

**Competing Narratives in Cold War Thailand: Identity Politics and the  
Construction of Foreign Others**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is 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 investigates political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftist intellectuals and activists through narrative contestation of the Cold War in the late 1940s to the 1970s. The Thai government propagated a story of Thailand under communist threat from the outside, forced to ally with the United States to fend off a communist insurgency. This account of the Cold War, or the 'official narrative of the Cold War', was challenged by Thai leftist intellectuals and activists. Instead, they criticised the military government for collaborating with the United States, who for them was the country's real enemy. By employing a radical 'counter-narrative' about the Cold War, they could assert their own identity as true saviours of the Thai nation.

This research proposes that these Cold War narratives are stories of the 'Thai Self'. As each narrator, including the government and Thai leftists, told stories of themselves defending the Thai nation, people, and values, they imposed an 'un-Thai' or 'foreign Otherness' on their opponents. In this way these narrators constructed a binary opposition of the Thai Self and foreign Otherness. This research focuses on three Others who were staple components in both official narratives and counter-narratives: the Americans, Northeastern villagers, and the Chinese. Each foreign Other was narrated as the opposite of the Central Thai-ness that was shaped under the Cold War contexts: Americanness versus Thai tradition and culture, Isan versus Bangkok, Chineseness versus Thai ethnicity. These sets of dichotomous identities often appeared and were referred to throughout narratives of the Cold War in relation to the narrator's heroic struggles and devotion to the Thai nation. Their competition to assert the Thai Self led to the emergence of a dominant Central Thai-ness and to the restoration of the monarchy's prestigious status in the Cold War period.

This research examines materials and texts produced by the Thai government and Thai leftists by applying the technique of narrative inquiry. This approach not only provides an alternative way to understand the interrelations between Thai politics and the Cold War from a different angle, it also critiques some misrepresentations of Cold War Thailand generated by Benedict Anderson, Charles Keyes, and William Skinner.

## Abbreviations

ARD	Accelerated Rural Development
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
KMT	Kuomintang
MDU	Mobile Development Unite
MIT	Mobile Information Team
NIDA	National Institute of Development Administration
NEED	Northeastern Economic Development Plan
NETC	North Eastern Technological College
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEATO	Southeast Asia Organisation Treaty
TDS	Thai-ness Deficiency Syndrome
TIC	Thailand Information Center
UFAT	United Front of Artists of Thailand
UFIA	United Front of Isan Artists
USIS	United States Information Service

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis studies the construction and reconstruction of foreign identities in Cold War Thailand, particularly from 1948 to 1976, through the contest of Cold War narratives, an area of political contention where political struggles between the Thai military government Thai leftists, and the Indochina conflict collided. The foreign identities, or foreign 'Others', in this study include the Americans, Northeastern villagers, and the Chinese, who constantly appeared in stories of the Cold War circulating amongst the Thai public. Narrative inquiry is applied and introduced to examine conflicts between the two dominant stories of the Cold War circulating in Thai society: the official narrative and the counter-narrative. The first was produced and promoted by the Thai government and ruling elites, while the latter was cultivated by Thai leftist intellectuals and activists.

To illustrate that the narrative contestation of the Cold War significantly influenced the construction and reconstruction of identities in the Cold War period, extensive materials and documents were gathered and revisited by using narrative reading techniques. This offers an alternative approach to studies on Thailand and the Cold War, particularly in terms of the subjective roles of Thai agents in making use of the Cold War conflict. This angle has often been overlooked in studies on Cold War Thailand, including Benedict Anderson's study of the American Era, Charles Keyes' studies on the Northeast and William Skinner's arguments about the Chinese in Thailand. It also reveals connections between subjects in the field that have been separately examined, namely the ethnic Chinese and the Northeast as prone to communist threats, the American influence in Thailand, the development of national security in Cold War Thailand, and the ideological confrontation between the rightist-royalists and the Thai leftist movement.

Thailand's involvement in the Cold War in Asia, from its onset as an ally of the United States, significantly affected the course of conflicts in Indochina and in turn the country's internal politics. In exchange for American support, the Thai government under Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1948-1957), recognised the French-backed Bao Dai regime in Vietnam and sent material aid and military troops to support South Korea in the



Korean War.<sup>1</sup> When the Vietnam War escalated, the United States deemed Thailand strategically important due to the country's proximity to the conflict. The American military used Thailand for massive bases where American personnel were stationed.<sup>2</sup> Domestically, the Cold War conflict manifested itself in the polarisation of Thai politics; the pro-American government and the ruling elite were strongly opposed by leftist-nationalist intellectuals and activists. Both sides represented the internalisation of the Cold War in Thai society by employing competing Cold War 'narratives' to explain and justify their political quests. While the military authoritarian government (1948-1973) depicted themselves as the country's saviour against the threat of a communist invasion, the anti-government/anti-American intellectuals and activists, who were influenced by leftist ideologies, countered the government's authority and legitimacy, and accused them of serving the interests of American imperialism. The intensification of the Cold War situation, alongside the social and economic changes taking place in Thai society, escalated the conflict between the military regime and leftist intellectuals and activists. Ultimately, this escalation led to massive student-led demonstrations that aimed to overthrow the military regime and were in opposition to Thailand's involvement in the Cold War conflicts taking place in neighbouring countries in October 1973. However, their success lasted only three years. In 1976, the student movement was brutally crushed in a notorious episode in modern history of Thai politics, the 6 October events, and the military resumed its central political role.

During the Cold War period, Thailand witnessed the construction and reconstruction of identities, as a result of internal struggles and the Cold War situation combined. Distinct examples include Thai-ness itself, which became intertwined with the revived Thai monarchy, to counter communism and legitimise the military rule. Other illustrations were depictions of people in rural Thailand, particularly in the Northeast or Isan region, and of the Chinese residing in Thailand that became associated with communist insurgency. In this

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1 Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, or Phibun, was a military dictator who took premiership twice, between 1938-1944 and 1948-1957. Phibun was known for his ultra-nationalist policy, particularly during his first premiership. He allied the country with Japan in the second World War and announced that Thailand was an American ally after he resumed his power 1948. For further detail on the American pressures and lobbies on Thailand regarding Bao Dai and the Korean War, see, Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 102-119.

2 In 1973, Thailand housed 44,000 American servicemen. Sean Randolph, *The United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986), 156.

Cold War context, Isan people and the Chinese were deemed crucial to the country's security for the first time. The Northeasterners were often regarded as easily deceived by 'evil' political forces because of their poverty and supposed naivety.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, often appeared as communist-inclined in the government's propaganda when the Cold War loomed large. However, in the 1980s, the representation of the ethnic Chinese, or the Sino-Thai, as the 'good' Chinese who were loyal to the Thai nation and monarchy, completely took over the 'evil' Chinese representation of the early Cold War period. The identity of 'good' Chinese soon became the foundation of the political slogan '*luk chin rak chat*' or the Thai-born Chinese who love the nation. This slogan was heavily promoted by Sondhi Limthongkul, a Thai-born Chinese and one of the key leaders of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) during the 2005-2006 protests against Thaksin Shinawatra, then Prime Minister.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Cold War conflict and internal political struggles heavily influenced identity construction in the Cold War period, this subject is often taken for granted leaving many important issues unclarified. For example, since stories of the Cold War were promoted by the Thai government, and Thai leftists were subject to the Cold War situation, there should also be developments and changes in the narratives. However, the inconsistency of Cold War stories, namely the changing depiction of enemies and victims in the Cold War conflict, has not been raised by any scholar. Another issue that needs further clarification is that while both the official narrative and the leftist counter-narrative of the Cold War were ostensibly opposite, they reinforced particular forms of Thai-ness and Otherness that benefited Bangkok and Thai royal nationalism. These are examples of a gap in the study of the Cold War in Thailand and identity politics that this research seeks to answer.

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3 Chusak Pattarakulvanit, *อ่านใหม่: เมืองกับชนบทในวรรณกรรมไทย* [Re-read: Urban and Rural in Thai Literature] (Bangkok: Aan, 2015). For an analysis of political discourse on 'stupid, poor, and ill' rural villagers in Thailand, see, Prajak Kongkirati, "นิทานสอนใจว่าด้วยความโง่งมเจ็บ ของผู้เลือกตั้งชนบท: มายาคติและอคติของนักรัฐศาสตร์ไทย" [Fables about stupidity, poverty, and illness of rural voters: myth and bias of Thai political scientists], *Same Sky Magazine* 6, no. 4 (2012): 140-155.

4 The term '*luk chin rak chat*' in Thai is ลูกจีนรักชาติ. The concept and its political implication are examined in Kasian Tejapira, "The Misbehaving *Jeks*: The Evolving Regime of Thai-ness and Sino-Thai Challenges," *Asian Ethnicity* 10, no. 3 (2009): 263-4.

## Research Questions and Argument

This research examines the political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists in the Cold War period (1948 to 1976 in particular) through the contestation of Cold War narratives. It aims to shed light on correlations between the construction/reconstruction of three foreign Others in Cold War stories—the Americans, Isan villagers, and the Chinese—and the power struggle between the Thai government, including ruling elites, and Thai leftists. The main research question is: how did political struggles between the Thai government/ruling elites and leftist intellectual activists shape the identities that emerged in the Cold War period? In order to elaborate on the main question, two subsidiary questions are raised. First, how did the Thai government and ruling elites increase and justify their power through Cold War narratives? The other question is how did Thai leftists challenge the state through their Cold War counter-narratives? Answering these questions can help understand some of the current tensions in Thailand that can be traced back to their identity formation in the Cold War era.

The research argues that both the Thai government and its ruling elites, and Thai leftists used the construction of foreign Others in Cold War narratives to assert an identity that represented the Thai nation. At the same time, each side branded their opponents with foreignness or incomplete Thai-ness to undermine their political legitimacy. The Thai government promoted Cold War stories that allowed them to claim themselves as the protector of three essences of Thai-ness including the Nation, Religion, and King, while associating Thai leftists with foreign communists. By contrast, Thai leftists narrated themselves through a different set of Cold War stories. Leftists were true saviours of the Thai nation, whereas the Thai government betrayed the nation because it served American imperialism. Both narrators, the Thai government and Thai leftists, ended up creating sets of dichotomous identities, namely Americanness versus Thai tradition and culture, Isan versus Bangkok, Chineseness versus Thai ethnicity. These dichotomies constructed 'Otherness' as the direct opposite to the dominant Thai Self defined by Central Thai tradition and culture, Bangkok-ness, Thai ethnicity, and Thai monarchy. As a result, both sides contributed to the emergence of a dominant Central Thai-ness and the restoration of the monarchy's prestigious status.

## Literature Review: Approaches to Studying Thailand and the Cold War

There are three main approaches to the study of Cold War in Thailand. The first approach focuses on inter-state relationships and the military issues between Thailand and the United States concerning the Vietnam War and the anti-communist policy in Southeast Asia. The study of Thailand's foreign policy towards Cold War conflicts is also included.<sup>5</sup> However, studies on Thailand's role and intervention in Vietnam during the Indochina War are very limited. One reason is that the scholars of modern Thai history were drawn to other matters in the Cold War period.<sup>6</sup>

The second approach focuses on internal issues influenced by Cold War politics. Many of these political, economic, and social issues deal with power struggles and the quest for superiority and victory among political players, especially concerning Phibun's and Sarit's political careers. These works particularly engage with internal politics and consider external/foreign forces a critical factor that shaped power dynamics in Thailand during the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> Similar to studies on how the American government manufactured public consent in order to justify waging war in Vietnam, Puangthong's *Vietnam War: War with*

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- 5 For example, Fineman, *A Special Relationship*; Robert J. Muscat, *Thailand and the United States: Development, Security, and Foreign Aid* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1990); Richard A. Ruth, *In Buddha's Company: Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012); Sutayut Osornprasop, "Amidst the Heat of the Cold War in Asia: Thailand and the American Secret War in Indochina (1960-74)," *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (2007); Surachat Bamrungasuk, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule, 1947-1977* (Bangkok: Dungkamol, 1988); and David Oldfield, *Cold War Relations between Thailand and Laos, 1950s-1991* (Bangkok: Indochina Studies Center, Burapha University, 1999).
  - 6 See, Richard A. Ruth, *In Buddha's Company: Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War*, 11-13. Another reason that may explain the shortage of publications on Thailand and the Vietnam War is the absence of Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia in Thai textbooks after the communist victories in these countries. See, Sunait Chutintaranon et al., *ชาตินิยมในแบบเรียนไทย* [Nationalism in Thai Textbooks] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2009), 195-196.
  - 7 For example, on Thai military leaders, see, Charnvit Kasetsiri, Thamrongsak Petchlertanan, and Wikan Phongphanitanon, *จอมพล ป. พิบูลสงครามกับการเมืองไทยสมัยใหม่* [Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram and Modern Thai Politics], 2nd ed. (Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2001); Suthachai Yimprasert, *แผนชิงชาติไทย: ว่าด้วยรัฐและการต่อต้านรัฐสมัยจอมพล ป. พิบูลสงคราม ครั้งที่สอง (พ.ศ. 2491 - 2500)* [Seizing Thai Nation Plan: On State and Struggle in Field Marshal Phibunsongkram's Second Premiership 1948-1957], 2nd ed. (Bangkok: 6 Tula Ramleuk, 2007); Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2007). On economy see, for example, Grit Permtanjit, *Political Economy of Dependent Capitalist Development: Study on the Limits on the Capacity of the State to Rationalize in Thailand* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1982); Suehiro Akira, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand 1855-1985* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996); Kevin Hewison, *Bankers and Bureaucrats: Capitals and the Role of the State in Thailand* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1989).

*Reality of the 'Thai State'* and chapter 3 and 4 in Prajak's *And Then The Movement Emerged: Cultural Politics of Thai Students and Intellectuals Movements before the October 14 Uprising* investigate political conflicts in Thailand by explaining how the Thai government concealed the truth about the Vietnam War to control public consent. Their work also points out how Thai intellectuals and students attempted to oppose the military rule by revealing the truth about the Vietnam War, thereby demonstrating the intersection of Cold War conflicts, political movements, and control of public perception.<sup>8</sup> They also apply discourse analysis to their studies in order to explain how the Thai state controlled public perceptions towards neighbouring countries.<sup>9</sup>

The third approach studies power relations in Thai politics within the context of the Cold War in terms of identity politics and discourse analysis. This approach bases arguments on various theories and ideas such as postmodernism and postcolonialism. Some scholars concentrate on the construction of Thai identity and Cold War politics by examining Thai popular culture in the Cold War period, for instance, literature and film. They share similarities with the studies of Cold War culture prevalent in the West, that investigate dynamics of the Cold War in various realms of society to demonstrate how the Cold War's culture shaped identity and permeated public perception in a subtle way. Perspectives of gender, ethnicity, and class are often included in these analyses. Illustrative examples include Rachel Harrison's 'Mit Chaibancha's Insi Thorng and the Hybridization of Red and Yellow Perils in Thai Cold War Action Cinema' and Janit Feangfu's PhD thesis '(Ir)resistibly Modern: The Construction of Modern Thai Identities in Thai Literatures during the Cold War Era, 1958-1976'.<sup>10</sup> In *Read Till It Shatters: Nationalism and Identity in Modern Thai Literature*, Thak Chaleomtirana investigated literature in order to demonstrate changes to

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8 Puangthong Rungwasdisab Pawakapan, *สงครามเวียดนาม: สงครามกับความจริงของ "รัฐไทย"* [Vietnam War: War with Reality of the "Thai State] (Bangkok: Kobfai publisher, 2006), chap. 3-4.

9 Puangthong, *Vietnam War*, and Prajak Kongkirati, *และแล้วความเคลื่อนไหวก็ปรากฏ: การเมืองวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาและปัญญาชน ก่อน 14 ตุลาฯ* [And Then the Movement Emerged: Cultural Politics of Thai Students and Intellectuals Movements before the October 14 Uprising] (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2005), chap. 3-4.

10 Rachel V. Harrison, "The Man with the Golden Gauntlets: Mit Chaibancha's Insi Thorng and the Hybridization of Red and Yellow Perils in Thai Cold War Action Cinema," in *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, ed. Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2010), 195-226. Janit Feangfu, "(Ir)resistibly modern: The Construction of Modern Thai Identities in Thai Literature during the Cold War Era, 1958-1976" (PhD diss., SOAS, 2011), <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/12761/>

the dynamics of Thai identity, in which Cold War politics played a significant role.<sup>11</sup> For example, Thak used textual analysis to trace representations of the Chinese in Thai literature from the reign of King Vajiravudh to the 1990s. Thak pointed out how the representations of the Chinese, from the ‘Other Within’ to ‘we (Thai) are them (Sino-Thai), and them are us’, evolved through interactions and struggles between the Thai state, international forces, and the Chinese minority. He described the Chinese representation in the period when the Cold War intensified in Southeast Asia as ‘the External Chinese Other’, during which the local Chinese were related to the communist movement in the region, and consequently perceived as the enemy of Thai nation and the liberal world.<sup>12</sup>

This research positions itself closest to the third approach but with a focus on narrative inquiry. By applying narrative inquiry to study Thailand and the Cold War, this research provides an alternative approach to understand political structures and dynamics in relation to Cold War narratives. This approach points out overlaps and connections among studies on Thai politics and the Cold War that have often been separately investigated. The ethnic Chinese as a communist threat, the United States in Thailand, development and economic growth, the Vietnam War, political movements, and the expansion of leftist ideologies will be read in terms of manipulating Thai subjects and resistance against the dominate power through constructed/reconstructed identity in the narratives of the Cold War. The approach also allows us to revisit prevailing influential concepts and assumptions on Thai politics relating to the Cold War, such as Benedict Anderson’s the American Era, Charles Keyes’ arguments about the ‘Northeastern Problem’ and the Isan regionalism, and William Skinner’s studies on the Chinese in Thailand.

### **Research Methodology: Narrative Inquiry and the Cold War in Thailand**

The research applies narrative inquiry to examine the emergence of political identities that were fabricated in the power struggle between the Thai government/ruling elites and leftist intellectual activists in stories of the Cold War. Narrative inquiry is an effective approach to

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11 Thak Chaloehtiarana, *อ่านจนแตก: วรรณกรรมความทันสมัยและความเป็นไทย* [Read Till It Shatters: Nationalism and Identity in Modern Thai Literature] (Bangkok: Aan, 2015).

12 Thak Chaloehtiarana, “Are We Them?: Textual and Literary Representations of the Chinese in Twentieth-Century Thailand,” *Southeast Asia Studies* 3, no. 3 (2014): 494.

understand the interrelationship between narrative and identity construction as it deems narrative ‘the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful’.<sup>13</sup> In other words, an identity is defined or described in the form of a narrative. A narrative also ‘marks out differences, differences define “the other”, and the other helps structure the moral life of culture, group and individual’.<sup>14</sup> Through narratives, we make sense of ourselves and the world, and our experiences become ordered and have meaning. Stories of the Cold War in Thailand, the primary focus of this study, did not only allow its narrators to construct self-identities, but also demonstrated how varying narrators made sense of the world in context of the Cold War. Although the research relies on narrative analysis, it does so in a manner that fits the study’s foci and objectives. Before explaining the research method used, the selection of concepts and how they are deployed in this research are first clarified.

### ***Narrative and Story***

In terms of the definition of narrative, many narrative analysts agree that a ‘narrative presents information as a sequence of connected events, having some kind of thematic or structural (usually temporal) coherence: this happened and then this related event happened’.<sup>15</sup> Without an ‘event’ you may have a description, an exposition, or an argument, but not a narrative.<sup>16</sup> The ‘event’ in this research refers to the foreign threat faced by Thailand during the Cold War (communist insurgency from abroad or residing in the country, and American imperialism) that appeared in ‘narratives’ generated by the Thai government and Thai leftists. The term ‘narrative’ in this research is used interchangeably with ‘story’, although several narrative scholars insist on making a distinction between ‘story’ and ‘narrative’.<sup>17</sup> The former often refers to a sequence of events while the latter

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13 Mariana Souto-Manning, “Critical Narrative Analysis: The Interplay of Critical Discourse and Narrative Analyses,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 27, no. 2 (2014): 162.

14 Roger Pierce, *Research Methods in Politics: A Practical Guide* (London: Sage, 2008), 299.

15 Janine L. Wiles, Mark W. Rosenberg, and Robin A. Kearns, “Narrative Analysis as a Strategy for Understanding Interview Talk in Geographic Research,” *Area* 37, no. 1 (2005): 90. A similar definition is given by, for example, H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13; Corinne Squire and et al., *What is Narrative Research?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5; Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa, introduction to *Narratology: An Introduction*, ed. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa (London: Longman, 1996), 3.

16 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 13.

17 For example, Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5; Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 27.

‘the discursive organisation of events’.<sup>18</sup> Story is therefore a component of narrative represented or narrativised by ‘narrative discourse’, that suggests the objectivity of a story.<sup>19</sup> However, I will put aside the distinction between narrative and story and the terms will be used interchangeably in this research for two reasons. First, as we live in a society and culture that are highly characterised by specific kinds of narratives, it is very difficult to assert that the story we recount is not narrativised given that recounting, an act of narrating, is dialogical in that it involves an exchange between narrators and audiences (which can be actual, intended, or imagined).<sup>20</sup> Secondly, breaking down the distinction between narrative and story is not very helpful in this study since it does not aim to ‘contrast the “what” of “stories” (content) with the “how and why” of “narratives” (structure, context)’.<sup>21</sup> The research, however, focuses on studying how the narrators of the Cold War, namely the government and Thai leftists, gave an account of the Cold War in order to claim and impose a set of identities to achieve their political purposes. As such, the stories they recounted were highly narrativised and implied co-constructed features of narratives. In other words, the structuring and ordering stories was carried out with an awareness of how audiences would perceive them. The term ‘story’ used in this research therefore means a ‘narrativised story’.

### ***Narrative Materials: Fiction and Nonfiction***

In terms of the scope and selection of narrative materials in this study, this research engages with both fictional and non-fictional narratives such as novels and short stories for the former, and academic texts and government statements for the latter. This is for two reasons. Firstly, fabricating Cold War identities in Thailand included what was deemed ‘factual truth’, a primary feature of nonfiction (for example the role of anti-communist anthropological knowledge in Thailand during the Cold War). The second reason is that fictional texts also contain factual truth while nonfiction can be falsifiable as a result of incomplete evidence and being subject to political discourse.<sup>22</sup>

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18 Squire and et al., *What is Narrative Research*, 19.

19 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 19.

20 Squire and et al., *What is Narrative Research*, 23-24.

21 Squire and et al., *What is Narrative Research*, 25.

22 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, chap. 11.



Although a narrative may exclusively include ‘linguistic phenomenon, a speech act, defined by the presence of a narrator or a teller and a verbal text’, this research also involves written, verbal, and non-verbal texts.<sup>23</sup> This study therefore follows a broader sense of narrative that includes a representation of an event or a sequence of events that can appear in various kinds of semiotic media and genres such as spoken and written language, and visual media (films, pictures, photos, and plays).<sup>24</sup> However, written texts are prioritised and engaged with more in the study because they are still accessible. Other forms of media, such as films and paintings from the Cold War period, were lost or destroyed. Additionally, despite limited engagement with non-written texts (such as films and posters), this research sets aside the fact that each kind of narrative material has a different interpretation approach due to its technique of narration (for example, reading narratives in cinematography). This research only focuses on conflicts in narrative content and how they end or resolve, which is the key to reading the intention underlying narrative contestation.

### ***Narrative Contestation: Masterplot and Counter-narrative***

As the contestation of Cold War narratives is the primary focus of this study, the concept of narrative contestation and how it is applied in this study needs to be explained. Narrative contestation does not necessarily mean a conflict between dominant and marginal narratives (hierarchical order) nor a prevailing narrative being countered by a ‘newer’ narrative (chronological order). Narratives produced by equally powerful narrators in the same period of time can be contested. However, here I refer to narrative contestation as a contest between master narratives and counter-narratives in which a challenge to the status-quo is accentuated.<sup>25</sup> Master or dominant narratives, which I will also refer to in the study as ‘official narratives’ due to their close connection to state authority and the Cold War narrative, ‘serve as a blueprint for all stories’. They are powerful because they offer us

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23 Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa, introduction to *Narratology*, 3.

24 Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa, introduction to *Narratology*, 3-4.

25 Porter Abbott suggests that the term ‘masterplot’ is more suitable than ‘master narrative’ since, to him, ‘narrative’ refers to a particular way of interpreting a story, while ‘plot’ is more skeletal and adaptable which ‘can recur in narrative after narrative’. However, Abbott also indicates that the distinction between ‘masterplot’ and ‘master narrative’ matters when we take into account the difference between ‘story’ and ‘narrative’, which is not the case in this research. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 47.

‘a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience’ which allow us to become a part of the stories we know and, in this case, manipulate how Thai people perceived the Cold War in general.<sup>26</sup>

The master or official narratives of the Cold War in Thailand tell stories of the country under communist threats from the People’s Republic of China and from neighbouring Laos and Vietnam. Communists infiltrated into Thailand by deceiving uneducated, poor and backward Thai people, particularly those in rural areas, and convincing them to support communist plans to occupy the Thai nation. This account of Thailand under communist threats was heavily challenged by intellectuals and activists influenced by leftist ideologies. They produced and promoted counter-narratives of Thailand and the Cold War by narrating that Thailand fell prey to American imperialism by seeking benefits from the Indochina conflict. The Thai government became an American ally in exchange for military and economic assistance from Washington. The counter-narrative presented here emerged because many leftist narrators considered themselves a member of ‘outgroups’, or ‘groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized’.<sup>27</sup> Many of them were from oppressed and powerless groups regarded as ‘un-Thai’ or ‘less Thai’ as a result of having Chinese blood or an Isan background. These identities were deemed ‘problematic’ in Cold War stories. Marginalised people sometimes find that their stories or experiences deviate from master narratives thereby leading them to question and ‘counter’ the stories. As such, a counter-narrative is a form of resistance ‘occurring between oneself and a dominant social structure... and/or as a refusal to being identified as oneself in the first place’.<sup>28</sup> It allows narrators to resist by re-identifying themselves through counter-narratives, thus rejecting the marginalised identities imposed on them through dominant narratives.<sup>29</sup> This research illuminates in each chapter how Thai

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26 Molly Andrews, “Opening to the Original Contributions: Counter-narratives and the Power to Oppose” in *Considering Counter-narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense*, ed. Michael Bamber and Molly Andrews (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), 2.

27 Richard Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2412.

28 Jennifer R. Wolgemuth, “Analyzing for Critical Resistance in Narrative Research,” *Qualitative Research* 14, no. 5 (2014): 587.

29 Wolgemuth, “Analyzing for Critical Resistance in Narrative Research,” 587.

leftist intellectuals and activists re-defined themselves and their opponents through counter-narratives of the Cold War.

However, this does not always mean that counter-narratives are completely oppositional nor dichotomous to the stories that they are in tension with.<sup>30</sup> As we will see in Chapter 5, the counter-narrative of the Cold War did not 'counter' Thai nationalist sentiments that circulated around the Thai monarchy, nor did it question the issue of Thai ethnicity. Embracing this dominant type of Thai-ness can be perceived as a way to re-define the not-so-Thai identity of promoters of counter-narratives that affected the course of identity formation in the Cold War period.

### ***Narrative Interpretation and Narrative Conflict***

As the primary focus of this research is the narrative contestation of the Cold War, I apply the concept of 'authorial intention', or 'the author's intended meanings or effects', to the study.<sup>31</sup> Although there is a debate on interpreting narrative materials by putting an emphasis on authorial intention, or 'intentional readings', it fits the research objective to investigate the Cold War narratives used by the Thai government to stay in power, and Thai leftists to resist and counter state authority.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, the focus is on the 'intention' of Cold War narrators to achieve their political purposes, thereby rendering the reading of authorial intention valid in this case.<sup>33</sup> The research also engages with 'symptomatic reading', or the interpretation of narrative by 'decoding a text as symptomatic of the author's unconscious or unacknowledged state of mind, or of acknowledged cultural conditions'.<sup>34</sup> In other words, symptomatic readings demonstrate the author as being subject to, or a part of, the political, social, or economic conditions where the author

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30 Andrews, "Counter-narratives and the Power to Oppose," 2.

31 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 229.

32 Although reading the authorial intention in narrative materials is one of the earliest approaches in reading narrative texts, its critics have grown since the twentieth century. It has been argued that, for example, authorial intention is interminable, the author is fallible and thus an unreliable guide for us to read the text accordingly, and that it leads to a single privileged interpretation of narrative. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 229.

33 The three major approaches to interpreting narrative include intentional readings, symptomatic readings, and adaptive readings.

34 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 242.

resides. Despite different emphases, both readings presume that a meaning exists behind the narrative.<sup>35</sup>

Narrative scholars refer to the ‘author’ as ‘a real person who creates a text’ and the ‘narrator’ as ‘one who tells a story in a text’.<sup>36</sup> Fundamental actions of a narrator such as voice, focalisation, and the narrator’s degree of involvement in the story are where narrative scholars often look in order to analyse text. To them, a narrator is considered as ‘a tool, devised by the implied author, to narrate the story’.<sup>37</sup> This research, again, puts aside the distinction between them and refers those who constructed and narrated Cold War stories through written or non-written materials as ‘narrators’. This is related to how the term ‘story’ is used here. In this research, a story means a ‘narrativised story’, and is thus used interchangeably with ‘narrative’. A ‘narrator’, as in narrators of the Cold War stories, refers to a person who ‘narrativises’ Cold War stories. This is to accentuate their roles in narrativising stories of power struggles in the Cold War.

The distinction is crucial when taking the actions of a narrator into account when carrying out narrative analysis. However, this is not a primary concern in this research. Instead, I pay attention to the main conflict and its closure in narrative materials as they illustrate the political intention of the narrators, which act as a centre of contestation between opposing Cold War narratives.<sup>38</sup> In terms of narrative analysis, conflict is one of the central elements that might structure the narrative itself.<sup>39</sup> Conflicts at play in narrative often, but not always, represent larger conflicts in society—be they political, cultural, moral, or psychological. From how an author engages a conflict, particularly in the end of a

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35 This is not the case for ‘adaptive readings’, a mode of narrative interpretation that minimises engaging with the author’s influence while prioritising the narrative reader’s role in creatively interpreting the texts. See, Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 106-9.

36 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 238-9.

37 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 229. Abbott, taking a cue from Wayne Booth, also distinguishes an actual or real author from an ‘implied author’ by arguing that the latter refers to ‘the idea of the author constructed by the reader as she or he reads the narrative’. This is because a real author is an actual person whose life is complex and multi-faceted. The text that he or she produces represents only a part of his or herself in a specific time and is thus subject to change. However, some narrative scholars are sceptical towards this concept. On Abbott’s the ‘implied author’, see, Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 84-86. On critiques of the ‘implied author’, see, for example, Bal, *Narratology*, 17-18; Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 137-154.

38 There can be more than one conflict in a story. But the conflict I focus or define as the main conflict is the one that is ‘closed’ or being dealt with in the end.

39 However, this does not mean that conflict is a decisive element that makes something a narrative. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 193.

narrative conflict (which does not always mean that the conflict is resolved), we can see his or her intention to take a side in the conflict, either by compromising or by suggesting adaptive ways in which readers should live with the conflict.<sup>40</sup>

A narrative can have many conflicts, or even none, and so can stories on the Cold War in Thailand. However, the conflicts I chose to focus on are those regarding the Americans, Isan villagers, and the Chinese, in other words, the foreign Others in Cold War narratives. This research investigates conflicts regarding these foreign Othernesses and their endings in stories created by the Thai state and Thai leftist intellectuals and activists.

## Research Contributions

This research contributes to three subjects regarding Cold War studies: Thailand and the Cold War, applying narrative inquiry to Cold War studies, and identity and nationalism in Thai politics from 1948 to 1976. In terms of Thailand and the Cold War, this research contributes a better understanding of Cold War Thailand by revisiting arguments on Cold War Thailand proposed by Benedict Anderson, Charles Keyes, and William Skinner, which overlooked the role of Thai agents in shaping Cold War politics in Thailand. For the second contribution, most studies on the Cold War that refer to the 'Cold War narrative' do not really engage with narrative analysis, in other words, the term 'Cold War narrative' is used without engaging narrative theory or clarifying how it works in the studies.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, prior studies do not significantly differ from studying Cold War culture except that the term 'narrative' has been introduced with an emphasis on rhetoric and literature.<sup>42</sup> Despite the limitation of theoretical engagement and the specific application of narrative inquiry, this study is an example of how to apply narrative inquiry to Cold War studies in Thailand and at large.

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40 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 55-56, 193-4.

41 For illustrations, Andrea Carosso, *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950s* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012); Stephen Carter, "'I Am Resisting Narrative Here': The Vietnam War, Postmodernism, and the Ends of American Power in Joan Didion's *Democracy*," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 48, no. 3 (2018): 415-437; David Seed, "Seven Days to Noon: Containing the Atomic Threat," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45, no. 4 (2012): 641-652.

42 One of a few studies that explicitly involves and applies narrative inquiry to the Cold War is Steven Belletto's *No Accident, Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives*, where the concept of 'narrative chance' is employed to explain how the Cold War encouraged state control in the United States by looking at American literature in the Cold War period. Steven Belletto, *No Accident, Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

As this study investigates the construction and roles of foreign Others in Thai politics in the Cold War context, it also contributes to a better understanding of the study of Thai identity and nationalism in the Cold War period, a topic of interest to many scholars such as Thak Chaleomtiarana, Thongchai Winichakul, and Kasian Tejapira. By suggesting that the foreign Others in the Cold War narratives, or the ‘un-Thai’ entities, are constitutive outside of Thai-ness and Thai nationalism, this research provides an understanding of the other side of the coin in studying Thai-ness, which is unclear in many principal studies on Thai identity and nationalism. A case in point is Thongchai Winichakul’s influential argument on Thai royal nationalism and the emergence of neo-royal nationalism in the 1970s. His emphasis is on internal politics, particularly the student-led movement in the 1970s and the role of the Thai monarchy in the political turmoil. Winichakul deemed the role of the Thai monarchy a crucial element in the formation of ‘neo-royal nationalism,’ or a type of nationalism that fetishised a so-called ‘democratic king’.<sup>43</sup> Although his work focuses on politics in Thailand in the 1970s, when the Cold War played an important role in Thailand and multiple foreign presences in Thai politics became apparent, it does not extensively investigate how Cold War politics played an important role in constructing the ‘un-Thai’, or the external Others that constituted the Thai-ness. By investigating the ‘un-Thai’ identities related to the Cold War conflict, this current study contributes to a better understanding of the study of Thai identity and nationalism.

## Research Method and Material Selection

In terms of the research method, the two stages employed in conducting this research included first collecting narrative materials and then analysing narrative contestation by focusing on foreign Others, specifically how they were narrated, and by whom. The materials used for analysing Cold War narratives can be divided into three categories: materials produced by Thai authorities, by Thai leftists, and academic studies from the Cold War period.

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43 Thongchai Winichakul, “ประวัติศาสตร์ไทยแบบราชาชาตินิยม’ จากยุคอาณานิคมอำพรางสู่ราชาชาตินิยมใหม่หรือลัทธิเสด็จพ่อของระบอบไทยในปัจจุบัน” [The royal-nationalist historiography in Thailand: from the crypto-colonial period to the cults of Royal Fathers in the present], *Arts and Culture* 23, no. 1 (2001): 56-65.

