in the North were less sceptical about the junta's intentions (see data for FG2 in Table 6.1). They were, however, largely pessimistic about the junta's abilities to carry out a project premised on modern digital technologies. As one male participants noted, the military government consisted of

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[19] Focus group with university students, Ubon Ratchthani, 13 October 2016; Focus group with university lecturers, Ubon Ratchathani, 13 October 2016.
[20] Baker and Pasuk, *History*, 212-6.
[21] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 9-13.
[22] Jochen Legewie, 'Japan launches its own Industry 4.0 initiative,' *CNC*, 23 June 2015, http://www.cnc-communications.com/blog/japan-launches-industry-4-0-initiative/.

old army generals who were not familiar with modern technologies.[23] Nevertheless, two participants still expressed hope in the project and its feasibility. Perhaps the junta's branding efforts were slowly succeeding in undermining the popularity of the Shinawatra political networks in the North.

Despite the different feelings and opinions, all focus group participants agreed that the Thailand 4.0 video and the wider branding project was aimed at the Thai population at large. Most participants believed that the video targeted mainly young generations, such as students and young adults, as these sections of Thai society could potentially benefit from the project. As one female student in Bangkok noted, the junta's focus on young people was also very pragmatic because they were the next generations of voters and potential junta critics.[24] Following the coup, Thai students were among the most vocal critics of Prayuth and the ruling junta.[25] Two participants in the Upper South also believed that the video was targeting Thailand's rural populations (the Shinawatra strongholds). This is in line with the generals' approach to nation branding through the framework of information operations (IO). In the junta's mind, certain kinds of students and villagers were their 'enemies' because they did not support the coup, the military rule or the right of the traditional elites to state power. This explains the Thailand 4.0's focus on changing the people instead of the country's economy. Overall, most participants criticised Thailand 4.0 for lacking clarity on how Thailand would transition from the 3.0 to the 4.0 age. The vision of a creatively modernising Thailand was not strong enough to diffuse concerns the participants had over the project's feasibility and the junta's altruism. Despite all the branding efforts, Thailand 4.0 did little to help the generals achieve the objectives behind their strategic national myth. Nevertheless, as an ongoing project Thailand 4.0 might develop beyond the form described in this chapter.

Pride of Thailand

Launched in June 2016, the 'Pride of Thailand: Filling up the nation with pride' project was a nation-wide internal nation branding campaign aimed at diffusing virtue across Thai society. It was jointly run by: the National Identity Foundation, a conservative charity with links to the military, monarchy and big Bangkok

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[23] Focus group, Chiang Mai, 19 October 2016.
[24] Focus group, Bangkok, 28 October 2016.
[25] 'Post-coup Thai Student Activists – Part I.' *Prachatai*, 1 May 2015, https://prachatai.com/english/node/5020.

businesses;[26] Siam Piwatat, a Bangkok-based retail and real estate development giant run by the Chutrakul family with close links to the monarchy and many influential big Bangkok-based business families;[27] and Iconsiam, a joint venture between Siam Piwat, Charoen Pokpand Group (a Bangkok-based business conglomerate owned by the influential Sino-Thai Chearavanont family) and MQDC Magnolia Quality Development Corporation (also owned by the Cheavanont family). The campaign comprised of a dedicated 'Pride of Thailand' website, Facebook page, Twitter hashtag and an official LINE account. It promised to 'build value, build inspiration and reinforce virtue by inviting Thai people to unite in telling stories that are beautiful, things that are wonderful, invaluable things that are [the source of] pride from every Thai community.'[28] The campaign asked Thai people to submit stories they were proud of via the dedicated 'Pride of Thailand' website, the campaign's official LINE account or by post. These stories could have been in the form of an image, a video or a short message and people could have submitted them between 27 June and 30 September 2016, which was the official duration of the campaign.[29] Once submitted, the stories would be categorised and stored in a digital repository that would, according to the project website, become a

> 'knowledge resource for the [Thai] youth, students, citizens, governmental agencies and the private sector, including foreigners, [that is] for dissemination so that the world can learn about the prosperity of Thai

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[26] The National Identity Foundation is sponsored by Thai Bev (Chang Beer), Boon Rawd Brewery (Singha Beer), The Stock Exchange of Thailand, Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (government-owned), The Siam Cement Group (its main shareholder is the Crown Property Bureau) and the Government Savings Bank (government-owned). General Surayud Chulanont, former prime minister (2006-2008) and supreme commander of the Royal Thai Army (2002-2003) is the Foundation's president. Surayud has served as a Privy Councillor to both King Vajiralongkorn (2016-present) and King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1946-2016). See 'ความเป็นมา [Origins],' The National Identity Foundation, accessed 15 December 2018, http://www.nif-tidthai.org/เกี่ยวกับมูลนิธิ/.

[27] According to Ünaldi, the royal family is Siam Piwat's second biggest shareholder. See Ünaldi, *Working towards*, 157.

[28] Original text: สร้างคุณค่าสร้างแรงบันดาลใจและเสริมสร้างคุณธรรมจริยธรรม ด้วยการเชิญชวนคนไทยร่วมกันบอกเล่าเรื่องราวที่ดีงาม สิ่งที่เป็นสุดยอด สิ่งล้ำค่า ที่เป็นความภาคภูมิใจจากทุกชุมชนของประเทศไทย; 'ที่มาของโครงการภาคภูมิแผ่นดินไทย [The origins of the Pride of Thailand project],' The Pride of Thailand, accessed 29 January 2018, http://www.theprideofthailand.com/aboutus.php

[29] 'วิธีการและเงื่อนไข [Rules and Conditions],' The Pride of Thailand, accessed 25 January 2018, http://www.theprideofthailand.com/rules.php.

civilisation, wisdom and identity and to preserve it so that it continues to live together with Thai people and Thailand.'[30]

To ensure that the campaign was working in support of, rather than against, virtuous rule, all submissions were screened by the project's committee that reserved the right to remove any content deemed illegal or that 'contradict[ed] the peace and order or the beautiful moral standards of [Thai] people or society.'[31] Those submitting to the campaign not only needed to comply with the country's laws but also the junta's peace and order rhetoric, definitions of morality and Thainess. The designated channels for submission sought to ensure that any submissions deemed inappropriate could be traced back to their original senders. Before submitting via the website, potential participants would be asked to register either via their Facebook account or by filling out a short form that asked, among other things, for the participants' national ID number. Submissions via LINE could be linked to the sender's phone number and postal submissions to the sender's address or at least their local post office. This procedure might have discouraged some Thais from participating in the project, especially those who did not subscribe to the junta-defined notions of Thainess, morality and peace and order.

The 'Pride of Thailand' website presented the campaign as the first ever example of *pracharath*, the NCPO's strategy for domestic economic growth based on joint public-private sector-government partnership.[32] According to the website, the campaign was led by the National Identity Foundation.[33] Yet, the campaign's promotional materials seem to indicate that Siam Piwat and Iconsiam were also heavily involved in the creation and the running of the campaign. The official campaign launch event took place in Siam Paragon, a shopping mall in downtown Bangkok developed by Siam Piwat, followed by a poster campaign and stalls all across the shopping mall distributing campaign leaflets and selling the campaign t-shirts. It is important to note that *pracharath* was conceived, first and foremost, as a strategy for economic growth. Yet, the first campaign hailed as an example of *pracharath* was paradoxically an identity campaign that had nothing to do with the

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[30] 'The origin,' The Pride of Thailand.

[31] 'Rules and Conditions,' The Pride of Thailand.

[32] 'ร่วมบันทึกล้านเรื่องราวอันดีงามและล้ำค่ากับโครงการ "ภาคภูมิแผ่นดินไทย" เติมความภูมิใจให้เต็มชาติ [Join in recording million stories that are beautiful and invaluable with the 'Pride of Thailand' project. Fill up the nation with pride.],' *Matichon*, 28 June 2016, http://www.matichon.co.th/news/191607.

[33] 'The origin,' The Pride of Thailand.

country's economic development. One reason for this might be that the 'Pride of Thailand' project did not require as much time, commitment and resources as an economic project would. Wiwan Tharahirunchot, a successful Bangkok businesswoman and a member of Thai Social Enterprise Board (one of the twelve areas of *pracharath*), pointed out that economic projects under *pracharath* faced many implementation problems due to the lack of budget and willingness of the Thai business community to get involved.[34] The 'Pride of Thailand' project offered an opportunity for big Thai businesses to publicly reassert their commitment to Thainess and to present themselves as good patriotic businesses and model Thai 'citizens.' The project offered an opportunity for instant gratification. The campaign was also officially supported by the Royal Thai Armed Forces (all units) and many ministries from within the military government (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Ministry of Tourism and Sports and Ministry of Culture). However, an official working for the Ministry of Interior, whom I interviewed after the project was launched, was unaware of the project's existence and claimed his ministry had nothing to do with it.[35] This points to the somewhat fragmented character of the nation-branding process under the military junta.

The project's timing was also significant. It was launched on 27 June 2016, less than six weeks before the 7 August constitutional referendum, and finished on 30 September 2016, almost two months after the popular vote. The project's appeal to preserving all things Thai and uniting Thai people in their Thainess seemed like a tactical move to shore up support for the ruling junta and its notions of virtuous rule ahead of such a crucial political event. The referendum was the first time after the 2014 coup that the junta allowed Thai people to directly participate in politics. The generals could not afford to lose the referendum because doing so would seriously undermine their claims for political legitimacy based on their peace and order rhetoric and the post-coup promise of returning happiness to the Thai people which Prayuth reasserted every Friday in his 'Returning Happiness to the People' broadcast. The 'Pride of Thailand' campaign was trying to refocus the public attention from the country's political problems to problems of individual and collective identity. This was reflected in one of the campaign videos that sought to induce social anxiety in people by telling a story of Thainess that was at the verge of extinction; its last

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[34] Interview with Mrs Wiwan Tharahirunchot, 15 August 2016.
[35] Interview B, Ministry of Interior.

guardians were a handful of *farang* (white foreigners) who realised the value of Thai culture, identity and the way of life.

The 'Pride of Thailand' campaign comprised two short videos. The first video relied heavily on celebrity endorsement; a number of well-known Thai celebrities appeared in this video sharing with the viewers the different ways in which they can preserve Thainess and all things Thai. At the end of the video, viewers were urged to join the campaign if they 'still love[d] Thailand.'[36] The second video was very different from the first one in that it used no celebrity endorsements and no words were spoken throughout. It sought instead to play on people's emotions and conscience. The focus group participants were asked to watch and discuss the second video. The two-and-a-half-minute video starts by showing images of foreigners engaged in very 'Thai' activities: a *farang* practicing *khon* dance, a *farang* cooking *pad thai* (a well-known national noodle dish), a *farang* embroidering traditional Thai patterns and a *farang* sitting in front of a portrait of King Bhumibol. Then, the sequence is interrupted by a single-sentence caption that reads: 'These people love Thailand.' When the video resumes again, there are more images of *farang* engaged in 'Thai' activities such as working in the paddy fields and writing the Thai alphabet. Then comes another short interlude before another caption emerges: 'Do you love this country?' Clearly directed at viewers, this caption is followed by more imagery but this time the imagery contrasts *farang* and Thais by applying a good-bad dichotomy to the visual narrative. It shows an image of bad 'un-Thai' behaviour carried out by Thais – such as daubing graffiti on walls, mistreating elephants, partying and getting drunk – followed by good 'Thai' behaviour carried out by *farang* – such as restoring ancient murals, working in an elephant sanctuary or performing *khon* dance. Then a whole series of captions emerges in a quick sequence, occasionally interrupted by images depicting Thailand and Thais:

> 'If you have ever said that you love this country, we want you to do [it] by preserving, preserving the stories, preserving the thinking, preserving [the Thai way of] life, preserving wisdom, preserving all Thai stories, preserving… so that Thainess does not disappear by telling the story that you are proud of

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[36] Original text in Thai: ถ้าคุณยังรักประเทศไทย มาร่วมเขียนเพื่อเก็บของดี วิธีชีวิต ความคิด หรือภูมิปัญญาไทยที่คุณรู้และอยากให้คงอยู่; See 'โครงการภาคภูมิแผ่นดินไทย Version 1 [The Pride of Thailand Project Version 1],' YouTube, published 2 August 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SOMgmeYqBE&list=PLcwQy6DvJjsz0aKXzMp-rcB7bKQv6LhQC.

at the Pride of Thailand project. Preserving so that [Thainess] continues to live on with the Thai nation.'[37]

The last caption is followed by a well-known photograph of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit on a tour of Thailand's rural areas possibly from the 1960s or 1970s. Indeed, at least five other images and footage shown during the last fifteen seconds of the video are historical. They invoke a sense of nostalgia for the 'good' old times before the politically turbulent 2000s and 2010s. The video presents an implicit social critique of Thai people for not being and not acting 'Thai' enough. Although the video is visibly appealing, its content is simplistic and patronising. Some of the captions and images, such as 'Do you love this country?' or 'If you have ever said you love this country […],' amount to a form of emotional blackmail by the Thai state, traditional elites and their political networks. The video effectively questions Thai people's right to claim their Thai identity by telling them that most of their behaviour and actions are un-Thai. Thainess, as the main message of the video makes clear, is merit-driven and something that Thai people have to earn by being and acting 'Thai.'