As the research distinguishes between Cold War narratives based on the narrators, namely the Thai state (official narrative) and Thai leftists (counter-narrative), narrative materials were selected accordingly. The former concerns the anti-communist media produced by the Thai government (with or without American support) and Thai ruling elites including radio programmes, fiction, films, and magazines. The latter deals with materials created by Thai leftist intellectuals and activists, particularly with their written publications which were the most pervasive form of their materials. This research also engages with some non-written materials such as music and films by Thai leftists, but to a lesser extent. It then applies 'intentional reading' to primary materials produced by both sides of the Cold War narrators in order to illustrate their 'intention' in political control or resistance. In these materials, I particularly focus on stories or depiction of 'we-ness' or 'Self', or how the authors defined themselves in the texts, and the representation of 'them' or the 'Other' in relation to themselves, the Thai nation, and the Cold War situation. This approach reveals the political intention and attempts of Cold War narrators to construct/reconstruct both their identities and others' through the account of the Cold War that they promoted in order to achieve their political goals.

To make the study manageable, the narrators who were prominent and influential figures, and who played an outstanding role in promoting Cold War narratives, receive more attention. On the Thai government side, they include Thai Prime Ministers and high-ranking government officials such as Plaek Phibunsongkhram, Sarit Thanarat, Thanom Kittikachorn, and Sanya Thammasak, for example. Kukrit Pramoj, due to his devotion to constructing Thai-ness and reviving the Thai monarchy and royalist ideology to fight against 'communism', earns special attention in this research. Materials produced under the government authority and the United States are also included, such as radio programmes by the Public Relation Department and the government's periodicals *Tesaphiban* and *Pattanakonsan*, and the *Seripharb* magazine.

On the leftist side, some important figures such as Nai Phi, Jit Phumisak, and Kulap Saipradit are prioritised. Their works were deemed influential as they were reprinted countless times and circulated among Thai leftist intellectuals and activists throughout their movements in the Cold War period. *The Social Science Review* and Suchart Sawatsi's four-volume anthology of contemporary Thai short stories are also included. The former is the

most influential intellectual journal while the latter is a rich source of leftist writing available and useful to the investigation of foreign Others in this research.

Some lesser-known writings or figures are engaged with in this research to challenge prevailing ideas or concepts (for example, Tak Wongrat's short story). The materials that have specific usage and those that deal with one foreign Other in particular (such as Suwat's *Red Dove*, Lao Kamhawn's *The Politician and Other Stories*, Aran's *Thailand: A Semicolony*, for example) will be stated in the beginning of each chapter.

Academic studies in the 1950s-1970s are investigated to explain the role of anthropological knowledge in empowering Cold War narratives and serving the political objectives of the narrators, particularly the Thai government. Despite their hidden political agenda and anti-communist purpose, these studies are still deemed valuable as an important primary source. I found this literature and surveys, particularly those conducted by Cornell scholars and the United States Information Service (USIS), useful to understand the influence of some media and publications concerning the communist situation in Thailand and the political struggles between the Thai government and university students. Opinion surveys of people involved in the Cold War conflict in Thailand, such as those that interviewed local Chinese leaders in Bangkok or villagers in the Northeast, are useful to provide a better understanding of narrative contestation and its affects.

These materials were collected from libraries and archives in Thailand and Cornell University. As data collection in Thailand was limited to four months (June and September 2016), large libraries in Bangkok with extensive collections relating to the research topic were prioritised. These include Chulalongkorn University library, Thailand Information Centre (TIC), Thammasat University library and archive, the National Archive of Thailand, Department of Provincial Administration library, the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) and National Defence College of Thailand (NDC). Selected films are from the Thai Film Archive and YouTube. This research also uses data and materials from Cornell University and Cornell Research Projects especially in the section on anthropological knowledge and the construction of Otherness.

I also selected narrative materials produced or published between 1948 and 1976 to correlate with the time period when Thailand was under Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram and officially entered the Indochina conflict. This research does not go beyond 1976 since narrative contestation lessened after the 6 October events in 1976 when leftist student



activists, who were promoters of the counter-narrative, were violently crushed and the intellectual resistance was silenced.

From the collected data and materials collected, this research examines stories and representations of foreign Others, or the point of narrative contestation in this research. The foreign Others studied in this research are the American, Isan villagers, and the ethnic Chinese. These Others appear in both official and counter-narratives but were depicted differently. Also, as many leftists have Isan or Chinese backgrounds, these two foreign Others are both narrated and narrators at the same time, demonstrating how these leftists used counter-narratives to resist the dominant narratives that imposed marginalised identities on them. Another reason is, through these three foreign Others, the Thai Self that is compatible to the Central Thais, Bangkok, the Thai monarchy, and an imagined history of Thai 'race' was constituted.<sup>44</sup>

In terms of official narratives, by focusing on foreign Others, this research seeks coherence of the Cold War narrative and its traits across anti-communist media, enforcement of state authority (policies, programmes, legislation), and anthropological knowledge. Afterwards, I will identify the relationship between the narrative, Thai-ness, and narrators to demonstrate how the narrative promoters or producers narrated themselves through the Cold War stories in relation to foreign Others and Thai-ness. This research also traces changes and developments to the official narrative in the course of the Cold War. Similarly, in terms of the counter-narrative of the Cold War, this research starts by identifying how narrative materials produced by Thai leftists countered the official narrative through their depictions of foreign Others. This research then looks at how Thai-ness was narrated in relation to foreign Others and the leftist narrators. At this point, in the Cold War stories, we will see similar depiction of Thai-ness shared by both sides of the conflict despite different depictions of foreign Others. This study also examines how foreign Others in leftist publications evolved throughout the Cold War period in a manner similar to the official narrative. This sheds light on how both the Thai government and Thai leftists eventually created and confirmed the same set of dichotomous identities.

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44 Siamese/Thai ruling elites such as King Rama VI and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab used or referred to the term 'Thai race' in English in their Thai works. On narrating a history of the Thai nation as a story of 'Thai race' to promote Thai nationalism, please see the introduction.

## Foreign Other and Thai Self /Thai-ness in the Cold War

The usage of the terms 'Self' and 'Other' in this research needs to be clarified. Although the 'Other' appears in numerous academic works on Thai identity, for example, Thongchai's 'the Other within,' Thak's 'the External Chinese Other,' and Rachel Harrison's 'foreign Otherness,' none of them provide a clear explanation of the reasons why they decided to use 'Other' rather than 'other'. The contemporary idea of the Other appears in theories of race, class, gender, and postcolonial theories of national identities. In these contemporary theories, the meaning of the Other differs. Generally, the Other is used 'as half of Self/Other dichotomy as distinguishing one person from another'.<sup>45</sup> The use of Self/Other appears in Terry Goldie's racial theory, signifying the distinction between white people and black people, in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, signifying woman as the 'Other' to man, and in Homi Bhabha's discussion on national identity.<sup>46</sup> Despite various usages of Self/Other, what they seem to have in common is the implication of an uneven distribution of power, that is the Self is deemed a superior and active subject, while the Other is inferior to the Self and is considered a passive object. As such, the Self/Other is a dichotomous concept that serves to constitute each other's existence, meaning that without the Other, the Self cannot become a Self, and vice versa. In this study, the Self, a superior and active entity, refers to Thai national identity, which constitutes itself through negating the Other, namely the foreignness that is described as 'un-Thai'.

This research proposes that foreign actors in Cold War narratives should be viewed as Others because how they are created is based on the notion of what is and is not Thai. Here the role foreign Others in Cold War narratives comes into play. In each chapter, this research points out how each foreign Other constructed Thai-ness or Thai identity in the Cold War period in a dichotomous manner. For example, the American Other is often contrasted with (Central) Thai tradition and values, and the Chinese Other with Thai 'race' or ethnicity.

Opposite to foreign Others is the 'Thai Self'. In this research, the Thai Self refers to the type of Thai-ness or Thai identity that emerged in the Cold War period. Since Thai-ness

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45 Tamise Van Pelt, *The other Side of Desire: Lacan's Theory of the Registers* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 139.

46 Tamise Van Pelt, "Otherness," *Postmodern Culture* 10, no. 2 (2000): 1-4.

in the Cold War differed from Thai-ness or Thai identity prior to the Cold War period, the Thai-ness/Thai Self needs clarification before investigating foreign Others.

In the Phibun era (1949-1957), Luang Wichitwathakan played a crucial role in explaining and promoting Thai identity and Thai-ness. He performed the same role under the Siamese monarchy before the 1932 Siamese Revolution, during Phibun's first premiership (1938-1945) and also under Sarit's government (1958- until his death in 1963). Under Luang Wichit's influence, Thai-ness was shaped and presented differently in order to justify the power of the ruling leaders whom he served.<sup>47</sup> In Phibun's first term, Luang Wichit promoted a nationalist campaign in favour of Phibun's policies by creating a new Thai identity or a Thai-ness based on the notion of a 'Thai race' with a long history that had been flourishing since ancient times.<sup>48</sup> The primary objective was to challenge modern Thai nationalism that described the king as the 'heart of Thai-ness' and had emerged in the reign of King Rama VI. This new concept of nationalism that emphasised the 'Thai blood' shared by all Thai people justified Phibun's power and the People's Party's revolution.

In Phibun's second term (1948-1957), Luang Wichit turned to define the monarchy as a part of the Thai essence, along with Thai nation and Buddhism, which signalled better terms between Phibun and the royalist camp. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, Phibun attempted to counterbalance the increasing power of Phao Sriyanond and Sarit Thanarat by allying himself to the conservative royalist. The other reason is that Phibun wanted to incorporate King Bhumibol into his anti-communist policies in order to secure foreign aid from the United States. The Phibun government promoted the idea that if Thailand turned communist, it would put an end to 'Nation, Religion, King', or the very essence of Thai-ness.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a noticeable change in the character of Thai-ness when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat stepped into power in 1958 due to domestic politics and Thailand's anti-communist campaign. Under Sarit's tenure, the role of the Thai monarchy grew rapidly

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47 Federico Ferrara, *The Political Development of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 111-112.

48 In Luang Wichit's *ชาตินิยม* [Nationalism] (1949), he stated that, 'the term chua-chat, or Race, means a group of human being who share the same bloodline, language, culture, traditions, and a way of life... nation... is the coming together of people of the same ethnicity, sharing the same destiny'. Here Luang Wichit referred to 'race' in English. Quoted in Saichol Sattayanurak, *10 ปัญญาชนสยาม เล่ม 2 ปัญญาชนหลังการปฏิวัติ 2475* [10 Siamese Intellectuals: Volume 2 Intellectuals after the 1932 Revolution], vol. 2 (Bangkok: Open books, 2014), 26.

49 Saichol, *10 Siamese Intellectuals*, 56.

and the relationship between the throne and Sarit's military government developed significantly. Sarit realised that in order to stabilise his foundation after having toppled the Phibun government, the King was an absolutely crucial legitimiser of his political leadership. He made great efforts to support and encourage the young King Bhumibol to promote himself both domestically and internationally. The more popularity the King gained, the better image the Sarit regime had. The Sarit government also promoted the King as an anti-communist symbol, the heart of the Thai nation that must be protected from communist insurgency at all cost. A significant increase in the number of royal rural tours and the donations received by the King in the Sarit era illustrated not only the growing popularity of the monarchy but also the expansion of anti-communist campaigns in remote areas. This was in sharp contrast to the Phibun period. For example, the Phibun government deemed the King's popularity from his visit to the Northeast in 1955 disruptive. Ultimately, the government refused financial support for the royal trip and the King's dissatisfaction towards Phibun grew. Also, Phibun was much less energetic in using the King as a representation of anti-communist policy.<sup>50</sup>

When examining the shaping and constructing of Thai-ness from the early 1950s, one cannot disregard M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, an aristocrat and minor member of the royal family. Kukrit was a ruling elite figure who influenced both the intellectual and political spheres due to his dominant role as an author, founder of *Siam Rath* newspaper, founder of the conservative Social Action Party, and his tenure as Prime Minister of Thailand (1975-1976). The Thai-ness promoted by Kukrit, therefore, appeared both in state rhetoric and in the cultural realm. The definition and components of Kukrit's Thai-ness were shaped in order to be able to effectively resist ideological challenges, namely liberalism and socialism. This can be seen from his most well-known and now classic novel published in 1951, *Four Reigns*. The novel successfully revived royalist ideals by convincing Thai people that the monarchy and the King were absolutely indispensable to the Thai nation.<sup>51</sup> It is therefore, no surprise that the Thai-ness Kukrit emphasised implied explicit political meanings. There are at least four main aspects of Thai-ness that Kukrit promoted. The first is Thai-style

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50 King Bhumibol's first grand tour in his realm began on November 11, 1955, under the Phibun government. Phibun's decision to initiate the royal tour happened after Phibun came back from his travels to the anti-communist countries in early 1955. See, Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2006), 127-128, and, Thak, *The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 205-206.

51 Saichol, *10 Siamese Intellectuals*, 297-8.

governance, purportedly the most suitable type of governance for the Thai people and one he deemed superior to western democracy. In Thai-style governance, the absolute power of the Thai leader is needed. However, this will supposedly not lead to abuses of power as Thai rulers, particularly the King, practice the Buddhist ‘tenfold virtue of the ruler’.<sup>52</sup> As the ruling class had to be educated and ethical, those who lack these qualifications were not encouraged to participate in Thai-style governance, as they might cause damage or chaos to the nation.<sup>53</sup>

The contribution of Kukrit’s Thai-ness is the imagined Thai political scenario, a society with political silence or no politics. This ideal is clearly communicated through Mae Ploy, the female protagonist in his most famous novel *Four Reigns*. An ideal desirable society for Thai people is one where the nation is governed by a benevolent and ethical ruler and has subjects who ‘know their place’. To shore up this idealised society, Kukrit projected the image of ‘the Thai country is good’, which purportedly embodies the virtues of Thai society since ancient times. Not only conveying the definitions of Thai-ness, ‘the Thai country is good’ also demonstrates how Kukrit perceived and reacted to international forces. ‘The Thai country is good’ convinces Thai people that Thai nation is better than other countries due to its geography, monarchy, and Thai-style governance, which tries to reduce public resistance against the ruling regime and any political alternatives.<sup>54</sup> However, it should be noted that Kukrit’s Thai-ness and revival of the monarchy’s prestigious status were promoted by the United States as a part of its anti-communist psychology warfare. This point is discussed in Chapter 2.

From Phibun’s second premiership to Sarit, the significant difference of Thai-ness during these two eras is the representation of the King as the ‘Thai essence’. Although the role of the monarchy dramatically increased after Sarit stepped into power, it should be noted that the monarchy also appeared and was represented as a part of Thai-ness in the Phibun era as well, although to a much lesser extent and with a different implication. The appearance of the Thai monarchy in both eras, despite being to different degrees and content, can also be considered as evidence of the continuity of Thai-ness. In his second

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52 Tenfold virtue of the ruler in Thai is ทศพิธราชธรรม.

53 Kasian Tejapira, “เมืองไทยในเงาศึกฤทธิ์ (ตอนต้น)” [Thailand under Kukrit’s Shadow (part I)], *Siam Intelligence*, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.siamintelligence.com/thailand-under-kukrit-shadow-i/> (site discontinued).

54 Kasian, “Thailand under Kukrit’s Shadow.”

period in office, Phibun used the throne to promote Thai identity as a symbol of the nation to unite Thai people under the new military regime.<sup>55</sup> However, the role of the throne was still limited as Phibun tried to contain the influence of the King that increased after his permanent return to Thailand in late 1951. Phibun responded to the growing influence of the King by banning royal tours in 1955 and elevating his standing by promoting Buddhism and appealing to more progressive ideas from politicians and leftist activists to counterbalance the royalism of the Democrat Party, one of Phibun's political rivals at that time.<sup>56</sup>

The Thai-ness or the quality of the good Thais, both in the Phibun or Sarit eras, was embodied by only a small group of Thai people, that is, the Central or Bangkok Thais. In Cold War narratives, Others were defined as alienated from Central Thai-ness, which reflected the perception of Bangkok elites. This is obviously noticeable in an investigation of the villagers and the neighbouring countries as Others in Cold War narratives. The Central Thais, specifically Bangkokians, privilege 'more power and resources from the central administration, and their culture (along with their languages) has been adopted to represent Thailand's culture'.<sup>57</sup> This can be seen in Thai textbooks where Thai cultural unity is highly emphasised. The Thai culture presented in textbooks mostly represents the culture of the Central Thai middle-class. The Thai etiquette taught in textbooks – for example, composure, not speaking or laughing when you have food in your mouth, how to pay respect to seniors and elders, and a polite way of talking – is the etiquette of middle-class Bangkok, even though the characters and settings are in Thai rural areas. 'Thai cultural heritage' in textbooks only refers to the literature, dance, and national costume of the Central Thais.<sup>58</sup> The result is a cultural monopoly by the centre and the marginalisation of non-Central Thai identities (for example, Isan, Lanna, and Malay Muslims in Deep South). As

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55 Charnvit, Thamrongsak, and Wikan, *Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram and Modern Thai Politics*, 96-99.

56 Ferrara, *The Political Development of Thailand*, 139-140.

57 Duncan McCargo and Krisadawan Hongladarom, "Contesting Isan-ness: Discourses of Politics and Identity in Northeast Thailand," *Asian Ethnicity* 5, no. 2 (2004): 221.

58 Nidhi Eawsriwong, "ชาติไทยและเมืองไทยในแบบเรียนประถมศึกษา" [Thai Nation and Thailand in Primary School Textbooks] in *ชาติไทย, เมืองไทย, แบบเรียน, และอนุสาวรีย์* [Thai Nation, Thailand, Textbooks, and Monuments] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2014), 62-64. On national costume and the construction of Thai identity, Sujit Wongthes suggests that the so-called Thai national costume was created in Phibun's first premiership (1938-1944), in a similar manner to colonial countries that invented national costumes to create national identity. See, Sujit Wongthes, "ชุดประจำชาติที่เพิ่งสร้างใหม่" [National Costume That Was Recently Invented], *Matichon Online*, April 10, 2016, <http://www.matichon.co.th/news/101564>.

such, regardless of varying degrees, the non-Central Thais frequently perceive Bangkokians as ‘gentle folks’ or urban people of a higher class who can access better education and are more up to date. They are also inclined to view themselves as inferior to Bangkokians and are looked down upon for being poor, provincial, uneducated, and low class.<sup>59</sup> To them, the Bangkok Thais are the imagined Other, a representation of Thai-ness that excludes them yet claims itself as a desirable Thai-ness to all Thai subjects.

Degrees of Thai-ness vary, and some types of Thai-ness are preferable to others. The more your ‘Thai-ness’ is distant from Central Thai-ness, the more alien you become. Central Thai-ness is often related to the Thai national shibboleth ‘Nation, Religion, King’. ‘Nation’ implies a centralised state as other parts of the country are subordinate to the capital and the ‘Thai race’ as a dominant ethnicity. ‘Religion’ here specifically refers to Buddhism. The Thai state obviously prioritises Buddhism over other religions as we can see, for example, from the fact that only Buddhist religious days are announced as public holidays. ‘King’ is the most important of these three words. Absolute loyalty to the monarchy is required in order to be a full Thai citizen. Any action implying defiance against the monarchy can be charged as a serious crime according to Thai *lèse-majesté*. The three-part shibboleth often causes problems for non-Central Thais, especially those who regard their inclusion in Thailand as arbitrary, those who are not Buddhist, and even those that have their own ‘local kings’.<sup>60</sup> Of course, these dissenting qualities do not appear in Bangkok Thais, full Thai citizens who represent ‘real’ Thai-ness.

### **Thai Leftists and Leftist Movements in the Cold War: Overview**

Besides ‘Thai-ness’ and its overview in the Cold War period, the definition of ‘leftist movement’ used in this research needs to be clarified. Here, the leftist movement means the movement that was influenced by leftist ideologies in general (using leftist perspective, rhetorical style, and terms). As a result, people who took part in the movement were called ‘leftists’ despite the variety of individual political ideologies. For example, some of them demonstrated a relatively ‘stronger’ leftist ideologies as their priorities concerned class

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59 McCargo and Krisadawan, “Contesting Isan-ness,” 232.

60 Duncan McCargo, “Informal Citizens: Graduated Citizenship in Southern Thailand,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 842-3. The article points out the problematic Thai-ness of Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand as unfit to access national Thai-ness.

struggle and destroying capitalism in Thailand. Their ideological obligation was to ‘awaken’ and ‘mobilise’ the exploited masses (workers and farmers in particular) to rise and topple feudal lords, local capitalists, and foreign imperialists.<sup>61</sup> Some intellectuals and students known as leftists, however, selectively employed leftist terminology and concepts but did not, or rarely, mention the overthrow of the capitalists and the proletarian revolution in their writings.<sup>62</sup>

Noticeably, some of the intellectuals demonstrated distinct leftist perspective after studying or having experiences in foreign countries. For example, Supha Sirimanond who founded *Akornsarn*, a leftist weekly magazine, and translated Marx’s *Capital* into Thai, developed an interest in an ‘alternative’ political idea when he travelled to the Soviet Union, China, and Europe. He later studied Marxism by himself from books imported from the United Kingdom and Chinese bookstores in Thailand. Similarly, the Socialist tone in Kulap Saipradit’s writings became apparent when he returned to Thailand after studying in Australia. Udom Sisuwan and Asanee Pholachan (Nai Phi) whose works later inspired the Art for Life movement also studied Marxism in China.<sup>63</sup>

However, Malai Chupinit and many Thai intellectuals such as Sod Kuramarohita, Issara Amantakul, and Srirat Sathapanawat never advocated Marxism, Leninism, or Maoism, but strongly expressed liberal and humanist perspectives.<sup>64</sup> Despite ideological differences, these Thai intellectuals often worked together or collaborated in Thai journalist circles to criticise the military government and American foreign policy. Except for Malai Chupinit, they were also charged with communist activities along with the intellectuals who demonstrated strong leftist ideologies. Because Thai politics during the Cold War period

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61 Asanee Pholachan (Nai Phi), Jit Phumisak, and Udom Sisuwan are a good illustration of ‘stronger’ leftists in this case. The thesis also sometimes refers to this group as ‘extreme’ leftists. Their ideological interest was related to the Marxist-Maoist publications from abroad. Asanee translated his pen name, Nai Phi, as a ‘Spectre’, as in Marx and Engle’s ‘the Spectre of Communism’. For Jit Phumisak, Lu Xun and Mao Zedong were influential to his *Art for Life, Art for the People* (1957). Udom Sisuwan also translated Mao’s *On Practice* (1951). Kasian Tejapira, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001), 105, 133.

62 Kulap Saipradit, for example, never strongly advocated the proletarian revolution nor fiercely attacked capitalism. However, Kulap translated some foreign Marxist-communist publications and explicitly expressed the Socialist and anti-feudalist thought in his work.

63 *Thailand: A Semicolony* in Thai is ไทยกึ่งเมืองขึ้น. Sopha Chanamool, “ชาติไทย” ในทัศนะปัญญาชนหัวก้าวหน้า [“Thai Nation” in the Perspective of Thai Progressive Intellectuals] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2007), 89-92, 94-96.

64 Sopha, “Thai Nation” in the Perspective of Thai Progressive Intellectuals, 49. Although Sod spent many years studying in China and strongly supported cooperatives in Thailand, he resented both communism and authoritarianism. For more details on Sod, please see Chapter 5.



were highly polarised, causing a view of ‘either us or them’, the Thai government simply lumped all opponents together as ‘communists’ even though they were actually a mixed group of people composed of non-communists, anti-communists and actual communists.<sup>65</sup>

The spread of leftist ideologies and publications in Thailand became apparent in the Phibun era due to the suspension of an anti-communist law between 1946 and 1952.<sup>66</sup> This inspired Thai students and intellectuals loosely organised collaboration to challenge the military government and the United States under leftist ideologies. When the Thai government decided to send Thai troops to the Korean War in 1950 in exchange for American economic and military support, many Thai intellectuals protested against the decision and formed an anti-war movement that led to the government’s crackdown in 1952. Again in 1957, the year after Phibun won the national election, students from the Thammasat, Chulalongkorn and Kasetsat universities organised a protest against pro-American foreign policy and electoral fraud.<sup>67</sup> After Sarit toppled the Phibun government and assumed the premiership in 1958, the government again faced loud criticism from intellectual and student activists against its pro-American foreign policy. Consequently, the Sarit government employed harsh measures and censorship to silence activists. Newspapers were censored and many journalists, lawyers and politicians who joined political activities before 1958 were arrested. This led to an intellectual and political silence in Thailand during the Sarit era.<sup>68</sup>

Counter-narratives gained momentum when Thai university students became active again after the death of Sarit in 1963 and reached its peak in 1973 to 1976. Unlike the anti-government/anti-American intellectuals in the Phibun era, these political activities and movements were more organised as we can see from the political activities and protests of student clubs and unions. After the promulgation of a permanent constitution in June 1968, students started to actively engage in Thai politics, for example, they were involved in the general elections in June 1969 in varying capacities.<sup>69</sup> The political intensity grew

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65 Kasia, *Commodifying Marxism*, 136-137.

66 Suspension of an anti-communist law was a requirement made by the USSR for Thailand to acquire Soviet recognition as a member of the UN. As a result, many bookshops imported Marxist publications from the Soviet Union, China, the United States, Britain, and India. Sopha, *“Thai Nation” in the Perspective of Thai Progressive Intellectuals*, 83-84. And, Kasia, *Commodifying Marxism*, 110.

67 Frank C. Darling, “Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand,” *Pacific Affairs* 47, no. 1 (1974): 5.

68 Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 84-85.

69 Darling, “Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand,” 6.

considerably when the military rulers made a self-coup and abolished the 1968 constitution in 1971, actions which led to major student campaigns. Examples include a boycott of Japanese goods in 1972, and a protest against the unjust expulsion of Ramkamhaeng University students who had published satirical anti-government statements in a magazine in June 1973.<sup>70</sup> Student movements became increasingly directed at the military regime leading to the first genuine massive demonstrations in October 1973. One of the events that triggered the massive uprising was the arrest of thirteen professors, students and politicians who had made a public statement demanding the promulgation of a new constitution.<sup>71</sup> The popular protests in 1973 successfully forced the ‘Three Tyrants’, namely Thanom and his son, Narong, and Prapas, to step down and go into exile, during the events of the 14 October.

Between 1973 and 1976, the role of student movements explicitly increased and socialist ideas became more and more apparent in Thai society because student activists were no longer restricted by the government. The students also led the anti-American protests in this period demanding a complete removal of American military bases and personnel on Thai soil. Their social and political activities focused on issues of social and economic oppression, especially the exploitation of labour and people in rural areas. In this regard, they forged a tripartite coalition composed of students, labours and farmers to fight for social and economic justice.<sup>72</sup> This included the increasing role of the Art for Life movement, a group of Thai artists from various disciplines who shared a similar belief that art should serve the people.<sup>73</sup> The United Front of Artists of Thailand (UFAT) enthusiastically took part in the Anti-America protests and demonstrations against the military regime. It also influenced artists outside Bangkok, such as in Isan, and led to the spread of the Art for Life movement in rural areas.

The Thammasat University Massacre in 1976, best known as the 6 October events, marked the end of the student movement in urban areas and silenced opposing narratives

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70 Ferrara, *The Political Development of Thailand*, 166.

71 Clark D. Neher, “Stability and Instability in Contemporary Thailand,” *Asian Survey* 15, no. 12 (1975): 1103.

72 Prajak Kongkirati, *การเมืองวัฒนธรรมไทย ว่าด้วยอำนาจ/วาทกรรม/อำนาจ* [Thai Cultural Politics: On Memory/Discourse/Power] (Nontaburi: Same Sky, 2015), 134-135.

73 The Art for Life’s concept was apparent in the Phibun era and first became influential in the Thai literary circle. Then, in 1963 to 1976, the influence of art for life’s sake in visual arts became prominent, especially from 1973 to 1976. See, Natdhond Sippaphakul, “ทัศนศิลป์เพื่อชีวิต: กระบวนการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของศิลปินอีสาน” [Visual Art for Life’s Sake: Constructing Identities of Esan Artists] (PhD diss., Arts and Cultural Research, Srinakarinwirot University, 2011), 32-33.

of the Cold War. The massacre was the result of an emergence of the new bourgeois strata in the Sarit era and political polarisation which had increased in intensity since the 14 October in 1973.<sup>74</sup> However, unlike the 1973 uprising that ended with the victory of the students, the students killed at Thammasat University on the 6 October event were portrayed as Vietnamese, the un-Thai, and traitors by both the state and public alike. From being the nation's democratic heroes just three years earlier, these students were now portrayed as enemies of the Thai nation that all Thai citizens were obliged to get rid of.<sup>75</sup> In the aftermath of the event, the military, again, stepped in and seized power from Seni Pramoj. Later the King appointed Thanin Kraivichien, a royalist and anti-communist to be, Prime Minister. The student movements came to an abrupt end. Many intellectuals and student activists either fled into the jungle to join the Communist Party or hid themselves for their own safety. The Thai state and the right-wing mass referred to student movements and their leftist ideologies as a threat against 'Nation, Religion, and King', the Thai national shibboleth and the very essence of Thai-ness. For them, what happened during the 6 October events was a fight against communist enemies to preserve the independence of the nation and Thai-ness, in which the monarchy was located at the centre.

In order to understand the support for the violent suppression of students by Thai society, especially in Bangkok, Thongchai Winchakul's 'neo-royal nationalism' helps to explain the role of Thai monarchy and the rightist camp in the mid-1970s. According to Thongchai, neo-royal nationalism developed from 'royal nationalism', a kind of nationalism in which the monarch plays a central role in the history of a nation. In royal nationalism, the neighbours (especially Myanmar) are often portrayed as evil enemies of the nation in the 'master narrative of Thai history', and are eventually defeated by the wise kings of Thailand. In this so-called 'royal-national history', the neighbours, represented as foreign Others,

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74 For an explanation on the formation of the new bourgeois strata, see, Benedict Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms" in *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 145-148.

75 This was a message highlighted repeatedly in the news broadcast by the Royal Thai Army Station Chanel 5 and the Armoured Division radio station a few hours after the massacre ended. Dr Udhis Narkswasdi was a moderator of the programme with another five policemen who were active in the morning of October the 6th at Thammasat University, including Pol Gen Salang Bunnag. Salang said people around Thammasat University demanded that the police suppress the students and were unsatisfied because the police refused to use extreme measures in the first place. During the talk, they condemned the students as bloodthirsty communists and joked about burning a student alive because he was *yuan*, a pejorative term for the Vietnamese, and thus could not speak Thai. See, Thongchai Winichakul, *6 ตุลา สืบไม่ได้ จำไม่ลง* [6 October: Unforgettable and Unrememberable] (Bangkok: Same Sky, 2015), 104-105.

justify the sacred position of Thai kings and connects them to the existence and survival of Thailand.<sup>76</sup> The master narrative permeates both Thai fiction and non-fiction writing, particularly those that relate to Thai central authority.<sup>77</sup> In terms of neo-royal nationalism, Thongchai refers to ‘royal nationalism that is democratic and serves the people’, which emerged after the 1973 popular uprising.<sup>78</sup> After the event, the Thai King as a democratic king was undisputedly recognised in Thai society due to his role in ending the violence in the 14 October incident.

Unlike the earlier royal nationalism supported by members of the royal family or royalist intellectuals, the new middle class was now an influential factor promoting neo-royal nationalism. They played a decisive role in supporting students’ and intellectuals’ protests in 1973, leading to the success of demonstrations. After 1973, their resentment towards the student movement grew and finally culminated in the student massacre in 1976. This is because the newly emerged middle class became frustrated and insecure due to their fear of the end of the great boom. They supported the crushing of the student movements because they deemed the students to be a cause of their insecure situation (the students-labours-farmers coalition and a sharp increase of labour strikes and protest, for example). It is actually one of the same reasons when they supported of anti-government movements and the uprising in 1973; they found Thanom and Prapas a source of their insecurity. The middle class people blamed Thanom and Prapas for their straitened economic circumstances and feared losing out economically due to the collapse of the American position in Indochina. However, the student movements and collaboration between the students, workers, and farmers, caused the new middle class and enterprises, especially the new ones, uneasiness and panic due to a sharp increase of farmer and worker demonstrations and strikes.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the new middle class, particularly in Bangkok, perceived an assault on the monarchy due to the bloom of leftist ideologies that challenged the legitimacy and centrality of the monarchy in Thai history; they deemed these ideologies

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76 Thongchai, “Royal-national History of Thailand,” 56-65.

77 Luang Wichitwathakarn’s plays and Thai textbooks are illustrative examples of the discursive representation of the neighbours in official Thai-ness. See more on Luang Wichitwathakarn’s perception of neighbouring countries and an analysis of his published works in Pra-oronrat Booranamat, *หลวงวิจิตรวาทการ กับบทละครประวัติศาสตร์* [Luang Wichitwathakarn and Historical Plays] (Bangkok: The Foundation for The Promotion of Social Science and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1985), 104-7.

78 Thongchai, “Royal-national History of Thailand,” 19.

79 Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms,” 153-157.

a menace because of their loyalty to the throne.<sup>80</sup> All of this led to the Rightist movements against the Left which ended with the former's triumph and the complete restoration of the Thai monarchy in the form of neo-royal nationalism.

## **Thesis Structure**

This study is composed of four empirical chapters exploring alternative points of contention between official narratives and counter-narratives of the Cold War. Chapter 2 investigates representations of the Americans and American-ness in Cold War narratives promoted by two conflicting parties, the Thai government and the leftists. By investigating the relationship between the narrators and the narrated, this chapter challenges Benedict Anderson's trope of 'the American Era' by arguing that Thai actors were not passively Americanised as his concept suggests, but actively deployed American depictions to accomplish their own political objectives, which ultimately resulted in different stories of the American. Through depictions of the American Other, the Thai government and leftists produced versions of Thai-ness and Thai identity that related to Central Thai values and American interests. Both narratives competed to represent Thai-ness by otherising their opponent as westernised/Americanised, or as being un-Thai.

Chapter 3 and 4 deal with Isan villagers and how they were narrated in stories about the Cold War. The former particularly focuses on the representation of Isan villagers in official narratives while the latter looks at how Thai leftists constructed and employed Isan identity to advance their political goals. In Chapter 3, the research investigates how Isan came into 'existence' and became a dominant representation of the Thai countryside in opposition to Bangkok in the Cold War period, or Bangkok's Otherness. By narrating Isan villagers as a target of the communists, the Thai government was able to assert the role of Isan's protector. This legitimised tighter governmental control over Isan and the introduction of development programmes in the region that established an unequal and exploitative relationship between Bangkok and Isan.

Chapter 4 studies the Isan villagers in the Cold War narrative promoted by Thai leftists in political struggles against the government, and clarifies how Thai leftists employed

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80 Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms," 169-170.

stories of Isan villagers as victims of the corrupt government, the American military presence in Thailand, and Bangkok capitalists (counter-narrative of the Cold War). These stories of Isan villagers allowed Thai leftists to assert themselves as the voice of the exploited Isan, a powerful identity that justified their anti-government and anti-American activities. However, the narratives on Isan promoted by Thai leftists also contributed to the construction of a Bangkok-Isan dichotomy because the leftists used perspectives utilised by Bangkok (such as the concept of development) to view the Isan people and the region, and thus also constructed Isan as Bangkok's Other.

Chapter 5 examines a major transition of Chinese identity in the Cold War period, from the external and untrustworthy Chinese, to the safe and friendly Chinese who had been integrated into Thai society, or an early stage of formation of '*luk chin rak chat*' (the Thai-born Chinese who love the nation) identity. It argues that both sides of the political conflict, the government and Thai leftists, contributed to the transformation of Chinese identity and to the formation of 'the Thai-born Chinese who love the nation'. While the Thai government used depictions of an evil Red China and the communist-prone Chinese in Thailand to promote the Thai ethno-nationalism attached to the Thai monarchy, and to eliminate political enemies in particular the Thai leftists, the Thai leftists narrated Red China as a political model and inspiration that challenged the United States, the corrupt government, and ruling elites. However, the Thai leftists also embraced and promoted Thai royal nationalism even though many of them came from a Chinese background. In practice, the Thai leftists left stories of the Chinese who love the nation and the King unchallenged. Chapter 6 is a conclusion of this research. It recapitulates the findings of the research in each chapter and their contributions to the study of the Cold War and Thailand.

## Chapter 2 The American Other in Cold War Narratives

This chapter investigates American Otherness found in the contestation of Cold War narratives between the Thai government and Thai leftists. This study found that Thai actors actively and subjectively employed the American depiction to serve their own political purposes. While the Thai state secured their legitimacy and controlled their power through the American Other, Thai leftists employed an alternative story that narrated the United States as an imperialist enemy who tried to benefit from Thailand and the region by causing the Indochina conflict to attack the military government. The research also found that the Thai rulers selectively adopted and promoted Americanness to justify their power by 'Thai-ising' and 'other-ising' the United States rather than entirely embracing American concepts and values to become completely Americanised.

The main argument and findings in this chapter are in conflict with Benedict Anderson's the 'American Era', the term Anderson coined to describe Thailand when it was under heavy American influence during the Cold War period. The American Era is one of the most influential concepts regarding the Thai-American relationship in Cold War studies. It appears in a multitude of studies examining Thai-American relations during the Indochina conflict from different angles, from conventional military issues to popular culture. However, this image of the American Era is misleading and an oversimplification as the American Era trope significantly downplayed Thai agency while overemphasising American influence as a primary cause of major political transition in Thailand during the Cold War. One of the primary objectives of this research is to revisit Anderson's the American Era in order to provide an alternative approach to understanding the American presence in the identity politics of the Cold War. This chapter accomplishes this through a comprehensive examination of the role of Thai agents and their political goals, a topic that has not yet been the subject of any study.

The representation of Americans as a point of contention between the official narrative and the counter-narrative of the Cold War is the primary focus of this chapter. The Thai government justified their collaboration with the American government by claiming to act as the nation's saviour by narrating stories of the United States as a powerful ally who protected Thailand from communist expansion and developed the country. This story was directly attacked by Thai leftists, who promoted a different version of the American

presence in Thailand. Namely, that the United States tried to benefit from Thailand and this region by causing the Indochina conflict while the military government betrayed the country by joining hands with the American imperialists. This chapter further explains that despite the conflict between the American representation in the Cold War narratives promoted by the Thai government and Thai leftists, both used the Americans as a foreign Other to constitute Thai-ness/Thai identity that was compatible with Central Thai values and fit international recognition, such as the fact that Thai traditions and culture were admired by the Americans.

This chapter is composed of two main parts. The first part revisits Anderson's the American Era by investigating the intention of leftist writers, particularly the contributors of selected short stories in his collection *In the Mirror*. The second part, by placing the leftist writers of the short stories in a wider context, examines the Thai-isation of the American from both sides of the political struggles: Thai leftists and the government. The materials used to investigate the American in leftist publications include Suchart Sawatsi's works, Aran Phromchomphu's *Thailand: A Semicolony*, *The White Peril* and the *Social Science Review*, and Sujit Wongthes's *Made in U.S.A.*<sup>81</sup>

In terms of the Thai-ised American in the official narratives, this research engages with writings by Kukrit Pramoj, speeches by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachon, the *Seripharb* magazine, and the Thai government's periodicals, *Tesaphiban* and *Pattanakonsan*. Despite the significance and relatively good condition of these periodicals, only a few academic works examine *Seripharb*, while *Tesaphiban* and *Pattanakonsan* are unseen in any work.<sup>82</sup>

### **Benedict Anderson and the 'American Era'**

In studies on the American presence in Thailand during the Cold War period, Benedict Anderson's coinage of the term the American Era is frequently referenced to explain the purported 'Americanisation of Thailand' that allegedly produced drastic changes to Thai

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81 *Thailand: A Semicolony* in Thai is ไทยกึ่งเมืองขึ้น. *The Yellow Peril*, or ภัยเหลือง, is a special issue of the *Social Science Review* on anti-Japanese movement.

82 For example, Sutayut Osornprasop's "Amidst the Heat of the Cold War in Asia: Thailand and the American Secret War in Indochina (1960-74)" refers to many volumes of *Seripharb* magazine to support the article's main argument.



society. The concept first appeared in the introduction to Anderson's 1985 volume *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era*, a book containing translations of thirteen Thai contemporary short stories by young intellectuals.<sup>83</sup> The impact of the American Era on scholars of Thailand, both inside and outside of the country, is far and wide. For example, Rachel Harrison and Janit Feungfu have taken cues from Benedict Anderson in their studies of Thai culture and literature. In her article 'Mit Chaibancha's *Insi Thorng* and the Hybridization of Red and Yellow Perils in Thai Cold War Action Cinema', Rachel Harrison uses the concept of the American Era to provide her historical conceptualisation.<sup>84</sup> By exploring mass and popular media, namely Thai cinema, she analyses the Cold War paranoia and the fear of communism that Thailand witnessed in the American Era, and to point out how Thai cinema culture was Americanised.<sup>85</sup> To support Anderson's view against the popular conservative claim that Thailand was the only country in the region that avoided direct colonisation, Rachel systematically employs a postcolonialist approach to explain the semi-colonial status of the country dating back to the period of the colonisation of Southeast Asia by analysing of Thai literary cultures.<sup>86</sup> In her PhD thesis '(Ir)resistibly Modern: The Construction of Modern Thai Identities in Thai Literatures during the Cold War Era, 1958-1976', Janit Feangfu examines how the American Era impacted the identities of Thai writers, which were 'vitaly intertwined with the process of "becoming modern"'.<sup>87</sup> Matthew Phillips' *Thailand in the Cold War* is another case in point. Drawing closely on Anderson's the American Era, Phillips investigates the problematic issue of Thai-ness in the Cold War period by focusing on the impact that the American media had on shaping Thai identity.<sup>88</sup> To Prajak Kongkirati, the American Era sheds light on the cultural aspect of the political movement of Thai students and intellectuals. It

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83 Benedict R.O.G. Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era*, ed. trans. Benedict R.O.G. Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones (Bangkok: Duangkamol, 1985).

84 Harrison, "The Man with the Golden Gauntlets," 197.

85 Harrison, "The Man with the Golden Gauntlets," 199.

86 Rachel V. Harrison, introduction to *Disturbing Conventions: Decentering Thai Literary Cultures*, ed. Rachel V. Harrison (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 6-12. Her postcolonialist position on investigating the West in Thai culture is explained in *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*. Although her focus in the book does not include Thai-U.S. relations after the second World War and the Cold War in Thailand as she addresses this matter in 'Mit Chaibancha's *Insi Thorng*', Harrison points out the continuation of Thailand's interaction with the West from 1850 to the present days. See Rachel V. Harrison, introduction to *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, ed. Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 9.

87 Janit, "(Ir)resistibly Modern," 15.

88 Matthew Phillips, *Thailand in the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2015), 11-12.

demonstrates that the reaction from Thai intellectuals and students towards social and economic changes originated from the cultural realm, starting with a small group of young intellectuals, then spreading to a bigger group, and finally affecting the mass public. In the American Era, culture and ideas from the United States significantly influenced these young educated people and led them to change their lifestyles, values, and, ironically, critical political perspective against the American itself.<sup>89</sup>

Anderson's American Era trope also influenced studies of Thailand's political economy. Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead and Nattapoll Chaiching emphasised the American role as a leading force of capitalism that brought changes to Thailand in the Cold War, a very important point in the American Era. The Americanisation of Thailand is a process of the country's integration into the global economic structure. Kullada explains Thai-U.S. relations through the country's involvement in the *pax Americana*, and the United States as an imperial power advancing their capitalist interests through the Cold War project.<sup>90</sup> The Thai state was fully open to *pax Americana* during the Sarit era (1958-1963) as evidenced by the reorganisation of their internal structure to accommodate American demands and interests. This led to the rapid growth of local capitals and various changes in Thai society, politics and economic structure.<sup>91</sup> Nattapoll also shed light on the American role of intervention in the power transition in Thailand in the Cold War. Like Kullada, he proposed that American policy towards Thailand was a part of the grand project of global capitalist expansion under the United States.<sup>92</sup>

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- 89 Prajak Kongkirati, “อะไรอยู่ในกระจก?” [What is in the Mirror?] in *ในกระจกวรรณกรรมและการเมืองสยามยุคอเมริกัน* [In the Mirror: Siamese Literature and Politics in the American Era], ed. Ida Arunwong (Bangkok: Aan, 2010), 353-356. *In the Mirror* was translated into Thai by Aan, a Thai-language journal of literary, art and cultural criticism, in 2010. In this translated version of *In the Mirror*, Anderson's interview in 1982 and an afterwards by Suchart Sawatsi, Chusak Pattarakulvanit, Prajak Kongkirati and Anderson himself are included. To avoid confusion between the original English version of *In the Mirror* and the Thai version, I will use a title in Thai *ในกระจก* [In the Mirror] for the translated version of *In the Mirror* in footnotes.
- 90 Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, “The Cold War and Thai Democratization,” in *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, ed. Albert Lau (London: Routledge, 2012), 216.
- 91 Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, “รัฐไทยในกระแสโลกาภิวัตน์” [The Thai State in Globalisation], *Journal of Social Sciences* 39, no. 1 (2008): 13-15. For more details on Kullada's Thailand under *pax Americana* in Sarit era, please see, Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *การเมืองไทยในยุคสหประชาชาติ-ถนอมภายใต้โครงสร้างอำนาจโลก* [Thai Politics in Sarit-Thanom Era in the World Power Structure] (Bangkok: Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 2007), chap. 3.
- 92 Nattapoll Chaiching, “การเมืองไทยสมัยรัฐบาลจอมพล ป. พิบูลสงครามภายใต้ระเบียบโลกของสหรัฐอเมริกา (พ.ศ. 2491-2500)” [Thai politics in Phibun's government under the U.S. world order (1948-1957)] (PhD diss., Chulalongkorn University, 2009), 19-21.

The American Era offered a new approach to the study of Thailand in the context of the Cold War even when it was first publicised. It illuminated the impact of the American role in the Indochina conflict on Thailand's political, economic and social structure. The American Era also challenged a conventional view of literature in Thailand, that literature is pure and disconnected from social context. This is probably one of the primary objectives of the lengthy introduction as *In the Mirror* is a compilation of selected Thai contemporary short stories. Chusak Pattarakulvanit, a Thai scholar of literature, pointed out that Anderson used the concept of the American Era to analyse and distinguish Thai contemporary literature from the 1960s to 1970s from other eras. Instead of adopting a traditional approach that divided the periods of development of Thai modern literature according to different internal political climates, Chusak shows that Anderson provided a refreshing view of contemporary literature that differed from many Thai scholars by focusing on Americanisation in Thailand.<sup>93</sup> He explained that all the writers in the anthology are both a product of modernisation of the country and of Americanisation. Their lives mostly share a similar background: provincial origin, lower middle class family, education and/or work in the city.<sup>94</sup>

According to Anderson, the American Era started in 1958, the year that Sarit's dictatorship started, and continued until 1973, when Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Charusathien, Sarit's associates and successors, were forced to step down. During this period of time, Thai society underwent an enormous change. Sarit, according to Anderson, led the country in a way that differed greatly from the Phibun era, thus marking a new chapter of Thai modern history. With American support, Thai rulers took administrative control of the Thai population and enthusiastically promoted 'development'. In terms of development, the American government meant 'unhindered access to Siam by foreign capital (in his [Sarit's] lifetime mainly American)'.<sup>95</sup> Sarit was able to follow the American development plan by dismantling state enterprises and trade unions, and lowering wages,

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93 According to the 'traditional' approach, Thai contemporary literature can be generally divided into three periods: non-political or สายลมแสงแดด (1957-1963), seeking answers or แสงหา (1964-1973), and for-life period or เพื่อชีวิต (1973-1976). This four 'eras' of Thai contemporary literature are very well-known particularly among Thai leftist students and intellectuals. In this view, Chusak Pattarakulvanit, "ปรัศวภาควิไลมวรรณกรรมไทยสมัยใหม่ในสายตาเบเนดิกท์แอนเดอร์สัน" [Lateral Inversion of Thai Modern Literature in Perspective of Benedict Anderson], afterword to *ในกระจกวรรณกรรมและการเมืองสยามยุคอเมริกัน* [In the Mirror: Siamese Literature and Politics in the American Era], 331-332.

94 Chusak, "Lateral Inversion of Thai Modern Literature," 334-336.

95 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 20.

for example. Following a large amount of American assistance and aid from 1964, there was a boom in the Thai economy, with great and very mixed social consequences, including the expansion of the Thai middle class and much tighter control of the rural areas by the capital. During this time, Thailand's education and infrastructure were also significantly developed and expanded to rural areas. This encouraged the spread of capitalist relations in many parts of Thailand, which resulted in fundamental changes in rural Thai society. Additionally, it was during this period of time that a huge number of American servicemen stationed in Thailand brought 'Americanisation' to the country's rural areas.<sup>96</sup> The rural people not only had direct experience with American culture, but also experienced the consequences of social problems including an increase in prostitution, the birth of children between Thai women and American men (the children usually ended up effectively fatherless), and drug addiction. In general, Anderson claims that, in the American Era, Thailand was culturally and socially decayed by the American consumerist culture that entered through American films and products.<sup>97</sup>

However, this research proposes that Anderson's American Era needs to be revisited because it is not only an oversimplifying concept but also misleading in certain respects. First of all, in these depictions all the Thai actors are passively Americanised. This does not fit the political trend of hypernationalism in Thailand during the Cold War period in which the three-part Thai shibboleth 'Nation, Religion, King' was widely promoted, especially by the monarchy in the Sarit era.<sup>98</sup> Even though an increasing role of the Thai shibboleth was related to the anti-communist policy promoted by the United States, it required the Thai authority and state apparatus to achieve American objectives. Cooperation from the Thai elite was indispensable and the strengthening of Thai-ness was undeniable.<sup>99</sup> Also, the

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96 By 1968, there were no less than 46,000 American servicemen stationed in Thailand. Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 23.

97 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 21-24.

98 One of the most influential works on the return of Thai monarchy in the Sarit era is Thak Chaloemtiarana's *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*. For a recent study, see, Nattapoll Chaiching, "พระบารมีชปกเกล้าใต้เงาอินทรี: แผนสงครามจิตวิทยาอเมริกันกับการสร้างสถาบันกษัตริย์ให้เป็นสัญลักษณ์แห่งชาติ" [The Royal Benevolence under the Eagle's Shadow: American Psychological Warfare and the Making of the Monarchy as the National Symbol] in *ขอฝันใฝ่ในฝันอันเหลือเชื่อ: ความเคลื่อนไหวของขบวนการปฏิวัติสยาม (พ.ศ. 2475-2500)* [Dream the Impossible Dream: Counter-revolutionary Movements in Siam, 1932-1957] (Bangkok: Same Sky, 2013): 289-340.

99 For example, USIS promoted a sense of Thai-ness in rural areas in the Northeast with assistance from local government officials. USIS, *Report on the Sixteenth Mobile Information Team Trip Visits to 11 Villages in Nakorn Phanom Province, January 15-30, 1964*, 7-9. (TIC 175)

American Era overlooked the crucial role of the Japanese economic and cultural influence on Thailand, and because the time period of the American era, from 1958 to 1973, is rigid, it raises questions about the American role in Thailand before and after the American Era.<sup>100</sup>

Japanese influence on the Thai economy in the Cold War period was tremendous, however, it has no place in the American Era. For example, Japan was the largest foreign investor in Thailand between 1960 and 1972, which amounted to 2,570 million baht. 38 percent of the total foreign investment was from Japan, followed by Taiwan and the United States (16 percent and 14 percent, respectively).<sup>101</sup> Another example is the rapid growth of investment in Thailand in the late 1960s. Suphap Pussong and Krissana Chingjit referred to data from the Board of Industrial Investment (a former name of the Office of Board of Investment) to illustrate Japanese influence on the Thai economy, namely that Japanese investment in Thailand increased from 354 million bath in 1966 to 776 million baht in 1970, or 100 percent, thereby making Japan the largest source of foreign investment in Thailand.<sup>102</sup> In the late 1960s, news and criticism against Japanese economic influence in Thailand grew steadily. Thai students at Kasetsart University in Bangkok formed the 'Japanese Goods Boycott Club' in 1970, one of the first student movements against Japanese economic domination.<sup>103</sup> In April 1972, the *Social Science Review*, a leading academic journal by progressive intellectuals and students, released an edition of 'Yellow Peril' to criticise Japanese economic domination in Thailand.<sup>104</sup> In November the same year, the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), one of the leading entities in the anti-

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100 For example, the United States played a significant role in supporting Field Marshal Phibun in resuming premiership in 1948 and provided aid and assistance to the Phibun government in exchange for the Thai government's collaboration with the United States in the looming Cold War in Southeast Asia. Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, part 2.

101 These figures exclusively concern the promoted firms. The United States was the largest contributor to foreign direct investment if we take all forms of foreign investment into account. Japan was the second largest investor in this regard, but its presence in direct investment was still remarkable. Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand 1855-1985*, 187.

102 354 million and 776 million baht are approximately 11.4 and 25 million USD, according to the exchange rate in June 2019. Suphap Pussong and Krissana Chingjit, "ภัยเหลือง: การลงทุนของญี่ปุ่นในประเทศไทย" [The Yellow Peril: Japanese Investment in Thailand], *Social Science Review* 10, no. 4 (1972): 18.

103 Atcharaporn San-artid, "อุดมการณ์ชาตินิยมของนักศึกษาไทยกับการต่อต้านสินค้าญี่ปุ่นใน พ.ศ.2515" [Nationalist Ideology of Thai University Students and the Boycott of Japanese Products in 1972], *Japanese Studies Journal* 30, no. 2 (2013): 112.

104 Three main points emphasised in 'Yellow Peril' are, first, although the Japanese ran businesses in Thailand, the Thais held fewer shares than the Japanese, and the Japanese also bribed Thai officials for their own business benefits. Secondly, they accused the Japanese of being an 'economic animal' that lacked sincerity. Lastly, they criticised the Japanese grouping for gaining economic advantages in Thailand. See, *Social Science Review* 10, no. 4 (1972).

government movements led by students, launched the first anti-Japanese protest and campaigns boycotting Japanese goods, which at the same time indirectly demonstrated dissatisfaction against the military government.<sup>105</sup> The campaign was intended to stimulate public awareness of the government's inefficiency through economic disadvantages and Japanese economic invasion. Economic nationalism was promoted in the campaigns as a solution to Thai economic regression and the growing trade deficit with Japan.<sup>106</sup> The success of the boycott encouraged an escalation of students' political involvements as seen in the massive demonstration the following year, which disrupted the Thai military rule that had prevailed since 1948. The main objective of the demonstration was to attack Japanese economic exploitation and domination in Thailand.<sup>107</sup>

The American Era is essentially the sequel to Anderson's critique of the mainstream historical view of an independent, never colonised Siam, a critique which he proposed in the article 'Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies (1978)', which was Anderson's academic debut in Thai studies. The article proposed that the country was subject to an indirect form of colonisation and the nation-building and modernising role of the Chakri dynasty was carried out in the same sense as colonisation by Western regimes.<sup>108</sup> The concept of the American Era offers elaborates on the country's neo-colonial status by proposing that Thailand was indeed colonised by America in all aspects. In other words, Anderson challenged the historical claim that the country was the lone survivor of European colonisation by asserting that Thailand was a fully colonised state, an assertion that falls at the other end of the spectrum. His over-zealous revisionism led him into an alternative oversimplification, which neglected and downplayed the important role of Thai elites in exercising agency between the United States and domestic policies during the Cold War.

The most important reason why the American Era needs to be revisited lies in how Anderson extracted the concept from his 'readings' of the short stories selected in *In the Mirror*. Here some background should be given first. Anderson started working on *In the Mirror*, a translation of writings by Thai leftists in 1979, in order to complement his previous

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105 The second anti-Japanese protest took place in January 1974 when the Japanese Prime Minister, Kakuei Tanaka, visited Thailand.

106 Atcharaporn, "The Expansion of Japanese Economic Influence," 33.

107 Darling, "Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand," 11-12.

108 Benedict Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: the State of Thai Studies" in *Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam over Forty Years* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2014), 18-20.

work on Thai rightists and their use of violence, which he described in his influential article *Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup*.<sup>109</sup> It is in the introduction to *In the Mirror* that Anderson clearly labelled the period of Thai history immediately following the Second World War as the American Era. In other words, it was not until Anderson worked with Thai leftist students and intellectuals that he publicly coined the American Era, a term that had never been previously used in either Thai or English.

Anderson sees the thirteen stories as a reflection of Americanised Thailand in various aspects, a primary feature of the American Era.<sup>110</sup> For Anderson, it was the American Era that determined the tone and style of the literature as the fact that all the writers in the anthology were both a product of the modernisation of the country and Americanisation. Their lives mostly shared similar backgrounds: provincial origins, a lower middle class family, and education and/or work in the city.<sup>111</sup> For example, in his discussion of 'The Pink Pills' and '12.00 Noon', Anderson described the medical capitalist and the teacher as the result of 'Americanised' policies of development and modernisation in Thailand during the Cold War.<sup>112</sup> In discussing 'The Railway Hamlet' and 'The Book-Learners', Anderson described the dilemma confronting the two protagonists who had provincial origins as result of Americanisation: a dilemma experienced by villagers who had moved into Bangkok and consequently found themselves disconnected from their provincial homes.<sup>113</sup>

However, Anderson's view is different from that of Suchart Sawatsi, a prominent figure in the Thai contemporary literary world, who selected the thirteen short stories for Anderson to translate.<sup>114</sup> Since Suchart rather than Anderson actually chose all the short

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109 Benedict Anderson, afterword to *ในกระจก* [In the Mirror], 364. His afterword in this Thai version was written approximately 30 years after his famous introduction to *In the Mirror* was published.

110 The thirteen stories include Sujit Wongtes' 'Second Nature' (1967); Witthayakon Chiangkun's 'As If It Had Never Happened' (1969); Lao Khamhom's 'You'll Learn Soon Enough' (1974); Wanit Jarungkit-anan's 'Michigan Test' (1974); Wat Wanlayangkun's 'Before Reaching The Stars' (1975); Si Dao Ruang's 'Mother of Waters, Thaokae Bak, and a Dong' (1977); Chatcharin Chaiwat's 'The Railway Hamlet' (1977) and 'The Book-Learners' (1978); Kon Krailat's 'In The Mirror' (1978); Manop Thanomsri's 'The Pink Pills' (1978); Niwet Kanthairat's '12.00 Noon' (1979); Samruam Sing's 'The Necklace' (1979) and Prathip Cumphon's 'Water and Earth' (1979).

111 Chusak, "Lateral Inversion of Thai Modern Literature in Perspective of Benedict Anderson," 324, 331-336.

112 Chusak, "Lateral Inversion of Thai Modern Literature in Perspective of Benedict Anderson," 334.

113 Benedict, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 61-67.

114 Suchart Sawatsi is one of the most influential figures in the contemporary Thai literary world and is strongly committed to fighting against injustice in Thailand. Despite himself publishing only a limited number of fictional works, Suchart has been a key figure in promoting awareness of social predicaments among Thai intellectuals, especially the younger generation, through his newspapers and magazine

stories, his perspective on the selection is crucial to illustrate discordances between Anderson's interpretations and the views of leftist writers. As the research will later elaborate, this discrepancy points out what Anderson and the American Era missed or overlooked from reading the texts.<sup>115</sup> According to Anderson:

I completely trusted Suchart's generosity, honesty, selflessness and good taste... I was an amateur, so it would be best if he [Suchart] selected the stories for me... He [Suchart] sent me the copies as examples of style and theme of the stories, but I misunderstood that those were Suchart's best selection so I started translating them right away. This coincidence brought me fortune. I, soon, realised that these short stories fitted my objective very well... I would write an article for the short stories to record a part of social and cultural history of the young Thai leftist.<sup>116</sup>

Suchart selected the short stories from 1967 to 1977 based on his 'personal taste' and personal connections (which helped to facilitate copyright permissions).<sup>117</sup> To him, these stories demonstrated the rebellious nature of the writer who challenged long-established traditions in the Thai literary world and refused to acquiesce in the face of a repressive and unjust society.<sup>118</sup> This mode of writing also targeted the conservative

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articles, lectures, seminars and editorial roles. He is probably best known in Thai intellectual circles as an editor. After assisting Sulak Siwaraksa for approximately two years, Suchart succeeded Sulak as the editor of the *Social Science Review* [สังคมศาสตร์ปริทัศน์], the leading intellectual journal of the 1960s and 1970s. See more in David Smyth, "Suchart Sawatsi: Thailand's First Man of Letters," *Asiatic* 1, no. 1 (2007).

115 According to Suchart, he himself sent the works to Anderson to choose from for translation, but Anderson thought that Suchart already made a decision on Anderson's behalf, so all of them were translated.

Suchart Sawatsi, Interview by Rungchai Yensabai, 25 October 2016.

116 Benedict Anderson, afterword to *ในกระจก* [In the Mirror], 364.

117 Originally, approximately 30 short stories were chosen for Anderson to pick from, but Anderson asked Suchart to narrow the choice down. The thirteen short stories were finally sent to Anderson as a guideline representing different themes and styles of the short stories. Suchart Sawatsi, "ความรำลึกย้อนหลัง เขียนให้เบนเนดิกแอนเดอร์สัน" [Reminding of the Past, A Writing for Benedict Anderson] afterword to *ในกระจก* [In the Mirror], 311.

118 Suchart, "Reminding of the Past", 312. Although Suchart did not clearly explain what reason the thirteen short stories were chosen to be translated in *In the Mirror*, we could understand Suchart's literary taste from his introductions to each volume of a four-volume anthology of contemporary Thai short stories he edited for Duang Kamol, namely *แล้งเข็ญ* [Drought] (1975), *ถนนสายที่นำไปสู่ความตาย* [The Road to Death] (1975), *เหมือนอย่างไม่เคย* [As If It Had Never Happened] (1976) and *คำขานรับ* [Response] (1976). *Drought*, the first volume, is a collection of short stories focusing on a life in rural areas, while the short stories in *The Road to Death* mainly concern atmosphere and perspectives towards Thai urban life. *As If It Had Never Happened* and *Response* deal with the education system in Thailand. The former puts an emphasis on primary and secondary schools while the latter pays attention to life and atmosphere in Thai universities. Suchart had a plan for a fifth volume and compiled the short stories 'for life' with a plot about Thai proletariat, *The Rebellious Child*, but it was cancelled because of the 6 October event in 1976. From rural (*Drought*) to urban life (*The Road to Death*), experiencing the education system (*As If It Had Never Happened* and *Response*), then staging a rebellion (*The Rebellious Child*), the order and themes of the anthology obviously reflect the life of young Thai intellectuals who struggled and challenged unjust



intellectual circles that rejected the young (and progressive) intellectuals' ideology and political position, since the latter challenged the worldview of the former. Suchart clearly stated that, 'I compiled contemporary Thai short stories into an anthology... because of three reasons. They are, first, to prove that contemporary Thai short stories have been continuously developing, not failing as has been claimed. Secondly, to publish the short stories of lesser-known 'new writers', and, lastly, to pick out distinctive short stories.'<sup>119</sup> However, Suchart was impressed when he learned about Anderson's different opinions and analysis of the short stories. According to Suchart, from these short stories, 'Ben [Benedict] discerned clear "connections" and "ruptures", which formed the basis of what he called "the American Era". He figured it out by himself.'<sup>120</sup>

Indeed, *In the Mirror* is the result of Suchart's commitment to challenge, his resistance to the prevailing dominant power, and his enthusiasm to promote contemporary Thai literature in English to the international world, or in Suchart's words, a desire to 'go inter'.<sup>121</sup> Suchart and Suk Soongsawang, one of the owners and founders of Duangkamol Publishing (aka DK Books), initiated a plan to promote Thai contemporary literature among academic circles of Thai studies abroad, and have it re-published by foreign academic institutions such as the East-West Center and School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).<sup>122</sup> In 1980, Anderson agreed to collaborate with Suchart by translating the short stories because this opportunity also fit with Anderson's objective of writing articles 'to record the part of social and cultural history of young Thai leftists'.<sup>123</sup>

Different readings of the short stories between Anderson and Suchart partially stemmed from a different approach used to interpret the texts. As Anderson focused on identifying social and economic structures in Thai society during the Cold War that 'produced' this group of authors, he read the texts *symptomatically*, or the short stories are 'seen to express symptomatically the conditions out of which [they come]'.<sup>124</sup> On the

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power. Three short stories in the anthology, 'As If It Had Never Happened', 'Michigan Test' and 'Before Reaching the Stars', are included in *In the Mirror*.

119 Suchart Sawatsi, preface to *แล้งเข็ญ: รวมเรื่องสั้นร่วมสมัยของไทย* [Drought: An Anthology of Thai Contemporary Short Stories], ed. Suchart Sawatsi (Bangkok: Duangkamol, 1975), (9).

120 Suchart, "Reminding of the Past," 312.

121 Suchart Sawatsi, "ความรำลึกย้อนหลังเขียนให้เบนเนดิกแอนเดอร์สัน" [Reminding of the Past, A Writing for Benedict Anderson] afterword to *ในกระจก* [In the Mirror], 307-308.

122 Suchart, "Reminding of the Past," 305-7.

123 Anderson, afterword to *ในกระจก* [In the Mirror], 364.

124 Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 105.

contrary, Suchart read the short stories *intentionally*, or interpreting the texts according to what he perceived as authorial intention, the intention to struggle and rebel against the dominant structure in Thai society.<sup>125</sup> To Suchart, this is a general trait of these young (and leftist inclined) writers. Not only these thirteen stories and their authors, but other works produced by their peers, were written to reflect problems in Thai society from angles that were often overlooked: the perspectives of underprivileged and oppressed people. This new generation of writers demanded answers to the confusing and frustrating situation of Thai society and institutions. They often expressed their sense of social alienation and a feeling of not belonging to in society; this was a common characteristic of contemporary literature in Suchart's definition.<sup>126</sup> They resented and blamed the educational system and the ruling elites for distorting the truth and social realities. The form of this contemporary literature was also strikingly different from the previous era. The stories are not strictly attached to a unity of plot but focus on the 'situations' in which the characters find themselves. A narrative hook and a surprise ending that used to be crucial elements of traditional literary forms are deemed unnecessary by these writers. The ambiguity of modern life, a non-specific time frame and unclear characters open more space for readers to ponder the meanings of the story. The length of the short story often seems arbitrary and many more narrative techniques are employed, for example, flashbacks, backstories, flashforwards, stream of consciousness or interior monologues. The protagonist is an ordinary person leading a simple life in modern society and despite wishing to control his fate, becomes a victim of 'carnivorous' society. The protagonist, thus, is no longer prominent nor able to understand himself and others like the main characters in traditional literature, but negates or rebels against himself. Some of these stories aggressively reject the monopoly exercised on literature by the elites through both content and pattern.<sup>127</sup>

Now let us try re-reading some of the short stories from *In the Mirror* by focusing on the authorial intention, or 'reading intentionally', and see what the American Era might miss. To illustrate the intended meanings of the author in these short stories, I look at the

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125 One of the critics against intentional readings in narrative analysis is it is very difficult to identify the author's intention in the texts. However, this approach is applied to the study because it serves the research objectives. This issue has been discussed in Chapter 1.

126 Suchart, introduction to *Drought*, (23).

127 Suchart Sawatsi, introduction to ถนนสายที่นำไปสู่ความตาย: รวมเรื่องสั้นร่วมสมัยของไทย [The Road to Death: An Anthology of Thai Contemporary Short Stories], ed. Suchart Sawatsi (Bangkok: Duangkamol, 1975), (41)-(47).

connection between the main conflict and the closure of the stories, or what is narrated as a conflict and how the choice is or should be made in the end. Given that these writers knew that their audience would be educated people in Bangkok, due to the narrow circulation of leftist publications, their intended meanings can be regarded as a message to the intellectual audience who was likely to be interested in leftist writing.

Chatcharin's 'The Book-Learners' illustrates the conflict of reading books through two leading characters in the story: an unnamed provincial youth (the narrator in the story) and his cousin, Si. In the story, they are surrounded by people who repeatedly tell them to 'read books and study hard' so they can have a bright future. While the former successfully climbs up the educational system and becomes a university student in Bangkok because he 'reads a lot of books', Si, by contrast, stays with her cousin's parents helping with housework. She reads a lot of books too, but they are serialised and movie magazines. While the narrator becomes distant to Si and his family due to his 'study in Bangkok', Si, his forgotten cousin, commits suicide possibly because of a failed love. Anderson points out that 'The Book-Learners' and 'The Railway Hamlet' illustrate how students and intellectuals become separated from their provincial origin and how the provincial Si 'falls prey to the no less impersonal force of metropolitan capitalism's mass culture'.<sup>128</sup>

If we look at the main conflict of 'The Book-Learners' and how the story ends, we can see the message that Chatcharin would like to pass on to the readers. When the main conflict develops, one between the unnamed provincial youth and 'reading', Chatcharin provokes readers to ask themselves the real purpose of 'reading a lot of books', in other words, going on to tertiary education. The story ends with the narrator's decision not to go back to Bangkok, but to visit Si's parents instead. Similarly, 'The Railway Hamlet' also shows the conflict between the unnamed narrator's Bangkok-ness and longing for his origins in the Railway Community. Anderson explains that the changes in the Cold War period transformed the relationship between the unnamed narrator, who receives an education in Bangkok, and his community. For example, the narrator's relationship with Peng, his childhood friend who was also 'a victim of the faceless state railway corporation' was

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128 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 63-66.

transformed.<sup>129</sup> However, we can see Chatcharin's message to readers when the unnamed narrator announces his choice to identify himself after Peng is killed by the train in the end:

The little station-worker was never given the opportunities we had. All he could do was wait and scramble for any chance that might come by...<sup>130</sup>

Chatcharin's message to readers is also visible when the narrator shouts back when told to stop brooding over Peng's death:

You know, he's not really dead at all. Do you see his two little kids? Do you see his wife? Do you see their future? That's just it, no one sees. Where will those two kids end up? It's not over yet. I know for sure it's not over yet. It'll happen again, over and over, because no one gives a damn about these little people.<sup>131</sup>

At this point the reader sees that Chatcharin wants him or her to 'give a damn about these little people'. The connection between these two short stories, by reading intentionally, is a plea to readers, potentially even to his students and fellow intellectuals, to confront dilemmas and make the right choice for the voiceless and unseen people. Noticeably, the message in both 'The Book-Learners' and 'The Railway Hamlet' demonstrate *noblesse oblige* of Thai students and intellectuals. Both educated protagonists in the two short stories realise in the end that that should help and care for their relatives/childhood friend, who were not 'given the opportunities we had' like Si and Peng.

A similar perspective and message appear in Witayakorn's 'As If It Had Never Happened', where the conflict between Thongmuan and the student volunteers' intention to develop her village by building a 'Community Hall,' is highlighted. Although the story ended with Thongmuan's 'regret' over questioning the purpose of building a Community Hall, because no one in the village can make use of it, readers know that the girl (Witayakorn) is sending them the message that they need to ask themselves if they know what villagers need or what their problems are. These examples of 're-reading' the short stories show that Anderson indeed overlooked the rebellious intentions of the authors and their political perspectives that challenged the Thai state. Moreover, as Anderson considered these stories a reflection of Americanisation in Thailand, a perspective that

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129 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 65-66.

130 Chatcharin Chaiwat, "The Railway Hamlet," in *In the Mirror*, 188.

131 Chatcharin, "The Railway Hamlet," 189.

supported his argument on Thailand's status as a lone survivor of imperialism, his view regarding these stories was clouded and misleading.