What did a sample of Thai people make of the 'Pride of Thailand' video?[38]

Table 6.2: Participants' views of the 'Pride of Thailand' video.

Focus Group	Mostly Positive Views of Pride of Thailand	Mostly Negative Views of Pride of Thailand	No Views of Pride of Thailand
FG1 (South)	83%	17%	
FG2 (North)	83%	17%	
FG3 (Centre)	60%	40%	
FG4 (Northeast) - students		83%	17%
FG5 (Northeast) - lecturers		83%	17%
FG6 (Northeast) - villagers	33%	67%	

Most participants of the six focus groups had not seen the video or heard about the 'Pride of Thailand' project before taking part in this study. The only exception were the participating students in Bangkok, who had all seen the video prior to the focus group session. Although 'Pride of Thailand' was a nation-wide project, its physical presence in Siam Paragon in Bangkok might help to explain why the general

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[37] See 'โครงการภาคภูมิแผ่นดินไทย Version 2 [The Pride of Thailand Project Version 2],' YouTube, published 2 August 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQ3IW_3tuGA&index=2&list=PLcwQy6DvJjsz0aKXzMp-rcB7bKQv6LhQC.

[38] For the full list of 'Pride of Thailand focus group questions, see Appendix A.

awareness of the project was higher in Bangkok than in other provinces. Outside of Bangkok, only one female student participant in Hat Yai and two male student participants in Chiang Mai were familiar with the video. Social media seemed to have been instrumental here as these students had come across the video either on YouTube or on Facebook.[39] Interestingly, some of the students who had seen the video had not watched it until the end. They watched the whole video for the first time at the focus group session. This was especially the case of female students in Bangkok who claimed that after watching a few scenes from the video it was clear to them that the video was about promoting Thainess.[40]

Participant reactions to the video varied. This was likely due to the emotive nature of the video. It made participants consider their own identity, their affiliations and feelings towards the nation. Because of this, none of the participants who expressed their views on the 'Pride of Thailand' video was left feeling indifferent. The video evoked strong emotions, both positive and negative, in all of them. The strongest reaction came from one female student in the Upper South who burst into tears whilst watching the video. This was the participant who had seen the video before, yet the video had a profound emotional effect on her. To explain her reaction, the participant said that she really liked the video but felt ashamed at times when images of Thais behaving 'badly' were shown.[41] The video's reproachful tone clearly resonated with this participant who took the video's messages at face value. Other participants' reactions in the Upper South were also largely positive (see data for FG1 in Table 6.2). One male participant noted that the video's messages went beyond the topic of culture. He rightly pointed out that many things shown in the video had been constructed throughout modern Thai history in order to give Thai people a sense of nationality. For this participant, the video was more about preserving the sense of nationality and togetherness, which he believed was about to disappear, rather than preserving Thai culture.

Only one participant in the Upper South found the video's messages problematic. She was left feeling confused by the video's depictions of Thainess as they did not represent her and the way she felt about her national identity. As she explained, 'Thainess is not [about] dancing *khon* but it is a feeling of togetherness. For example, Japanese people do not have to wear kimono [or] drink tea everywhere

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[39] Focus group, Bangkok; Focus group, Chiang Mai.
[40] Focus group, Bangkok.
[41] Focus group, Hat Yai

they go.'[42] This participant implicitly criticised the performative character of Thai identity reinforced by the military government following the 2014 coup. She believed that feeling Thai was enough to qualify for Thainess and that Thai people should not need to prove their Thainess by doing or saying particular things. Nevertheless, she agreed with her fellow participants that the video was well-made.

When the participants in the Upper South were asked whether the video had inspired them to preserve Thai culture or Thainess, only two female participants out of the total of six participating students agreed. The remaining four participants were more inclined to say they would not damage Thai culture rather than committing to its preservation. This was an interesting response as the students made clear they were not ready to change their social attitudes and behaviours just because someone had told them to do so. Their intention not to participate in activities that could damage Thai culture did not necessarily require them to change their behaviours because they likely did not participate in such activities in the first place. One female participant offered a market-oriented view on this debate by saying that Thais should 'showcase [their] Thai identity' in the market more. She explained that some Thai businesses were copying products and designs from abroad so that their products and designs looked luxurious and, in this process, they forsook Thai identity. This, according to the participant, was unnecessary.

Like participants in the Upper South, participants in the North also viewed the 'Pride of Thailand' video in mostly positive ways (see data for FG2 in Table 6.2). Out of six participating students, only one expressed discontent with the video. As he explained, the video 'present[ed] only our bad side […] some Thai people do not act like that [and] not all foreigners love Thainess.'[43] The remaining participants seemed to have readily accepted the video's message about Thai culture being under threat and the proposition that foreigners cared more about preserving Thai culture and Thainess than Thai people did. Interestingly, one male participant opined that the video showed that Thailand was not a racist country. According to this participant, it did not matter whether one was Thai or not because 'foreigners could also love our country. Our country is not racist. We accept foreigners who come here.'[44] In some respects, this participant was indirectly supporting the performative character of Thainess promoted by the junta in that anyone who acted Thai could become Thai.

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Focus group, Chiang Mai.
[44] Ibid.

Yet, this sets a dangerous precedent as the logic also works in reverse in that those Thais who act 'un-Thai' can lose their right to Thainess.

Only one participant in the North openly questioned the concept of Thainess. He pointed out that Thainess was a very vague concept: 'Personally, I don't know what Thai culture is. When my [fellow participants] say that Thainess means culture, I mean, our neighbouring countries have very similar cultures to us. If our neighbouring countries are similar to us, then what is Thainess?' This participant clearly did not buy into the national myth of Thai exceptionalism that had been promoted by the Thai state for decades and emphasised by the military government since the 2014 coup. However, other participants were ready to defend this national myth. As two female participants explained, Thainess was to be found in the similar patterns of social attitudes and behaviours, such as when Thai people meet foreigners, they will smile even though they are unable to communicate with them due to language barrier. Once again, it seems that the performative character of Thai identity is deeply rooted in the consciousness of some Thais.

Despite their generally positive views of the 'Pride of Thailand video,' the participants' responses to the question about whether they were inspired by the video to preserve Thai culture were fairly ambivalent. All participants agreed that only some aspects of Thai culture should be preserved. Other aspects should be left to change and adjust to the needs of the modern life. In fact, one female participant completely rejected the video's message, and arguably its purpose, by saying that it was an individual's decision whether to preserve or not to preserve Thai culture. The video had failed to convince her that preserving Thai culture and Thainess was a duty of all Thai people. She aptly explained her position: 'Personally, I believe it depends on us. I don't feel like I want to preserve [Thai culture] that much, maybe it is because I am also *hua samai mai* [a person with a modern outlook].'[45] This participant is exactly the type of a person the traditional elites are afraid of: someone who does not cling to tradition, thinks for themselves and is not afraid of change. However, not all participating students in the North displayed this *hua samai mai* attitude. One male and one female participant expressed they should preserve Thai culture but at the same time they noted a lack of guidance. As the male participants explained not even their parents' generation complied with Thai culture to the extent described by the video. The female student further added that having been brought up in urban settings, they

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[45] Focus group, Chiang Mai.

did not 'see clearly what it is that we should preserve'.[46] The responses of these two participants reflected a *hua boran* attitude, that is characterised with a more conservative outlook and an inclination towards the authority-centred, paternalistic and hierarchical social structure as represented by virtuous rule. This *hua boran* attitude corresponds to the conservative and traditional notions of Thainess and the ideas of Thainess as a thinking frame expressed in the Tourism Authority of Thailand's 2015 magazine.

Unlike their fellow participants in the Upper South and the North, the participating students in Bangkok offered more mixed views of the 'Pride of Thailand' video (see data for FG3 in Table 6.2). On the one hand, three out of five participating students seemed to have liked the video and they also agreed with the video's message about Thai culture being under threat. The military government have clearly succeeded in making some Thai people feel insecure about their culture and identity. One participant even admitted that she liked this video more than the MoC's 'Thailand 4.0' video because this video was more real.[47] For this participant, the image this video presented was more representative of Thailand and its people than the modern digital image of 'Thailand 4.0.' On the other hand, all participants were aware that the video had a deeper purpose than just making Thai people preserve their culture. Two participants believed that the video was also aimed at building national unity, while one participant referred to the video as propaganda and pointed out an obvious paradox: the video was promoting 'traditional' Thai culture, yet the campaign had a physical presence in Siam Paragon that had nothing to do with Thainess. As a glitzy, luxurious shopping mall in downtown Bangkok, Siam Paragon is far removed from the traditions the video calls on Thai people to preserve.

None of the participating students in Bangkok were concerned about the video's lack of cultural diversity. They believed that showing a variety of Thai culture and customs would make the country look disunited. One participant did, however, note that: 'Actually, almost all of this is central culture.'[48] The students' lack of concern for diversity is reflective of Bangkok's economic, political and cultural hegemony over other provinces. It shows how far removed some people in Bangkok are from people in other provinces, their feelings and identities. While the images in the video might have been largely representative of these Bangkok-based participants,

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Focus group, Bangkok.
[48] Ibid.

their perceptions of selves and Thai identity, many people in the North, Northeast or the three southernmost majority Malay-Muslim provinces would struggle to relate to these cultural notions. The participating students in Bangkok saw the use of foreigners in the video as a tactical move to provoke Thai people to act on the video's messages. As one participant summarised it: Thai people care about their image and 'worry about losing face.'[49] However, another student questioned whether foreigners were really doing the things depicted in the video. She concluded that 'no one would come [to Thailand] to live like this but they [the video producers] emphasise for us to see why foreigners love [Thainess] while we [Thais] do not.'[50] This seemed to have inspired one participant to look for an excuse for the video's patronising tone: 'Maybe it is to show us we don't love the good things we have, instead we cause damage to our country, [our country] is disunited.'[51] The junta's peace and order rhetoric seemed to have resonated with this participant.

All participating students in Bangkok admitted that the 'Pride of Thailand' video made them feel a bit sad. However, it failed to motivate them to change their existing behaviours. Quite the contrary, the video made these participants question the role of the government in preserving Thainess and Thai culture. As one participant explained, through this 'Pride of Thailand' campaign the government was calling upon Thai people to love Thai culture, yet the government did nothing to support it. Another participant noted that the government 'should not call on us [to do things] one-sidedly, the government also needs to do something.'[52] The participants believed that they as individuals had no power to bring about change. The students concluded that 'one video is not able to change anything no matter how good it is. It's sad.' The 'Pride of Thailand' video had far from a desirable effect on the participating students in Bangkok. Instead of legitimating the military government, the video made the participants question the government's commitment and ability to deliver on their promises.