### **The American Other in Leftist Counter-narratives**

The previous section illustrated how the American Era downplayed or overlooked the intention to resist/counter dominant power in short stories. However, the intention to rebel against authoritative power was not limited to these leftist writers but was also prevalent in the leftist movement in general. The Cold War stories that leftists narrated clearly expressed the intention to counter the Thai state and American imperialism. This section explains that the leftists challenged government authority by promoting an opposite story of the American and the Cold War that invalidated the government's political legitimacy. Also, by promoting a counter-narrative of the Cold War, they asserted a new powerful Self as the true saviour of the Thai nation, thereby allowing them to impose an 'un-Thai' identity on their opponent.

### ***Thai Leftists and Anti-American Movement***

Thai leftists narrated the Americans as an imperialist enemy of the nation. The American presence in Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia was Washington's imperialist scheme to take political and economic advantage of these countries under the guise of being a righteous protector against communism. The American imperialist enemy was a staple topic in leftist publications from the early days of the leftist movement in the late 1940s to the dissolution of the leftist movement in the 1980s. The early leftist critics of the United States and of anti-American activities that they criticised as a form of imperialist ambition in Thailand became virulent when the conflict on the Korean peninsula escalated and the Thai government sent Thai troops to the Korean War in 1950 upon America's request. This later stimulated an anti-war movement against the United States and the Thai government's pro-American policy, which ended after a mass arrest in 1952 known as the Peace Rebellion. The arrest was called a rebellion because anti-war intellectuals and activists were arrested and interrogated under false accusations of plotting a coup. Hundreds of people including prominent leftist intellectuals were arrested in the incident

such as Kulap Saipradit, Pleuang Wannasri, and Supha Sirimanond. After the incident, the Thai government revived the anti-communist law and tightened censorship.<sup>132</sup>

During the first intellectual movement (late 1940s to 1959), the depiction of the American among Thai leftists illustrated the strong influence of Lenin's capitalist imperialism and Mao's description of China's situation before the communist victory in 1949 as 'semi-colonial, semi-feudal'. One of the best illustrative and earliest works is Aran Phromchomphu's *Thailand: A Semicolony* (1950).<sup>133</sup> Similar perspective also appeared in, for example, Kulap Saipradit's article 'The American Foreign Policy' (1950) and *Pituphum*, a weekly newspaper run by Pleuang Wannasri.<sup>134</sup> Suchart Phumibrirak's book, *Isan: Land of Blood and Tears* (1958), also explained the impact of American imperialism on the Isan region.<sup>135</sup> However, anti-American expression, together with other forms of opposition against the military regime, were silenced when the Sarit government (1959-1963) launched suppressive policies towards leftist intellectuals.

Intellectuals and students resumed their political activities including criticism against the American military role in Thailand during the Thanom government (1963-1973) when the government's control and censorship were loosened due to internal conflicts among rival Thai leaders.<sup>136</sup> In late 1966, the *Social Science Review*, under the editorship of Suchart Sawatsi, launched the first attack against the United States after long period of political silence. The journal became a clearing house for essays and translations criticising the

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132 Many leftist intellectuals and members of the Communist Party of Thailand took part in the Peace Rebellion and the Cominform, the Soviet Communist Information Bureau, influenced an origin of the peace movement. However, Sopha Chanamool argues the Peace Rebellion also attracted anti-war intellectuals outside the leftist camp. Sopha, *"Thai Nation" in the Perspective of Thai Progressive Intellectuals*, 112-118.

133 *Thailand: A Semicolony* and many leftist writings from the 1950s were reprinted and circulated among leftist student activists in the 1970s. Suthachai Yimprasert, "เหตุการณ์ 6 ตุลาเกิดขึ้นได้อย่างไร," [How did the 6 October Event happen] Documentation of Oct 6, assessed February 6, 2019, <https://doct6.com/learn-about/how/chapter-2/2-1>.

134 Sopha, *"Thai Nation" in the Perspective of Thai Progressive Intellectuals*, 301. Pleuang Wannasri was a prominent leftist from Isan. He was an owner and editor of *Pituphum*, one of the most influential leftist magazines in the 1950s. His view on Thailand under American imperialism appeared in his speech in Surin province during his political campaign in 1957. See, Pleuang Wannasri, "ปาฐกถากลางแปลงเรื่อง "ทางรอดของไทย" [An Outdoor Speech "Thailand's Way Out"]" in เปลื้องวรรณศรีกวี-นักคิดนักเขียน-นักสู้ [Pleuang Wannasri Poet-Thinker Writer-Fighter], ed. คณะกรรมการจัดงานรำลึกเปลื้องวรรณศรี [A Committee of Memorial Event for Pleuang Wannasri], (Bangkok: Pappim, 1997), 32-4.

135 Suchart Phumibrirak, *อีสานดินแดนแห่งเลือดและน้ำตา* [Isan, Land of Blood and Tears], 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Plewfai book club, 1971), 80-81.

136 Suchart Sawatsi, "จาก อักษรสาส์น ถึง สังคมศาสตร์ปริทัศน์" [From Aksornsan to Social Science Review] in *จาก อักษรสาส์น ถึง สังคมศาสตร์ปริทัศน์* [From Aksornsan to Social Science Review], ed. Narong Petchprasert (Bangkok: Political Economy Center, Chulalongkorn University, 2006), 39-40.

United States and the Vietnam War, motivating other students and intellectuals to join the movement, which continued growing and reached its peak after the 14 October event in 1973. Between 1973 and 1976, student and intellectual activists actively promoted anti-American sentiments by holding exhibitions on the Vietnam War, organising protests, and public speaking.<sup>137</sup>

During this second intellectual movement (the mid 1960-1970s), anti-American publications were influenced by literary works and anti-American imperialist writings from the first intellectual movement such as Supha Sirimanond's *Capitalism, Aran Phromchomphu's Thailand: A Semicolony*, and Jit Phumisak's *Art for Life, Art for People*, to name a few. However, the anti-American tone during the first and second intellectual movements were not identical. Just as the depiction of Isan villagers and the Chinese in leftist publications evolved throughout the Cold War period, there was a transition and evolution of the American presence from the first to the second intellectual movement. During the first intellectual movement, depictions of the American demonstrated a strong leftist ideology. Aran Phromchomphu's *Thailand: A Semicolony* clearly prioritises 'imperialism' over the 'American' by suggesting that imperialist powers took turns semi-colonising Thailand, from British imperialism in the eighteenth century, to the French, the Japanese, and the American modes of colonialism. To solve the problem, Thai feudalism had to be destroyed because the feudal class choose to collaborate with foreign imperialism by exploiting Thai people. Aran further proposed that to wipe out both foreign imperialism and Thai feudalism, an alliance of people needed to be formed. It should only be composed of people from the classes that suffered imperialist exploitation such as workers and farmers, but the former should be the leaders.<sup>138</sup> Similar sentiments were shared by, for example, Jit's *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* and Suchart's *Isan: Land of Blood and Tears*.

This leftist take on American imperialism was complemented, or even dominated, by intense Thai nationalism during the second intellectual movement.<sup>139</sup> This younger generation of Thai leftist intellectual activists used distinct nationalist rhetoric to narrate

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137 Examples of student activities were exhibitions on the Indochina War at Thammasat and Chiangmai universities in 1973, public speaking and debates on the topic 'the American Imperialism: An Invader' in 1974, and the protest on the Mayaguez incident in 1975. See, Puangthong, *Vietnam War*, 97-101.

138 Aran Phromchomphu, *ไทยกึ่งเมืองขึ้น* [Thailand: A Semicolony] (Bangkok: Udomtham Book Club, 1950), 306-311.

139 Nationalist sentiment is detectable in writings by hardcore leftists like Aran and Jit. However, their priorities and rigid view on class struggle were dominant.

stories of the American in the Cold War. One of the most well-known one-baht books that criticised the American role in Thailand was *The White Peril* published in 1971 by a group of students from Thammasat University under the name ‘Council in front of the Dome Group’.<sup>140</sup> What makes *The White Peril* quite special was not only that it was the first book solely dedicated to attacking the Thai government and the US military for causing the Vietnam War, but that it illustrated royal nationalist sentiment in the leftist movement by including an ultra-nationalist poem by King Rama VI.<sup>141</sup>

*The White Peril* was not the only publication by leftist intellectuals and students that included or referred to royal writings. Another was *Who Violated Sovereignty*, a collection of anti-government articles and announcements, and many writings pointed out that the American presence must be removed to defend the country’s sovereignty.<sup>142</sup> Many articles, poems, and short stories published in the *Social Science Review* took a similar line. From June 1967 to October 1973 (the last issue of the magazine), the Indochina conflict was among the leading topics in the *Social Science Review*.<sup>143</sup> Recurring themes on the Cold War included that the communist threat was propaganda from the American and Thai government, the Free World was indeed the one who waged the Vietnam war, the government’s military collaboration with America jeopardised Thailand’s sovereignty, American assistance to Thailand had a hidden agenda, and so on.<sup>144</sup> Noticeably, none of them demonstrated a strong leftist ideology, namely destruction of capitalism and the rise of the proletariat.

These stories of the American in the Cold War in both the first and second intellectual movements straightforwardly countered the military government’s central

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140 The title “The White Peril” [ภัยขาว] refers to the American because of their ‘white’ skin colour. Council in front of the Dome Group, *ภัยขาว* [The White Peril] (Bangkok: Aksornsampan, 1971). Other examples include, for instance, Bunlue Muengsing, “แต่มิตรที่ซอบขี่คอมิตร” [to a friend who rides on a friend’s shoulders], in *วารสารเศรษฐธรรม* [Setta Dharma Journal] (Bangkok: Simeung, 1971), 39-40; N.A., “กลับรูของเจ้าเถอะมะริกันเฮ้ย” [Back to your hole, the American], in *พาลาด* [Palad] (Literature Club, Chiangmai University, 1973), and Literature Club of Chiangmai University, *Social Science*’15 (Bangkok: Aksornsampan, 1973). See, Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 308-319.

141 Examples of writings published in *The White Peril* include Surapol Srikam, “เสียงจากเบอทรัสเซล” [Voice from Bertrand Russel], 26-33; Bertrand Russell, “สุนทรพจน์เนื่องในโอกาสการประชุมผนีกกำลังแห่งชาติ” [Speech to National Conference Solidarity in War Cries in Vietnam], trans. Cherdkiat Chiaoteerasakul, 49-52; Vajiravudh, “Siammanussati,” backcover.

142 Khien Theerawit, Pansak Winyarat, and Suchart Swatsi, *ใครละเมิดอธิปไตย?* [Who Violated Sovereignty?] (Bangkok: Daoreung, 1975), part 3 and annex. Also, Rawee Domeprachan, *ต่อสู้ชาติเอกราชราษฎรอธิปไตย* [Fight for Nation, People and Sovereignty] (Bangkok: Kan-Siam, 1975), 23, 53-4.

143 Prajak, *And then the Movement Emerged*, 215.

144 Prajak, *And then the Movement Emerged*, 215-222.



legitimacy to remain in power: to protect the Thai people and nation from communist threats. These leftist stories challenged the official narratives that the government did not defend the Thai nation as they claimed to legitimise themselves, and that they also betrayed the country by serving the foreign enemy, American imperialism, in exchange for their own benefit, causing suffering to Thai people. In other words, these ruling elites indeed ‘failed’ at being ‘good’ Thais.

### ***(Re)constructing Self: The American Otherness and Thai Leftists***

Narrating foreign Others is narrating a story of Self. Stories of the Americans in counter-narratives allowed Thai leftists to narrate their Self stories and assert a powerful identity. Thai leftists claimed we-ness as a part of an international movement against the American imperialist ambitions, either actual or imagined, thereby connecting themselves to the international. Also, by narrating the American as Thailand’s enemy, it was leftists who truly represented the Thai nation and people, not the Thai government. Prajak points out that Thai leftist intellectuals and activists considered themselves connected to anti-American nationalist movements in other countries from their translated writings and speeches by anti-American leaders in neighbouring countries and Asia, such as works and speeches by Sukarno, the first President of Indonesia and a nationalist leader, and Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania and a political activist.<sup>145</sup> *Asian Heroes* (1972) published by the *Social Science Review* editorial department is also a good example. The anthology is a collection of seven articles on Asian ‘heroes’ and how they fought imperialist power.<sup>146</sup> Writings on international political movements against the United States particularly by young people and students and their role in bringing changes to society often appeared in the *Social Science Review*.<sup>147</sup> In *Made in U.S.A.*, Sujit Wongthes admired the anti-Vietnam

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145 Prajak, *And then the Movement Emerged*, 295.

146 The seven Asian heroes include Sukarno from Indonesia, Norodom Sihanouk for Cambodia, Aung San from Burma, Gandhi from India, Mao Zedong from the PRC, Ho Chi Minh from Vietnam, and Philippine nationalist fighters Rizal, Bonifacio, and Aguinaldo. *วีรชนเอเชีย* [Asia Heroes] (Bangkok: editor department, *Social Science Review*, 1974).

147 For example, Warin Sinsoongsud, “การปฏิวัตินักศึกษาในอเมริกา” [Student Revolution in America] *Social Science Review Student Edition*, no. 8 (1969): 38-42; Witayakorn Chiengkul, “ขบถนักศึกษา” [Student Rebellion] *Social Science Review Graduate Edition*, no.2 (1969): 38-51; Pridi Bunnsue, “คนหนุ่มสาวกับนโยบายต่างประเทศ” *Social Science Review Student Edition*, no. 10 (1970): 5-11; and, Thak Chaloehtiarana, “ศีลธรรมของคนหนุ่มสาวกับสงครามเวียดนาม” [The Morality and the Vietnam War] *Social Science Review* 8, no. 2 (1970).

war movement led by American students in the United States.<sup>148</sup> However, I argue that because many leftist students and intellectuals particularly in the second intellectual movements had Isan origins or a Chinese background (Chapter 4 and 5), adopting a counter-narrative against the American re-constructed their self-identity, from inferior and powerless to international anti-American activists fighting alongside their comrades around the world.

As much as they proclaimed themselves as ‘international’ activists, these students also announced themselves as ‘nationalist’ fighters. In their works, American imperialism was narrated as a foreign Other who not only jeopardised Thai sovereignty, but also corrupted Thai culture and tradition.<sup>149</sup> In this regard, the American as the Other to the Thai Self was an enemy of the Thai tradition and of national sovereignty. While leftists identified themselves in opposition to the American enemy, they also ‘Other-ised’ the Thai military government who allied themselves with American imperialism as an ‘un-Thai’ traitor.

However, the Thai tradition and culture, including myths of the country’s independence, that leftist students and intellectuals upheld and protected from the Americans/American-ness, were the same kind of Thai-ness that appeared in official narratives. Thus, these counter-narratives inevitably supported the revival of the Thai monarchy in the Cold War period and discouraged leftist progress in Thailand. Before examining this argument, we need to look at the American in official narratives of the Cold War first.

## The Americans in Official Narratives

The Thai dictatorship’s close collaboration with the United States to secure aid and assistance is characterised as a crucial aspect of the American Era and the beginning of Americanisation in Thailand.<sup>150</sup> In the official narrative, the United States was often

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148 Sujit Wongthes, *เมดอิน ยู.เอส.เอ.* [Made in U.S.A.] (Bangkok: Open Books, 2004), 165, 276-7. This book was first published in 1975 by the publisher Pikkanes. Sujit is one of the most prominent Thai intellectuals who consistently produced ‘unconventional’ studies on Thai historical topics such as challenging a well-established argument on the mono-ethnic ‘Thai race’, for example. He wrote *Made in U.S.A.* in a form of travel log to record what he experienced from visit to Cornell University.

149 For example, Jaran Ditapichai, “วัฒนธรรมฝรั่งในไทย” [Western Culture in Thailand] in *The White Peril*, 84-87 and Sujit Wongthes, *Made in U.S.A.* (Bangkok: Open Books, 2004).

150 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 17-20.

described by the Thai government as Thailand's great friend and ally who would protect Thailand from communist expansion in the region.<sup>151</sup> The Thai government emphasised that Thailand needed to align with the democratic world against the communist threat and the American assistance was crucial for Thailand to remain independent and safe from communist threats. However, despite the government's insistence of the importance of the American role and U.S. assistance in Thailand and the Southeast Asian region, Thai rulers frequently publicly claimed that they were not under American dominance nor did they prioritise American interests over the Thai people's. For example, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn once stated he was not pro-American, but pro-Thai, 'my Thai friends and I love (our) American friends the most because they always help us... However, this love does not exceed (my) love towards Thai nation and people.'<sup>152</sup> In his radio programme, Kukrit Pramoj asserted that the American presence in Thailand was not ill-intentioned. Rather, American agents were sent to Thailand to assist Thai people. He further claimed that Thai people acknowledged American good will because Thailand had never been colonised by the west, which makes Thailand an extraordinary case and different (in a superior way) from neighbouring countries.<sup>153</sup> In other words, Kukrit suggested that the American presence in Thailand was a matter of friendship and the continuation of Thailand's glorious history as the sole survivor of western colonisation in this region.

However, Kukrit Pramoj was one of the people who called for defending the Thai tradition from being corrupted by an influx of American culture and rejected the democracy that represented the core value of the United States, a leader of the Free World. Some of his works and idea are referred to in the following section to illustrate that Thai agents were

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151 One of the clearest sources narrating the official stories of the Cold War is an official speech and announcement from the Thai government officers. For example, Sarit's speeches in various occasions, especially when they concerned Thai-U.S. relations, national security and anti-communist policy. See, for illustration, Sarit Thanarat, "คำแถลงของ ฯพณฯ นายกรัฐมนตรี ต่อสภาร่างรัฐธรรมนูญ เรื่อง แถลงการณ์ร่วมของรัฐมนตรีต่างประเทศสหรัฐฯ และรัฐมนตรีต่างประเทศไทย เกี่ยวกับการรักษาความมั่นคงและความปลอดภัยของประเทศไทย 15 มีนาคม 2505" [Speech by the Prime Minister to Constituent Drafting Assembly on Joint Communique between the U.S. Secretary of State and the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs on Security and Safety of Thailand, 15 March 1982], in *ประมวลสุนทรพจน์ของจอมพลสฤษดิ์ ธนะรัชต์ พ.ศ. 2505-2506* [Collection of Speeches by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat 1982-3] (Bangkok: The Prime Minister's Office, 1964), 596-7.

152 Somphob Chandraprabha, *ชีวิตและงานของจอมพลถนอมกิตติขจร* [Life and Works of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn] (Nakhonluang Bangkok-Thonburi: Wangbura, 1972), 231-2.

153 Kukrit Pramoj, "อเมริกันในเอเชีย" [The Americans in Asia] in *เมืองไทยในสังคมโลก* [Thailand in the World Society] (Bangkok: Prapansan, 1967), 34-5. This article was originally from Kukrit's radio programme *เพื่อนนอน* [Bed Buddy] regularly broadcast on Territorial Defence Command Radio between March 1962 to 1965.

not completely submissive to the United States as Andersons' the American Era trope suggests. This section explains how Thai rulers used the American presence to construct a Thai-ness that benefited them. The two concepts, including 'Thai-style' democracy and *kanpatthana* (development), that appeared for the first time in the Cold War period, will receive particular attention.<sup>154</sup> As the terms were often used by the United States to signify themselves in the Cold War, the fact that Thai rulers 'Thai-ised' American concepts and used them as they pleased, demonstrated that Thai agents were not as Americanised as Anderson proposed.

### ***The 'Thai-ised' American Era: 'Thai-Style' Democracy and 'Kanpatthana'***

The idea of 'Thai-style democracy' is a good example of a representation of American-ness and democracy, that was Thai-ised by Thai rulers.<sup>155</sup> The political concept first emerged in the Sarit era to describe how Western political ideas and practices (democracy) needed to be adjusted to suit Thai society and culture.<sup>156</sup> Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat introduced the term 'Thai-style democracy' to justify the coup ('revolution' in Sarit's own word) in 1958. A spokesman for the coup junta said:

The Revolutionary Council wishes to make the country a democracy... and to be able to bring this about, it must correct the mistakes of the past... The revolution of October 20, 1958 abolished democratic ideas borrowed from the West and suggested that it would build a democratic system that would be appropriate to

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154 Thai-style democracy and Thai-style development in Thai are ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทยๆ and การพัฒนาแบบไทยๆ.

155 As the United States always presented themselves as a leader of the Free World as against communism, democracy is one their defining traits. However, it does not mean that the United States had to promote democracy to their allies.

156 All studies on the 'Thai-style Democracy' focus on internal struggles among Thai rulers in the Sarit era or Thai contemporary politics. None particularly engaged the Cold War in an explanation on the origin of the Thai-style democracy. please see, for example, Chaloeankiat Phiunuan, *ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย: ความคิดทางการเมืองของทหารไทย (2519-2529)* [The Thai-style Democracy: Political Ideology of the Thai Military (1976-1986)] (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1990); Kriangsak Chertpatanavanich, *ความคิดประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย จากยุคชอชยราชครูถึงยุคจอมพลสฤษดิ์ ธนะรัชต์* [Thai-Style Democracy: From Phin Choonhavan to Sarit Thanarat] (Bangkok: The Foundation for The Promotion of Social Science and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2007); Kevin Hewison and Kengkij Kitirianglarp, "Thai-Style Democracy: The Royalist Struggle for Thailand's Politics" in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, ed. Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2010), 179-202; and, Michael K. Connors, "When the Walls Come Crumbling Down: The Monarchy and Thai-style Democracy," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41, no. 4 (2011): 657-673.

the special characteristics and realities of the Thai. It will build a democracy, a Thai way of democracy.<sup>157</sup>

In other words, Sarit criticised the fact that political instability and inefficiency in the past were caused by previous governments trying to install ‘democratic ideas borrowed from the West’ which were not suited to ‘the special characteristics and realities of the Thai’. As a result, it caused ‘severe divisions, intrigues... and the desire to destroy each other’.<sup>158</sup> This political ideology not only legitimised Sarit and the coup for authoritative rule, but was also used to eliminate the remnants of the People’s Party in Thai politics as they were to blame for staging the 1932 Siamese Revolution and planting ‘democratic ideas borrowed from the West’ on Thai soil.

The emergence of so-called ‘Thai-style democracy’ is related to the Cold War particularly in terms of identity politics. This concept can be seen as a part of the narrative contestation of the Cold War. From how the military coup explained the political ideology, we can see an explicit construction of the dichotomy between Thai-ness and the West (American-ness). Similar to the Thai leftists that identified themselves with Thai-ness in the dichotomy of Thai-ness and the American Other that they created to justify their struggle, Sarit also asserted himself as a representation of the Thai style he designated in relation to the West/American-ness. At the same time, Sarit also ‘Other-ised’ his opponents, particularly the People’s Party as the ‘un-Thai’. A similar concept is Kukrit’s ‘the Thai-style government’, which is not to be confused with Sarit’s ‘the Thai-style democracy’.<sup>159</sup> To Kukrit, no foreign political ideology suited Thai society as it caused only the destruction of harmony in the country and the decay of Thai culture and tradition.<sup>160</sup>

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157 Army Radio “20,” August 17, 1965, quoted in, Thak, *Thailand: The Despotism Paternalism*, 101. Thak used “Thai way of democracy” as the English translation of ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย.

158 Sarit Thanarat, “คำปราศรัยในวันชาติ” [National Day Speech], June 24, 1959, quoted in Thak, *Thailand: The Despotism Paternalism*, 101.

159 Saichol and Connors argue that Kukrit launched the ‘Thai-style government’ to ‘correct’ the Thai-style democracy, which implied some tension between Kukrit and the military. For Kukrit, Thailand was not then ready for democracy and Thai-style democracy was deemed nonsensical to him. For Kukrit the term ‘democracy’ was also used by the leftists. To solve the problem, Kukrit suggested that the term should be replaced by the ‘Thai-style government’, where a hierarchical relationship between leaders and subjects was secured by the state. Connors, “When the Walls Come Crumbling Down,” 667-669; Saichol Sattayanurak, *ศึกฤทธิ์กับประชาธิปไตย “ความเป็นไทย” เล่ม 2 ยุคจอมพลสฤษดิ์ถึงทศวรรษ 2530* [Kukrit and Construction of “Thai-ness” volume 2, from Field Marshal Sarit Era to the 2530s B.E.] (Bangkok: Art and Culture, 2007), 31-32.

160 This is the main theme of his most famous novel, *Four Reigns*. Kukrit presented this view through Mae Ploy, the protagonist, who lost her two sons because of their different ‘foreign’ political ideologies.

Similar to the Thai-style democracy, the concept of *kanphattana* (development) introduced in the Sarit era implies the identity politics and the Cold War.<sup>161</sup> *Kanphattana* was often represented by the United States as American technological, scientific, industrial, educational and economic advances that were desired by the Thai people, especially those who lived in Bangkok and were educated.<sup>162</sup> This American version of progress was widely promoted and publicised by both the Thai state and the United States. The term *kanphattana* became increasingly popular after the Thai government launched the first national development plan, the National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966), which was based on a review from a World Bank mission.<sup>163</sup> The National Economic Development Board (NEDB) broadly incorporated recommendations from the World Bank into its 'First Plan'. Under the First Plan, with generous support from the United States, the Thai government carried out many development programmes such as massive infrastructure construction, building roads, the installation of irrigation systems, and educational expansion.<sup>164</sup> The Northeast of Thailand had their own regional development plan because the Thai government and the United States deemed the region susceptible to communist expansion and were convinced that development was the key to solving 'the Isan Problem'.<sup>165</sup>

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161 In this section, I use *kanpatthana* [การพัฒนา] instead of 'development' to highlight its political context. According to Demaine, there are other terms in Thai that have a similar sense to 'development' such as *watthana* [วัฒนา] and *burana* [บูรณะ]. The former was often used by Field Marsal Phibunsongkhram to refer to 'creating the outward appearances of modernization and (Western) civilization in Thai society'. *Burana* was used before *watthana* by Siamese rulers before the 1932 Revolution, particularly as in 'ราชบูรณะ' [*ratsadon burana* or restored by the Thai people]. The term is opposite to 'ราชบูรณะ' [*ratcha burana*] or 'restored by the King'. Harvey Demaine, "Kanpatthana: Thai Views of Development," *Context Meaning and Power in Southeast Asia*, ed. Benedict Anderson (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1986), 95.

162 In 1960, USIS conducted a survey to study patterns of communication of university students in Bangkok and how they perceived the United States. After submitting a questionnaire to 1,104 students at Thammasat University, Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, and the College of Education, the survey found that the students perceived the United States as the most advanced country in the fields of public health, basic science, education, agriculture, social welfare, industrial technology, and atomic energy. However, the students perceived that England and Italy surpassed the United States in the fields of literature and architecture, respectively. USIS, *Basic Communication Habits of Thai Students: A Bangkok Survey* (Bangkok: USIS, 1960), 18-21.

163 The First Plan was followed by additional five-year plans. From the Second Plan onwards, the plan was changed from the National Economic Development Plan to the National Economic and Social Development Plan.

164 During the First Plan, Thailand received support from the World Bank (under American leadership) that amounted to approximately 2,773,000 US dollars. Thailand spent 1,900,000 on the plan. IBRD, *A Public Development Program for Thailand*, 5, cited in Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism*, 169.

165 For detail on 'the Isan Problem', please see Chapter 3.

Sarit himself promoted the concept of *kanpatthana* from the beginning of his premiership to justify the coup d'état, even before the visit from the World Bank mission.<sup>166</sup> However, without international support, particularly from the United States, Sarit could not realise such grand development plans. When the Americans became more involved in the Indochina conflict and Sarit's ambitious aims for national development grew, both Washington's and Sarit's objectives became entangled, leading to an expansion of development plans and projects in Thailand.<sup>167</sup>

The consequences from the Thai-American collaboration and large-scale development plans in Thai society illustrated the American influence on Thai society that Benedict Anderson termed the American Era. To Anderson:

"development" meant... unhindered access to Siam by foreign capital (...mainly American)... Sarit dismantled many state enterprises, smashed trade unions, enforced low wages, offered very favourable conditions for the repatriation of corporate profits, and abolished Plaek-era 50-*rai* (roughly 20 acre) statutory limits on landownership. Partly as a result of these measures, partly as a consequence, after 1964, of huge American military expenditures in Siam as the Indochina War intensified, the Thai economy went into a sustained decade-long boom, which gave birth for the first time to a real Thai middle class. "Rural development," heavily financed by the U.S., meant a drive to tighten Bangkok's administrative grip on the country's overwhelmingly agricultural population; a vast expansion of the nation's various police forces, the military, and the educational bureaucracies; the rapid commercialization of agriculture...<sup>168</sup>

Anderson's description of Americanised Thailand is scary and overwhelming. However, I find myself in disagreement. I argue that the Thai coinage of the term *kanpatthana* illustrated the Thai-isation of the concept of development, which was another defining trait of the United States.

The term *kanpatthana* was linked to the royal nationalist history of Thailand, thus implying the Thai-isation of the concept. For illustration, the concept of community development was 'Thai-ised' or claimed as relating to the central Thai history because the

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166 Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism*, 148. Demaine suspected that what Sarit might have deemed as *kanpatthana* and the macro scale of development in the plan might be the same. For Sarit, an outcome like better/extended roads and running water for people seemed to be *kanpathana* to him. But for professional economists, these were merely factors that stimulate the macro-level development. Demaine, "Kanpatthana: Thai Views of Development," 97.

167 Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism*, 167.

168 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 20-21.

(Central) Thai ruling elites in the past has been practicing community development.<sup>169</sup> Field Marshal Prapas Charusathien, Minister of the Interior, once claimed that community development was carried out by King Ramkhamhaeng, during the Sukhothai kingdom, in the thirteenth century. A similar view can be seen in local administrative officers and staff, when focusing on Siamese monarchs in Thailand under the absolute monarchy in the Rattanakosin period. Many articles in *Tesapiban*, a monthly periodical by the Department of Provincial Administration, claimed that community development had long existed in Thai history as it was promoted by benevolent ruling elites.<sup>170</sup>

*Kanpatthana* served as a tool for Thai rulers/ruling class to create a tripartite discursive relationship between the American, rural villagers, and themselves, where Thai ruling elites were in a dominant position. By promoting *kanpatthana*, the rural was depicted as inferior to Bangkok and was compelled to follow Bangkok's footsteps to become *patthana* (developed) (see Chapter 3). The relationship between the Americans and Thai ruling elites is more perplexing. Theoretically, the Americans should have ranked the highest in the relationship since *kanpatthana* was a miniaturised, American/Western model of development (as we can see from the Thai government applying the World Bank review to the National Economic Development Plan). The advanced and developed America as Thailand's tomorrow was often referred to or implied by the Thai state and the United States themselves. However, the tricky part is when the Thai ruling elites found that *kanpatthana* might disturb existing the hierarchical structure, so they introduced cultural relativism, Thai-ness, into the equation, to create an identity dichotomy between American/Western materialistic development and the spiritual virtues of Thai traditions and culture, which the latter deemed superior or unique to the former. This binary opposition was embedded in stories of Thai culture being corrupted by foreign development, and American/Western admiration or acknowledgement of the Thai tradition. This illustrated that the Thai ruling elites selectively adopted American development while preserving virtues of Thai-ness at the core.

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169 Community development in Thai is *Kanpatthana chumchon* [การพัฒนาชุมชน].

170 Prapas Charusathien, "การปกครองและการพัฒนาท้องถิ่น" [Community Administration and Development], *Tesapiban* 54 (10), October 1959: 1044-1046. For similar examples, please see, Chalor Wanaphut, "เจ้าคุณสุนทรเทพกิจจารักษ์" [Chao Khun Sunthonthepkijjarak], *Tesapiban* 59 (4), April 1964: 401, and, Boontan Chaluaysi, "การพัฒนาการท้องถิ่นในประเทศไทย" [Community Development in Thailand] *Tesapiban* 53 (9), September 1958: 922. Technical Service Division, Department of Provincial Administration, "ผู้ช่วยผู้ใหญ่บ้านฝ่ายรักษาความสงบ" [Assistant Village Headman in Peacekeeping], *Tesapiban* 62 (3), March 1967: 235.



Although this perspective of American materialist development versus Thai spiritual virtue and what a ‘good’ *kanpatthana* were prevalent, Kukrit Pramroj’s enthusiasm for promoting the superiority and uniqueness of Thai-ness in contrast to American/Western development was distinct.<sup>171</sup> Kukrit publicised his views via radio programmes, newspaper articles, and novels, warning that economic development might cause the loss of Thai cultural heritage. He gave the example of invaluable historical sites being destroyed by infrastructural development such as road extensions and people who ‘ignored [Thai] historical value and national art’.<sup>172</sup> Various stories of the American admiration of Thai traditions and virtue were regularly broadcast on his radio program *Bed Buddy*.<sup>173</sup> Seni Pramroj, Kukrit’s brother and three time Prime Minister of Thailand, also warned Thai people to be very careful of following the example of developed countries (such as the United States). Instead, according to Seni, the Thais should value the Thai tradition and culture such as Buddhist architecture, royal water-borne processions, Thai traditional dance, Chakri palaces, and splashing water in the Songkran festival.<sup>174</sup> All of which are parts of Central Thai culture and related to the Thai monarchy.

The view of American development in opposition to Thailand’s virtuous tradition and culture was prevalent in leftist publications as well. In counter-narratives of the Cold War, Thai leftists blamed modern development for cultural and moral decay in both urban and rural Thailand.<sup>175</sup> Some illustrative examples include, Sujit’s and Korn’s short stories ‘Second Nature’ and ‘In the Mirror’, *The White Peril*, *The Politician and Other Stories*, and many articles in the *Social Science Review*, to name a few.<sup>176</sup> To understand the common view

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171 This enthusiasm is often shared among royalist intellectuals such as Seni Pramroj and Sulak Sivaraksa. S. Sivaraksa, “Siam Versus the West” in *Siam in Crisis: Collected Articles by S. Sivaraksa* (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation, 1980), 196-202. This article was first published in *Solidarity* magazine in 1970.

172 In his example, these people include an ignorant Buddhist abbot who let ‘the Chinese’ steal cultural-historical objects from a temple to sell to ‘the westerners’. Kukrit Pramroj, “สิ่งที่สูญหายไปกับการพัฒนา” [What (we) Lost for Development] in *สยามรัฐฉบับพิเศษ ครบรอบ 83 ปี คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช คึกฤทธิ์กับความเป็นไทย [Siam Rath Special Edition the 83rd anniversary of Kukrit Pramroj, Kukrit and Thai-ness]* (Bangkok: Siam Rath, 1994), 136-7.

173 For example, “รอยยิ้ม” [Smile] (1964), “วิลันดาติดยาก” [Viland in Trouble] (1965), “มาร์ลอนแบรนโดที่กรุงเทพฯ” [Marlon Brando in Bangkok] (1963). Kukrit Pramroj, *เมืองไทยในสังคมโลก [Thailand in International Society]* (Bangkok: Prapansan, 1967), 2-27.

174 Seni Pramroj, “ผลของประเพณีตะวันตก” [Consequences of Western Culture], *Pattanakonsarn* 1, no.2 (1967): 107.

175 There are numerous works attacking American materialist development for corrupting Thai culture. Here I only use well-known and influential works for illustration.

176 Some examples of the articles criticising development for corrupting Thai society include, Sulak Sivaraksa’s, editorial page to the *Social Science Review* 2, no. 4 (1956): 3; Sulak Sivaraksa, “สุนทรพจน์ในการเปิดสมาคมผ้าถุง” [Speech for an Opening of Sampot Club], *Social Science Review* 3, no. 3 (1965): 31-32; Thanet Aphornsuvan, “หนทางของการพัฒนาในประเทศกำลังพัฒนา” [An Approach of Development for Developing Countries], *Social Science Review Student Edition*, no. 11 (1971): 30-34.

shared by both sides of the conflict, Thongchai Winichakul's explanation of the term *siwilai* (being civilised) is helpful.