The most negative reactions to the video came from the participants in the Northeast (see data for FG4, FG5 and FG6 in Table 6.2) but their reasons varied. For example, the participating lectures took an issue with the narrow representation of Thai culture shown in the video. As one female participant put it: 'When we think of Thai culture, we think of *lao kra thop mai* music or something like that. We think of

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

[cultural] things that are more than this [central Thai culture].'[53] All participating lecturers agreed that the video only represented the culture of people in Bangkok, which left them feeling alienated. However, the narrow representation of Thai culture was not the only issue lecturers had with the video. One male lecturer pointed out, the video was a work of a socio-political network that was trying to divert people's attention away from the country's political problems. With a considerable degree of sarcasm, a fellow female lecturer added: 'If we talk about politics or the colour t-shirts, that will perhaps look too radical. Let's take the topic of culture, it's better, it's safer because everybody will likely already have something in common.'[54] These two lecturers identified the aims of the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign rather well as the campaign was launched to distract people from the country's political problems during the critical time of the national constitutional referendum.

The students in the Northeast were critical of the video because of its judgemental tone. As one male participant pointed out, the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign was

> 'not a good idea because it is as if they established that people who go to the temple are good [and] people who go to the pub are not good, which in reality there are bad people who go to the temple and good people who go to the pub […] People should have a right to choose their lives and not be limited to do [as they are told].'[55]

For this participant, the good-bad dichotomy was dangerous. Another male student participant in the Northeast added that such dichotomy could lead to social exclusion: 'People who are preserving [the culture] might think that they are privileged [or good] and look at those who are not preserving the culture as different [or bad].'[56] Besides social exclusion, the participating students were also critical of the video's patronising style. As one male participant aptly put it, the video did not explain to viewers why they should care about Thai culture and Thailand: 'Why should we love Thailand? Personally, I think that [just because someone tells us] is a weak reasoning. Why don't they teach us to think? [They tell us to] just say that [we] love Thailand. Why do we

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[53] *Lao kra top mai* dance is a Thai folk dance, which uses bamboo poles, typical for the Northeast and central regions.
[54] Focus group – lecturers, Ubon Ratchathani.
[55] Focus group – students, Ubon Ratchathani.
[56] Ibid.

have to love Thailand? Why do foreigners have to love Thailand?'[57] The video's patronising tone left this participant feeling clearly frustrated.

Nevertheless, there were still two participating villagers in the Northeast who liked the video and accepted the video's premise that Thai culture was under threat. As the 'Pride of Thailand' video was playing the two female villagers were complaining about the state of Thai youth and how 'Thai people these days can no longer write Thai.'[58] One of the villagers even said that if things were to continue like this, she was worried that future generations would not recognise many of the cultural traditions shown in the video. However, the villagers' acceptance of the video's message of deteriorating Thai culture, did not automatically translate into the full support for the military government. Their relationship with the video was very complicated. The following exchange between the two female villagers (villagers 1 and 3) who liked the video and one female villager (villager 2) who did not like the video aptly captures the general mood:

Villager 1: I'm proud.

Villager 2: '[The video] deceives us!'

Villager 3: 'I understand but we also need to be proud of our Thainess.'[59]

On the one hand, the two female villagers liked the video and agreed with its messages. On the other hand, they understood that the video's messages had a deeper meaning. In fact, all participating villagers in the Northeast agreed that the 'Pride of Thailand' video was part of the junta's information operations (IO) aimed at shaping their social attitudes and behaviours.[60] Because of this, they disapproved of the video. The two female villagers were going through an internal struggle: they wanted to dislike the video because they knew the video was imposing certain behaviours on them, but at the same time they were unable to do so because they felt attached to the notions of Thainess presented in the video. It was interesting to see that none of the participating villagers in the Northeast took issues with the video's narrow representation of Thai culture and that they accepted it as representative of them all. Yet, not all villagers were keen to preserve Thai culture and Thainess. As one female participant pointed out:

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Focus group – villagers, Ubon Ratchathani.

[59] Ibid.

[60] The villagers mentioned the concept of information operations by themselves. They were not prompted and they continued to refer to it throughout the rest of their discussions of the Pride of Thailand video.

> '[I]f you ask whether this culture is good, then it's been around for a long time, it's ancient culture. This wisdom should be preserved […] but if the video seizes the things we are attached to in order to influence us, then we should keep this video as a learning tool that these are the things [the government/elites] use to influence us, IO [information operations] with us. Then I don't agree [that we should preserve Thai culture].'

Similar to the 'Thailand 4.0' video, who was behind the video mattered more to the participating villagers in the Northeast than the video's content. The fact that the 'Pride of Thailand' video was linked to the military government; the traditional elites and their political networks was enough to dissuade the villagers from acting upon the video's messages.

Phrik Kaeng

The film *Phrik Kaeng* (Senses from Siam) was launched on 11 August 2016 to commemorate Queen Sirikit's eighty-fourth birthday. Its central theme was the preservation of authentic Thai food and a promise of a mouth-watering cinema experience. The official film trailer even claimed that *Phrik Kaeng* was going to be 'the most delicious Thai movie of the year.'[61] In reality, the film was not so much about Thai food than nationalism and conservativism of two Thai families who sought to preserve the alleged authenticity of Thai food. The first family, family of Khun Thaenthong, owned a Thai restaurant in which they served only authentic Thai food. The second family was a family of Ajarn Phim, a university lecturer who was teaching her students how to cook authentic Thai food. Just like the Prayuth regime, the film portrayed a grim picture of Thai society where young generations were no longer interested in preserving Thainess, this time in the form of Thai food. The film depicted the two families as the stalwarts of Thainess, who were fighting the young and their desire for change.

Although the film was shown in cinemas only for few days,[62] it generated considerable popular attention online. However, this was not the kind of popular attention the producers were hoping for. The film received a number of harsh critiques

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[61] For the full trailer, see 'พริกแกง ตัวอย่าง Senses from Siam Official Thai Trailer [Phrik Kaeng Trailer, Senses From Siam Official Thai Trailer],' YouTube, published 7 August 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4A3JRg7MgRQ.

[62] I went to see the film in Siam Paragon on 20 August 2016, eight days after the official release date, but was told the film was no longer showing. Field notes, Bangkok, August 2016.

from disappointed cinemagoers. For example, one disappointed cinemagoer wrote a review on a popular online forum called Pantip claiming that: 'I have watched [*Phrik Kaeng*] in the cinema and [it was] the biggest torture in life.'[63] This cinemagoer criticised the film for being too conservative, sexist and overly repetitive in that it was saying again and again that Thai food had to be authentic and that Thai people had a duty to preserve its authenticity.[64] According to this cinemagoer, the film was anything but delicious.

Just like many governmental branding projects launched between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016, *Phrik Kaeng* was reminding Thai people to be and to act more Thai reinforcing the performative character of Thai identity. The film was another manifestation of the workings of the traditional elites and their political networks. It was produced by a newly established media organisation, Wandee Media Company, and sponsored by some big Thai businesses from the agricultural sector such as Betagro, Oleen, Ampol Food Processing or S Khonkaen Foods. It was also sponsored by the National Food Institute and the military-owned Channel 7. Wandee Media was only established in 2016 and *Phrik Kaeng* was its first and so far only feature film.[65] Considering the speedy production of the *Phrik Kaeng* film, it seems rather peculiar that no other films have been produced by Wandee Media since. Perhaps the company was established in the hope that *Phrik Kaeng* would become another patriotic blockbuster (such as Bang Rajan in 2000) but the film failed to live up to that. This might explain why *Phrik Kaeng* was shown in cinemas only for a few days and why Wandee Media did not release the film on DVD or other commercially available media.

What did the focus group participants think of *Phrik Kaeng*?[66] The participants were shown the official *Phrik Kaeng* trailer and then invited to discuss what the trailer/film was about, who were the target audiences, why was this film made and how it made them feel. Although the trailer was only two minutes long, it captured the essence of the film rather well. It contained a scene depicting the 'battle over

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[63] Original text: เป็นหนังที่ผมดูในโรงแล้วทรมานที่สุดในชีวิตเลย; '[CR]Review: พริกแกง (อยากกระโดดถีบจอจริงๆ...) [[CR] Review: Phrik Kaeng [I really wanted to lunge through the screen…)],' Pantip, accessed 10 January 2018, https://pantip.com/topic/35480916.

[64] '[CR] Review,' Pantip.

[65] See 'Projects – Movies,' Wandee Media, accessed 14 December 2018, http://www.wandeemedia.co.th/projects/.

[66] For the full list of *Phrik Kaeng* focus group questions, see Appendix A.

Thainess' in which a young chef served a plate of fusion food to restaurateur Khun Thaenthong who crossly threw the plate back on the table with the words: 'My food has to be authentic. It has to be Thai.'[67]

Table 6.3: Participants' views of the *Phrik Kaeng* trailer.

Focus Group	Mostly Positive Views of *Phrik Kaeng*	Mostly Negative Views of *Phrik Kaeng*	No Views of *Phrik Kaeng*
FG1 (South)	67%	33%	
FG2 (North)		83%	17%
FG3 (Centre)		100%	
FG4 (Northeast) - students		67%	33%
FG5 (Northeast) - lecturers		83%	17%
FG6 (Northeast) - villagers		100%	

A number of other scenes shown in the trailer contained patriotic messages. For example, a scene where Ajarn Phim lectured her students on preserving, loving and being proud of Thai food or a scene in which Khun Thaenthong explains to his restaurant manager that authentic Thai food was 'a duty of all Thai people, who have to make Thai food that tastes Thai.' These scenes were a good indication that the film was not just about the food, especially for those participants who had not seen the film or read its reviews. Only one female participant, a student in Bangkok, had seen the whole film. One female and one male student participant in the Upper South had seen a short teaser, two female participating lecturers in the Northeast had read reviews online, all participating villagers in the Northeast and students in the North had either seen the trailer or heard about the film.

Overall, the most positive responses to the *Phrik Kaeng* trailer were expressed by the participating students in the Upper South (see data for FG1 in Table 6.3). As one female participant explained: 'I like it because I like Thai food.'[68] For this participant, the trailer was good because it was promoting Thai food which she considered part of Thai identity that was under threat. The trailer's message clearly resonated with this participant when she complained that '[t]hese days, Thai children rarely eat Thai food, [they are] addicted to Korean food [and] anything new.'[69] She viewed children's food choices as an expression of their identity rather than a matter

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[67] 'Phrik Kaeng Trailer.'
[68] Focus group, Hat Yai.
[69] Ibid.

of taste. As such, Thai children were supposed to like and eat Thai food on regular basis. The participant's reaction was a good example of how unreasonable, and potentially dangerous, the state-defined performative character of Thai identity can be. Just because someone is Thai, they are automatically expected to like and eat Thai food. If they do not do so, their commitment to Thainess comes into question. Nation branding reinforces this performative character of national identity as it shows people how to behave in a patriotic way. It encourages compliances while transgression is presented as something inherently 'un-Thai,' or unpatriotic, foreign and bad.

Yet, not all participants in the Upper South accepted the trailer's messages so readily. One female participant questioned the trailer's commitment to authentic Thai food by pointing out that many Thai dishes shown in the trailer, such as massaman curry, had foreign origins; they were not authentically Thai. The trailer seemed to have confused this participant: 'So I wonder, [have we] agreed that this is Thai food?'[70] Another female participant did not fully agree with the trailer's message that authentic Thai food must not be changed. The participant pointed out that sometimes things, including Thai food, needed to change in order to survive. The participant made an important point here that change is often the only way to survive. However, this is not the case for the NCPO and the traditional elites whose sense of security and survival is linked to the preservation of the increasingly dysfunctional virtuous rule.