In 'The Quest for *'Siwilai'*: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Siam', Thongchai Winichakul investigates the formation and usage of the term *siwilai* in nineteenth-century Siam. Although the notion of *siwilai*, transliterated from 'civilised', appeared in the late nineteenth century, *siwilai* and *kanpatthana* share similarities. First of all, the origin of both *siwilai* and *kanpatthana* illustrates the international order that involved Siam/Thailand as supreme sources of power.<sup>177</sup> Siamese rulers and elites became increasingly interested in *siwilai* (being civilised) mainly because of colonialism and the emergence of the new *axis mundi*, Europe. After France defeated Siam for Laos in 1893, the Siamese rulers deemed an evaluation of the Siamese position in the new World Order and in relation to Europe an urgent issue. Thongchai further argued that the drive behind this urgency also related to the fear that Siam might not be on par with other sovereign rulers which could lead to losing 'the supreme royal power', or 'sovereignty' in modern language.<sup>178</sup> To prevent negative scenarios, Siamese rulers considered learning the new ethos of 'civilisation', at that time signified by Europe, as crucial to secure their power. King Rama V and his entourage travelled to Europe in 1897, the King's first experience of Europe and part of his quest to learn how to attain *siwilai*.<sup>179</sup> Like *siwilai*, *kanpatthana* also emerged in the context of the American power that reigned supreme in the international arena. In the article, Thongchai also states that the United States was the supreme source of power after the second World War, and thus was a signifier of *siwilai*.<sup>180</sup> However, *kanpatthana* has a stronger connotation of secular development and material progress that came in the form of concrete development projects.

Secondly, both are relational concepts that rely on the identification of 'the Others' from within and outside of Siam. While in *siwilai* the 'Others outside' to Siam refers to Europe or the West, while for *kanpatthana* it is the West as a whole but with a focus on

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177 Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for *'Siwilai'*: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Siam," *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (August 2000): 531.

178 "The supreme royal power" here Thongchai means พระบรมเดชานุภาพ. Thongchai, "The Quest for *'Siwilai'*," 539.

179 Thongchai, "The Quest for *'Siwilai'*," 538.

180 Thongchai, "The Quest for *'Siwilai'*," 531.

America.<sup>181</sup> In terms of ‘the Others within’, Siamese rulers used similar ethnographic techniques that European colonial administrators used in order to categorise their subjects to indicate the *siwilai* status of the Siamese rulers (that they were ‘more’ *siwilai* than the Others within). This allowed Siamese elites to establish a hierarchical relationship between them and their subjects and claim a dominant position in Thai society.<sup>182</sup> Two categories of the Others came up: the *chaopa* (jungle people, people of the wilderness) and *chaobannok* (rural villagers). Unlike the former, the latter were perceived as civilised and loyal subjects despite their backwardness.<sup>183</sup> Since the target of *kanpatthana* in the Cold War was rural Thailand, particularly the areas susceptible to communist insurgency such as Isan, *chaobannok* also refers to the ‘Others within’ in the concept of *kanpatthana*. Here we can see a continuity of the ‘Others within’ in the notion of *siwilai* to *kanpatthana* which might explain the origin of the depiction of rural villagers in an unspecified countryside in the early stories of the Cold War, before shifting to Isan villagers when the Indochina conflict intensified (Chapter 3 and 4).

Regardless of political views, both the Siamese elites and intellectuals sought after *siwilai* or had a desire to become *siwilai*.<sup>184</sup> The approach to attain *siwilai*, however, differed between elite groups and was used as a political tool to legitimise their power struggle. For example, the monarchical rulers who originally introduced *siwilai* to Thai society were criticised for hindering the country’s attainment of *siwilai* by the revolutionaries when they ended the absolute monarchy.<sup>185</sup> Similar to *kanpatthana*, during the Cold War period both Thai government and Thai leftists agreed that Thailand needed *kanpatthana* despite their differences over how *kanpatthana* should look like in Thai society.

Despite different political sides and ideologies, like Siamese elites and their quest for *siwilai*, both Thai state actors and oppositional leftists were in ‘the contact zone of cultural

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181 Thongchai suggests the linear development of the signifier *siwilai*, from China and India to Europe and the United States. I think this view is too simplistic because it depicts the linear transition of the signifier ‘*siwilai*’. I propose that there is an overlap between Europe and the United States under the term ‘*farang*’ that Thai elites used to signify ‘*siwilai*’.

182 On Siamese elites using an ethnographic approach to differentiate their subjects, see, Thongchai Winichakul, “The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910” in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 38-62.

183 Thongchai, “The Quest for ‘*Siwilai*’,” 534-6.

184 Thongchai, “The Quest for ‘*Siwilai*’,” 528.

185 Thongchai, “The Quest for ‘*Siwilai*’,” 528.

encounter' where they gazed outward at the West and inward upon 'the Others within' at the same time.<sup>186</sup> As such, both conflicting parties embraced what they perceived as Thai-ness as their Self when in contact with, virtual or actual, the 'Others outside', or the American Other in this case. They were inclined to impose the identity dichotomy between the American Other and the Thai Self that they had constructed on the 'Others within', the rural villagers, possibly causing uneasiness (and even tension) between them and the rural villagers who did not affiliate with Central Thai values.<sup>187</sup> Additionally, when Thai leftists themselves also failed to question the Thai-ness that implied the existence of a dominant 'Thai race', they failed to challenge the essence of Thai nationalism and failed to perceive ethnic related issues as a problem.<sup>188</sup>

In sum, although the concept of democracy and development often represented Americanness, they were Thai-ised by the Thai agents, hence the 'Thai-style democracy' and *kanphattana*. These concepts also constructed the dichotomy between the American Other and the Thai Self. Both the Thai-style democracy and *kanpatthana* rejected original/American democracy and development by suggesting that foreign political concepts were not compatible with Thai society and Thai-ness, which was the kind of Thai-ness that related to the Central Thai tradition and the Thai monarchy. Only democracy in the Thai style was deemed compatible to Thai society because it did not threaten the Thai monarchy, the very core of Thai-ness which has been supporting the country for generations. This is similar to *kanpatthana* and how it was employed by the Thai elites. The Thai elites used the term to establish an unequal relationship between themselves and rural villagers while at the same time they contested it when they deemed the Thai-ness they identified themselves with as threatened.

### **The American Role in Construction of (Central) Thai-ness**

As a part of the anti-communist campaign, the United States, the American Other to Thai-ness, also contributed to the political trend of hypernationalism in Thailand in the Cold War

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186 Thongchai, "The Quest for 'Siwilai'," 540.

187 One of the best illustrations is Lao Kamhawm's *The Politician and Other Stories*. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

188 A case in point is the issue of the Chinese ethnicity in Thailand during the Cold War. This topic is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 5.

period in two respects: by assisting the return of the Thai monarchy to its prestigious status and by constructing anthropological knowledge on Thai-ness. One might argue that the American role in promoting Thai-ness is a further evidence of an Americanised Thailand. However, I propose that it demonstrates a symbiotic relationship between the United States and the monarchy, which proves the concept of the American Era is misleading. The American needed to collaborate with Thai agents to achieve its agenda.

In *The Royal Benevolence under the Eagle's Shadow: American Psychological Warfare and the Making of the Monarchy as the National Symbol*, Nattapoll Chaiching explains the rise of the Thai monarchy in the Cold War period by examining the formation of the relationship between the royalists and the United States in the Phibun era. The royalist camp and the King reached out to the American to gain its support in their struggle against Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, who tried to limit or remove the royalists from the scene. On the American side, William J. Donovan, the American Ambassador and a former agent of the Office of Strategic Services, took the opportunity created from the power struggle between the royalists and Phibun to develop a close relationship with the King in order to achieve 'U.S. Psychological Strategy based on Thailand' (PSB D-23) in Thailand. PSB D-23 refers to the American anti-communist psychological warfare in Thailand endorsed by the National Security Council (NSC) in 1953, after the Viet Minh suddenly attacked Laos, a move that brought the Viet Minh forces very close to Thai borders in April that same year. Donovan and the CIA started to frame the King as an anti-communist symbol of the Thai nation in the late 1953 by promoting loyalty to the King as a morale of the Border Patrol Police and Thai Paratroopers. This plan was later escalated and became concrete after the Mobile Information Team (MIT) was established by the USIS in mid 1954 to promote anti-communist propaganda among rural villagers in Isan. It also worked as a channel of communication between the government and villagers, for the former to know the latter's needs, and the latter to have a better understanding towards the former.<sup>189</sup> The MIT distributed USIS publications portraying the King as an anti-communist symbol and often showed films about the King in rural villages to promote loyalty to the King.<sup>190</sup> After the

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189 Nattapoll, "The Royal Benevolence under the Eagle's Shadow," 317-325.

190 MIT promoted the King as the symbol of the Thai nation in anti-communist media during their field trips to Isan in the early-mid 1960s. See, for example, USIS, *Report the Fourteenth Mobile Information Team Field Trip Visits to 21 Villages in Nongkhai Province, November 8-28, 1963*. (TIC 176); *Report on the Sixteenth Mobile Information Team Trip Visits to 11 Villages in Nakorn Phanom Province, January 15-30,*

American attempts and the King's visits to rural provinces, particularly the communist-prone areas in Isan, the massive popularity that he gained from the Thai people paved the way to his unprecedented rise in the following decade.

The USIS periodical *Seripharb* is another illustration of the American effort to promote the King's image as the heart of a Thai nation that must be protected from communist danger. As the magazine was widely published with the aim of being easily accessible to people in countryside, *Seripharb* was indeed an efficient anti-communist tool. In the magazine, stories of the King, including the royal family, did not only demonstrate anti-communist position but also royal benevolence, royal concern for the Thai people, and royal devotion to Buddhism.<sup>191</sup> USIS films on royal activities were often screened during the MIT field trips.<sup>192</sup> The American media also presented the King's presence during activities with the Americans in order to promote an amicable and close relationship between the King and the United States.<sup>193</sup> Along with promoting the King as an anti-communist symbol, the Americans also presented themselves as highly developed and militarily advanced in their media and publications. Some illustrations include the USIS films *The Pursuit of Happiness*<sup>194</sup>, *USA Today* (promoting development, technological advances and good living

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1964. (TIC 175); and, USIS, *Report the Seventeenth Mobile Information Team Field Trip Visits to 18 Villages in Nongkhai Province, April 19-May 2, 1964*. (TIC 181).

191 For example, USIS, “พระราชทานเงินรางวัลให้ตำรวจที่ขัดขวางพวกก่อการร้าย” [Royal Reward to the Police Officers for Countering Terrorists], *Seripharb*, no. 131 (1966): 35-39; USIS, “เสด็จ เลียบพระนคร” [Royal Barge Procession], *Seripharb*, no. 100 (1964): 22-25; USIS, “เสด็จพระราชดำเนินเยี่ยมราษฎรภาคเหนือ” [Royal Visit to People in the Northern Region], *Seripharb*, no. 39 (1958): 2-7.

192 For example, *Royal Visit to Burma, King's Activities, King's Northern Tour, King's Ordination, King Visits Troops, and Royal Tour of the Northeast*. USIS, *List of USIS Films for 1968* (NA: USIS, 1968); USIS, *Report the Fourteenth Mobile Information Team Field Trip Visits to 21 Villages in Nongkhai Province, November 8-28, 1963*. (TIC 176). For more details on USIS films in Thailand, see, Sakdina Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, “สงครามเย็น ภาพยนตร์ และการเมืองในประเทศไทย” [Cold War, Film and Politics in Thailand] in *ด้วยรัก: ประวัติศาสตร์เศรษฐกิจการเมืองและสังคมรวมบทความในโอกาสศาสตราจารย์กิตติคุณ ดร. ฉัตรทิพย์ นาถสุภาอายุ 72 ปี* [With Love: History of Political Economy and Society. A Collection of Essays to Commemorate the 72nd Birthday of Dr. Chatthip Nartsupa], ed. Chatthip Nartsupa (Bangkok: Sangsan, 2013), 184-192.

193 For example, USIS filmed *His Majesty's Visitor* and *Their Majesties in North America*. See, USIS, *List of USIS Films for 1968*. For some example in *Seripharb*, USIS, “ข้อความกระแสพระราชดำรัสของพระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวพระราชทาน ณ รัฐสภาของสหรัฐ” [His Majesty's Address Before U.S. Congress], *Seripharb*, no. 60 (1960): 36-37, 74-76.

194 The film is composed of four episodes portraying four different types of American life: a father and son who farm, industrial workers, shoe manufacturers and college students. It demonstrates American technological progress in farming, the higher standard of living of the American industrial workers due to advanced techniques and capitalism, the modern production of shoes, and higher education and life at an American university. USIS, *Impact of Three USIS Films on a Selected Village Audience in Thailand* (Bangkok: USIS Research Division, 1967). (TIC 135) And USIS, *Impact of Three USIS Films on College Students in Bangkok* (Bangkok: USIS, 1960), appendix (TIC 138).

in the United States), *Nautilus* (the American progress of submarine building), and *Jariang* (the Thai-US cooperation to develop villages on the Thai-Cambodia border), for example.<sup>195</sup>

In some respects, the King's presence in the American media narrated an integration of Thailand into the international arena where the United States was located at the centre. This may imply that the way the United States represented Thailand supported and created the dichotomy of Thai-ness and the American Other. It lacked explicit antagonistic sentiment characteristic of the set of identity dichotomies that arose from the narrative contestation between the Thai state and Thai leftists. The American Other, in this case, depicted Thailand's tomorrow, as a developed Thai-Self, the Other that the Thais should look up to, in the same sense that rural provinces should look up to Bangkok.<sup>196</sup>

An emergence of anthropological knowledge on Thailand or Thai studies in the late 1940s is another contribution of the United States to the construction and promotion Thai-ness.<sup>197</sup> Through the emergence of Thai studies brought about by the American anti-communist agenda, Thai society and culture were explained through an anthropological lens.<sup>198</sup> Because the growth of Thai studies was related to the American anti-communist policy in Thailand, early western anthropologists paid close attention to the study of rural villages, areas deemed potential communist targets, rather than Bangkok. An illustrative

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195 USIS, *Impact of Three USIS Films on College Students in Bangkok*.

196 Again, the Thai elites managed to keep admiration of the advanced American Other under control by promoting the concept of *kanpatthana* (development) as elaborated on in the previous section.

197 The rapid growth of Thai studies in American institutions should be noted. It started with the Cornell-Thailand project founded by Lauriston Sharp in 1947. The project was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation. Under the project, Sharp chose to study a farming society in Bangchan, a village not far from Bangkok, as a unit of analysis. In 1950, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, Sharp founded Cornell's Southeast Asia Program and became its first director until 1960. Cornell's Southeast Asia Program played a significant role in producing knowledge and scholars of Thai studies in order to meet the needs of the American government. Fifteen scholars graduated from Cornell in 1950s and many influential works in Thai studies were produced between the 1950s to 1960s, laying the foundation for the next surge of scholars in American universities. For example, G. William Skinner's research on the Chinese community in Thailand, Konrad Kingshill's village study in Chiang Mai, a study of the Thai peasant personality by Herbert Phillips, David K. Wyatt's study of educational reform in the reign of King Rama V, and research on the relationship between Isan villages and the Thai government. Besides Cornell, centres of Southeast Asian studies, which included scholars in Thai studies, were founded in another nine American universities in the 1960s: Yale, University of California (Berkeley), University of California at Los Angeles, Ohio University, Stanford, University of Hawaii, University of Washington, University of Michigan, and Indiana University. Anan Ganjanapan, "ไทยศึกษาในสังคมศาสตร์อเมริกัน" [Thai Studies in American Social Science] in *ทวนคิดค้นความคิดถึงศตวรรษไทยศึกษา* [Thinking Revisited: Half Century of Thai Studies] (Chiangmai: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Science, Chiangmai University, 2012), 18-24.

198 Peter F. Bell, "Western Conceptions of Thai Society: The Politics of American Scholarship," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 12, no. 1 (1982): 63.

example of the boom of Thai rural village studies can be seen in James Scott and Howard Leichter's *A Bibliography on Land, Peasants and Politics for Burma and Thailand* (1972), a research project funded by USAID to collect and record research on Thai and Burmese society. According to Scott and Leichter, there were 488 studies on Thai subjects, almost five times more than the number of research studies of Burma. The majority of the research on Thailand studied different aspects of Thai rural villages, for example, the social economy of agricultural communities, Thai peasants and the economy, village studies, and area studies (53, 54, 54, and 86 studies, respectively).<sup>199</sup>

As rural villages were emphasised in Thai studies, the image of the rural village became a dominant representation of Thailand in the Cold War period, and a representation of 'Thai-ness' in the eyes of foreign anthropologists. In the early period of Thai studies, the Thai village was described as highly individualistic, deeply religious, strongly nationalistic, and submissive to authority. This is due to the influence of work by Ruth Benedict (1943) and John F. Embree (1950) that suggested that Thai society lacked cohesive social organisations and thus had a 'loose structure'.<sup>200</sup> By comparing Thailand to Japan and the United States, Embree described Thai individualistic behaviour as, 'the almost determined lack of regularity, discipline, and regimentation... In contrast to Japan, Thailand lacks neatness and discipline; in contrast to the Americans, the Thai lacks neatness for administrative regularity and has no industrial time sense'.<sup>201</sup> In this sense, political interest and class conflict were absent from Thai society as its loose-structured society allowed for variations in individual behaviour and resulted in a combination of Thai individualistic behaviour and a loosely integrated social structure that is 'an attitude of minding one's own business when it comes to matters of action'.<sup>202</sup> Cornell's village studies, especially at Bang Chan village, are a good example of the notion of a loosely structured society.<sup>203</sup> The first

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199 Kengkij Kitirianglarp, *มานุษยวิทยาจักรวรรดิ: การประดิษฐ์ "หมู่บ้านชนบท" และกำเนิดมานุษยวิทยาไทยในยุคสงครามเย็น* [Empire Anthropology: The Invention of Rural Village and the Birth of Thai Anthropology during the Cold War]. A research project granted by the Thailand Research Fund, September 2016, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://www.academia.edu/30242801/>

200 Bell, "Western Conceptions of Thai Society," 68-69.

201 John F. Embree, "Thailand-A Loosely Structured Social System," *American Anthropologist* 52, no. 2 (April-June 1950): 182.

202 Embree, "Thailand-A Loosely Structured Social System," 187, 191.

203 Bang Chan was often called the 'Cornell village' because many Cornell scholars used it as a research site or a subject of study. Robert B. Texter, "Intermezzo: The Ernest Boesch I Knew a Half-Century Ago," in *Discovering Cultural Psychology: A Profile and Selected Readings of Ernest E. Boesch*, ed. Walter J. Loner and Susanna A. Hayes (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2007), 82.



Bang Chan village project was done by Lauriston Sharp in the late 1940s, funded by the Fulbright programme and the Ford Foundation. After Sharp, other Cornell scholars who studied the Bang Chan village are, for instance, Robert B. Textor, Herbert P. Phillips and Rose K. Goldstein. Kengkij notes that Cornell's village studies played a crucial role in establishing new knowledge about Thai society by introducing a new methodology that shaped the perception, and hence management, of the rural village in Thailand. In the Bang Chan project, a village became a commensurable system of social relationships. Statistical data, surveys, interviews, and other methods of data collection used in field research, together with western anthropological theories and methods, were employed to 'understand' rural villages for the first time. Lastly, unlike villages in the eyes of the Thai ruling elites of the past, the study of Bang Chan village paid attention to the relationships between villages.<sup>204</sup>

In the late 1960s, the assumption that Thai society had a loose structure was challenged. At the annual conference of the Association for Asian Studies in 1968, some scholars, such as Hans-Dieter Evers, J.A. Niels Mulder, and a Thai student at Cornell, Boonsanong Punyodyana, questioned the validity of this assumption.<sup>205</sup> The challenge to this assumption grew stronger when the Student Mobilisation Committee to End the War in Vietnam (SMC) revealed primary documents about a controversy in Thailand that caused a heated debate on ethical issues among American scholars.<sup>206</sup> There are several critiques on the notion of 'loose structure': overemphasis on the role of Buddhism, neglect of cultural diversity and class, and the tendency to stress vertical relationships and to ignore horizontal ones, for example.<sup>207</sup> Probably one of the strongest critical arguments is that American scholarship adopted the Thai ruling elite's view of Thai society.<sup>208</sup> An illustration is James C. Ingram's *Economic Change in Thailand since 1850* (1952), which extensively cited Prince

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204 Kengkij, *Empire Anthropology*, 34.

205 Anan, "Thai Studies in American Social Science," 27-28.

206 For more details on SMC's release of documents on the controversy in Thailand, its consequences, and responses from involved parties, please see Eric Wakin, *Anthropology Goes to War: Professional Ethics and Counterinsurgency in Thailand* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), chap. 6.

207 Anan, *Thinking Revisited*, 32-36. Bell, "Western Conceptions of Thai Society," 69.

208 Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State," 41.

Dilok's PhD thesis on Siamese agriculture.<sup>209</sup> The notion of loose structure is also similar to Prince Dilok's view on Thai people that 'the Siamese call themselves Thai, meaning a free man, and are proud of individual freedom. They do not know order and obey only when they agree...'. Prince Dilok also added that 'Buddhism has great influence, but does not benefit all economic lives in Siam. The Buddhist point of view about life renders people a lack of ambition.'<sup>210</sup> Respect for social hierarchy, free of conflict, a generally easy and simple life, are the characteristics of the rural village projected by the Thai ruling elites, or what they hoped to see.<sup>211</sup> In this case, critics not only challenged the notion of a loosely-structured society, but also questioned to what extent anthropology in Thailand was Americanised.

As we will see in Chapter 3 and 5, this set of assumptions about the loose structure of Thai society and other depictions of the 'Thai trait' found in these anthropological studies were used to explain Isan villagers and the Chinese as foreign Otherness. Scholars who studied villagers and the Chinese in Thai society, such as Charles Keyes and William Skinner, had academic connections to Embree and Sharp. They often explained Isan villagers and the Chinese by comparing and contrasting them to the depiction of loosely structured Thai society, hence, the dichotomy of foreign Others to Thai-ness in the field of American anthropology.

## Conclusion

This chapter illustrates that the Thai government and Thai leftists narrated the American Otherness to serve their political goals. The Thai government and ruling elites employed stories of the American Other to legitimise their rule, while Thai leftists promoted an opposite story of the United States to attack the Thai government. By narrating the United States as Thailand's great ally, who helped fend off a communist attack and kept Thailand safe and secure, the military government could justify their collaboration with the United

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209 Wichitwong Na Pombejra, preface to *เศรษฐกิจสยาม: บทวิเคราะห์ในพระองค์เจ้าดิlighนพรัฐกรมหมื่นสรรควิสัยนรบดี* [*Economy of Siam: Analysis by Prince Dilok Nabarath*], ed. Sujit Wongthes (Bangkok: Art and Culture, 2001), (13)-(14). Prince Dilok received his PhD from the University of Tübingen, Germany.

210 Prince Dilok Nabarath, *Agriculture in Siam*, quoted in Wichitwong, *Economy of Siam*, 36.

211 Bell, "Western Conceptions of Thai Society," 69.

States in exchange for aid and assistance. The Thai rulers also 'Thai-ised' American values to serve their political goals and created the dichotomy between the American Other and the Thai Self in the process. The concepts of 'Thai-style democracy' and *kanpatthana* are a case in point. The concept of Thai-style democracy did not only allow its military rulers to rule in an undemocratic way, but also 'Other-ised' the military's main opponents, Pridi Banomyong's followers and Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram. In other words, the remnants of the People's Party were blamed for bringing an incompatible 'foreign' political ideology to Thai soil.

*Kanpatthana* illustrated the Thai-isation of the concept of development, another defining trait of the United States alongside democracy in two respects. Firstly, *kanpatthana* was connected to royal nationalist history by asserting that Siamese rulers in the past practiced *kanpatthana* to demonstrate their royal benevolence. The other aspect is that it allowed Thai elites to establish hierarchical relationship between rural villagers, the Americans, and themselves. Through the concept of *kanpatthana*, the rural was clearly depicted as inferior to the Thai ruling elites (Bangkok) and was compelled to follow the elites' footsteps to become *patthana* [developed]. *Kanpatthana* was also employed to criticise American/Western Otherness in order to protect the Central and monarchical Thai-ness that these elites embraced, a value that was also detectable in leftist publications.

The American Otherness was also employed by Thai leftists to challenge the Thai state and the American influence in Thailand. Thai leftist intellectuals and students promoted stories of the United States as the country's enemy to undermine the Thai government's legitimacy and to reconstruct their self identity, or narrate a 'self story', that depicted them as the country's saviours who truly represented the nation. They narrated the military rulers who collaborated with the United States and served American interests, as the country's traitors, or the Other-ised 'un-Thai'.

Stories of the United States and the construction of the American Other in both official narratives and counter-narratives point out that Benedict Anderson's the 'American Era' is indeed misleading. By examining extensive narrative materials produced by the Thai government, ruling elites, and leftist intellectuals and activists, this study found that Thai agents were not completely Americanised as proposed by the American Era, but played active roles in subjectively employing a depiction of the American to achieve their political objectives. This chapter re-examined the origin of the concept of the American Era in

Anderson's introduction to *In The Mirror*, a set of leftist writings Anderson used to conclude that Thailand was Americanised in all aspects. Anderson arrived at this conclusion by focusing on the intention of the leftist authors who were rebellious and resisted the dominant power. This research proposes that the short stories in *In The Mirror* illustrated an attempt by leftist writers to rebel against the dominant power, as opposed to short stories that merely reflected Americanised society. This leads to an important issue regarding my approach to studying the American presence in Thai politics in the Cold War period particularly in terms of identity construction: the active roles of Thai agents were potentially underestimated as were the effects that the political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists had on shaping foreign Otherness and the Thai Self.

### Chapter 3 Upcountry: Isan Villagers as Foreign Others (Part I)

The Otherness of the Isan region and people is another point of contention in the contestation of Cold War narratives. By promoting depictions of villagers as underdeveloped and vulnerable to the communist threat in official narratives, the Thai authorities used these stories to justify their power and eliminate their opponents. This depiction was resisted by a different story of rural villagers in counter-narratives of the Cold War. According to these counter-narratives, instead of being targeted by the communist insurgency, rural villagers were actually victims of the Thai government and of the United States.

Similar to the American and Chinese Otherness in Cold War narratives, the Thai government and Thai leftists used stories of Isan villagers to construct or narrate their Self stories. Since the Isan people and the region were regarded as vulnerable to Thailand's survival in the Cold War period, both the Thai government and Thai leftists competed to assert their identity as the true 'protector' of the Isan people, which also means the Thai nation's saviour, while imposing an 'un-Thai' depiction on the opposing party, who risked making the Isan people susceptible to external threat. In other words, stories of Isan villagers were employed to constitute the Thai Self of the narrators thereby allowing them to strengthen their political control or challenge the dominant power.

By examining extensive narrative materials concerning the Isan people and region, and the Cold War that were produced by the Thai state and Thai leftists, this research found that both parties often compared and contrasted Isan with Bangkok-ness, or perceived Isan using the Central Thai/Bangkok perspectives. In other words, both sides contributed to an emergence of the dichotomy between Isan and Bangkok, or Isan as Bangkok's foreign (and inferior) Otherness, despite a sharp conflict between the two parties. One may argue that the Isan people were depicted 'un-Thai' because of their Lao ethnicity and thus should be regarded as Otherness to the 'Thai ethnicity', like the Chinese Other discussed in Chapter 5. However, this un-Thai ethnicity was described as one of Isan's regional traits, thus subsumed under the regional identity in this case.

As the dichotomy, along with a discriminative perception towards Isan, persists to this day, its root in the political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists through narrative contestation needs to be investigated. Nevertheless, this point and its political implications still remain unclarified despite a long history of academic interest in

Isan. Since Charles F. Keyes' studies on 'the Northeastern Problem' in 1966, his work has continued to influence other studies on the Northeast through the present day. Research from the mid 1960s to the 1970s explored the Isan villages and people and their 'problems' concerning communist dangers through anthropological studies.<sup>212</sup> From the 1980s onwards, studies on the Northeast of Thailand have dramatically expanded and included various topics. Isan identity or Isan regionalism has become a popular subject and been investigated from different angles, but only a few studies look at the formation of the dominant representation of Isan in Cold War Thailand, let alone investigate the construction of Isan-ness as the opposite of Bangkok in the political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists in the context of the Cold War.<sup>213</sup>

Addressing the gap in studies on Isan identity, or Isan-ness and the Cold War is one of the primary objectives of this research. However, since the topic is complicated and involves extensive detail, the discussion here is divided between Chapter 3 and 4. This chapter focuses on the stories of villagers in official narratives of the Cold War, while the following chapter deals with the depiction of villagers by the Thai leftist movement. The main argument is that through official narratives of the Cold War, Isan came into 'existence'

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212 Charles F. Keyes was one of the first American anthropologists who chose to conduct field research in a village in Isan. Examples of studies on Isan in the Cold War influenced by Keyes include, Thomas Kirsch's 'Development and Mobility among the Phu Thai of Northeast Thailand' (1966), Suthep Suntonpesat's *Sociology in the Northeastern Villages* (1968), Dalip Saund's 'Ban Khua Kaj: A Case Study of the Responses to Development in a Northeast Thai Village' (1969), and Wichai Bamrungrit's *Isan: A Bitter Reality* (1974).

213 Indeed, Keyes is the first scholar to propose the concept of Isan regionalism in his 1967 data paper. He argued that it emerged from the inter-group interactions between Isan people and the Central Thais. However, as elaborated later in this chapter, one of his flaws is that he did not include Isan regionalism among Isan leftists in his investigation, thus he inaccurately illustrated Isan regionalism in Cold War Thailand. He also missed the American role in constructing Isan regional identity. Recent studies concerning identity or the perception of Isan in Cold War Thailand, include Kengkij's *Empire Anthropology*, Dararut Mettariganon's PhD dissertation 'The Political Groupings of Isan Members of Parliament, 1933-1951' (2000), Streckfuss' article 'An 'Ethnic' Reading of 'Thai' History in the Twilight of the Century-old Official 'Thai' National Model' (2013), and Martin Platt's *Isan Writers, Thai Literature* (2013). However, none of these studies engages with the formation of Isan identity from the political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists and the related Cold War situation. Kengkij studies Thai rural villages as an 'invented' unit in the Cold War period. Although he refers to rural villages in Isan, the construction of Isan identity is not his focus. Dararut focuses on regional sentiment of Isan MPs after the Siamese Revolution in 1932 to the early years of the Cold War period. Streckfuss studies Thai-isation of Lao ethnicity and Northeast Thailand to explain the transformation from multi-ethnicity to Thai mono-ethnicity, and Thai mono-ethnicity from the nineteenth century to present days. Similar to Keyes, the article also focuses on the conflict between the Northeast and the central authority, and minimally engaged with the Cold War period. Martin Platt, on the contrary, gives a lot of attention to the formation of Isan regional traits in literary works by Isan writers in Cold War Thailand to explain a rise of Isan regionalism in the 1980s. However, the book does not clarify ideological conflict and transformation from the strong leftist tone to Isan regionalism in these writings.

and became a dominant representation of the Thai countryside, a representation that was the opposite of Bangkok during the Cold War period. In other words, Isan was Bangkok's Otherness. By narrating Isan villagers as targets of the communists, the Thai government was able to assert its identity as Isan's protector, which in turn led to tightened control over Isan and Thai subjects in general.<sup>214</sup> These stories allowed the Thai government to establish an unequal and exploitative relationship between Bangkok and Isan that manifested through development programmes and projects that promoted Bangkok as a model for Isan. This chapter also explains that anthropological studies on Isan that emerged during the Cold War period, which were endorsed by the Thai state, contributed to the power of stories about Isan in the official narrative and led to the growth of Isan's presence in popular media. From the 1960s, rural villagers in Isan and Isan people gradually replaced an unspecified countryside in popular movies, music, and novels.

Besides the main data and original sources used across this study that I already mentioned in the introduction (such as *Tesaphiban*, *Seripharb* and publications by Public Relations Department), this chapter also engages with materials that particularly concerned the Isan region and villagers. They include studies on Isan in the Cold War period by both foreign and Thai scholars, USIS surveys on the Northeast of Thailand, influential anti-communist propaganda materials by both the Thai state and the United State such as the USIS films (*The Community Development Worker*, *Cold Fire*, and *The Spread of Kinship*), and Kukrit's *Red Bamboo*. Successful popular novels, films, and music about Isan from different times are also included in this chapter to illustrate the development of Isan's appearance in popular media in relation to the Cold War context. For example, popular novels examined include *The Revolutionary District Chief*, *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma*, *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, and *A Child of the Northeast*.<sup>215</sup> Popular movies about Isan include, for example, *Charming Bangkok*, a film version of *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* and *A Child of the Northeast*. Some background and illustrations of *lukthung* ('child of the field') music will also be discussed. A particular focus is also placed on writers, film producers and singers who came from Isan, such as Boonchoke Chiamwiriya, Kanchana Nakkhanan, Pramote Tatsanasuwan, and Surasi Patham.

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214 The main target of narratives on Isan and other foreign Others are actually Thai subjects in general. These foreign Others gave Thai subjects an idea of how to be a 'good' Thai.

215 These novels are either received national wards or re-printed many times, or both.

## Background: Isan and the Cold War

The term *Isan* is derived from Pali-Sanskrit, meaning Northeast. Isan is Thailand's largest region and is home to one third of the Thai population. It should be noted that a history of Isan as a part of Thailand according to the modern concept of nation-state is short. Also, when considering ethnicity, culture, and language, people in Isan are 'closer' to Lao people than to Central Thais or Bangkokians. The current understanding of Isan as the Northeastern region of Thailand, or Pak Isan, emerged in 1913. The term Isan was first used in 1900 referring to 'monthon Isan' when the modern administrative system, *thesaphiban*, was introduced. Before the administrative reform, this region was known as the 'Eastern Lao chiefdoms' or 'Jungle Khmer'.<sup>216</sup> The majority of the Isan people speak a linguistic variety of Lao and share cultural and historical background with the people of present-day Laos.<sup>217</sup> In official Cold War narratives in Thailand, rural villages and villagers often appear as targets of communist insurgencies and in need of protection and attention from the Thai state. Villagers in rural areas are generally described as poor, dull, docile, uneducated, uncivilised, and alienated from central Thai-ness, the very qualities that make them susceptible to communist infiltration. Those often referred to in Cold War narratives include the hill tribes in the North, villagers in the southern provinces of Thailand, and those in the Northeast, or in Isan, where the majority of people identify as ethnically Lao. However, the investigation of villagers in Cold War narratives in this thesis exclusively deals with Isan and its relationship to Bangkok, or the central Thais. The purpose of this delimitation is not only to make the research more manageable: Isan was the region that received the most attention from the Thai government and the United States as it was considered the region most susceptible to a communist insurgency in Thailand.

In the Cold War period, Isan was considered the prime target of a communist insurgency by both the Thai state and the insurgents themselves. The region was chosen to be the headquarters of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the party's cadres often

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216 In Thai is หัวเมืองลาวตะวันออก and เขมรป่าดง, respectively. Arin Wannachat, "ความรู้เรื่องอีสานของชนชั้นนำสยาม พ.ศ. 2433-2475" [The Siamese Elites' Knowledge of "Isan", 1890-1932] (master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2010), 18-19.