When participants in the Upper South were told that the conservative side represented by the two families won over the young progressive chefs in 'the battle over Thainess,' most participants, even the two female participants who raised some issues with the trailer, seemed content with this ending. As one participant declared:

> 'I believe that this ending is good because if we completely change [Thai food], then we should not call it Thai food. If [you] want to call it Thai food, then it is appropriate for it to be truly Thai. Thai food is food that pays attention to every step […]. If it is changed, it is true it is still Thai food, but it is not authentic Thai.'[71]

Interestingly, none of the other participants, not even the female student who questioned the meaning of authentic Thai food before, found this answer problematic. Once the participants knew how the film ended, they seemed more willing to accept the trailer's messages. This change in opinion might indicate that the participating

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

students in the Upper South have a conservative *hua boran* outlook and defer easily to a perceived source of authority, in this case the film producers.

Participants in the other three regions, the North, Northeast and Centre (Bangkok), were less enthusiastic about the trailer and its messages than their Upper South counterparts (see data for FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5 and FG6 in Table 6.3). All participants in these three regions took issue with the trailer's message to preserve authentic Thai food and many were left feeling confused. One male student in the Northeast aptly expressed this confusion:

> 'Why do we have to preserve Thai food? I'm very confused. I have absolutely no idea what [authentic Thai food] means. Is this to conclude that I am not a Thai person or what? Thai food is the food that Thai people eat, which is different in every region. Why does it have to taste the same? […] Do we have to make a curry in the same way as he [the chef in the trailer] did? If I miss an ingredient, is it no longer Thai food then? But I'm a Thai person and I'm the one who made it. Then what is the [trailer's] message?'[72]

Just like this participant, all other participants across the three regions acknowledged the diversity of Thai food and criticised the trailer for showing only food from the central region. Student participants in Bangkok, participating students and villagers in the Northeast even referred to the food shown in the trailer as 'palace food.'[73] Lecturers in the Northeast described it as the food of 'upper classes' pointing out that ordinary people had no access to such food. One female lecturer likened it to food found in Siam Paragon.[74] In many respects, the identity elitism of the *Phrik Kaeng* trailer alienated the participants of the three regions from the concept of Thainess because they felt misrepresented by it. Instead of creating feelings of togetherness and mutuality in Thainess, the trailer reinforced the feelings of us and them among these focus group participants. These feelings were often accompanied with notions of injustice. As one male student participant in the Northeast pointed out '[f]ood in Isan is called Isan food, food in the South is called southern food, food in the North is called northern food but food in the central region is called Thai food.'[75] In this case, nation branding seemed to have only reinforced the negative feelings towards Bangkok's hegemony. Despite the promotion of Bangkok's hegemony, the prospects

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[72] Focus group – students, Ubon Ratchathani.
[73] Focus group, Bangkok; Focus group – students, Ubon Ratchathani; Focus group – villagers, Ubon Ratchathani.
[74] Focus group – lecturers, Ubon Ratchathani.
[75] Focus group – students, Ubon Ratchathani.

of preserving the food shown in the video did not bode well with the participating students in Bangkok. When asked how they felt about the trailer telling them that it was the duty of all Thai people to preserve Thai food, the participating students explained that they got 'goose bumps straight away, [we] do not like it at all. The word duty is too strong. […] We wonder why does [the film] finish like this? Why doesn't [it finish] like *Mo Rong*?'[76]

Similarly to their Upper South counterparts, the participants of the three other regions contested the trailer's claim to preserving authentic Thai food by pointing out that many 'authentic' Thai foods shown in the trailer had foreign origins. One female lecturer in the Northeast accused the trailer of 'monopolising Thainess,' whereas a female student in Bangkok believed that the trailer was trying to 'freeze Thai culture.'[77] Unlike the participants in the Upper South, none of the participants in the other three regions changed their opinions on *Phrik Kaeng* after finding out how the film ended. On the contrary, they seemed to have disliked it even more. Participating villagers in the Northeast offered their own explanation for the film's ending: 'Most of the people who did this film are *sakdina* [feudal].[78] Therefore, the film is also in the direction of *sakdina*. […] The identity of those who made this film is broadcast through the film. The identity of other [social] classes is not broadcast at all.'[79] The fact that the villagers used the term *sakdina* in this context indicates that they are very class conscious and that they conceptualise Thailand's political problems as inter-class struggles.[80] For these villagers, *Phrik Kaeng* was an elitist project; a form of promotion created by the elites for the elites.[81] This is an interesting interpretation of

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[76] Focus group, Bangkok; Mo Rong is a nationalistically-themed cultural Thai soap opera in which western culture could co-exist or even be mixed with Thai culture. See 'จอแก้ว: เรื่องย่อ โหมโรง [Television: Mo Rong story summary],' *Komchadluek*, 30 October 2011, http://www.komchadluek.net/news/ent/113342.

[77] Focus group – lecturers, Ubon Ratchathani; Focus group, Bangkok.

[78] Sakdina is an old Siamese feudal-like division of society based on land ownership.

[79] Focus group – villagers, Ubon Ratchathani.

[80] The use of the term *sakdina* and related terms – *amnat* (nobleman) and *phrai* (peasant) – to describe Thailand's political problems were popularised among the Red Shirts in the build-up to the 2010 protests against the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva. For an explanation why and how these terms were popularised, see the following interviews with Nattawut Saikua, one of the Red Shirt leaders at the time: 'ประชาธิปไตยไทยกับการเคลื่อนไหวของคนเสื้อแดง chunk 2 [Thai Democracy and the Red Shirt Movement part 2],' YouTube, published 17 April 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EUrRoBA7g0 and 'ประชาธิปไตยไทยกับการเคลื่อนไหวของคนเสื้อแดง chunk 3 [Thai Democracy and the Red Shirt Movement part 3],' YouTube, published 17 April 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB2WXSY20PA.

[81] Focus group – villagers, Ubon Ratchathani.

the film's objectives and one that invites a re-consideration of nation branding, its purposes and target audiences. It might well be the case that nation branding has an element of this 'promotion-for-the-self,' which governments use to compensate for their own insecurities. As such, it is a strategy for self-legitimation just as much as it is a strategy to justify one's right to rule to the governed.

Travelling Thailand is Fun

Released on 11 September 2016, 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' was a new TAT tourism video aimed at promoting domestic tourism.[82] It depicted a number of masked *khon* characters, including Demon King Thotsakan, from Thai national epic *Ramakien* travelling across Thailand and engaging in various tourism-related activities such as taking selfies, go-karting, jet-skiing, horse riding, cycling, cooking Thai sweets or riding a tuk-tuk.[83] The video was complemented by a jovial song with a catchy tune sang by two well-known Thai pop-singers, who were also wearing traditional *khon* dresses but without the masks. Through this song, the video was trying to persuade Thai people to travel within Thailand instead of choosing holiday abroad by appealing to their national consciousness. The song's refrain comes in two parts and tells Thai people that:

> Part one: 'We are Thai people, we Thais must travel in Thailand. We are Thai people, we must travel in Thailand. We are Thai people, we Thais must travel in Thailand.'
>
> Part two: 'Travelling in Thailand is fun, [we] want you to try travelling in Thailand with us. Travelling in Thailand is fun, we are Thai people, we must travel in Thailand.'[84]

Besides this nationalist refrain, the video also tells Thai people that 'We travel in Thailand so that Thai [people] are proud.'[85] Altogether, the song includes nine of these

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[82] The original name of the campaign in Thai is เที่ยวไทยมีเฮ.

[83] *Ramakien* is Thai national epic poem based on *Ramayana*, Hindu epic poem.

[84] Original lyrics in Thai: เราคนไทย เราก็ต้องไทยเที่ยวไทย เราคนไทย เราก็ต้องเที่ยวเมืองไทย เราคนไทย เราก็ต้องไทยเที่ยวไทย (Part one) and เที่ยวไทยมีเฮ ก็อยากให้ลองลองมาเที่ยวกัน เที่ยวไทยมีเฮ เราเป็นคนไทย เราก็ต้องเที่ยวไทย (Part two); For the full video, see 'เที่ยวไทยมีเฮ - เก่ง ธชย feat. ฟิล์ม บงกช (Original Version) [Travelling Thailand is Fun – Keng Thachaya feat. Film Bongkot (Original Version)],' YouTube, published 20 September 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rn93oE1CUA.

[85] Original lyrics: เรามาไทยเที่ยวไทยให้ไทยภูมิใจ; 'Travelling Thailand is Fun.'

nationalist appeals in three minutes and forty-five seconds, which is the total duration of the video (excluding the final credits). The frequent use of nationalism in the video might be a sign of urgency on the part of the military government. Although Thailand's macroeconomic performance started to improve in 2016, domestic spending was still low.[86] Thailand's post-coup economic growth was driven mostly by international tourism and foreign direct investment, but this made little difference to the day-to-day lives of most Thais. The 2016 'Traveling Thailand is Fun' campaign sought to address this problem by encouraging Thais to spend their hard-earned cash in Thailand rather than abroad. As such, the campaign was trying to make Thai people help the military government and the virtuous rule by working collectively towards improving the country's domestic economic record. After all, this was the duty of all Thai people as the video implicitly indicated. Those who listened to this tourism appeal and decided to change their behaviour accordingly, would work, consciously or not, towards strengthening the NCPO rule, its legitimacy and the legitimacy of the virtuous rule on the whole.

The 'Travelling in Thailand is Fun' video stirred up a lot of controversy from the day it was released, but this was not because of the strong nationalist undertone. A few days after the video's release Ladda Tangsuphachai, the former managing director of the Culture Surveillance Bureau (Ministry of Culture), filed an official complaint with the Ministry of Culture to protest the video's 'inappropriate' use of *khon* characters, especially Thotsakan, urging the government to ban the video.[87] This triggered a fierce popular backlash across the country's social media platforms, where the video enjoyed considerable popularity exactly because of its modern take on the traditional Thai culture. For example, an online petition expressing discontent with Ladda's complaint gained more than sixty-thousand signatures within two days of opening.[88] Due to popular pressure, the Ministry of Culture did not ban the video but they did request the video producers to remove around 40 per cent of 'controversial'

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[86] Hiroshi Kotani, 'Low-growth Thai economy flirts with stagnation,' *Nikkei Asian Review,* 27 November 2016, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/Economy/Low-growth-Thai-economy-flirts-with-stagnation?page=1.

[87] 'MV เที่ยวไทยมีเฮ ถูกร้องเรียน ทำ "ทศกัณฐ์" เสียเกียรติ โดนขู่ฟ้อง ทำลายวัฒนธรรม!? [MV Travelling Thailand is Fun received complaints that it makes "Thotsakan" lose dignity and was accused of damaging culture!?],' *Travel Kapook*, accessed 15 January 2018, https://travel.kapook.com/view157144.html.

[88] 'Tourism ad faces ban for allegedly defaming Thai literature,' *Prachatai*, 23 September 2016, https://prachatai.org/english/node/6589.

footage involving Thotsakan.[89] The producers were left with no other choice but to apologise to the authorities and substantially censor the video editing out almost half of the original footage.[90] The Thotsakan controversy shows that nation branding and its identity elitism can easily backfire. One high profile individual representing a small group of ultra-conservative Thais managed to compel the military government to change a popular tourism campaign by using the government's own rhetoric of preserving traditional Thai culture: Ladda argued that *khon* was a high art and a national treasure, and that its use in the video was disrespectful and inappropriate. The government was left with no other choice but to comply. Otherwise, the generals would have undermined themselves and their strategic national myth of a socially traditional and culturally unique country.

What did the focus group participants think of the Travelling Thailand is Fun?[91]

Table 6.4: Participants' views of the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun video.'