217 Charles F. Keyes, "Ethnic Identity and Loyalty of Villagers in Northeastern Thailand," *Asian Survey* 6, no. 7 (1966): 362.



gathered in Isan because the CPT viewed rebellion in this region as most achievable.<sup>218</sup> The Thai state employed various measures to ensure national security in Isan. The Provincial Director for the Suppression of Communist Activities, normally a senior administrative or police officer, was designated by the Thai government to each area in Isan. Provincial Directors had the power to, for example, interrogate, arrest, and search without a warrant; order the handing over of weapons; and forbid people from leaving their residences.<sup>219</sup> Security programmes were accompanied by development projects that concentrated on the Isan region to pre-empt a communist insurgency. To the Thai government and the United States, Isan was susceptible to communist threats for many reasons. One reason was geographical location, because Isan shares northern, eastern and southern borders with Laos and Cambodia. Although the Mekong River forms the border between Thailand and Laos for approximately 500 kilometres, the river is shallow enough to cross in the dry season, and easy to cross in small boats at any time. Also, the dense tropical forest and mountainous landscape along the borders and particularly the Phu Phan mountains, an L-shape range of mountains covering most of the provinces in northern and eastern Isan, were deemed beneficial to communist infiltration from outside Thailand. Phu Phan is very well-known as one of the most crucial important strategic bases of the communist insurgency in Thailand due to its impenetrable terrain with many caves and grottoes. Poverty in Isan, which is related to chronic drought, and lack of access to development and education, was also deemed by the Thai state as another significant factor that made Isan vulnerable to a communist insurgency. Inadequate attention and care from the Thai authorities resulted in poor public health services, the insecurity of life and property, and eventually resentment towards Thai state officers among Isan people. These conditions benefited the growth and expansion of communism in Isan and required urgent and serious countermeasures from the Thai government.<sup>220</sup>

It was in the Cold War period that Thai rulers first recognised that the that situation and conditions in Isan had an immense impact on the whole country. After the Thai

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218 Somchai Phatharathananunth, "Civil Society in Northeast Thailand: The Struggle of the Small Scale Farmers' Assembly of Isan" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2001), 28-33. And, Charles Keyes, *Finding Their Voice: Northeast Villagers and the Thai State* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2014), 53-54.

219 Thanin Kraivichien, *การใช้กฎหมายป้องกันคอมมิวนิสต์ในประเทศไทย* [Using the Anti-communist Law in Thailand], 5th ed. (Bangkok: Security Centre, Ministry of Defence, 1974), 265.

220 Rit Ittipracha, *แบ่งอีสาน 16 จุด* [Dividing 16 Areas of Isan] (Bangkok: Wittayayut, 1975), 62-69.

government under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat launched anti-communist projects and policies, 'backwardness' in Isan and the rural areas was perceived as 'a dead weight against progress' in the country.<sup>221</sup> The emergence of the 'Northeastern (Isan) Problem' as a major focus of government paranoia in the Cold War is an illustrative case. The Isan Problem drew on anti-communist anthropological knowledge by proposing that there was a possibility of a communist-initiated separatist victory in the Northeast due to the region's economic and political conditions.<sup>222</sup> To deal with the Isan problem, the government, with American assistance, launched the Northeast Development Plan in 1962, the country's first regional plan to improve the standard of living in Isan and deal with economic problems.

Indeed, the Thai elites perceived the Isan region as backward long before the Cold War period. However, they never perceived Isan as crucial to the country's survival and prosperity, especially prior to the Siamese Revolution of 1932. The Siamese elites perceived Isan as a backward bulwark of Lao culture and that because it was a peripheral region, it had nothing to do with the status or well-being of the Siamese territory as a whole.<sup>223</sup> The Siamese rulers paid little attention to Isan as long as there were no rebellions and tribute from Isan to Bangkok was not interrupted. The Cold War marked a drastic change of Isan's position, from an unseen region to a strategically important area. It is not an exaggeration to say that Isan started to concretely 'exist' in Thai public perception during the Cold War period through the stories of the Cold War that permeated Thai society.

The government's fear and suspicion towards the Isan region and people was also rooted in an unfriendly past between Isan and the central authority. To Bangkok, Isan often caused disturbances because they were not truly loyal to the country. The main reason, according to Bangkok rulers, was the ethnic proximity between people in Isan and Laos, a neighbouring country that was narrated throughout Thailand's national history as untrustworthy to Siam. One of the best illustrative examples of this is the story of King

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221 Boontan Chaluaysi, "การพัฒนาการท้องถิ่นในประเทศไทย"[Local Development in Thailand], *Tesaphiban* 53, no. 9(1958): 920. Chalor Dhammasiri, "การพัฒนาการนครหลวง"[Development of the Capital], *Tesaphiban* 55, no. 2 (1960): 177.

222 Charles F. Keyes, "Peasant and Nation: A Thai-Lao Village in a Thai State" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1966), 29-30. Also, Suthep, *Sociology in the Northeastern Villages*, 2-4.

223 Before the concept of the modern nation-state was introduced in Southeast Asia, it was common and acceptable that tiny chiefdoms and smaller kingdoms had multiple sovereignties. The Lao region, part of which was annexed into Thailand in the late nineteenth century, was composed of small chiefdoms 'under two overlords' (สองฝ่ายฟ้า) or 'under three overlords' (สามฝ่ายฟ้า). See, Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 96.

Anouvong of the Lao kingdom ‘betraying’ Siam in the reign of King Rama III.<sup>224</sup> After political reforms forced Isan under the central authority in the reign of King Rama V, millenarian revolts emerged in Isan due to growing dissatisfaction with centralised control and especially to sharp increases in taxation. The revolts were mostly composed of Isan farmers. The biggest revolt was the Holy Man rebellion in 1902 when at least three major movements rose in Ubon, Sisaket, and Roi Et provinces to free themselves from Siamese rule.<sup>225</sup> After the 1932 Revolution, members of parliament from Isan formed political groups to negotiate resources and a budget for the Isan region from the central government, and to bring problems in Isan to the government’s attention. Some Isan representatives such as Tiang Sirikhan and Thong-in Puripat joined and played an influential role in the Free Thai Movement, an underground resistance movement against Japan when Thailand was under Field Marshal Phibunsongkram, an ultra-nationalist military leader, and became a Japanese ally in the second World War. The Isan representatives also had connections with nationalist movements in Laos and Vietnam, which resulted in their being charged with separatism after Phibun returned to power. As their relationship with Pridi Banomyong developed from the anti-Japanese underground resistance, they gave political support to Pridi against the military regime in later political turbulences until Pridi went into exile after the coup in 1947. As the confrontation between the pro-Pridi Isan representatives and the military government escalated, the five important leading figures of the Isan representative group were arrested and brutally killed in Bangkok and Kanchanaburi.<sup>226</sup>

The Thai state’s view of Isan was related to the Indochina conflict. Due to the rise of communism in Southeast Asia, especially in the neighbouring countries of Cambodia, Laos,

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224 The uprising of King Anouvong is often narrated as a betrayal against Siamese rulers. As a result, Siam had no choice but to send forces to defeat and capture the ambitious Lao king to Bangkok where Anouvong was brutally executed. However, this historical account has been heavily challenged by many scholars who argued that the uprising was a response to Bangkok’s exploitation and tightened control. See, for example, Thawat Punnothok, “พื้นเวียง: การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์และวรรณกรรมอีสาน” [Peun Vieng: A Study of Isan History and Literature] (PhD diss., Thammasat University, 1983), 78-90. Korakit Choomgrant argued that a story of King Anouvong repeatedly appears in Thai history textbooks in order to stimulate Thai nationalist sentiment and superiority to Laos. See, Korakit Choomgrant, “Laos in Thai Textbook” in *Thai Nationalism in Thai Textbooks*, 126-162.

225 Somchai, “Civil Society in Northeast Thailand,” 28-33, and Keyes, *Finding Their Voice*, 39-47.

226 This was one of the most shocking incidents in that period of time. Four Isan MPs, Thong-in Puripat, Tawin Udol, Tawee Boonyaket, and Chamlong Daoreung, were arrested and shot to death when they were moved to another prison. Tiang Sirikan, together with his group, were arrested later and burned to death in Kanchanaburi province. On political movements and the role of Isan representatives after the 1932 Revolution, see Dararut Mettariganon, “The Political Groupings of Isan Members of Parliament, 1933-1951” (PhD diss., Chulalongkorn University, 2000), chap. 4-5.

and Vietnam, Isan was regarded as the Achilles' heel of Thailand. The whole country would be in peril if communism successfully prevailed in Isan. The threat looked imminent in the eye of the Thai rulers especially when the communist movement gained the upper hand in Laos, when the Lao Monarchy was overthrown by the communist movement in 1975. This caused fear among Thai rightists that King Rama IX might share the same fate. The rise of communism sharpened conflicts between the rightist and leftist groups in Thailand leading to the student massacre at Thammasat University in 1976.<sup>227</sup>

### **Isan Villagers in Official Narrative: Stories of the Victims**

Villagers in the official narratives of the Cold War were depicted as victims of the communist insurgency because they were impoverished, uneducated, naïve, and far from the capital, and thus in need of help and attention. Heavily promoted by the government, who had collaborated with the United States, the narrative became prevalent in Thai society. In the Northeast, the Thai government promoted anti-communist propaganda that warned rural people to stay vigilant for a communist insurgency. The government spread this propaganda through several channels such as local synoptic leaders (village headmen, teachers, and monks, for example), entertainment (*molam* or traditional Lao folk music), and radio and newspapers.<sup>228</sup> Anti-communist radio programmes became increasingly effective because more people in Isan owned a radio from the 1960s onwards.<sup>229</sup> According to the monitoring report for Udon radio station 09 in mid-1966 by USIS, anti-communist programmes were broadcast from every 30 minutes to every two hours.<sup>230</sup> Somchai Rakvichit, a Thai researcher who took part in a psychological operation in Ubonratchathani and Nakhon

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227 Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms," 170-171.

228 In Isan areas where radio ownership was low, personal contacts played a significant role in spreading information. Local leaders, therefore, were an efficient channel to promote anti-communist propaganda in Isan. William J. Klausner, *Notes on Values, Media Habits and Some Central Attitudes of Rural Thailand as They Apply to USIS Programs: A Memorandum* (Bangkok: USIS, 1959), 1-2. (TIC 128)

229 In 1960, the government set a policy to encourage every household to own a transistor radio, which included lowering the price of radios and even distributing free transistor radios to many villages. Pinyapan Potjanalawan, *กำเนิด "ประเทศไทย" ภายใต้เผด็จการ* [Birth of "Thailand" under Dictatorship] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2015), 127-128. Phimmasone Michael Rattanasengchanh, "Thailand's Second Triumvirate: Sarit Thanarat and the Military, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the Monarchy and the United States, 1957-1963" (master's thesis, University of Washington, 2012), 64-65.

230 USIS, *Monitoring Report for Udorn Radio Station 09*, June 15-July 1, 1966. (TIC 22292)

Phanom provinces, concluded that for the people of Isan, especially village leaders, radio seemed to be the most reliable news source.<sup>231</sup>

The Thai government and the United States considered 'developing' the Isan region crucial to prevent the Isan people from joining the communists. Here the official narratives took the form of government programmes that resulted in an extension of the central authority in Isan. The Thai government, with American support and assistance, launched development and construction projects in Isan for security purposes. The Mobile Development Unit (MDU) and the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) are illustrative examples. The purpose of MDU project was 'to win and/or hold the loyalty of villagers in remote, disaffected areas by bringing a responsive government to the people and by creating an awareness in rural areas of the functions and responsibilities of both the government and the people. To achieve this primary objective MDUs carried out construction activities (such as roads and small dams) conducted programs in a variety of areas (for example, agriculture and health), and provided other essential government services.'<sup>232</sup> MDU worked in the provinces using a three step process: survey, training, and operations. After a potential MDU province was selected, a preliminary survey was conducted to identify its security and development needs. Statistics and data regarding the province were then collected to determine a tentative plan.<sup>233</sup>

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231 Somchai Rakwichit, *Seminar Report on Accessibility to Local Population: Problems and Recommendations*, Maruekatayawan Training Centre, 17 November 1970, Military Research and Development, 4-5. (TIC 25907)

232 Department of State, *Mobile Development Unit PROP*, 22 May 1969, accessed April 4, 2017, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pdaad616b1.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdaad616b1.pdf)

233 The Mobile Information Team members also provided some assistance to the MDU planning. See, USIS, *Report a Visit to Mobile Development Unit 5, Nongkhai Province, February 25-March 8, 1964*, 1. (TIC 174) The Mobile Information Team Program was a joint-collaboration between the RTG and the American government in 1961. Its main purpose was to create a channel of communication between the Thai government and the people living in remote areas considered prone to communist influences, particularly the Northeast and North of Thailand. The Thai government would gain a better understanding of the needs and conditions of the villages, including the villagers' opinions and attitudes, through data and information provided by the teams. The program also aimed to promote a positive understanding of the Thai government among villagers by using information materials (films and printed materials) supported by USIS, in close coordination with the Thai government. As the operation was based on friendly personal contact, most of the information materials aimed to enhance loyalty to the Thai state among the villagers rather than promote anti-communist sentiment. See, *Report the Eighth Mobile Information Team Field Trip, A Follow-Up Trip to Nongkhai Province, January 15-February 4, 1963*, 1. (TIC 189); *Report on the Sixteenth Mobile Information Team Trip Visits to 11 Villages in Nakorn Phanom Province, January 15-30, 1964*, 1. (TIC 175)

The Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) was another programme that originated from the growing concern over communist activities in Isan provinces. The programme aimed to ‘increase the income of the rural population, to improve ties between the Royal Thai Government and rural people, and to strengthen local self-government’.<sup>234</sup> Initially, the programmes covered only security sensitive districts in six provinces in the Northeast: Loei, Nong Khai, Udorn, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, and Ubon. However, due to the expansion of a perceived communist insurgency, especially in the Northeast and northern provinces, the programme was expanded to cover not only all of the six original provinces, but to include other provinces deemed vulnerable to an insurgency.<sup>235</sup> The programme, at first, focused almost entirely on the construction of roads to access the ARD areas. Construction activities were later carried out according to the needs and conditions of the selected areas, for example, constructing and repairing water reservoirs, occupational promotion, mobile health services and landscape renovation of schools and temples.<sup>236</sup>

The stories of the Isan region and its villagers as the target of a communist insurgency confirmed and reinforced the dichotomy between Bangkok (us) and Isan (them), which depicted the latter depicted as ‘inferior’ to the former.<sup>237</sup> In the anti-communist radio programmes produced by the government’s Public Relations Department and broadcast by the Radio of Thailand, in addition to emphasising that Isan was the target of a communist insurgency, they repeated that communist propaganda worked in Isan because the people were uneducated.

Communist propaganda might be just a joke for **us educated people**, but for the population in rural areas far from knowledge about communists and communism, the propaganda affected **them** at a certain level... Communist propaganda is pathetic because it is based on lies that in no way can convince

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234 USOM, *A Brief History of USOM Support to the Office of Accelerated Rural Development* (September 1969), 1, accessed April 4, 2017, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pdacr645.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacr645.pdf)

235 Muscat, *Thailand and the United States*, 160. And, USOM, *A Brief History of USOM Support*, 3.

236 Somsri Chaiwanichaya, “นโยบายการพัฒนาภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของรัฐบาลไทยระหว่าง พ.ศ. 2494-2519” [The Thai Government Policies to Develop the Northeast, 1951-1976] (PhD diss., Chulalongkorn University, 2005), 257.

237 People in the Isan region (and other rural remote areas in the North) were perceived as barbarian and uncivilised ‘Others’ when the Siamese elites adopted the concept of modern ethnography the nineteenth century. See, Thongchai Winichakul, “The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910” in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 38-62.

us. However, this is different to ordinary people in the rural areas.<sup>238</sup> (emphasis mine)

Tolerance against communist propaganda was used to separate the educated and the uneducated. Besides, it was *them*, the people in Isan and rural areas, who were ‘uneducated’ and thus vulnerable to the communist threat, not *us*, the educated people in town.<sup>239</sup> Other programmes provoked audiences for being ‘stupid and easily deceived’ if they believed communist propaganda.<sup>240</sup> Brainwashed people or communist sympathisers were also deemed ‘un-Thai’ because the main objective of the communist insurgency was to destroy the (Buddhist) Religion, the Nation, and the King.<sup>241</sup> This particularly applied to the Isan people, whose loyalty had long been questioned by Siamese/Thai rulers due to their geographical, ethnic and cultural proximity to Laos.

The stories of villager victims were prevalent among government officials and staff from Bangkok who worked in rural areas in Isan. Government officials and staff employed these narratives to identify themselves in relation to the villagers. A case in point is that official staff and local administrators in the development programmes were sent to Isan carrying a sense of *noblesse oblige* with them, and which can sometimes be seen in *Tesaphiban* and *Pattanakornsarn*.<sup>242</sup> In *Tesaphiban*, Thai officials emphasised that underdevelopment in Isan could jeopardise national security, or the other way around, that the security problem hampered development in Isan.<sup>243</sup> In *Pattanakornsarn*, community

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238 Public Relations Department, “สิ่งที่คอมมิวนิสต์ไม่พูดถึง” [What did the communists not talk about?] in *คอมมิวนิสต์คิดร้ายอย่างไร* [What Is the Communist’s Evil Thought?] (Bangkok: Public Relations Department, 1968), 3-4. The book is a collection of selected articles on communism and the communist insurgency that were broadcast on the Radio of Thailand between 1964 and 1967.

239 Education was regarded as both a means and a symbol of development. Many *kanpatthana* projects in the Cold War period focused on educational expansion particularly in rural areas. Using education to indicate the superior status or position of Thai elites or Bangkokians is the same as using the concept of *kanpatthana* to establish a hierarchical relationship between Thai elites/Bangkok and rural villagers. Please see Chapter 2.

240 Public Relations Department, “การโฆษณาชวนเชื่อของคอมมิวนิสต์” [Deceitful communist propaganda] in *What Is The Communists’ Evil Thought*, 38.

241 Public Relations Department, “กองโจรคอมมิวนิสต์ไทย” [Thai communist guerrillas] in *What Is The Communist’s Evil Thought*, 156-157.

242 *Tesapiban* [เทศาภิบาล] is a monthly periodical by the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior, launched in 1906 and active since then. This is the second oldest magazine in Thailand (the first is the Royal Thai Government Gazette). *Tesapiban*’s main audiences include provincial administrators and local government staff. *Pattanakornsarn* [พัฒนาการสาร] is a magazine issued by the Community Development Department of the Ministry of the Interior to circulate news and information between the government and community development workers.

243 Prapas Charusathien, “ความสงบเรียบร้อยของบ้านเมืองเป็นรากฐานของการพัฒนาประเทศ” [The Country’s Peace and Order Is a Foundation of National Development], *Tesapiban* 61, no. 3 (March 1966): 239-268. This article was

development workers, or *pattanakon*, were encouraged to see their responsibilities as an effort ‘to bring development to the many rural Thais who are underdeveloped and suffering. This is to bring them more happiness and development and is a way to make the country prosperous’.<sup>244</sup> Therefore, it was not a surprise when some community development workers compared their duty of developing the Isan villages to the Europeans developing America, and the villagers to the Native Americans.<sup>245</sup>

Under the concept of development, villagers were deemed inefficient in cultivating and producing goods because of their idleness and lack of agricultural knowledge. As rural farmers worked only in the harvest season, or 191 days per year, the rest of time was wasted on unproductive activities.<sup>246</sup> By promoting the idea of development in rural areas, villagers would learn to manage their environment for the production of agriculture and discard ‘old’ beliefs that prevented ‘development’.<sup>247</sup> The Community Development programme and its concept of development emphasised the inferior status of villagers to the capital, thereby shaping the relationship between Bangkok and rural villages so that it strengthened the dominant position of Bangkok or the central Thai-ness over the rural villagers.

The United States also supported the official stories of villagers who were susceptible to a communist insurgency. The United States Information Service (USIS) in Bangkok produced various printed materials to promote an anti-communist campaign in Thailand. In 1966, they included the following: *Pattanakarn*, a USIS monthly wall newspaper in Thai illustrating development in Thailand; *Freedom vs. Communism*, the anti-communist cartoon posters; *Be Aware of Agitators*, the anti-communist posters particularly attributed to the Thai police and *It Happened in Ban Pang Pone*, the anti-communist cartoon narrative.

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from the speech Prapas gave at the College of Commerce, The Thai Chamber of Commerce, on February 23, 1966. For another example, please see, Technical Service Division, Department of Provincial Administration, “ผู้ช่วยผู้ใหญ่บ้านฝ่ายรักษาความสงบ” [Assistant Village Headman in Peacekeeping], *Tesapiban* 62, no. 3 (March 1967): 239. This programme was broadcast on the Radio of Thailand on February 7, 1967.

244 Thanom Kittikachorn, quoted in, *Pattanakonsarn* 1, no.2 (October 1967): (3). The status of the Community Development workers or *pattanakon* was similar to that of assistant district officers, but their work included carrying out the projects predetermined by the central authorities in the development districts using local labour and a very limited budget. Keyes, *Finding Their Voice*, 106.

245 Seri Kiatbanlue, “จดหมายจากเขตพัฒนา” [Letters from Development Area], *Pattanakornsarn* 1, no. 3 (December 1967): 85-86.

246 Uthai Hiranto, “บทบาทของกำนันผู้ใหญ่บ้านในการพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจชนบท” [A Role of Kamnan and Village Headman in Developing Rural Economy], *Tesapiban* 63, no. 8 (August 1968): 959.

247 Prapas, “The Country’s Peace and Order Is a Foundation of National Development,” 263.



In terms of radio broadcasting, USIS Bangkok also produced 41 hours of radio programmes a week that consisted of music (16 percent), news and commentary (19 percent), and other message type programmes such as interviews, special events, and radio programmes that supported priority security themes, and discussed development and the communist threat in Thailand (65 percent).<sup>248</sup> USIS used the Lao language in news commentaries and *molam*, the Isan style of folk singing, to deliver messages on security and development. Lao-speaking soap operas under the themes of anti-communism, security, and development were broadcast for 30 minutes five days a week. A total of 53 radio stations, including five in the Northeast, transmitted these programmes.<sup>249</sup> Unfortunately, most of the information and records on anti-communist radio programmes in Isan are missing. This analysis on how villagers were depicted in American propaganda, thus relies on printed materials namely the *Seripharb* magazine and USIS anti-communist films (*The Community Development Worker*, *Cold Fire*, and *The Spread of Kinship*).

Stories of Isan villagers in American media are similar to those produced by the Thai government. However, what seems to be different is that the United States often connected the situation of the villagers to the international context; the United States defined their assistance to Isan as a part of the American commitment to the Free World. The *Seripharb* magazine, a USIS periodical, is a good example.<sup>250</sup> Although stories of villagers and the situation in Isan often appeared in the magazine, articles and news stories about villagers in other regions and in neighbouring countries, who also received American assistance, were also published. For example, 'The Good Neighbours' is about how the United States helped farmers develop in Asia, the US-Thai collaboration of sending rice to Lao to alleviate famine in 'Rice Delivery by Aircraft', 'Miracle in Countryside' tells the story of free vaccinations for sick cattle in rural Cambodia, 'Food for the Whole Country' is about how the United States helped Sri Lankan farmers increase rice production, 'Development in Rice Fields' emphasised the American contribution to successful rice farming in Taiwan, and 'Model

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248 USIS, *USIS: Thailand* (Bangkok: USIS, 1966), 6. (TIC 5097)

249 USIS, *USIS: Thailand*, 6-7 (TIC 5097)

250 *Seripharb* was circulated widely in Thailand targeting village headmen, every primary and secondary school and every government office. In 1966, the magazine printed 125,000 copies, 32,000 were sent to paying subscribers and the rest were distributed free. More than 50 percent of its articles and stories were devoted to the issues of security and development in Thailand, especially in Isan. USIS, *USIS: Thailand*, 8.

Village' showed how the Americans helped develop a village in the Chonburi province.<sup>251</sup> In this respect, *Seripharb* did not only strengthen the depiction of underdeveloped villagers who needed support from Washington, it also pointed out that many villagers in Asia experienced the same situation. The audience could therefore place themselves and the Isan villages within a global context. In other words, *Seripharb* is an example of how Cold War narratives created an image of the international that reinforced the global hierarchical relationship between the underdeveloped and the developed.

Similar stories of the villagers in Isan and the American contribution also appeared in USIS films, such as *The Community Development Worker* (1958), *Cold Fire* (1966), and *The Spread of Kinship* (1966).<sup>252</sup> *The Community Development Worker* is an 18-minute long film using Lao language singing *molam* to narrate the story.<sup>253</sup> The main purpose of the film is to introduce community development workers to its audience, which mainly consisted of rural villagers in Isan. In the film, a few westerners appear as experts who give advice to community development worker and a physician treating sick villagers. The film also explains that the Southeast Asia Organisation Treaty (SEATO) provides support for community development and protected villagers from a communist insurgency. At the end of the film, the villagers, called 'the Thai-Isan', successfully overcome drought and board a

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251 “เพื่อนบ้านที่ดี” [The Good Neighbours], *Seripharb*, no.9 (1956): 2-5; “ส่งข้าวทางอากาศ” [Rice Delivery by Aircraft], *Seripharb*, no. 10 (1965): 6-9; “ปาฏิหาริย์ในชนบท” [Miracles in Countryside], *Seripharb*, no. 20 (1957): 24-25; “อาหารเพื่อคนทั้งชาติ” [Food for the Whole Country], *Seripharb*, no. 41 (1959), 14-15; “พัฒนาการบนผืนนา” [Development in Rice Fields], *Seripharb*, no. 37 (1959): 16-17; “หมู่บ้านตัวอย่าง” [Model Village], *Seripharb* no. 37 (1959): 22-25.

252 *Cold Fire* and *The Community Development Worker* are available on YouTube, while *The Spread of Kinship* is open to public access at the Thai Film Archive in Thailand. USIS, “Cold Fire,” accessed September 3, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0NnwPL-7Dc>. And, USIS, “The Community Development Worker,” accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wV9PEtXe4s>.

253 *The Community Development Worker* was often delivered to rural villagers by the Mobile Information Team (MIT), a programme that evolved from discussions between the United States and the Thai government in 1961. The main objective of the programme was to create a preferred understanding between the Thai government and people in remote areas by establishing a flow of information between the two parties. The central authorities would learn the villagers’ needs and attitudes while the villagers would develop a positive perception towards the government agents. According to the report on the MIT field trip to eleven villages in Nakhon Phanom province, Isan, in January 1964, the movies were screened every night from seven to midnight. Besides *The Community Development Worker*, other selected films included the following: *Railroads of Thailand*, a documentary showing the life and customs of people around the country; *Bungkla*, a film about Border Patrol Police around the Bungkla district in Isan; *Wealth in Waters*, a documentary about fishing in Thailand with American assistance; *Jungle Farmer*, a story about Thai people who started farming in an underdeveloped area; and some films about the Thai monarch. USIS, *Report on the Sixteenth Mobile Information Team Trip Visits to 11 Villages in Nakhon Phanom Province, January 15-30, 1964*, 1 and 7-9. (TIC 175)

train with beautiful melons that they have grown to sell in town and neighbouring countries.<sup>254</sup>

Unlike *The Community Development Worker*, *Cold Fire* is a fully-fledged anti-communist propaganda film that tells the story of a communist insurgency in Isan. This two-hour movie was a staple anti-communist material that USIS and the Thai state used in anti-communist campaigns across the country, not only in Isan. According to *The Cold Fire Comprehension Survey* conducted by USIS in 1967, the film reached a wide audience in Isan. Although most of the villager respondents spoke Lao, they understood the premise of *Cold Fire* even though the film was in the Central Thai language. The film was shown in five villages in Isan (three in Ubon and two in Nakhon Phanom) and on the following day 194 people randomly selected from these villages were questioned (30 to 55 adults per village). 156 out of 194 people, or 80 percent, had seen at least some part of *Cold Fire*. Approximately two thirds of these people had seen the entire film.<sup>255</sup> In terms of the comprehension of the communist threat, the film was considered successful. Three fourths recognised which people in the film were either a friend or a foe and knew that the armed people in the jungle were communist terrorists. 86 percent also knew why these armed men deceived the villagers. However, in relation to foreign assistance, only 40 percent knew what kind of assistance was given to the villagers and how the communists reacted to it in the film. In terms of credibility, 85 percent of the respondents believed that what happened in the film also happens in Thai villages.<sup>256</sup>

In *Cold Fire*, the protagonist, Teacher Porn, a government agent working against the communist insurgency in the village, explains that the reason why the communists do not openly invade Thailand is because they are afraid of the United States, Thailand's powerful ally.<sup>257</sup> The *Spread of Kinship* shares a similar plot with *Cold Fire* in that a rural area in Isan is infiltrated by the communist insurgency and local administrative officers, with American assistance, do their best to develop the villages. The film also emphasises that villagers need

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254 The United States Information Service, "The Community Development Worker," accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wV9PEtXe4s&list=WL&index=13&t=815s>

255 USIS, *Cold Fire Comprehension Survey*, August 1967, 6. (TIC 16801).

256 USIS, *Cold Fire Comprehension Survey*, 8.

257 The film tells the story of a communist insurgency in a village in Isan. Boon Num is a young man in a village who is deceived by a communist. The communist tells Boon Num that he will get 'a piece of farmland and a tractor', two important factors that Boon Num believes will make his life better. In the end, Boon Num finally realises that the communist is evil and dangerous. He decides to inform the police, leading to the elimination of the communist insurgency in the village.

to cooperate with government help in order to develop their villages, a partnership that will also allow the villagers to help themselves. The ignorant villagers who are always dependent on the government and do not understand the government's concept of development are considered an obstacle in the film.<sup>258</sup>

### **Empowering the Narrative: Knowledge and State Endorsement**

This section explains that the official narratives became powerful and pervasive because they were validated by anthropological studies and endorsed by state authority. In other words, they were affiliated to authoritative institutions in Thai society. I will start with examining the emergence of anthropological knowledge concerning the Isan people focusing on Charles Keyes' studies and his arguments on the 'Northeastern Problem' and Isan regionalism. I will then elaborate on how they were incorporated into the Thai state's policies on the Isan region.

The emergence of the study of modern anthropology in Thailand cannot be separated from Cold War politics as the studies often expressed communist concerns. Similar to William Skinner's research on the 'Chinese Problem' in Thailand in the 1950s, Charles F. Keyes made a parallel contribution by introducing anthropological knowledge on Isan and evaluating the likelihood that this region might fall under a communist insurgency. Keyes received his doctorate degree from Cornell University in 1966 for his thesis, *Peasant and Nation: A Thai-Lao Village in Thai State*. His research studied Nong Tun, a village in the Muang district and the Mahasarakam province, which are located in the Isan region. The project was supported by the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, the University of Washington and the Ford Foundation, and was supervised by Lauriston Sharp and G. William Skinner.<sup>259</sup> Keyes' research on villages in Isan in the 1960s was part of the growing interest of American anthropologists in Northeast Thailand, a factor that significantly contributed to the creation of Isan in Cold War narratives (and the Chinese in Cold War narratives in Skinner's case).<sup>260</sup> Prior to the 1960s, many American scholars chose to study

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258 *The Spread of Kinship*, Thai Film Archive, D3-01968.

259 Kengkij, *Empire Anthropology*, 35.

260 Similar studies to Kengkij's *Empire Anthropology*, also see, for example, Wakin's *Anthropology Goes to War* and Anan's "Thai Studies in American Social Science".

Bang Chan, a village not far from Bangkok.<sup>261</sup> But as the Cold War intensified, American academic institutions and American government agencies, especially the USIS, collaborated to produce knowledge on villages in Isan and northern Thailand in order to prepare for a possible communist insurgency in these regions.<sup>262</sup>

Keyes' studies on Isan in the 1960s examined two related issues: the Northeastern Problem and Isan Regionalism. In *Peasant and Nation*, Keyes explained that the Thai fear of separatism in Isan, due to its historical background and ethnic and geographical proximity between 'the Thai-Lao in Northeastern Thailand' and 'the Lao in Laos', escalated because of the political situation and leftist movements in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. This escalation caused 'the Northeastern Problem' in the Thai mind, a possible scenario in which the Northeast could fall victim to communist expansion and jeopardise Thai national integrity.<sup>263</sup> For Keyes, this fear was not groundless, but should not be exaggerated because it would further deteriorate the relationship between the Isan people and the Thai state. Keyes explained that harsh (and wrong) measures were employed to solve the problem. For example, the Thai government accused and arrested Isan members of parliament and politicians who criticised the government for negative view on communism. Although economic and infrastructure development programmes were introduced to Isan, Keyes was sceptical that the Isan villagers truly benefited from them, although he agreed that economic problem in the Northeast was fuelled by the Northeastern Problem.<sup>264</sup>

Keyes also argued that Isan regionalism contributed to political dissidence by Isan people, or the 'problem'. It was 'the inter-group interactions between Northeasterners and Central Thai or Siamese' that developed the ethnic and regional identities of the Northeasterners through the realisation of 'we-they' dichotomies.<sup>265</sup> Keyes pointed out that the more the Thai state spread power and tightened administrative control over the

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261 The first Bang Chan village project was done by Lauriston Sharp in the late 1940s, funded by the Fulbright Programme and Ford Foundation. After Sharp, other Cornell scholars who studied Bang Chan village included Robert Textor, Herbert Phillips and Rose Goldstein. Kengkij, *Empire Anthropology*, 34.

262 USIS launched the pilot village study in Northeast Thailand in 1960. Please see, Research Studies by the USIS Research Office, Bangkok, 1957-1969. TIC 10963. Also, many USOM studies on the Northeast were produced by Toshio Yatsushiro. For example, *The Appeal of Communism in Northeast Thailand* (1963) and *Village Changes and Problems* (1967) studying Isan villages. Most of his works during his time in Thailand, from 1962-1969, primarily focus on communism and villages in the Northeast.

263 Keyes, *Peasant and Nation*, 29.

264 Charles F. Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, Data Paper Number 65 (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1967), 53-57. Keyes, *Peasant and Nation*, 42-43.

265 Keyes, preface to *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, vii.

Northeast, the more Isan people realised that they were distinct from Central Thai people in terms of their ethnicity, culture, economy, and politics.<sup>266</sup> The sense of regionalism in Isan grew stronger when surges of people from Isan migrated to Bangkok for temporary work because of economic underdevelopment in Isan and a labour shortage in Bangkok.<sup>267</sup> In the capital, Isan people found that the Central Thais looked down on them and thus that their Isan traits were considered inferior in Bangkok. As such, they tended to congregate in Bangkok by forming Isan regional groups and developing a collective sense of regional identity.<sup>268</sup>

To Keyes, an accurate understanding of regionalism in Isan led to an appropriate approach to the Northeastern Problem. He confirmed that Isan's growing regionalism would not lead to separatism or to overthrowing the King as Thai officials feared. According to Keyes, 'the uses of Isan regionalism have been directed towards improving the status of the Isan people within the national order (emphasis original).'<sup>269</sup> For example, the regionalism was apparent in MPs from Isan when they unanimously acted to improve conditions and solve problems in Isan. Also, Isan regionalism did not override Thai nationalism among the northeastern population, nor did it defy Central Thai culture. The Northeasterners identified themselves as Thai citizens and accepted culture of the Central Thai elites.<sup>270</sup> The 'Thai Way' attracted the Isan people because it represented the elite character that was deemed crucial to upward social mobility.<sup>271</sup> Keyes suggested that, the right way for the Thai government to approach the Northeastern Problem and Isan regionalism was to recognise Isan/Lao identity instead of bluntly imposing 'Thai' identity and loyalty on the Isan people.<sup>272</sup> Keyes also suggested that in addition to alleviating economic disparity in Isan, the suppression of political opposition in Isan and ethnic discrimination towards the people of Isan by Thai officials, must end.<sup>273</sup>

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266 Keyes, preface to *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 59.

267 Keyes, preface to *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 36. In 1949, the Thai government imposed a quota of 200 migrants per year, leading to the end of mass Chinese migration, which was an important source of unskilled labour in Thailand.

268 Keyes, preface to *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 38.

269 Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 60.

270 Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 58-59.

271 Keyes, "Ethnic Identity and Loyalty in the Northeastern Thailand," 369.

272 Keyes, "Ethnic Identity and Loyalty in the Northeastern Thailand," 369.

273 Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 61

Keyes' arguments on the Northeast in Cold War Thailand widely influenced both Thai and foreign scholars.<sup>274</sup> However, his view misrepresented some aspects of Isan and the Cold War situation. Firstly, in terms of the Isan regionalism, the American military presence and operations in the Northeast also contributed to the construction of Isan identity. A case in point was the formation of the 'Korat-style visual art for life'.<sup>275</sup> The United States also contributed to the emergence of the Northeastern Problem, not solely the Thai government as Keyes proposed. Stories of Isan targeted by a communist insurgency and stories about American assistance to the underdeveloped region were pervasive in the American anti-communist propaganda that was distributed nationwide. Also, Keyes obviously missed examining a trait of 'Isan regionalism' in leftist publication. Many Thai leftists from Isan did not employ Isan regionalism to 'improve the status of Isan people', but to mobilise the masses in Isan to violently fight back against oppressive power and economic exploitation.<sup>276</sup>

The concepts of the Northeastern Problem and Isan regionalism endorsed the depiction of Isan in official narratives and validated the dichotomy between Bangkok, or Central Thai-ness, and Isan, through anthropological knowledge. They also justified the tightened control of the central government in the Isan region, and supported Bangkok's supremacy. Influenced by William Skinner, Keyes' arguments were based on identifying the ethnic differences of Isan people, thus demarcating the identity boundary between them and the Central Thais.<sup>277</sup> Keyes also frequently emphasised that Central Thai-ness was dominant and superior to Isan's ethnic and regional characteristics thus the Northeasterners admired and accepted Central Thai-ness. This view established a hierarchical relationship between Central Thai-ness and the Isan identity, which was in line with stories of

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274 Some illustrations on studies influenced by Keyes in the Cold War period include Kirsch, "Development and Mobility among the Phu Thai of Northeast Thailand"; Suthep, *Sociology of Villages in the Northeast*; Wichai, *Isan: A Bitter Reality*, and; Kukrit Pramoj, "แฮร์รี่ ดี. เฟลด์" [Harry D. Felt] in *Thailand in the World Society*, 150-158. The article was first broadcast on January 12, 1963. For recent studies, see, Ratana Boonmathya Tosakul, "ชาวนาอีสาน ชาติไทย และการพัฒนาไปสู่ความทันสมัย" [Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization], *Journal of Social Science* 19, no. 1 (2008); Somsri, "The Thai Government's Policies to Develop the Northeast, 1951-1976"; and, Dararut, "The Political Groupings of Isan Members of Parliament".

275 Please see detail in Chapter 4.

276 For example, Rawee Domeprachan's *The Red Sun* (1975), Udon Thongnoi's poems *Spectre of Freedom* (1973) and *Freedom* (1963), and Phusit Nakrong's short story *Red Thai* (1974). See Chapter 4 for more information.

277 Keyes, "Ethnic Identity and Loyalty in Northeastern Thailand," 363.

‘underdeveloped’ villages in Isan and their relationship to ‘developed’ Bangkok in official narratives.

In contrast to Keyes’ explanation, recent studies show that the Isan region had not been perceived as a threat to the integrity of Siam/Thailand until the Siamese/Thai rulers adopted the idea of the modern nation-state and nationalism, particularly of ethno-nationalism, in the nineteenth century.<sup>278</sup> Indeed, the appearance of the Northeast as a serious problem that could endanger the country’s survival only emerged in the Cold War period. An illustrative example is ‘the Northeastern Problem’, a concept first introduced by Keyes using an anthropological approach, and its concrete explanation of Isan as ‘the problem’. This reflected the influence of Thai royal-nationalism, a crucial component of Thai-ness during the Cold War, in Keyes’s argument and showed how he indirectly reproduced this political ideology through the Northeastern Problem.

According to Keyes, the Northeastern Problem persisted because of economic difficulties in the Northeast and the Isan people’s awareness of economic disparity between themselves and the Central Thais. The Thai government and the United States shared a similar perspective, believing that poverty in Isan greatly contributed to its vulnerability to a communist insurgency. National and regional programmes were released in order to solve the problem. A case in point is the Northeastern Development Plan, 1962-1966, the first regional plan implemented in Thailand with the support of the United States. The plan was supervised by the Committee on the Development of the Northeast whose responsibilities also included coordinating the plan with the National Economic Development Board and related government offices.<sup>279</sup> The Northeastern Development Plan’s main objective was to deal with the underdevelopment of the Isan region and the economic disparity between the people in Isan and other regions, particularly the Central region.<sup>280</sup> In 1968, the Northeastern Economic Development (NEED) Plan was launched to complement the regional plan. The United States provided technical assistance to ‘maximise the impact of the Plan on the economic development of Northeast Thailand, with emphasis at the village

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278 This also includes the Franco-Siamese war in 1893 that caused France’s ‘loss’ of the area known today as Laos. However, the incident stirred fear of Western imperialism among the Siamese rulers rather than of Isan separatism. Examples of recent studies that argued that past Siamese rulers did not perceive the Isan region as a threat include, Pichit Pituk’s “Thai Elites’ Perception of ‘Thongthin’ during the Government Reform of 1892” (1997) and Arin’s “The Siamese Elites’ Knowledge of “Isan”, 1890-1932” (2010).

279 Somsri, “The Thai Government Policies to Develop the Northeast, 1951-1976”, 226.

280 Keyes, *Peasant and Nation*, 29.



level'.<sup>281</sup> Additionally, while the government and the United States promoted Thai-ness that was compatible with Central Thai values and prioritised promoting the Thai monarchy in Isan, the government also followed Keyes' suggestions. Namely, that in order to solve the Northeastern Problem, the Northeasterners should be encouraged to identify themselves as people from Isan within the larger Thai nation, and not as Laotians.<sup>282</sup>

The Northeastern Development Plan benefited Bangkok and foreign capitalists as it integrated Isan into the state's economic structure. The plan dramatically improved economic infrastructure in Isan by expanding its road network and creating highways that connected Isan to Central Thailand. As a result, economic activities between Isan and Bangkok increased and transportation businesses along the Isan-Bangkok route grew.<sup>283</sup> The plan also aimed to promote private industrial and commercial development in the Northeast. This would encourage private investment and privatisation in the National Economic Development Plan, and cause an expansion of agricultural, transportation, and hospitality businesses in the private sector.

In sum, this section demonstrated that official narratives on the Isan villagers were institutionalised and integrated into national and regional programmes and policies. Two significant points arose from this study. Firstly, Bangkok cannot be excluded or separated from narratives on rural villagers. Indeed, the essence of official narratives on rural villagers is not about telling stories about villagers *per se*, but to shape and manage the relationship between Bangkok and the countryside in a way that favours or benefits Bangkok. Secondly, the concept of development used to justify Bangkok's rural hierarchy, is related to the Cold War context in Thailand. Indeed, media produced by the Thai government such as *Tesaphiban* and *Pattanakonsan* emphasised the underdevelopment of rural villages and the obedient characteristics of villagers. In terms of American propaganda, *Cold Fire* and the

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281 *AID Assistance to Thailand Progress to Date on Individual Projects*, 17 December 1967, 62, accessed by April 12, 2017. [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pdacw382.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacw382.pdf). Also, the planning process of the NEED was under responsibility of The NEED Planning Advisory (the NEED PAG), a group of western consultants to Thailand supported by USOM. See, Louis Berger, Inc. (Development Economic Group) and Systems Associates, Inc., *Northeast Thailand Economic Development study, Final Report*, vol 2 (Bangkok, 31 January 1972), 5. (TIC 22207)

282 Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 59-62.

283 The growth of motor business in the Northeast in the 1960s was dominated by the Chinese capitalists. Japanese cars were most in demand which also means an expansion of Japanese investment in Isan after the plan was promulgated. Pipu Boosabok, พัฒนาการของกลุ่มทุนจีนในภาคอีสานตอนบนของประเทศไทย พ.ศ. 2474-2559 [Development of Chinese Capitalists in Upper Northeast Thailand, 1931-2016] (Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund, 2017), 78-96.

*Seripharb* magazine also confirmed the need to develop rural villages in Isan by providing a picture of development at an international level. In this picture Bangkok was labelled as 'closer' to the American model of development, whereas the level of development in rural Thai villages was placed in a low category similar to rural areas in neighbouring countries, prior to having received American assistance. The government's development plans such as the Northeast Development Plan and the Community Development Programme also stressed the inferior and underdeveloped status of rural areas, especially in Isan. These policies led to dramatic changes of the environment in the countryside, for example, through the massive construction of roads and irrigation systems. Academic works on rural areas and Isan, especially those on the Northeastern Problem, validated these depictions of villagers. The development portrayed in these official sources, which was reproduced in popular films, was closely related to the Cold War context and the anti-communist strategy in Thailand. It was under the Sarit government that the term *kanpatthana* (development) became popularised, promoted, and instilled in the government's policies. This strengthened central domination over underdeveloped villagers and confirmed Bangkok's supremacy.

### **The Influence of Official Narratives and the Isan Villagers in Popular Media**

Isan's presence in popular media became noticeable in the 1960s and increased considerably afterwards, ultimately dominating representations of rural Thailand in the 1970s. In popular literature, films, and music, Isan's people were often discriminated against and depicted as poor and naïve. Villages in Isan often appeared in films and novels as barbarian and lawless communities that were under the influence of local mafia or communists, and that required protagonists (often from Bangkok) to restore peace and order. The increase and changes to Isan's presence in popular media coincided with the escalation of the Cold War conflict and the spread of official narratives about the government's anti-communist policies. This section will examine the impact that official narratives depicting Isan had on the Thai public during the Cold War period by looking at the emergence of Isan in popular literature and film, and its relationship with Bangkok through the increase of the Thai and American governments' attention on Isan.

Before Isan started to appear in popular media, the location of rural areas featured in fictional writings, popular music and movies was often unspecified. However, in the 1960s to 1970s, popular media circles witnessed a gradual transition from the generic countryside to villages and villagers in Isan. Before the 1960s, none of the highly popular and successful novels about the countryside were set in Isan. For example, the all-time classic novels acknowledged for giving the best portrayals of rural Thailand included Mai Muangderm's *The Scar* (1940) and Malai Chupinit's *Field of the Great* (1957) which took place in a Bangkok suburb and Kamphaeng Phet province respectively.<sup>284</sup> In terms of the communist threat, rural areas and people in general that were targeted by the communists, not Isan villagers in particular. Kukrit Pramroj's *Red Bamboo* (1954) describes an unspecified rural countryside confronting the expansion of communist ideology.<sup>285</sup> The story takes place in a village not far from Bangkok. *Red Bamboo* was first published in the *Siamrath Weekly Review* in 1954, during the second premiership of Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram. The novel was selected by the USIS and translated into English in 1961. From 1954 to 2009, the book was reprinted 21 times, demonstrating its remarkable popularity. The novel follows Giovanni Guareschi's Italian original, *The Little World of Don Camillo*, but the main protagonists were changed from a priest and a communist mayor to a Buddhist abbot, Krang, and a villager with a strong communist leaning, Kwan. *Red Bamboo* mocked and ridiculed Kwan who used various methods to promote communist ideas in the village.<sup>286</sup> Audiences not only found communists like Kwan unthreatening, but were also amused by his naivety and stubbornness.

From the 1960s to the mid-1970s, instead of unspecified villagers and villages, the appearance of Isan people and villages became noticeable in popular fiction. One reason is due to the increasing number of writers who experienced Isan through their careers or during their childhood. Many of these writers were teachers and local government officers, professions that had become far more numerous due to the government's development

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284 Titles in Thai are *แผลเก่า* and *ทุ่งมหาพระราช*. These two are not only considered masterpieces of Thai modern literature that influenced later works, they also clearly demonstrate the conflict between Bangkok and the rural. Rural Thailand in these novels, and other writings in general from the same period, are not set in the Northeast. Mai Muangderm and Malai Chupinit are praised for their vivid depiction of rural life in Thailand but none of their works concern rural villages in Isan. For more detail and analysis of *The Scar* and *Field of the Great* in terms of urban (Bangkok)-rural conflicts, see, Chusak, *Re-read*, 3-74.

285 Kukrit Pramroj was a Thai royalist intellectual and a senior politician who founded the conservative Social Action Party and served as prime minister from 1975 to 1976.

286 Kukrit Pramroj, *ไฟแดง* [*Red Bamboo*], 17th ed. (Bangkok: Dokya 2000, 2001).

plan in the Cold War period. Their writings are often based on or adapted from their work experiences in Isan. To illustrate, Boonchoke Chiamwiriya used his experiences as a district chief in the Northeast to create many works, one of which was *The Revolutionary District Chief* (1975).<sup>287</sup> The writer of *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma* (1965), Kanchana Nakkhanan, was sent to teach in Chaiyahum, a province in Isan. The novel reflects her wishful thinking about the Isan people.<sup>288</sup> Pramote Tatsanasuwan, who wrote *Dear Isan* (1968), was neither a teacher nor a district chief, but was a regular columnist for *Anusan Osotho* (*Osotho Magazine*). *Anusan Osotho* (*Osotho Magazine*) was the oldest Thai travel magazine and was owned by the Tourist Organisation of Thailand (TOT), a government organisation established as a part of Thailand's development scheme.<sup>289</sup>

The trend of Isan's presence in popular media in the 1960s was in line with both the escalation of the Indochina conflict and the anti-communist campaign and projects in which the Thai government portrayed Isan as a region prone to communism or as the home of communists. In 1964, the American President Lyndon Johnson started a large-scale military campaign in Vietnam that led to the drastic expansion of the American military presence in Thailand, one of the most important strategic areas from which the United States could launch attacks on neighbouring Vietnam. This intensified anti-communist propaganda in Thailand. USIS released films in 1966 about the communist threat in Isan, such as *Cold Fire* and *The Spread of Kinship*, that were screened across the country including Isan. The expansion of radio broadcasting stations and an increase in radio ownership in the 1960s influenced public perception of Isan through its depictions of the region as a communist target. The increase of development programmes in the Northeast, such as the Northeastern Development Plan and the Northeastern Economic Development Plan, also contributed to the Thai public's growing awareness of Isan, as did news and reports on these development programmes and the growing level of contact between the Isan people and Bangkok.

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287 In Thai is นายอำเภอปฐวีดิ. The novel won the Outstanding Book Award from the National Book Development Committee in 1975, one of the most prestigious book awards in Thailand.

288 In Thai is ผู้ใหญ่ลี้กับนางมา.

289 *Dear Isan* in Thai is อีสานที่รัก. On TOT and promoting tourism in Isan as a part of the anti-communist campaign, see, Phillips, *Thailand in the Cold War*, 145-156.

Noticeably, Isan regional characteristics in these writings are considerably vague and do not significantly differ from the depiction of Isan in official narratives.<sup>290</sup> It was in the mid 1970s that Isan's regional traits became apparent in popular media. Isan cultural traditions and language were used to realistically narrate Isan stories. The most illustrative example of this is Kampon Boontawee's novel, *A Child of the Northeast* (1975). The lively and realistic description of the daily life of Isan's people in *A Child of the Northeast* is based on Kampon's childhood in a rural village in Isan's Yasothon province.<sup>291</sup> The novel describes Isan cultural traditions concerning almost every stage of life: birth, marriage, sickness, and death. In this regard, the abundant information about Isan nature and culture, conveyed through the author's descriptive writing style, make the novel read more like a work of non-fiction that provides anthropological evidence.<sup>292</sup> The novel was first serialised in a weekly magazine between 1975 and 1976, before being published as a book in 1976. In that same year, it was awarded the Best Novel prize by the Thai National Book Association and won the first S.E.A. Write Award in 1976.<sup>293</sup> One of the most prominent values of this novel is the strong Isan identity expressed throughout the story. The Lao language appears often in the novel with Central Thai explanations when necessary. Readers learn about the Isan way of life through the eyes of Koon, a young boy in the rural village in Ubon, a province in the Northeast. The main plot is simple. Koon and family, together with other villagers, go on a fishing expedition to the Chi River due to drought and the villagers' low rice supply. In addition to eating the fish, the villagers also plan to trade the fish for rice and other ingredients.

In Khamman Khonkai's *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* (1978), 'Carn Khen, a senior villager in Mad Dog Swamp who has mastered many kinds of Isan folk culture and art, is another illustration of the emergence of Isan regionalism in Thai literature in the 1970s.<sup>294</sup>

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290 *Dear Isan* counters perception of Isan as a land of drought and famine, but confirms communist threat in some areas in Isan. The book explains that drought in Isan occasionally happens like it does in other parts of the country, and that drought in the Roi Et province is not terrible as people think. American bases and prostitution in Isan are also mentioned in the book but do not seem to be of much concern to the author. Pramote Tatsanasuwan, *อีสานที่รัก* [Dear Isan] (Bangkok: Prachachang, 1968), 18, 23, 41, 52, 66.

291 Kampon Boonthawee, foreword to *ลูกอีสาน* [A Child of the Northeast], *ลูกอีสาน* [A Child of the Northeast] Thai education edition (Bangkok: Poysean, 2009), 7.

292 Nopporn Prachanukul, "มีอะไรในลูกอีสาน" [What is in *the Child of the Northeast*?] in *ยกอักษรย้อนความคิดเล่ม 1 ว่าด้วยวรรณกรรม* [Yok Akson Yon Kwamkit Vol. 1 On Literature] (Bangkok: Aan and Wi Pasa, 2009), 44-45.

293 Kampon, preface to *A Child of the Northeast*, 7.

294 The Thai title of *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* is *ครูบ้านนอก*. 'Carn is abbreviated from acarn (อาจารย์), a term that can refer to an honoured and respectable man who possesses knowledge. Khamman Khonkai,

Like in *A Child of the Northeast*, readers learn about the Isan way of life and its culture, such as the fineness of Isan bamboo wickerwork, Isan folk music, paper cutting and banana stalk carving used for decoration at funerals, and Isan drum-beating competitions, through ‘Carn Khen’s role in the novel.<sup>295</sup> The novel, however, also calls for the Isan people in Bangkok, especially the educated, to ‘return home’ and ‘never forget their roots’ through the main protagonist, Piya. Teacher Piya is a new graduate from a teachers’ college who decides to teach at a school at Mad Dog Swamp, a rural village in Ubon province, because of his pride for his Isan hometown and culture.<sup>296</sup> Even though Piya moved to study in Bangkok when he was very young, he insisted that his time in the capital did not make him a Bangkokian. Piya uses his Isan identity to introduce himself, especially when meeting a fellow Isan.<sup>297</sup> Piya’s desire to learn about Isan art from ‘Carn Khen demonstrates Isan regionalism through preserving Isan culture.<sup>298</sup>

The novel also demonstrates a conflict between Piya and other villagers in Mad Dog Swamp due to Piya’s superior status; he represents Bangkok and urban development. When he moves to Mad Dog Swamp, the villagers do not fully consider him a Northerner but treat him as a teacher from Bangkok. They are surprised when they see Piya does household chores like other Isan villagers, for example drawing water from a well and carrying it home, and transplanting rice seedlings.<sup>299</sup> An invisible wall between Piya and the villagers stemmed from Piya’s sense of paternalism. Notably, that same sense of paternalism was prevalent among the government officials and staff sent to Isan, especially among those who engaged in development work. Although Piya considers himself an Isan man, he also believes that it is his responsibility to ‘help’ the villagers because he is a teacher who graduated from a college in Bangkok.

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whose real name is Somphong Phalasun, was a teacher by profession and by heart. He was born in the Amnat Charoen district (now province) in Isan. Khamman went to a teacher’s college and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in education from Prasarnmit University. Khamman returned to Ubon to teach for many years and moved to Bangkok when he was promoted to higher positions in the Teachers’ Council of Thailand. Martin B. Platt, *Isan Writers: Writing and Regionalism in Modern Thailand* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), 128-9.

295 Khamman Khonkhai, *ครูบ้านนอก* [The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp], 12th ed. (Bangkok: Mingmit, 2010), 102-5, 129, 139-41, 199, 259-61.

296 Mad Dog Swamp in Thai is หนองหมาว้อ. Khamman Khonkhai, *ครูบ้านนอก* [The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp], 13-14.

297 Khamman, *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, 16, 25.

298 Khamman, *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, 104.

299 Khamman, *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, 78, 143-4.

Isan culture and tradition also became evident in films during the late 1970s.<sup>300</sup> Both *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* and *A Child of the Northeast* were adapted into movies in 1978 and 1982, respectively. The films are a milestone of Isan films in the late 1970s as they were the first films in which Isan life and culture were a main element. Similar to the authors of *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* and *A Child of the Northeast*, popular films that portrayed a vivid picture of Isan life were produced by directors with Isan backgrounds, such as Pongsak Chantharukha and Surasi Patham, directors of *Mun River's Spell of Love* (1977) and *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, respectively.<sup>301</sup> Interestingly, some films that illustrate Isan culture and identity also demonstrate leftist traits. This is understandable considering that the films were produced after the leftist movement had reached its peak in the 1970s. For illustration, in *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, the two songs that Teacher Piya, the protagonist in the film, sings and teaches the students are 'songs for life' that describe struggles and drought in Isan, and persuade its listeners to return to and develop their homes (rural villages).<sup>302</sup> Some other subtle hints about the leftist influence in the film include, for example, a tale told to the children in the village about pigeons uniting to fight an eagle, and Piya's intention to 'serve the people', as opposed to his only serving children through teaching.

Vichit Kounavudhi, the director of *A Child of the Northeast*, also had interests that aligned with those of leftist activists. Unlike Surasi who particularly focused on the Isan subject, Vichit Kounavudhi's films vary from melodramas to being about the underprivileged

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300 In terms of Isan villagers in popular films in the 1960s, the number of popular films about Isan increased. Some example of popular movies that were set in Isan include *ภูพานอย่าร้องไห้* [Don't Cry Phu Phan] (1967), *ชาติลีลาวดี* [Chat Lam Chi] (1969), *คนแม่ถึก* [Brave Man Standing] (1970), and *ตะวันรอนที่หนองหาร* [Sunset at Nonghan] (1970). In these films, there is almost no recognisable connection to Isan. We can tell that these movies are telling stories that are taking place in the Northeast from conversation, railway station names, or simply from the film titles themselves. Some movies concerning the communist insurgency in Isan do not show anything about Isan life, and only the name of a province or village indicates that the setting is in Isan. Not only is the Central Thai language used in these films; Isan tradition and culture are rarely seen. In films about rural villages, whether in Isan or not, we often see rice paddies, water-buffaloes, local mafia, and exploitative creditors.

301 Surasi Patham, born in Ubon province, is the first director who earnestly and persistently advanced Isan-ness in Thai popular films. All of his work concerns Isan subjects, and most of his films deal with Bangkok-Isan conflicts. Besides *The Rural Teacher*, some of his works include *หนองหมาว้อ* [Mad Dog Swamp] (1979), *ลูกแม่มูล* [Son of The Mun River] (1980), *ครูดอย* [Mountain Teacher] (1982), *ผู้แทนนอกสภา* [Representative outside Parliament] (1983), and *หมอบ้านนอก* [The Rural Doctor] (1985), to name a few.

302 *ครูบ้านนอก* [Country Teacher] (1978), assessed July 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtYH4jxtWu8>

in Thailand.<sup>303</sup> Vichit showed an interest in writings by leftist intellectuals and selected those that he believed suitable to make into films. He made a film based on Suwat Woradilok's *Miss Barbet* (1965) and another based on Rom Ratiwan's *Captain Khrio, Iron Shark* (1963).<sup>304</sup> Both Suwat and Rom were renowned leftist writers.<sup>305</sup> Vichit also produced two films about the hill tribes, a peculiar theme for Thai films in the Cold War period.<sup>306</sup> In addition, after watching *Thongpan* (1976), a film by intellectual activists that was banned by the Thai government, Vichit decided to have the same actor who starred as Thongpan play a leading role in *A Child of the Northeast* too.<sup>307</sup>

Despite traces of leftist influence and the critiques of the local administration (such as on the ineffective education system in the Northeast) in *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*, Thai authorities did not ban nor censor the film. One reason is *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* still validated state power and supported the image of Isan villagers that was in line with the version narrated by the Thai state. For example, Teacher Piya, despite his leftist inclinations, is a product of the Thai state's desire to 'develop' his rural village in Isan. The death of Teacher Piya, the representation of the Thai state, is a confirmation of danger and disorder in the Northeast. In other words, as long as *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* including other popular films and novels about Isan did not disturb the Thai state's legitimacy over Isan, the Thai state gave them support by allowing them to be publicised.

### Isan as Bangkok's Otherness in the Official Narrative

The promotion of narratives about the Cold War in official and popular media implied the promotion of Isan as Bangkok's Other at the same time. Isan villagers were perceived as more Lao than Thai, uneducated, and poor, and thus as communist targets. The notion of Isan villagers as Bangkok's Others was also embedded in various development projects. This

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303 Vichit Kounavudhi was a film director and screenwriter regarded as one of most influential figures in the Thai film industry. During his 30-year career from the 1950s to 1980s, he earned numerous national and international film awards and was dubbed 'the golden-doll millionaire' [เศรษฐีตุ๊กตาทอง].

304 The titles in Thai are นางสาวพระटक and กัปตันเครื่องบินขอลามเหล็ก.

305 Suwat was arrested and sent to prison for four years after his visit to Mainland China in 1957. His interest in leftist ideology and China can be seen in many of his works. He will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. For Rom Ratiwan, see the discussion on his writings in Chapter 4.

306 Vichit's films on the hill tribes are *พารี่ซอ* [Pa Ree So] (1955) and *คนภูเขา* [Mountain People] (1978).

307 Kanit Kounavudhi, "The Magic Dad Casts in... *Son of the Northeast*" in *คุณาวุฒิ* [Kounavudhi] (n.p.: n.p., 1997), 9.



means that the ‘vertical dichotomy’ between Bangkok and Isan was not limited to the discursive realm but was also materialised. As discussed in Chapter 2, Thai rulers employed the concept of *kanpatthana* to establish a hierarchical relationship between them and the ‘Other within’, which is Isan in this case. *The Northeast Development Plan* is an example of a concrete effort by the Thai state to impose Bangkok’s model of development on the Northeast and to confirm the view that Bangkok is and will be Isan’s tomorrow. To illustrate, one of the main goals of *The Northeast Development Plan* was to develop regional growth centres by selecting a few provinces that were more ‘ready’. All important public utilities and government centres would be established in the selected provinces to serve as an agent of development to the surrounding areas.<sup>308</sup> This was indeed the creation of a miniature Bangkok, including an unequal and possibly exploitative relationship between development centres and their neighbouring areas in the Northeast. A similar example is the educational expansion in the Northeast that included sending troops of *Teacher Piya* to rural villagers. Apparently, these teachers not only educated and ‘developed’ villagers, but also made them realise their position as Bangkok’s Other.

The concept of *kanpatthana* and how it encouraged the representation of Isan as Bangkok’s Other also affected stories about Isan in popular media, and is therefore another good example of the influence of official narratives about the Cold War on the Thai public. Stories of Isan in popular media, since their first appearance in the 1960s, often involved a conflict between Isan and Bangkok, or illustrated the Bangkok-Isan dichotomy. The previous section which discussed the influence of official narrative on Isan’s presence in popular media, demonstrated the correlation between the official narrative and an increase of Isan presence in popular media. Through an examination of the construction of the Bangkok-Isan dichotomy in popular media, this section will further elaborate that the content/plot of stories about Isan was also influenced by the official narrative.

One of the most illustrative examples of the Isan-Bangkok confrontation and dichotomy in popular media is the emergence of *lukthung* (‘child of the field’) music in the 1960s. The term itself represented the dichotomy as it was coined in opposition to the genre *lukkrung* (literally means a ‘child of the city’). *Lukkrung* was created as a term for the

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308 Committee on Development of the Northeast, แผนพัฒนาภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ พ.ศ. 2505-2509 [The Northeast Development Plan, 1962-1966] (Bangkok: Prime Minister’s Office, 1961), 4.

westernised (central) Thai songs that were popular among the upper classes and Bangkok people.<sup>309</sup> *Lukthung*, unlike *lukkrung*, is a song genre that combines styles from modern music with folk songs that are often about rural people. This music style already existed before it was first called *lukthung* in 1964 after the successful TV programme *Lukthung Music*.<sup>310</sup> Originally, modern country music did not exclusively refer to Isan folk songs, but after the late 1950s, due to an increasing number of singers from rural areas including Isan, country songs about Isan that used some Lao words became more popular and eventually dominated the genre. As such, when the *lukthung* genre was termed and became popular, it was already perceived as Isan-style *lukthung*. The increasing popularity of Isan *lukthung* songs was also related to the expansion of musical bands and radio stations in Bangkok, and a stream of rural migrants to Bangkok. Some of them possessed folk music skills from their hometown and found a job through the demand for singers. The number of Isan *lukthung* songs telling stories of rural people's suffering and problems noticeably increased, and more songs demonstrating the split between Bangkok and Isan were released.

*Lukthung* music is a good example of the fact that Isan migrants adopted and narrated similar stories about Isan villagers, similar to government officials. However, these stories were from the marginalised, laments from oppressed migrants who were looked down upon by Bangkokians.<sup>311</sup> They acknowledged Bangkok's supremacy, wealth, and development, and embraced their economic inferiority and backwardness, but at the same time prioritised their 'good heart' over lavish and corrupt Bangkok. In other words, they confirmed the dichotomy but added a twist of 'poor but good' Isan-ness that triumphed over Bangkok. The film *Charming Bangkok* (1966) is a good example here.<sup>312</sup> *Charming*

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309 Terry E. Miller, "From Country Hick to Rural Hip: A New Identity through Music for Northeast Thailand," *Asian Music* 36, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2005): 99.

310 Siriporn Krobthong, "วิวัฒนาการของเพลงลูกทุ่งในสังคมไทย พ.ศ. 2481-2535" [The Evolution of Thai Country Songs in Thai Society, 1938-1992] (master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1998), 121-122. The TV programme's title in Thai is เพลงลูกทุ่ง.

311 For example, Pong Preeda's กลับอีสาน [Return to Isan] (1958) is one of the first songs pointing at the polarisation. The majority of the songs portray the evil rich Bangkokians and the (morally) noble poor rural/Isan people through love stories, which depict a mostly tragic or one-sided love, for example, ลาก่อน บางกอก [Goodbye Bangkok], บางกอก [Bangkok], อย่าลืมอีสาน [Don't Forget Isan], สัญญาฝั่งน้ำมูล [Promise of the Mun River], and อีสานบ่แล้ง [No Drought in Isan]. Waeng Phalangwan, *ลูกทุ่งอีสาน* [Isan Country Songs] (Bangkok: Ruen Panya, 2002), 229.

312 *Charming Bangkok* was a popular radio drama by Achin Panchapan before being adapted into a film by Vichit Kounavudhi. The film was also successful and earned two national film awards. Achin Panchapan, "แต่คุณาวุฒิ-มือเรื่องสั้นระดับอาจารย์" [To Kounavudhi, A Professional Short Story Writer] in *Kounavudhi* (n.a.: n.a., 1997), 76-77.

*Bangkok* tells the story of Prae, the son of a *kamnan* (subdistrict headman), who escapes home to Bangkok. After all the problems and bad experiences that he had in the capital, such as being deceived by a Bangkok woman, robbed, and kidnapped, he realises that Bangkok is indeed a cruel place and returns home. In the film, Prae's response to Bangkokians was seemingly created to represent how villagers wished to respond to arrogant Bangkok. When one of performers from Bangkok looks down on Prae's hometown because there is no kilometre sign and there are possible dangers in the area, Prae responds that, 'people here are religious, and development of this place cannot be judged from a kilometre sign... [development is] in people's minds. People like this guy (one of the Bangkok performers) might not be developed because I don't see any kilometre sign on him.'<sup>313</sup>

Within the context of the Cold War, the distance between Bangkokians and Isan people became much shorter. This constructed the self-identity of Bangkok and Isan that referred to each other as Otherness (as Isan is an opposite Other to Bangkok, and Bangkok to Isan). The rise of Isan migrants in Bangkok was inseparable from the Cold War conflict. The first wave of Isan migration took place after the end of Chinese mass immigration to Thailand in 1949 when the government limited the number of foreign immigrants to 200 per year.<sup>314</sup> Without Chinese migrants, a labour vacuum developed in Bangkok that was later filled by labourers from the Northeast. In general, labourers from Isan temporarily migrated to Bangkok to work between the harvest and planting times, or spent a few years working in Bangkok before returning home.<sup>315</sup> After the period from 1955 to 1960, the numbers of migrants from Isan increased. According to the 1960 census, conducted under the supervision of the Thai National Statistical Office, around 22 percent of all migrants to Bangkok came from the Northeast. However, from 1975 to 1977, 43 percent of male

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313 *เสน่ห์บางกอก* [Charming Bangkok], assessed by July 27, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtrFuiJp2nQ&t=2255s> This version was shortened from more than two hours to one hour and a half.

314 The quota was the result of the government's concern regarding the 'Chinese Problem,' of that the Chinese in Thailand might be communist due to their bond with mainland China. For more detail, please see Chapter 5.

315 Isan people migrated 'temporarily' to Bangkok to fill unskilled labourer positions, such as taxi drivers, construction workers, and maids. Keyes referred to his survey carried out in 1963 in the village of Ban Nong Tuen in Mahasarakham, a province in the Isan region in which half of men in their 20s and 69 percent of men between the ages of 29 and 39 had worked in Bangkok. Keyes, *Finding their Voice*, 76-77.

migrants and 51 of female migrants in Bangkok were from Isan.<sup>316</sup> This was quite a substantial change. This trend was in line with the expansion of transportation routes between Isan and the capital, and between provinces in the Northeast, which were part of the anti-communist projects that were largely funded by the United States.

The increase in contact between Bangkok and Isan, and the unequal relationship between them, became an inspiration for many popular films and literature. Similar to *lukthung* music, the dichotomy between Bangkok and Isan was confirmed and reproduced through the concept of *kanpatthana* (development). In *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma*, the author, Kanchana Nakkhanan, expressed wishful thinking that the Isan people would become developed.<sup>317</sup> The work illustrates a sympathy for underdeveloped and uneducated villagers and that villagers' lives will become better if they adopt the concept of development promoted by the Thai state. Kanchana Nakkhanan was inspired by the very popular song *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma*.<sup>318</sup> Although she found the 'innocent' Headman Li and Isan people in the song adorable, Kanchana felt sorry for them because they were looked down upon. This became an inspiration for her to 'recreate a new Headman Li that no one can laugh at. The only way to do so is to make him well-educated'.<sup>319</sup>

Kanchana realised this intention in *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma*. In the novel, Headman Li, or Linawat, is not only admired by villagers because of his kindness and knowledge, but also because he graduated from Kasetsart University, the first agricultural university in Thailand. His family also owns 500-rai rice fields. Together with his refined manner and pleasant appearance, Headman Li represents a modern farmer whose character could gain recognition from urbanites. Kanchana's Headman Li is completely different from the 'innocent' Headman Li in the popular song. Although Kanchana's intended to counter the

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316 These numbers are referred in Keyes, *Finding their Voice*, 109.

317 *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma* was published as a serial in *Satrisan* between 1965 and 1966. *Satrisan* was a leading popular magazine in Thailand targeting female readers. After the novel was printed as a book in 1968, it was nominated for the first SEATO Literature Award that same year. The novel was adapted into a TV series in 1971, 1977, 1987, 2003, 2009, and became a film in 1985.