Focus Group	Mostly Positive Views of Travelling Thailand is Fun	Mostly Negative Views of Travelling Thailand is Fun	No Views of Travelling Thailand is Fun
FG1 (South)	100%		
FG2 (North)	83%[92]	17%	
FG3 (Centre)	100%		
FG4 (Northeast) - students	50%	33%	17%
FG5 (Northeast) - lecturers	50%	33%	17%
FG6 (Northeast) - villagers	50%	17%	33%

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[89] Hatairat Deeprasert, 'Khon video red-flagged,' *The Nation*, 23 September 2016, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Khon-video-red-flagged-30295990.html.

[90] 'มาแล้ว! เอ็มวี "เที่ยวไทยมีเฮ" ฉบับแก้ไข ที่ไม่มี "ทศกัณฐ์" ราชาแห่งยักษ์หยอดขนมครก [It's here! The censored version of the MV "Travelling Thailand is Fun' that does not have "Thotsakan," the King of Demons, pouring coconut milk cups],' *Matichon*, 23 September 2016, https://www.matichon.co.th/news/296037.

[91] For the full list of 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' focus group questions, see Appendix A.

[92] Like their fellow participants in the Northeast, the participating students in the North were very critical of the video's nationalist wording despite expressing mostly positive views of the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' video. This was not the case of participating students in Bangkok and the Upper South, who did not mind the wording.

Out of all four videos, the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' was the most widely recognised video among the focus group participants. There was not a single participant who would have not seen or at least heard about the video and the surrounding controversy. This was also the most popular video among the focus group participants because it was considerably more fun than the other three videos and it did not contain as many moralising messages (see Table 6.3). As one female participant in Bangkok remarked, the video did 'not [make the participants feel] uncomfortable, it [was] fun.'[93] All participants across the four regions agreed that the video's main intention was to promote domestic tourism in Thailand. Only two participants in the Northeast picked upon the video's nationalistic undertone. As a male lecturer in the Northeast pointed out:

> 'The main goal is to encourage economy and perhaps to reinforce nationalism […] It is [a form of] social pressure, in one way. If I have enough money and want to travel to Japan, the hard-core nationalists will point a finger [at me] and scold [me] for why I'm not travelling within the country. […] The further you travel, the guiltier you feel. […] This is dangerous.'[94]

This lecturer found the government's use of nationalism to incentivise domestic tourism highly problematic and added:

> '[In] the tourism advertisements that we make to sell abroad […], we emphasise [Thailand's] beauty. I am astonished why we do not do the same at home. Why do we not sell [Thailand's beauty] to Thai people? Why does it have to be nationalist [sic]?'[95]

One possible answer to his question might be that the military government hoped that nationalism would have more impact on Thai citizens than a display of appealing tourist locations. Just like many other nation branding campaigns produced by the junta between 22 May 2014 and 1 December 2016, this campaign sought to reassert the performative character of Thai identity and encourage Thai people to do more to prove their Thainess. In so doing, they would support the military government, its claims to power and political legitimacy.

Not all participants found the video and its nationalistic messages problematic. The video seemed to have resonated particularly well with female student participants in Bangkok (see data for FG3 in Table 6.3), who were fairly critical of the other three

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[93] Focus group, Bangkok.
[94] Focus group – lecturers, Ubon Ratchathani.
[95] Ibid.

videos. One participant summarised the group's feelings: they had seen many tourism videos before and never felt like they wanted to travel in Thailand but after seeing this video they all felt it was fun and wanted to join in.[96] When asked how they felt about the nationalistic 'We are Thai people, we must travel within Thailand' line, the Bangkok participants admitted that they did not think much about the wording when they first watched the video.[97] Although all participants agreed that the wording might have been unnecessarily strong, they did not find its use overly problematic. Reflecting on this, one participant noted that '[TAT] made [the video] look not [that] serious [and they all] watched it for pleasure.'[98] The participants enjoyed the video so much so that after watching it, they all agreed that the video inspired them to go traveling. It seems that the video's light-hearted nature managed to successfully obscure the nationalistic undertone for the participating students in Bangkok.

Participants in the Upper South had similar views on the video's nationalistic wording than their Bangkok counterparts (see data for FG1 in Table 6.3). They too did not think much about the wording and were not concerned about its use. One male participant even tried to defend the wording by claiming that '[t]ravelling [in Thailand] is not a duty but [TAT] are trying to encourage [Thai people to do so]. [TAT] want [Thai people] to have a choice to travel in Thailand.'[99] This was an interesting interpretation of a wording produced by a military-dominated administration and an indication of support for the military government among the Upper South participants, none of whom contested the wording or its interpretation by their fellow participant.

The picture in the North and the Northeast was different. Although most participants in these two regions were still inclined to view the video in positive ways, they were much more critical of the video's wording than their fellow focus group participants in the Upper South and Bangkok. All student participants in the North and three student participants in the Northeast pointed out that the words 'should' or 'help' would have been a more acceptable choice than the word 'must.'[100] The participating villagers in the Northeast explained that the video's wording was a feature of the military government that was constantly telling people what to do.[101]

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[96] Focus group, Bangkok.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Focus group, Hat Yai.
[100] Focus group – students, Ubon Ratchathani; Focus group, Chiang Mai.
[101] Focus group – villagers, Ubon Ratchathani.

Two student participants in the Northeast did not ascribe much importance to the video's wording claiming that they felt indifferent about it. They, as their fellow student participants in Bangkok and Hat Yai, did not take the video too seriously because it was 'just' a tourism promotion.[102] The student reaction here reflects some of the conventional beliefs about nation branding, mainly that nation branding is a superficial practice. However, these reactions might work in nation branding's favour rather than against it. Because of its seemingly superficial character, nation branding can succeed in changing people's attitudes and behaviours, such was the case of the participating students in Bangkok, as it catches them off guard. In other words, the light even entertaining nature of some nation branding campaigns can influence people's attitudes and behaviours without them even realising. It is here that nation branding's socialising power becomes visible. However, not all participants were misled by the video's light-hearted approach. As one female participating student in the North pointed out, despite its modern and progressive outlook the video still contained a considerable dose of conservativism. She explained:

> 'Those who made this [video] clip are creative [people]. They took the [Ramakien] characters and presented them at every [tourist] location. But there is still conservativism in that [the video] uses the word 'must' which has a strong meaning. It is like *phu yai* [an elder] forces a child that [they] have to do this [and that].'[103]

For this student, the video did not move far away from the traditional representations of Thai culture and society.

Despite their differences, all focus group participants across the four regions defended the video in relation to the Thotsakan controversy. None of the participants agreed that the video was disrespectful of Thai culture. Rather, they praised its creators for merging tradition with modernity. A lecturer in the Northeast pointed out that 'many people [publicly] came out [in support of the video] saying that if [Thai people] want [their] culture to continue, it has to be flexible.'[104] Although flexibility is one of the central features of nation branding, the junta's push for preserving social and cultural traditions made their nation branding efforts a lot more rigid and in danger of backfiring, as this Thotsakan controversy showed. The controversy surrounding the video was, in many respects, reflective of the wider problems in Thai society where

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[102] Focus group – students, Ubon Ratchathani.
[103] Focus group, Chiang Mai.
[104] Focus group – lecturers, Ubon Ratchathani.

seniority, in age and social status, matters above everything else. As the same female participant in the North remarked:

> 'In the end, those people who made this video had to publicly apologise [even though] they did nothing wrong. They had to apologise to *phu yai* in a live [TV] show. It was too humiliating. They only thought differently than the old generations [...]. They did nothing wrong but [they] had to apologise. Young generations [and] almost the entire country agreed with them, but they [still] had to apologise.'[105]

The controversy surrounding the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' video undermined the junta's branding efforts by exacerbating existing social grievances and the general feelings of injustice. Instead of making people come together in support of the junta-defined norms and values, it reinforced the sense of inter-generational conflict as the traditional elites and their political networks struggled to connect with younger generations, especially those in the North and Northeast. Their conservativism did not appeal to the participating students who were more flexible and open-minded in their views and values.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine public reaction towards the junta's nation branding by analysing data from six focus groups that I conducted in Thailand between October and November 2016. Although the data presented in this chapter cannot fully represent the broader trends in public opinion in Thailand, they indicate that Thai people's opinions on nation branding are likely to vary. This variation occurred both on geographical and regional grounds. Focus group participants in the South, a region typically aligned with the Democrat Party and traditional elites, were more likely to express positive views about the junta's nation branding efforts. They were generally more open to accepting the brand messages and less critical than participants in other regions. Focus group participants in the North and Northeast, regions typically aligned with the Shinwatras and their political networks, were much more critical of the junta's nation branding efforts. They were more likely to question the junta's motivations behind branding and were less receptive to the brand messages. The results in Bangkok were mixed and campaign dependent.

As for the generational variations, many student participants in the North, Northeast and Bangkok found it difficult to relate to the junta's strategic national myth

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[105] Focus group, Chiang Mai.

premised on social traditions and cultural uniqueness. The appeal of old, conservative notions of Thai culture and identity was relatively low among these participants most of whom enjoyed all things modern and were not opposed to change. Some participants in the North and Northeast displayed the *hua samai mai* attitudes that the military government has been so afraid of. However, not all student participants were the same. Students in the South displayed considerable levels of social and cultural conservativism. Two participating students in the North also displayed this *hua boran* attitude indicating that Thailand's younger generations are by no means unified in their socio-political views.

For many of the focus group participants, the content of the branding campaigns seemed to have mattered less than who was behind them. This was especially the case for the 'Thailand 4.0' campaign and the participants in the Northeast who harboured strong anti-junta sentiments. Nevertheless, some campaigns seemed to have done better than others. Although the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign generated mixed feelings among the different focus group participants, some participants in the Northeast found it considerably more difficult to reject this campaign than they did with others. This was likely due to the campaign's cultural appeal. Being culturally appealing was, however, not enough for a campaign to succeed. For example, the *Phrik Kaeng* trailer was much less popular among the focus group participants across all regions than the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign despite being based around Thai food. In fact, most participants felt misrepresented by the foods the trailer claimed were authentically Thai. Nation branding's identity elitism often worked as an alienating factor especially for participants in the North and Northeast. The 'Travelling in Thailand is Fun' tourism promotion campaign was the most-widely liked campaign across focus groups in all four regions because it mixed tradition with notions of modernity. However, not even this campaign had successfully managed to inspire all focus group participants to act in line with the government's wishes. This was especially the case of the focus group participant in the North and Northeast (all group), who were particularly critical of the video's nationalistic wording. The junta's use of nation branding as a tool for political legitimisation seemed to have made little change to participants' existing social attitudes and behaviours. Their nation branding efforts did not manage to overcome the existing cleavages (political, economic and social) among the focus group participants.

The findings presented in this chapter seem to be in line with claims made by a number of critical scholars, such as Jiménez-Martínez and Ståhlberg and Bolin, who doubt that governments can simply change their citizen's attitudes and behaviours through nation branding. However, much more research needs to be done into the domestic effects of nation branding in order to confirm these claims. To achieve a change in public attitudes and behaviours requires a lot of time and effort. It might well be the case that nation branding might not be very effective in shaping public opinions in the short term, but its long-term effects should not be underestimated. After all, some of my focus group participants did admit that they were attracted to some of the videos, mostly the 'Pride of Thailand' and 'Travelling in Thailand is Fun,' due to their emotional appeal or light-hearted nature. These participants did not take the videos and their messages too seriously. They enjoyed the visual spectacle and the feelings the videos aroused in them. It might well be the case that nation branding's seemingly superficial character can catch people off guard and in so doing succeeds in shaping their attitudes and behaviours in the long-term. Future research into public reactions to nation branding based on more representative sample and longer period of study could yield some fascinating results that would provide more concrete answers to this puzzle. The following chapter summarises my main findings, discusses my contributions to the academic literature on nation branding and suggests areas for future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I aimed to provide a holistic yet critical account of nation branding as a political phenomenon by challenging some of the mainstream readings that portray nation branding as an externally-oriented, business-derived, apolitical practice. Although much of the academic research on nation branding is still conducted in the fields of business and urban geography studies, a growing body of research outside these fields indicate that countries do not brand themselves for purely economic reasons. Studies within the fields of politics, international relations, communication, culture and media have shown that countries can also brand for political and cultural reasons, such as to improve their political standing abroad or to build a sense of nationhood in a highly globalised world. A number of critical studies by scholars such as Jansen, Varga, Volcic and Andrejevic argue that nation branding has important domestic implications. Yet, they typically reduce these to the negative effects of marketisation on socio-political space addressing issues such as identity commodification, depoliticization and neo-liberal governance. As a result, most critical studies denounce nation branding for attempting to change the social attitudes and behaviours of a nation's citizens in line with the economic logic of liberal capitalism. Despite the valuable contribution these studies make to our understanding of nation branding, they continue to work within the economic framework of liberal capitalism, which is both a Eurocentric and geographically limiting approach.

Rather than approaching the study of nation branding through the lens of either economic, political or cultural reasons, I argued that nation branding can have a mixture of economic (competitiveness and growth), political (international political influence and standing) and cultural (international recognition and national self-determination) motivations at any particular moment in time. Building on a small number of academic studies by Cornelissen, Cho and Fauve that link nation branding to political legitimation, I examined nation branding as part of the government's legitimation processes that are revealing about domestic power politics and state-society relations. I focused on the workings of nation branding in a non-democratic context as this is an underrepresented area within the existing academic literature. Many non-democratic regimes, such as Russia, China, Kazakhstan and post-2014 Thailand, have invested heavily into nation branding. However, more needs to be done to understand these branding efforts and their relations to domestic political processes. In this thesis, I offered an alternative reading of nation branding as a

strategy for political legitimation and a methodological framework for future studies of nation branding in non-democratic contexts. While some of the arguments advanced in this thesis could also apply to the use of nation branding in democratic regimes, such claims were outside the scope of my thesis and require further examination. A comparative study into the use of nation branding in democratic and non-democratic contexts would be particularly interesting and timely.

Despite its complex and often elusive character, political legitimation is a central pillar of state processes in both democratic and non-democratic contexts. In fact, political legitimation is one of the three pillars that help explain the stability of non-democratic regimes. Building on the work of Gershewski, Alagappa, and von Soest and Grauvogel, I defined political legitimation as an interactive, multifaceted, discursive process between the rulers and the ruled that is based on a mixture of six different rationales: foundational myth, ideology, personalism, performance, procedures, and international engagement. In other words, political legitimation is a process that creates narratives that justify the possession and exercise of power. I established that narratives are the central link between political legitimation and nation branding and that the legitimating potential of nation branding resides in its ability to reproduce existing national myths and create new national myths about the nation, its character and the people. However, national myths produced in the process of nation branding are specific kinds of myths. They are visionary, instrumental and they shape expectations of future behaviours. Crucially, they can be used for explicit political purposes. By combining scholarship on national myths and strategic narratives, I referred to these myths as strategic national myths and argued that by advancing these strategic myths, nation branding shapes legitimation discourses both inside and outside of the nation. Although I developed the concept of strategic national myths for the purpose of this thesis, it is applicable to the wider study of nation branding both on theoretical and practical levels as it helps to avoid some of the common assumptions in the critical academic literature that nation branding decontextualizes, dehistoricises and depoliticises national identity. As such, the concept of strategic national myths can be used beyond the scope of this thesis.

My analysis of nation branding was set in the context of Thailand, a troubled Southeast Asian nation with a complex political history and frequent authoritarian relapses, the most recent of which occurred on 22 May 2014. Thailand was a suitable case study as its post-coup environment was conducive to heightened nation branding efforts. Furthermore, there was a general lack of scholarship that would address

Thailand's past or present nation branding efforts in a holistic and critical way. In this thesis, I addressed the lack of critical scholarship with the hope that it can inspire future academic research on how nation branding operates in Thailand and other non-democratic regimes. My analysis covered the period from the 22 May 2014 coup until King Vajiralongkorn's official accession to the Thai throne on 1 December 2016. It was based on empirical data that I generated during my field research in Thailand between June and November 2016. Although this was a challenging period for a political researcher with an outsider status trying to conduct in-depth qualitative fieldwork, I carried out a total of thirty-one semi-structured interviews with elite informants, six focus group sessions across Thailand's four main regions, and a number of participant observations at public events. This data proved crucial when answering my main research question: 'Why do non-democratic states use nation branding?' I broke down this question into five subsidiary research questions that framed my analysis across the core empirical chapters (2-6).

To answer the first subsidiary research question – 'How is nation branding understood?' – I rejected the idea that nation branding is a new and unique practice and adopted a broader, more historicised approach to study it. I analysed the different reputation-based practices of the Thai state from the mid-nineteenth century until the May 2014 coup (chapter 2). These included nation building in the era of royal absolutism (1851-1932), constitutionalism and military nationalism under the People's Party (1932-1957), royal nationalism in the era of paternalistic military dictatorships (1957-1973), hyper-royalism under semi-democracy (1976-1988) and weak coalition governments (1988-2001), and nation branding under Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006) and the decade-long political conflict that followed Thaksin's rule (2006-onwards). This approach helped me to contextualise nation branding in relation to a number of important socio-political developments that shaped the way in which the post-2014 coup military government understood and used nation branding. My findings showed that Thailand's reputation-based practices had always been linked to the state legitimation processes. As a result, they were largely the prerogatives of the ruling elites and their political networks and were sustained by domestic power politics. Nation branding in the Thai context thus did not operate in a socio-political vacuum but rather built on this long and complex tradition of different reputation-based practices.

As my findings showed, the Chakri kings used different nation building practices to secure the survival of royal absolutism against internal (the rise of

commoner-bureaucratic elite) and external (western colonialism) threats. Their outcome was the shibboleth-like expression of the newly established Siamese nation as the Nation-Religion-King triad centred on the figure of the king, who was presented both as a protector of the nation and upholder of its moral standards rooted in Buddhism. Although the Chakri kings did not manage to secure the continuity of royal absolutism, which was overthrown by the People's Party in 1932, Siam managed to avoid formal colonisation. As a result, the traditional elements of the Nation-Religion-King triad were not delegitimised. The new commoner ruling elite organised under the People's Party also failed to delegitimise these traditional elements. Their image and identity practices rooted in the promotion of constitutionalism and later military nationalism fell short of establishing widely-accepted, long-term legitimacy rationales. Although the People's Party did marginalise the power and prestige of the Thai monarchy, they did not undermine its legitimating potential. Because of this, when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat overthrew the People's Party government in a dual coup of 1957-58, he was able to roll back on more than twenty years of constitutionalism and nominal democratic procedures and justify the instalment of a paternalistic military dictatorship by reviving the legitimating power of royalism. Sarit's royalism was based on traditional, highly-conservative and anti-liberal norms and values that were conducive to authoritarian rule. These norms and values became defining features of Thailand's image and identity practices until the early 1970s.

Following popular demands for a more democratic and liberal political order in the mid-1970s, Thailand's image and identity practices changed once again. This time it was to protect the royalist-military alliance forged under Sarit and their right to rule over the Thai state. Localised notions of democracy that did not threaten the power and prestige of this royalist-military alliance were included into the increasingly exaggerated state-led promotion of royalism. As a result of these efforts, the monarchy reached the pinnacle of its popularity and legitimation potential. This was especially the case under the premiership of General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988) and his government's hyper-royalism. Due to the increased politicisation of its activities, the monarchy also reinvented its *modus operandi* from hierarchical to network-based governance during this time. From then on, military generals, senior bureaucrats and palace supporters could intervene in politics on behalf of the monarchy, but without threatening to undermine its power and legitimating potential if things went wrong.

The end of Cold War and the rising demands of global capitalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s ushered in a new era of civilian governments and parliamentary democracy. During this time, Thailand's image practices became more economy-focused as business interests started to dominate Thai politics. However, hyper-royalism continued to be an important element of the more inward-oriented domestic identity practices. Buddhist notions of kingship based on royal virtue were particularly emphasised to provide continuous legitimacy to the power of the now traditional elites (the monarchy, military, senior bureaucracy) threatened by the rise of career politicians. As the ultimate source of virtue, then reigning King Bhumibol and those allied to him were considered 'good' people who had the nation's interests at heart. The 1997 constitution attempted to institutionalise this rule of the 'good' people, or virtuous rule, by creating a framework for 'good' people to enter politics in order to provide checks and balances on the 'bad' politicians. Yet, this strategy backfired with the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra and his political networks in the early 2000s.

As a successful telecommunications tycoon-turned-politician, Thaksin approached Thai politics from a corporate management perspective and was the first Thai prime minister to introduce the use of nation branding. During the five years of his premiership, Thaksin created a new strategic national myth of successful and competitive Thailand full of business-minded people that would be on par with the developed western world. To the dismay of the traditional elites, Thaksin's strategic national myth challenged the central tenet of virtuous rule, the Nation-Religion-King triad based royal conservativism, strict social hierarchisation and limited civic and political rights. Instead, it offered economic progress and the fulfilment of people's aspirations under Thaksin's new Nation-Economy-Thaksin brand. Not even a military coup that deposed Thaksin and his government in September 2006 was able to delegitimise his brand. Eight years of political instability followed as the traditional elites tried to reclaim legitimacy for the Nation-Religion-King brand, the source of their hegemonic rule over the Thai society. The 2014 coup that deposed the government of Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, signalled that the traditional elites were renewing their efforts to remove Thaksin's influence over Thai politics and regain legitimacy for virtuous rule.

The historicised analysis showed that nation branding is firmly embedded in the nation's historical and socio-political context and that this context influences the ways in which nations understand and use nation branding. These findings have important

implications for the future study of nation branding and its practical applications. Instead of assuming that there is a universal business-derived formula for branding that all nations should follow, more attention needs to be given to the different contexts in which nation branding operates. How did these nations build their collective identities and shape their external images before nation branding? What were the objectives behind these activities? Were these activities successful? By asking these kinds of questions, the academic field of nation branding will start moving toward a more robust critical scholarship.

To answer the second subsidiary research question – 'How does nation branding operate, what are its objectives, and who are its target audiences?' – I focused on providing an overview of nation branding efforts of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), Thailand's military government, between May 2014 and December 2016 (chapter 3). I argued that the NCPO's approach to nation branding was shaped by Thailand's domestic power politics rather than the economic logic of liberal capitalism. Their strategic national myth presented a vision of an economically modernising, yet socially traditional and culturally unique Thailand consisting of people that would reject the Shinawatras once and for all, abandon their provincial identities and democratic and social aspirations in exchange for a semi-authoritarian rule under the traditional elites. The myth formed part of the NCPO's wider post-coup political agenda to undermine the political networks of the Shinawatras, gain political legitimacy, strengthen the power of traditional elites, and secure military interests. As such, the NCPO did not follow the conventional nation branding model. Their approach to and understanding of nation branding was informed by the military concept of information operations (IO) that treats soft power as a coercive rather than co-optive tool directed at the country's enemies. I established that the use of IOs in the Thai context differed from the western IO doctrine in that the Thai military mostly relied on psychological operations and targeted predominantly domestic audiences. Operating under this Thai IO framework, the NCPO often used nation branding to target those who opposed their military regime and focused primarily on domestic audiences.

None of the academic literature reviewed for this thesis discussed the concept of information operations in relation to nation branding. As such, my findings provide opportunities for further research in this area: To what extent do nation branding and information operations overlap? What is the purpose behind their combined use? Does the combined use of these two concepts lead to an increased politicisation of the

nation's armed forces? Although the Thai case might be unique in the sense that Thailand is currently the only country in the world under full-fledged military regime, other non-democratic regimes such as Russia, China, North Korea, Burma and Egypt have powerful security forces. This creates opportunities for the combined use of nation branding and information operations in these non-democratic regimes.

My findings further demonstrated that the NCPO did not have a clear, unified nation branding strategy. Their post-coup nation branding efforts were policy-based. The monarchy, education, culture and economy were the main policy areas for post-coup nation branding as these areas had the biggest legitimation potential. As most closed authoritarian regimes do, the NCPO sought to establish their political legitimacy mainly on performance- and identity-based rationales. Hence, their nation branding efforts in 2014 were mostly aimed at creating notions of peace and order (performance), correcting social behaviours (identity) and re-educating sections of Thai society (identity). This was to help manage political dissent and shore up the junta's popularity at home. As a result, most of the junta's early nation branding efforts were internally-oriented and targeted primarily young people. The generals' branding efforts in 2015 and 2016 were more balanced. They were aimed at strengthening the position of traditional elites both in Thailand and abroad and expanding the basis of their legitimacy claims to international engagement- and procedure-based rationales. As such, these efforts targeted both international and domestic audiences although domestic audiences continued to matter more than the international ones. This became clear after the passing of King Bhumibol on 13 October 2016 when the NCPO tightened its grip on power in order to manage the royal succession. Much of the NCPO's nation branding activities were discontinued, paused or toned down following Bhumibol's death.

The NCPO's branding strategy has wider academic implications as it showed that social attitudes and behaviours of domestic audiences matter to non-democratic regimes, often more so than those of international audiences, because these regimes need to have at least some degree of domestic legitimacy in order to secure their long-term survival. It is therefore surprising that academic literature on nation branding pays so little attention to the questions of political legitimation. Future studies on nation branding, especially in non-democratic regimes, would benefit from a more systematic analysis of internal power dynamics and state-society relations and how these impact the ways in which nation branding operates, whom it targets and what objectives it strives for. The question of how nation branding operates domestically

also deserves some future research. As this thesis demonstrated on the example of post-coup Thailand, internal branding is an important element of nation branding and it goes beyond simple communication acts between the branders and the branded. Internal nation branding can assume the form of full-fledged branding campaigns that supports or exists in addition to externally-oriented branding campaigns. This means that nation branding is a much more complex phenomenon than most of the existing academic literature assumes and it deserves more rigorous academic approach.

To answer the third subsidiary research question – What are the political motivations behind externally-oriented nation branding? – I analysed the NCPO's branding activities across five sectors: tourism; economy, trade and exports; foreign direct investment; foreign policy; and public relations. Despite their seemingly external focus, nation branding activities in these sectors were functions of domestic power politics and the NCPO's quest for political legitimacy. They sought to shore up international acceptance of Thailand's post-coup military regime and divert public attention away from domestic political problems. The NCPO's post-coup tourism promotion campaigns, for example, emphasised culture and collective identity in order to reinforce traditional elements of the NCPO's strategic national myth that Thailand is a country full of happy, hospitable, self-sufficient and peace-loving Thais. Yet, these seemingly superficial representations were underpinned by shared norms and values of political passivity, subservience and conservativism. Post-coup tourism campaigns thus presented a very narrow and conservative notion of Thainess conducive to semi-authoritarian modes of governance under virtuous rule. They served as a source of behavioural guidance for the Thai people by encouraging public compliance with NCPO-defined norms and values. These findings suggest that non-democratic governments might want to use nation branding as a form of governance to achieve self-management of their citizens and that such use of nation branding can be motivated by domestic legitimation needs rather than by the economic logic of liberal capitalism. As such, assumptions made by critical scholars, such as Volcic and Andrejevic, that nation branding is a tool of neo-liberal governance do not apply to all contexts. It is therefore important that future research on nation branding moves away from this overly economic framework and approaches nation branding in a more holistic way.

Branding in the economy, trade, exports and foreign direct investment sectors was linked to the NCPO's desire to increase international acceptance of their regime as well as to establish their claims to political legitimacy on performance-based

rationales. Improving the country's economy, hit hard by the 2014 coup and the preceding political protests, was one of the key justifications the NCPO used upon seizing political power. Much of the branding in these sectors was thus aimed at reinforcing the more modern elements of the junta's strategic national myth that presented Thailand as an economically-modernising, business-friendly country that was ripe for investment. The government even brought in two former Thaksin-era ministers, Somkid Jatusripitak and Suvit Maesincee, to create Thaksin-style marketing messages and economic programmes. This was to reassure domestic and international audiences that the NCPO had a long-term economic plan. Externally, the generals needed to enhance investors' confidence in Thailand in order to speed up the country's economic recovery. Domestically, this economy-related branding was aimed at selling an appealing vision of economically modern and prosperous Thailand to the Thai public in exchange for their trust and loyalty. These findings suggest that even seemingly externally-oriented economic branding campaigns can have strong internal objectives and be used for the purpose of political legitimation of non-democratic regimes. By using this framework, similar examples of branding, such as China's One Belt One Road initiative, might be considered exercises in political legitimation.

One area of nation branding from within these economy-related sectors that would particularly benefit from further research is strategic foreign endorsement. As the Thai case indicated, strategic foreign endorsement might play an important role in branding efforts of non-democratic regimes. This might be especially the case when nation branding is primarily used for the purpose of political legitimation. However, many questions remain: Who arranges strategic foreign endorsement and who benefits from it? How much input does the government have in this strategic foreign endorsement and how much influence is given to foreign businesses involved? How much influence do foreign businesses have over the content of the endorsement messages? Why would foreign businesses want to endorse non-democratic regimes and how does this affect their corporate reputation and business performance? And finally, does strategic foreign endorsement have any real impact?

The NCPO's branding activities in the area of foreign policy were aimed at repairing Thailand's international image but also gaining international acceptance of the NCPO rule. As a result, much of the post-coup branding activities in this sector were devoted to explaining the coup and reaffirming the NCPO's commitment to democracy. The generals sought to export their saviour narrative abroad by presenting

the coup as a last-resort intervention to save the country from the brink of the civil war. They wanted to convince the international community that both the 2014 coup and the ensuing military rule was in their best interest. The generals also emphasised King Bhumibol's philosophy of economic sufficiency as part of their branding efforts. A keen international interest in Bhumibol's philosophy would have boosted the NCPO's claims to political legitimacy and aided their domestic efforts to institutionalise virtuous rule. This was largely consistent with branding in other sectors, such as economy, trade and exports, and foreign direct investment. Sufficiency economy was one of the core elements of the NCPO's brand and their strategic national myth. Similarly to the economic sector, my findings in the area of foreign policy suggest that branding in many seemingly externally-oriented sectors is a function of domestic political needs. When governments decide to engage in nation branding, this does not simply override their domestic agendas as many studies within the technical-economic strand seem to suggest. After all, nation branding is not an objective in itself. It is a strategy that can be used for different political purposes. There is one particular area of my findings that would benefit from further research. As the Thai case indicates, the nation's diaspora might also have a role to play in nation branding. However, much more research needs to be done to understand how exactly the nation's diaspora can help advance the government's nation branding objectives. This line of academic enquiry would be particularly relevant for countries with large diasporas, such as China or the Philippines.

Branding in the area of public relations was also aimed at creating rationales to justify the coup and virtuous rule. As a result, the NCPO approached public relations from the image management perspective and sought to use it for self-legitimation and socialisation purposes. General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, who was the official 'face' of the coup and his military regime, wanted to cultivate himself an image of a benevolent yet all-powerful paternalistic ruler based on the example of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. While paternalism worked relatively well for Sarit back in the 1960s, it did not work well for Prayuth following the 22 May 2014 coup. Prayuth was not an accomplished speaker, he often veered off the script and many Thais gradually became tired of his incessant moralising. His ham-fisted leadership style and brash public behaviour resulted in many public relations disasters (such as the 2014 bikini comment or the 2016 gender equality blunder) making him a frequent source of media mockery. Yet, through his public relations activities, Prayuth sought to create a sense of public anxiety that Thailand was losing its Thainess and the military government

was working hard to prevent that from happening. This was in line with branding in many other sectors, such as tourism, culture and education, as the NCPO tried to shift people's attention away from the country's economy and political problems towards the problems of collective and individual identity. Such use of nation branding deserves further examination. Originally described by Varga, this function of nation branding was an inherent part of many nation branding efforts in post-coup Thailand. As such, it has wide-ranging implications for the future study of nation branding both within and outside of the Thai context. What problems are the governments trying to divert their citizens' attention away from and why? Are these problems likely to affect the governments' popularity or even their legitimacy claim? Is nation branding really able to successfully divert citizen attention from pressing domestic issues?

To answer the fourth subsidiary research question – What are the political motivations behind internally-oriented branding? – I analysed the NCPO's internal nation branding efforts within the culture and education sectors and the role of Thailand's private sector. The NCPO's internal branding efforts within the culture and education sectors were largely focused on sustaining virtuous rule in the wake of an increasingly imminent royal transition. Before the 2014 coup, virtuous rule had been frequently legitimised through the Buddhist notions of *dhammaraja*, or righteous king. Following the coup, the NCPO sought to gradually detach virtuous rule from the figure of the king in order to secure its longevity beyond Bhumibol. Unlike Bhumibol, Vajiralongkorn – Bhumibol's son and the then heir apparent – was not an epitome of a righteous king. As a complex three-times divorced womaniser, Vajiralongkorn's personality and behaviour could hardly be used to justify the continuous need for virtuous rule. The NCPO found an alternative source of political legitimacy in notions of Thainess and collective national identity that were still associated with the Thai monarchy but did not require the legitimising figure of a righteous king. Their educational and cultural branding efforts were thus aimed at embedding virtue across Thai society to fill the legitimacy void left behind Bhumibol's virtuous reign. Similarly to my findings in the tourism sector, the government's branding in culture and education sectors was deployed as a form of governance. It had a strong socialisation function. Many of the education and culture campaigns, such as the 12 values or Thainess or the traffic education campaign (launched by the government as well as the private sector) also worked as identity reminders. This indicates that nation branding does not necessarily dehistoricizes, decontextualizes and depoliticises national identities as many critical studies by

scholar such as Varga, Jansen, Kaneva and Popescu suggest. As such, there are possibilities for future research to examine these internally-oriented nation branding campaigns especially in sectors such as education and culture that are part of traditional socialisation processes. A study into internal nation branding in countries, such as China or Singapore (as a soft-authoritarian regime), would further enhance our understanding of the ways in which non-democratic regimes seek to control their citizens through nation branding.

Although the role of businesses in nation branding is typically understood in terms of brand ambassadorship, many big businesses in Thailand are part of political networks linked to the traditional elites and have vested interests in sustaining virtuous rule. Following the 2014 coup, businesses such as Kasikorn, Siam Piwat, King Power, Singha Beer, or Chang Beer were instrumental in helping to disseminate and reinforce the NCPO's strategic national myth mostly through their corporate advertising and business activities. In so doing, they were actively helping to advance the NCPO's legitimacy claims at home. This role of private sector in spreading government's brand messages domestically is generally an underexplored area in contemporary nation branding literature and deserves future attention. Like Thailand, there are other non-democratic regimes, such as Russia and China, where big businesses are closely linked to the government and ruling elites, and have vested interest in maintaining the political status quo. These businesses, as the Thai case demonstrates, might take an active role in nation branding not because of the country-of-origin effect but rather to maintain the political system they benefit from. It is therefore important to analyse their involvement in nation branding: How do these businesses interact with their domestic and foreign customers? What brand values do they represent? How are these values communicated domestically and abroad? How much involvement do these big businesses have in state-led nation branding activities and what benefits do they get?

To answer the fifth and final subsidiary research question – How do domestic audiences react to nation branding? – I analysed responses from six focus groups that I conducted between October and November 2016. Public reactions to the NCPO's nation branding efforts varied. The focus group data generated for this thesis indicated that this variation was both geographical and generational. Focus group participants in the South, a region that had supported the pro-establishment Democrat Party and traditional elites in the two general elections preceding the 2014 coup (2007 and 2011), were more likely to perceive the NCPO's nation branding efforts in a positive light. They were generally less critical of the NCPO's nation branding efforts and

more open to accepting the brand messages. Focus group participants in the North and Northeast, the two regions that had supported the Shinawatras in the last two general elections, were much more critical and apprehensive of the NCPO's branding efforts. The results in Bangkok were mixed and campaign-dependent. Many participating students, especially in the North, Northeast and Bangkok, also found it difficult to relate to the NCPO's branding due to elements of the strategic national myth that emphasised social traditions and cultural uniqueness. The appeal of old, conservative, NCPO-defined notions of Thainess was relatively low among the participating students, most of whom enjoyed the advantages of modern life and were not opposed to change.

Out of the four campaigns shown to the participants, campaigns that sought to encourage compliance with the NCPO-defined socio-cultural norms and values had mixed results. While some participants found it difficult to reject the messaging of the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign due to its strong emotional appeal, others found the campaign problematic because it represented Thai culture and identity in a very narrow way. On the other hand, the *Phrik Kaeng* trailer, based on similar emotional appeals to the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign, was widely criticised by participants across all regions. This was because most participants felt misrepresented by the very elitist norms and values advanced by the trailer even though its central theme was Thai food, a topic close to many Thai people's heart. NCPO's identity elitism thus proved to be an alienating factor, especially for participants in the North and Northeast. Although the economically-themed 'Thailand 4.0' that presented a vision of economic progress and digitalisation of Thai economy appealed to many participants, it was not the campaign's content that mattered the most but rather who was behind it. Many participants simply did not believe that the NCPO would be able to deliver on their 4.0 vision either because of time constraints or because they did not trust the government and their intentions. The most popular campaign among focus group participants was the 'Travelling in Thailand is Fun' tourism campaign, because it mixed tradition with notions of modernity. However, this campaign was also unable to inspire all focus group participants to act upon the junta's brand messages. The NCPO's use of nation branding thus seemed to have made little difference to participants' existing social attitudes and behaviours. As such, it did not prove to be a particularly effective strategy for political legitimation. This helps to explain, at least in part, why much of the junta's nation branding activities were accompanied by high levels of political coercion.

Although my focus group findings did not represent the general public attitudes towards nation branding in post-coup Thailand, they were significant in that they indicated that nation branding might not be very successful in shaping social attitudes and behaviours of nation's citizens at least in the short term. In order to provide a definitive answer to the question of how domestic audiences react to nation branding, more extensive research into public opinions needs to be done. Nevertheless, the Thai case showed that public reactions to nation branding are likely to vary and the variation might occur across both geographical and generational lines as nation branding has a tendency to exacerbate existing socio-political cleavages and feelings of alienation. The extent to which this is done depends on the nature of brand messages and the purpose of branding. This indicates that some of the assertions found in the academic literature that nation branding is a universal public good and that it is a form of nation building might be overstated.

The passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1946-2018) on 13 October 2016 ushered in a new era in Thai politics where the traditional sources of political legitimacy might prove increasingly difficult to harness in support of virtuous rule. Whether or not the NCPO succeeds will largely depend on their ability to find alternative sources of political legitimacy that are compelling and widely acceptable. Although many branding projects discussed in this thesis have had a relatively short life, some are still ongoing (such as Thailand 4.0, *pracharath* or General Prayuth's Friday broadcasts) and can evolve beyond the form discussed in this thesis. It is therefore important to continue to study the NCPO's nation branding efforts beyond the scope of this thesis. Research analysing the NCPO's nation branding efforts following King Vajiralongkorn's accession to the Thai throne would be particularly revealing about the shifting domestic power dynamics (Vajiralongkorn seems to be a more independent monarch than his father, especially in his relations with the military) and sustainability of virtuous rule. Similarly, more detailed research into branding within individual sectors would further enhance our understanding of the different stakeholders and agencies involved in the nation-branding process, their competing interests and visions, and the complex relations between the traditional elites, government, private sector and ordinary Thai people. Having overseen the royal succession, there is no real reason for the NCPO to continue to stay in power. Any further delays to the country's first post-2014 coup elections (currently scheduled for 24 February 2019) are likely to increase popular dissatisfaction with the military regime. The longer the generals stay in power, the more difficult it will be to sustain

their legitimacy claims and rationales making legitimacy breakdown increasingly more likely. Following the return to civilian rule, it would be interesting to see how Thailand's elected governments use nation branding: do they use it as part of their legitimation processes? If so, do they use it in different ways to the NCPO or are there many similarities? What strategic national myth do they create and how does this myth differ from the one constructed under the NCPO?

The Thai case complements the growing body of academic literature that recognises the domestic focus of nation branding and its attempts to change the social attitudes and behaviours of the nation's citizens. While much of this literature focuses on Central and Eastern Europe, the Thai case contributes to the few studies that examine the domestic elements of nation branding across Asia. For example, Barr notes that China has invested heavily in nation branding to enhance its global competitiveness and to sustain the 'legitimacy and acceptance' of the ruling Communist Party at home.[1] In South Korea, nation branding has been used to encourage the country's citizens to become more open-minded, have respect for cultural diversity, welcome foreigners and to 'improve their global etiquette.'[2] These traits, the Korean government believed, would help the country become more competitive in the global marketplace. The Philippine government used nation branding to encourage its citizens to become '*the* ideal global care labour [original emphasis]' force by emphasising the 'unique' cultural qualities of Filipinos.[3] As Guevarra points out, the Philippine branding process was highly-racialized and essentialised as it reproduced the country's unequal socio-political order in favour of those institutional actors who benefitted from the country's export economy.[4]

While the Thai case is not unique in that the NCPO also used nation branding with a view to change the social attitudes and behaviours of Thai citizens, it differs from most of the above cases in that the Thai generals used nation branding primarily to secure their own political survival and the survival of virtuous rule. As a result, Thailand's post-coup nation branding was not aimed at turning Thai people into market-oriented entrepreneurs but rather self-governing virtuous citizens who would

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[1] Barr, 'Nation branding as nation building,' 82.

[2] Juliette Schwak, 'Branding South Korea in a Competitive World Order: Discourses and Dispositives in Neoliberal Governmentality,' *Asian Studies Review* 40, no.3 (2016): 438.

[3] Anna Romina Guevarra, 'Supermaids: The Racial Branding of Global Filipino Care Labour,' in *Migration and Care Labour: Theory, Policy and Politics*, eds. Bridget Anderson and Isabel Shutes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 131.

[4] Guevarra, Supermaids, 133.

help to uphold the legitimacy of virtuous rule. The Thai case thus contributes to a small number of recent academic studies that link nation branding to political legitimation in non-democratic regimes. For example, Cho notes that North Korea has been using nation branding to ensure the survival of the Kim dynasty and their Communist regime by designing sophisticated spectacles, such as the country's military parades, nuclear tests and the Arirang Festival.[5] Similarly, Fauve points out that Kazakhstan's nation branding served as a self-legitimation tool for the Kazakh leaders.[6] The Thai case shows that nation branding can be used for both self-legitimation and legitimation purposes and that it can target primarily domestic audiences. Crucially, it demonstrates that nation branding shapes domestic and international legitimacy discourses by advancing strategic national myths. As the currently only systematic critical study of nation branding in the context of Southeast Asia, the Thai case provides a useful methodological framework for future comparative studies of nation branding in non-democratic regimes across Asia and beyond. By using this framework, similar examples of nation branding in countries such as Russia, China, Singapore, Egypt and Turkey, might be considered exercises in political legitimation.

Much has been written on nation branding since the late 1990s, but the future of nation-branding scholarship lies in the growing body of critical literature that started to emerge during the past ten years. I add to this expanding critical research by moving away from the overly economic framework of liberal capitalism that is still a defining feature of the field and by analyzing the little explored function of nation branding as a strategy for political legitimation in a coherent and holistic way. My argument that nation branding is part of the state legitimation processes and that it shapes legitimation discourses (both inside and outside of the nation) by advancing strategic national myths is applicable to research well beyond the scope of this thesis and it has a potential to inform future academic research on this topic. My analysis of the use of nation branding in post-coup Thailand adds to the academic understanding of why non-democratic regimes choose to engage in this practice. It also contributes to the small body of academic literature on nation branding in the Thai context and provides topical assessment of Thai politics. I have already published some sections of this thesis in the SSCI-listed *Asian Studies Review* journal in order to share my findings with the wider academic community. However, many other sections remain that are

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[5] Cho, 'Nation branding for survival,' 596.
[6] Fauve, 'Global Astana,' 111.

worth publishing. For example, the sections discussing the relationship between nation branding and political legitimation can help advance the emerging critical debates on domestic implications of nation branding. Sections on branding across the five seemingly external sectors in chapter 4 provide further evidence that nation branding is more domestically-focused than generally assumed. Sections on branding across culture, education and private sector in chapter 5 show that domestic campaigns can assume the form of full-fledged branding and that more academic research needs to focus on this underexplored area. Although this thesis uncovered many more areas where future research is needed, it provided a systematic, holistic and critical account of nation branding as a complex political phenomenon.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

All focus group participants were asked the following questions:

'Thailand 4.0' video:
1. Has anyone seen this video?
2. Has anyone heard about the 'Thailand 4.0' project before? If so, in what context and what do you think about it?
3. Why do you think the government has done this project?
4. Who do you think this video and the Thailand 4.0 project are aimed at?
5. How does this video (and the Thailand 4.0 project) make you feel?
6. Do you agree with the image the video creates for Thailand?

'Pride of Thailand' video:
1. Has anyone seen this video?
2. Has anyone heard about the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign before? If so, in what context and what do you think about it?
3. Why do you think the private sector has done this campaign?
4. Who do you think this video and the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign are aimed at?
5. How does this video (and the 'Pride of Thailand' campaign) make you feel?
6. Do you agree with the image the video creates for Thailand?

***Phrik Kaeng* trailer:**
1. Has anyone seen this trailer/movie?
2. Has anyone heard about the *Phrik Kaeng* movie before? If so, in what context and what do you think about it?
3. Why do you think the private sector has done this campaign?
4. Who do you think this trailer and the *Phrik Kaeng* movie are aimed at?
5. How does this trailer (and the *Phrik Kaeng* movie) make you feel?
6. Do you agree with the image the trailer creates for Thailand?

'Travelling Thailand is Fun' video:
1. Has anyone seen this video?

2. Has anyone heard about the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' campaign before? If so, in what context and what do you think about it?

3. Why do you think the government has done this campaign?

4. Who do you think this video and the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' campaign are aimed at?

5. How does this video (and the 'Travelling Thailand is Fun' campaign) make you feel?

6. Do you agree with the image the video creates for Thailand?

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED ELITE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

All elite interviews that I conducted during my field research activities in Thailand between June and November 2016 were semi-structured. I asked all my informants individual questions that were related to their work, knowledge and experience. As such, none of the semi-structured interviews I conducted were the same. The example below is a sample of questions I asked Dr Suvit Maesincee, the then Deputy Minister of Commerce.

Questions for Dr Suvit Maesincee:

1. How do you understand nation branding?
2. When we talk about nation branding in Thailand, what are the common features that Thailand shares with other countries and what are the ones that make Thailand unique?
3. Why does the Ministry of Commerce use nation branding?
4. Is there any cooperation between the different ministries to create Thailand's national brand?
5. Is it important for the government to get Thai people on board with its nation branding activities? How is this done?
6. What do you want to achieve with the 'Thailand 4.0' project?
7. How do you get Thai people on board with the 'Thailand 4.0' project?