318 The song *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma* makes fun of villagers for mistaking swine (สุกร) for little dogs (หมาน้อย). In the second part of the song, Headman Li thought it is going to rain because he forgets to remove his sunglasses. The song was very popular and broadcast everywhere on the radio. The popularity lasted for decades and the song is still known today as a classic clapping game. According to Kanchana, she learned about the song when she became a teacher in Chaiyaphum, a province in Isan, in 1943. She was not sure if Headman Li resided in Chaiyaphum, but she believed so because the 'Chaiyaphum people are obedient and very nice, and they also deserve much more education'. Kanchana Nakkhanan, *ผู้ใหญ่ลีกับนางมา* [Headman Li and Mrs. Ma], 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1970), 12.

319 Kanchana, *Headman Li*, 12.

inferior image of Isan that was portrayed in the song *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma*, an unequal Bangkok-Isan relation remains intact in her novel. It implies that if any Northerner wishes to be recognised and not perceived as inferior, one has to practice the same values as Bangkokians. Her view towards villagers was one from Bangkok, and was similar to the perspective expressed in *The Northeast Development Plan, 1962-1966*.<sup>320</sup> Kanchana is a good example of a writer who adopted the depiction of villagers promoted by the Thai state and expressed it in her work. Indeed, Kanchana and Teacher Piya in *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* have many things in common, such as that Kanchana was actually from an elite family. Kanchana was born in Chaiyaphum, a province in Isan. She graduated from a university in Bangkok and returned to teach in Chaiyaphum for a while. In this regard, like Teacher Piya, we can see her as a representation of the Central administration and an agent of development.

*The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp's* author, Khamman Khonkhai, validated and reproduced the dichotomy in *Country Hick* (1978). This novel is less well-known than *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* but focuses more on pairing and countering Bangkok with Isan protagonists. By presenting a reversed version of Bangkok-Isan relationship, the novel makes fun of Isan as oppressed and looked down upon by Bangkok. The novel tells the story of Si, a young man from Ubon Ratchathani, and his first experiences in Bangkok. The plot is simple and ordinary, but what makes the novel interesting and entertaining is that Khamman reverses the reality of Bangkokians and Isan people by swapping their places. In *Country Hick*, Isan people are wealthy, and Bangkok becomes an affordable city to live in. Si earns a lot of money from rice farming and decides to travel to Bangkok. His village is fully developed, and its irrigation system is well-managed. The villagers, including Si, therefore, go to Bangkok not to find jobs, but because they are bored of the village. In Bangkok, Si meets many fellow Northerners working as taxi drivers, janitors, and housemaids, for example. Each is paid and treated very well. The workers in Bangkok protest a wage increase because the current wage is more than enough for them.<sup>321</sup> Bangkok is described as safe city where the people are very disciplined. Pedestrians always use zebra crossings. The city is free from hawkers, beggars, traffic, flood, pawnshops, and pollution. All canals

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320 Committee on Development of the Northeast, *The Northeast Development Plan, 1962-1966*, 1-6.

321 Khamman Khonkhai, *บ้านสี่เสา* [Country Hick] (Bangkok: Bannakit, 1978), 21.

are clean and the fresh markets in Bangkok are regarded as the cleanest in the world. On top of that, there is no corruption, and massage parlours are really for massage. Isan food is relatively expensive in Bangkok, while dining in hotels is quite cheap. On the contrary, the traffic in Si's village and downtown Ubon Ratchathani is very bad and the buses there make excessive amounts of smoke. Si is satisfied with his life in Bangkok and thinks that 'he will spend most of his lifetime in Bangkok, a heavenly city for all Thais. He is also a Thai who has the right to stay in this city.'<sup>322</sup> Soon afterwards, Si gets himself a job as a gardener because he becomes bored, not because he is in need of money. At the end Si returns to his home village because, again, he is bored.

In *Country Hick*, Bangkok and Isan are each other's Other, in which a reality reversal portrays Bangkok as the desirable Other in contrast to Isan. Similar to Kanchana's *Headman Li and Mrs. Ma*, *Country Hick* shows that the preferred values and standard of living that they followed are that of Bangkok, thus Isan-Bangkok relations also remain unchallenged in the novel. A good example is that Si's travel style is one of middle-class Bangkokians. He always makes decisions based on his level of boredom rather than on economic constraints: travelling to Bangkok, working, going to Pattaya, and finally returning to his home village.<sup>323</sup>

### **A Child of the Northeast: the 'Good' Isan and Cold War Narratives**

If the Isan villagers who might join the communist insurgency resisting Bangkok's control are 'bad' Isan villagers, 'good' villagers are those who are obedient to the central administration and accept the Bangkok-Isan unequal relationship. Ah Kong, the main protagonist in *Life with Grandfather*, is an illustration of the 'good' Chinese (Chapter 5), whereas Koon and his village, in the extremely popular *A Child of the Northeast* that was published in 1975, represent 'good' Isan villagers. 'Good' villagers do not question or challenge authority like the 'bad' Isan villagers, who go to Bangkok to protest against the government, but ultimately decide to stay in Isan and deal with the problems themselves.<sup>324</sup>

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322 Khamman, *Country Hick*, 99.

323 For example, the tourist campaigns promoted travelling among the middle class and upper class in Bangkok.

324 With support from leftist students, farmers in Isan went to Bangkok to protest against the government from 1974 to 1975.

Unlike many stories of Isan-Bangkok, *A Child of the Northeast* describes a peaceful Isan life and promotes a cordial relationship between Bangkok and Isan. Although the novel tries to correct Bangkok's insults and discrimination against Isan, no resentment towards Bangkok is seen in the novel. The novel tells the story of Koon's grandfather in monkhood who aspires to study the Buddhist teachings in Bangkok. He is rejected by the monks in Bangkok, who do not allow him to study in their temple, because he eats raw food, has tattoos all over his body, and is seen as dirty.<sup>325</sup> The story, however, is not meant to stir hatred towards Bangkok but to correct the misperception of Isan tradition. Through the arrival of tattoo craftsmen to Koon's village, *A Child of the Northeast* explains that tattooing in Isan is actually a sacred rite and a tradition that has been passed down for generations.<sup>326</sup>

Because the novel provides a lot of detail on Isan dining culture through Koon's daily life, Bangkok's perception of Isan food is rectified. For example, Koon's father tells Koon to take off a cicada's head and wings and squeeze the dung out before eating it, a snake is grilled immediately after being skinned so as to avoid blood stains when carrying it back home, banana branch is added into *larb*<sup>327</sup> for a better taste and more volume, and a jar containing fermented fish is covered by ash wrapped in a cloth to prevent flies.<sup>328</sup> This food, including those made from ant eggs and cicada eggs, are described as savoury delicacies that Koon and his family truly enjoyed.

*A Child of the Northeast* also challenges images of the un-Thai and the starving Isan region. The story shows that the rural Isan people in the novel consider themselves Thai and regard Thailand as their home country. An illustrative example is that when Koon's father tells Koon a history of the Ubon province, he often identifies himself as a part of the Thai nation ('our Siam').<sup>329</sup> He could even sing Luang Wichitwathakan's ultra-nationalist song *Thai Blood*, a song about harmony among people who share Thai blood.<sup>330</sup> Interestingly, another villager tells Koon that Phu Mi Bun (the Holy Man) deceived Isan people and eventually was killed by government officials.<sup>331</sup> This implies that not only do the Isan

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325 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 13.

326 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 134-138.

327 *Larb* is a Lao/Isan dish made of minced meat flavoured with herbs, spices, fish sauce, and roasted ground rice.

328 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 18, 20-21, 27.

329 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 199-200.

330 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 150.

331 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 98.

villagers depicted in the novel see themselves as Thai, but also that they pose no threat to the country and the Thai government, a representation that is in opposition to how official narratives of the Cold War portrayed Northeasterners.

*A Child of the Northeast* also offers a view of drought and starvation in Isan that differed from official narratives. Despite drought, Koon, his family, and other villagers live their lives peacefully and never starve. To them drought is a problem but also a part of their lives. They know very well how to cope with it (in the story the villagers go on a fishing trip to the Chi River).<sup>332</sup> If the novel did not discuss drought in the beginning and the middle, then its readers might not know that there was a shortage of water in Koon's village. Also, Koon seems to truly enjoy hunting and local delicacies, but not because the drought forces him to hunt or eat insects and snakes. These depictions question whether the reader has a correct understanding of drought and famine in Isan.

Different from stories of rich and influential Bangkokians taking advantage of poor yet innocent Isan people in popular music and films, the relationship between Bangkok and Koon's village is minimal (and even invisible in the film version). There are only a few times that the villagers feel disturbed by Bangkok, but in general, Bangkok does not affect their lives much except for occasional episodes, such as during military conscription and when police arrest local moonshine producers in the village next to Koon's.<sup>333</sup> One reason is the story is set around 1939 to 1940, when the government's role in rural areas was still limited compared to its role during the Cold War period. Koon and other children go to school in the village to learn Central Thai etiquette and basic subjects, but the villagers do not perceive education as a life-changing factor that will lead to a bright future, as seen in many writings by leftist intellectuals.<sup>334</sup> When the villagers are sick, either a traditional medical practitioner or senior villagers take care of them by using traditional medicine or performing spiritual rites, which seem to work many times in the novel (curing Koon's grandmother and Koon's red eye). The villagers also deal with drought themselves and do not seek or depend on

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332 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 140.

333 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 59, 258-9.

334 For examples of teaching Central Thai etiquette to village children see, Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 76, 78. Education, especially at university or college, is portrayed as a way out of poverty and hardship according to the perspectives of poor farmers. Stories of poor families in rural provinces who struggled to send their children to Bangkok are prevalent in leftist writings. For example, Seni Saowapong's *Spectre*, Somkid Singsong's *Haven't We Won Yet, Father?* and Bantoon Klankhajhon's *What Was Left*.



government assistance. Koon's self-sufficient village, in this regard, might render the reader curious as to what extent the government's rural development programs could be helpful. This seems to fit what Koon is taught and what he learns from his own experiences. On his first day at school, Koon is punished by his monk teacher, Monk Kane, for saying that he hates the sky for not raining and for causing drought in the village. The monk teacher teaches Koon that, 'you never blame the sky, the sky never punishes anyone,' it is people who hurt people.<sup>335</sup> This message reappears in the last sentences of the novel with Koon's reflection that:

Koon is a child of the Northeast, a grandson of his tattooed-leg grandfather who never blamed the sky like Monk Kane, and whose father's teaching has been engraved in his heart until now.<sup>336</sup>

Monk Kane's 'sky' refers to the superior power beyond (Isan) people's control. The message suggests that the superior power (Bangkok) should not be blamed for their hardship, but that Isan villagers should endure it with pride as a 'Son of the Northeast'.<sup>337</sup>

Due to the novel's distinct characteristics and writing techniques, most critics focus on its literary aesthetics or praise the novel for its accurate and lively description of Isan life. In other words, the novel is deemed free from politics.<sup>338</sup> Nopporn Prachakul argued that *A Child of the Northeast* proposes an alternative story of Isan that transcends the conflict between the word missing and the left in Thai society.<sup>339</sup> To Charles Keyes, the novel showed 'nostalgia for a more traditional way of life' to readers who suffered from 'the loss of way of life that had been obliterated in the rush to development in Bangkok'.<sup>340</sup> Similar to Nopporn, Keyes also believed that *A Child of the Northeast* proposed an alternative story of Isan that transcended the conflict between the word missing and the left in Thai society.<sup>341</sup>

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335 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 66-67.

336 Kampoorn, *A Child of the Northeast*, 310.

337 Nopporn Prachakul suggests that the main message of the novel is the Isan villagers could withstand hardship in life without migrating by adhering to Isan pride and dignity, namely self-restraint, endurance and harmony of Isan community. Nopporn "What is in *the Child of the Northeast*," 46.

338 Pratt, *Isan Writers*, 114; Pimol Meksawat, review of *A Child of the Northeast* in Witayakorn Chiengkul et al. *สารานุกรมแนะนำหนังสือดี 100 เล่มที่คนไทยควรอ่าน* [One Hundred Best Books that Thai Should Read] (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 1999), 374.

339 Nopporn Prachakul argues that *A Child of the Northeast* proposes an alternative story of Isan that transcend conflict between the and the left in Thai society. Nopporn, "The Child of the Northeast," 36.

340 Charles Keyes, "Hegemony and Resistance in Northeastern Thailand", quoted in Pratt, *Isan Writers*, 115.

341 Nopporn, "The Child of the Northeast," 36.

I argue that *A Child of the Northeast* is a political novel, one that serves the Thai state and its existing dominant political and economic structures although some elements of its depiction of Isan villagers are different from the official narrative. The most important point is that the author seems to believe that Bangkok's discrimination against Isan will disappear if Bangkok knows more about Isan tradition and way of life. This perspective seems to agree with Keyes's suggestion on how to deal with Isan regionalism. However, in reality, the insults and discrimination from Bangkok did not stem from its misunderstanding or insufficient knowledge about Isan, but from the exploitative and hierarchical structure that Bangkok imposed on Isan and its subsequent construction of Isan as an inferior and foreign Other to Bangkok. From this perspective, correcting Bangkok's 'misunderstanding' towards Isan was therefore not only pointless, but also distracted readers from the real cause of the discrimination.

## Conclusion

This chapter proposed that the Thai government constructed and employed stories of Isan villagers in official narratives about the Cold War to increase and justify its power and authority. By narrating Isan villagers as un-Thai, naïve, impoverished, uneducated, and thus targeted by the communists, Thai officials tightened their control over the Isan region. Security and development programmes and projects in Isan, such as the Northeastern Economic Development, the Accelerated Rural Development, and the Community Development programme, are illustrative examples of this control. As a result of these programmes, infrastructure and administrative power were greatly expanded in the Northeast, leading to tightened governmental control over the region.

Stories of Isan as a vulnerable target of the communist insurgency allowed the Thai government to control Isan through identity: Isan as Bangkok's foreign Otherness. A case in point is *kanpatthana* (development), a fundamental concept of government development programmes in the Northeast during the Cold War.<sup>342</sup> *Kanpatthana* was justified through a representation of the Isan region and people as vulnerable to a communist insurgency. This benefited Thai rulers and Bangkok by shaping the economic and political relationship

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<sup>342</sup> *Kanpatthana* means development in Thai. Here it was used instead of 'development' to suggest its political implication and context. See Chapter 2.

between Isan and the capital in their favour. At the same time, Isan in *kanpatthana* functioned as the 'Other within' who was less developed in relation to Bangkok. This empowered the Thai rulers to deal with the 'Other outside', the American Other, at the other end of the *kanpatthana* spectrum.

Depictions of Isan in the official narrative were very influential and were validated and rationalised by anthropological studies on Isan that emerged in the 1960s, the same time that the United States decided to escalate military intervention in the Indochina conflict. Pioneered by Charles Keyes, the 'Northeast Problem' was explained through an anthropological and academic lens rationalising the Thai rulers' suspicions towards Isan as rooted in their past. As Thai scholars and technocrats were influenced by the framing of the Northeastern Problem, they became another channel that passed the Northeastern Problem from academic circles to the policy-making process.

Isan's presence in popular media resonated stories of Isan found in the official Thai narrative. An increase of Isan's appearance in stories, novels, movies, and music in the 1960s, and Isan as a representation of rural Thailand coincided with changes and developments in the Cold War situation and the official narrative. The changes were also the result of increased direct contact between Isan and Bangkok, which under the dominating concept of *kanpatthana*, enhanced the dichotomy of Isan and Bangkok in the public sphere. However, some traces of leftist influences can be spotted in stories of Isan that appeared in the popular media, such as in *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*.

Stories of Isan in the Cold War were indeed stories of Bangkok itself. These stories were not exclusively intended for Isan audiences, but for the Thais in general. By identifying Isan with foreignness and as un-Thai, Bangkok and the Central region were able to claim that they were 'true' Thais that represented the Thai nation as a whole. However, this claim faced challenges from Thai leftists who proposed an alternative story of Isan in which it was a victim of Bangkok and the Thai government. These counter-narratives are the primary focus of Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4 Upcountry: Isan Villagers as Others (Part II)

While the government narrated that villagers, especially in Isan, fell prey to communism because of poverty and underdevelopment, Thai leftist intellectuals countered this narrative by arguing that Isan villagers were actually oppressed by the Thai state, ruling elites, and an exploitative hierarchical structure. This chapter examines representations of Isan villagers in the Cold War narrative in Thai leftist publications as the point of contention between official narratives and counter-narratives of the Cold War. It argues that Thai leftist intellectuals and activists promoted a story of Isan villagers as victims of the Thai state and of the American intervention in Thailand in order to counter the official narrative of the Cold War, which acted as a source of the Thai government's and the United States' political legitimacy. Additionally, the alternative story of Isan allowed Thai leftists to assert a powerful identity to achieve their political quest, that is, their identity as combatants against the Thai state and the United States, fighting for the sake of Isan villagers and the whole nation.

This chapter also investigates the development of dominant narratives on Isan during the first and second intellectual movement. The evolution of depiction of Isan in leftist materials corresponded to the evolution of the depiction of Isan in official narratives, thereby demonstrating an attempt to challenge Thai state authority, the changing international situation as well as domestic conditions in the Cold War context. This is crucial to understand the conceptual transition from leftist ideologies to a growing Isan regionalism in the leftist movement during the Cold War period. This point is missing in studies on Thai leftist movements and on the rise of Isan identity, which became apparent in the 1980s.

Stories of rural villagers as victims of government officials, not of the communists, were prevalent in the leftist intellectual and student movement in the late 1940s to 1950s. These stories reappeared with more popularity when the anti-government students and intellectuals became active again from the mid-1960s to the 1970s. However, the villagers narrated in the first and second intellectual movement were not the same due to changes in Cold War conditions, Thailand's internal affairs, and the political ideology of the leftist movement. During the first intellectual movement, few leftist publications focused on villagers in the Northeast. When they did, they prioritised the class identity of Isan villagers as exploited farmers and workers, not on their Isan regional identity. Isan regional traits in these works, such as language and culture, were almost unseen. However, in the second

intellectual movement, Isan regional identity became a noticeable theme in leftist writings and often represented rural Thailand in general. The trend correlated with a shift in the official narrative from unspecified rural areas, to the Isan region and the Indochina conflict in the 1960s. Some literary works, mostly by leftists from Isan, perceived Isan itself as the goal of the political struggle instead of aiming to liberate the exploited masses as a whole. They often deemed Bangkok, a representation of corrupt authority and capitalists, as an enemy of Isan, leading to the construction of the dichotomy between Bangkok and Isan in their works. Although Thai leftists employed the inferior identity of Isan (which was actually imposed on Isan by the Thai state) to defy Bangkok's supremacy, they inevitably confirmed the vertical dichotomy of Isan and Bangkok. This illustrates that, although counter-narratives on Isan villagers were used to challenge depictions of Isan in official narratives, stories of the villagers in the two narratives were not always in conflict.

This chapter is composed of three parts. The first part focuses on depictions of the Isan region and villagers in the first leftist intellectual movement (the late 1940s to 1950s). Works concerning the Isan region and people by prominent and active Thai leftists in this period, namely Nai Phi, Kulap Saipradit, Pleuang Wannasri, and Suchart Phumiborirak will be emphasised. Although these works are well-known and referred to in many studies regarding Thai leftists and the student-led movement, they have never been studied in terms of the relationship between leftist ideologies and Isan identity. Here I will illustrate that these writings ignored or downplayed the Isan-ness of Isan villagers while emphasising their identity as an exploited population as part of a larger class struggle. This is actually the same way these leftists treated the issue of Chinese ethnic identity of the Chinese and Sino-Thai in Thai society (see Chapter 5). The second part examines Isan in leftist works in the second intellectual movement from the mid-1960s to 1970s. This part demonstrates the evolving representation of villagers as victims in the counter-narrative, from villagers in an unspecified remote land, to an identifiable and legible Isan countryside. This was accompanied by the narration of Isan in opposition to Bangkok, a representation of the Central administration and ruling capitalists. The final part explains how Isan's evolving presence in counter-narratives of leftist movements can be understood as a form of resistance against state authority that acted by reconstructing the self-identity of leftist narrators.

The primary materials used in this chapter are leftist writings on Isan villagers. As the study was separated into two periods: the first intellectual movement (the late 1940s to 1950s) and the second intellectual movement (the mid-1960s to 1970s), the materials engaged are selected accordingly. For the first intellectual movement, works by Nai Phi, Kulap Saipradit, Suchart Phumiborirak and Pleuang Wannasri, are examined. For the second intellectual movement, the study uses, for example, Lao Kamhwam's *The Politician and Other Stories*, Rom Ratiwan's *Thon Thewada, Fighter from the Plateau*, Prasert Jandam's *Verses from Sap Daeng* and Udorn Thongnoi's *My Isan*.

I would like to clarify that, unlike the variety of materials studied in the previous chapter, narrative materials used in this chapter are mostly written materials or publications by leftist intellectuals and activists. This is due to limitations of the media that Thai leftists produced. Although the visual artists influenced by leftist ideologies were also enthusiastic and produced a lot of artwork as another form of counter-narrative, most of their works were destroyed either by Thai officials or by themselves to avoid communist charges.

### **Isan in Counter-narratives in the First Intellectual Movement: the late 1940s to 1950s**

When Thailand, under the Phibunsongkhram government, officially entered the Cold War in 1949, Thai leftist intellectuals actively produced literary works and publications to counter the government's decision to collaborate with the United States in the Cold War conflict. Their works often pointed out that oppression, injustice and exploitation were related to the government's anti-communist policy as an American ally, and particularly to their sending Thai troops to the Korean War in 1950. In leftist literature, the poor and the oppressed, namely rural farmers, villagers, and workers were leading protagonists used to criticise the nobility, the royals, and the capital. Prominent leftist intellectuals and activists in the late 1940s to 1950s include Supha Sirimanond, Kulap Saipradit, Pleuang Wannasri, Taweep Woradilok, Suwat Woradilok, Jit Phumisak, Asanee Pholchan, and Sakchai Bamrunghong, for example. Leftist publications generally criticised the government, the United States, and capitalists for the exploitation and hardship found in rural Thailand. However, only a few leftist intellectuals chose to use Isan villagers to represent class oppression. Moreover, Isan in their literary works often lack regional traits, such as the Isan

language and culture, and Isan was narrated as part of the larger suffering, exploited masses.<sup>343</sup> To illustrate the depiction of Isan villagers in the first intellectual movement, the following part investigates the leftist intellectuals who created influential works in relation to Isan villagers or showed a particular interest in the suffering of the people in the Northeast: Nai Phi (Asanee Pholachan), Kulap Saipradit, Suchart Phumiborirak and Pleuang Wannasri.<sup>344</sup>

Influenced by leftist ideologies, each of them narrated villagers in the Northeast quite similarly. One such work, Nai Phi's poem, 'Isan' (1952), is probably the first leftist literary work that narrated Isan in a form that was widely reproduced by Thai leftists later. In the poem, Isan is described as a land of drought where people were looked down upon and suffered from corrupt politicians. This was an explicit challenge against the official narrative in which villagers in the Northeast of Thailand were depicted as uneducated and stupid and thus targeted by communists. The poem ends by calling for the Isan people to unite and strike back against the oppressive authority.

Drought is illustrated in Nai Phi's 'Isan' as:

In the sky there's no water	In the soil only sand
Your tears falling in lines	Dissipate and disappear
The sun strikes your head	The land cracks and splits
Your chest heaves and moans	Shifting apart year—round <sup>345</sup>

This same poem by Nai Phi also countered the image of Isan villagers in official narratives and provoked the Isan people to retaliate against the oppressive authority:

They claim that we're stupid	These, our friends, you see
Love you lastingly	So why do they seem lacking...

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343 Many leftist intellectuals in the first movement came from middle-class families. Only two prominent intellectuals had Isan backgrounds: Pleuang Wannasri and Khamsing Srinawk. For background of influential leftist intellectuals, see Sopha, *"Thai Nation" in the Perspective of Thai Progressive Intellectuals*, 124-6.

344 There are other literary pieces on the suffering of the Isan people that occasionally appeared in leftist magazines. However, the writers are unknown as they used pen names, and it is thus impossible to investigate these works further at this point.

345 Nai Phi, "Isan", translated and quoted in Platt, *Isan Writers*, 106.

They call honesty foolish	Who is so virtuous
And clever as the representatives	With their brave cheating ways
Oppressing and harassing us	Who are they? Let it be revealed
...	
Our two hands are strong	There are those who hear our protests
Pity Isan to the end	Don't fall back, resist with both arms
The storm gathers strength	Around the jungle and plains
Isan's many millions	Is there anyone to defeat us? <sup>346</sup>

Nai Phi's 'Isan' is a well-known poem that describes drought and hardship in Isan with a bold call for the united action of Isan villagers against their oppressors. However, most of his works do not focus on the Isan people or region.<sup>347</sup> Strongly influenced by leftist ideology, Asanee's main interest was class conflict rooted in economic inequality and exploitation as exemplified by the urban poor and workers in Bangkok, Muslim people in the Pattani province in the South, and class transition in Thai society.<sup>348</sup> This is similar to Kulap Saipradit, a prominent Thai leftist intellectual, who dedicated his works to illuminate class oppression and called for the rise of the poor and exploited masses in Thai society. Isan villagers, to Kulap, were deemed as a part of the exploited masses and encouraged to form an alliance with those who also suffered from oppression and injustice. In other words, Isan in Kulap's works was narrated to serve leftist ideologies. The literary works in which Kulap Saipradit directly invokes people from the Northeast includes 'The Awakening' (1952) and *Look into the Future* (1955).<sup>349</sup> Published in 1952, the year when severe drought took place in the Northeast and Nai Phi's 'Isan' was publicised, 'The Awakening' is a short story about

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346 Nai Phi, "Isan", translated and quoted in Martin B. Platt, *Isan Writers*, 106.

347 The poem *Isan* was written in 1952, the same year that a severe drought struck the Northeast of Thailand. Kanchana Prasong-ngern, "การศึกษาเรื่องสั้นไทยที่เสนอปัญหาสังคมชนบทอีสาน: 2501-2525" [A Study of Thai Short Stories Concerning Rural Social Problems in the Northeast: 1958-1982] (PhD diss., Chulalongkorn University, 1984), 1.

348 Nai Phi's most well-known literary work on workers in Bangkok is probably the poem 'เราชนะแล้ว...แม่จ๋า' (1952) [We have Won, Mother Dear]. Others include, for example, the poem 'ความเปลี่ยนแปลง' (1952) [Change] and political short stories about Fatimah and Kulis Intusak (1948-1950). The former depicts class transition in Thai society from the decline of feudalism to the rise of capitalism, while the latter tells the story of the Muslim movement in the South against corrupt Thai officials. The most complete collection of Nai Phi's works was reprinted by Aan publishing house in 2017.

349 The original title in Thai of 'The Awakening' is เขาคืน. Joe Orser translated the short story into English. <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/thai/literature/awakening/Default.htm>. *Look into the Future* in Thai is แลไปข้างหน้า.



the political awakening of a poor Isan man in Bangkok. Am, an Isan pedicab driver in Bangkok, learns that he and other Isan people in Bangkok cannot rely on the rich and those in power to help their fellows in Isan avoid starvation. It is the poor like him, the masses or the ‘people’, who can truly make a change. The ‘people’ here also includes penniless workers, the youth, women, employees, and Thai and Chinese commoners, who contribute money and goods to people in the Northeast.<sup>350</sup>

Another interesting point in ‘The Awakening’ is that Kulap clearly emphasises the rice farming identity of the Isan people while their regional traits are unseen in the story. In the story, when Isan pedicab drivers debate about sending money to help their starving ‘brothers’ in Isan, they describe the suffering of the Isan people in terms of exploited rice farmers, rather than in terms of ethnic or cultural discrimination.<sup>351</sup> To Kulap Saipradit, the suffering of the Isan people equates with exploited rice farmers, and the exploitation of farmers is a key factor that leads to the political struggle of the Isan people. However, Kulap confirms that the ‘awakening’ is supposed to be guided by a Bangkok intellectual, a journalist in the short story, which implies an unsymmetrical relationship between Am and the journalist.<sup>352</sup>

Kulap Saipradit, under his pen name Sri Burapha, confirmed his political perspective on the representation of Isan villagers in his most notable novel, *Look into the Future*, the first Thai novel in which the main protagonist is from the Northeast. The novel describes the life of an Isan boy in Bangkok, from before the 1932 Revolution to the second World War.<sup>353</sup> *Looking to the Future* became famous after its first publication in serial form in the newspaper *Piyamit* in 1955. It was officially re-published at least eight times and multiple times unofficially by Thammasat University students.<sup>354</sup> In reading *Looking to the Future*, readers learn how Chanta Nondindang, a young boy from Buriram, a province in Isan, develops his political views after he moves to Bangkok. The portrayal of Chanta’s parents in Isan illustrated the life of poor Isan villagers as it often appeared in leftist publications.

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350 Si Burapha, “The Awakening” in *Please Give Me a Hand* [ขอแรงหน่อยเถอะ], Achin Chanthramphon ed. (Bangkok: Dokya 2545, 2005), 252.

351 Si Burapha, “The Awakening”, 249-251.

352 Si Burapha, “The Awakening”, 252-253.

353 Unfortunately, the novel was left unfinished because after the coup d’état staged by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1957, Kulap sought refuge in China until his death in 1974. The story ends after the Japanese invasion in 1941, but before the Free Thai movement, an anti-Japanese underground resistance movement emerges.

354 Preface to Si Burapha, *Looking to the Future* [แลไปข้างหน้า] (Bangkok: Dokya 2545, 2005), (25).

Chanta's father is put in jail for a crime he did not commit, leaving his wife and Chanta to struggle for survival in the land of drought and poverty. Eventually, Chanta's mother falls ill and passes away due to the lack of available medical treatment in the village. Chanta is later taken to Bangkok when he turns 12 to be a servant of Chao Khun.<sup>355</sup> Once at Chao Khun's luxurious residence, Chanta is sent to escort Chao Khun's son to a prestigious school. It is at this school that Chanta learns how social classes work in Thai society for the benefit of the rich and the noble.

The class conflict in *Looking to the Future* often concerns criticising the royalist nobles and their well-established culture and tradition in Thai society.<sup>356</sup> At Chao Khun's mansion, the boy learns that what the residents called 'a good tradition' is not equally applied to masters and servants. For example, sick servants are not allowed to receive the same medical treatment or to be treated by the same doctor as their masters, manual work is looked down upon and regarded as low class, and having many mistresses is a symbol of wealth and noble status. Similar situations happen at Chanta's school. For example, Seng, Chanta's friend from a poor Chinese family, is scolded and looked down upon by a noble senior teacher. Another example is when Chanta is punished for knocking down a royalist student, Rujirek, in defence of his best friend, Nitat. Rujirek is furious and tries to attack Nitat when the latter suggests that Thai people should feel grateful to the commoners, who had sacrificed their lives for the country in the past, in addition to feeling grateful to Rujirek's royalist ancestors, who Rujirek claimed had also sacrificed themselves for the country. For Nitat, these commoners might have been Chanta's and the other students' ancestors.<sup>357</sup>

It is Nitat who gradually guides the Isan boy to his political awakening. Nitat outspokenly criticises the class system and social hierarchy by pointing out that the nobles

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355 Chao Khun is a generic term used to denote the rank of senior commissioned officers in Thailand before the revolution.

356 Kulap's anti-feudal/royalist stance had been explicit in his work since he started a career as a journalist a few years before the Thai monarchy was overthrown in 1932. His view also appears in fictional writings too such as *Behind the Painting* [ข้างหลังภาพ] and *The War of Life* [สงครามชีวิต]. However, it seems that Kulap focused more on the feudalist/royalist rather than the capitalist as an enemy, while the depiction of the proletariat in his works is relatively vague compared to Nai Phi's works. For a similar critique on Kulap's work and a comparison to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*, see, Satien Jantimarn, สายธารวรรณกรรมเพื่อชีวิตของไทย [Stream of Literature for Life in Thailand] (Bangkok: Art and Culture, 1981), 143-174.

357 Si Burapha, *Looking to the Future*, 191-2.

actually emerged from commoners like himself and Chanta.<sup>358</sup> Nitat's robust defence of the voiceless Isan people also immensely impresses Chanta. Unlike other wealthy and noble students, Nitat is from a middle-class family in Bangkok that is experiencing financial difficulties due to his sick father. He is not only one of the smartest students in the class, but is also very brave to stand up against injustice. Nitat continues to be Chanta's ideological compass until they grow up. Once he reminds Chanta to 'look into the future' when Chanta fears that people might yearn for the old regimes because the new government is corrupt and inefficient. Nitat reassures Chanta that, 'there is no way we will move backward. We have already escaped crocodiles. When we encounter tigers, will we return to the crocodiles?... There is only one option for people: we will fight the tigers, seeking a way forward.'<sup>359</sup>

The relationship between the three good friends, Chanta, Nitat, and Seng, illustrates Kulap's view of class struggle and the formation of class alliance against economic exploitation and political injustice in two respects. First of all, middle-class intellectuals in Bangkok played a leading role in the movement, a factor which was indicative of the unsymmetrical relationship between the leading intellectuals and the masses. Similar to Am being 'awakened' by the Bangkok journalist in *The Awakening*, Chanta is 'awakened' by Nitat. Not only Chanta, but Seng, the Sino-Thai, also looked up to Nitat because of his ideas and confidence. Guided by Nitat, they united at school as a group of poor children, directly and indirectly challenging rich and royalist children as well as teachers from the noble class. When they grow up and go through the regime change in 1932, their struggle against the powerful elites continues, but was influenced by their chosen careers.<sup>360</sup> Secondly, regardless of ethnicity and provincial background, class is a decisive factor that unites people. For example, while Seng and Chanta define themselves as 'we' because both come from poor families, Seng is aware that Tianming, his wealthy Sino-Thai classmate, is different from him. Similarly, Chanta becomes disappointed when he cannot be friends with Boonkrong, the other provincial student in his class from a wealthy family.

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358 Si Burapha, *Looking to the Future*, 151-2.

359 Si Burapha, *Looking to the Future*, 529.

360 Noticeably, the paths that those three choose to pursue – a journalist (Seng), an assistant provincial public prosecutor (Chanta), and a law student in the UK (Nitrat) – are the same professions as many of the leading political figures and activists during the post-1932 regime change in Thailand.

Similar to Nai Phi's 'Isan', Isan in *Looking to the Future* is mainly associated with drought and oppression, whereas regional traits or Isan identity are almost unseen.<sup>361</sup> Moreover, Kulap explicitly identifies the people in Isan as rice farmers to explain exploitation in Isan. When Chanta seems to sympathise with the elites due to Chao Khun's downfall, a letter from Chanta's father reminds him that he must not to forget his fellow 'farmers' who suffer from the old regime.<sup>362</sup> It is intriguing that even Chanta's father perceives Chanta and himself as 'farmers' instead of 'Isan people'. That same message is confirmed by Chanta's former teacher, who takes part in the revolution, and by Chanta himself when he is reminded of the suffering of his fellow farmers for generations. In this regard, the novel prioritises leftist ideology over Isan identity by implying that Isan people suffer because they are farmers, a group of oppressed people whose labour and production are exploited by feudal lords and the bourgeoisie. As such, it is the farmers' identity, not Isan identity, that connects Chanta to his people in Isan.<sup>363</sup>

Stories of Isan and of Isan villagers in the literary work by Pleuang Wannasri and Suchart Phumiborirak are quite different from Nai Phi's and Kulap's. Compared to other prominent Thai leftists writing in the same era, Suchart and Pleuang received less attention from scholars and the younger generation of Thai leftist activists. However, their writings on Isan are worth mentioning in two respects: the connection between the people suffering in Isan and the Phibunsongkram government's decision to become America's anti-communist ally, and the emergence of Isan identity traits and regionalism in the leftist perspective.

As Pleuang and Suchart were from the Northeast of Thailand (Chaiyaphum and Surin province, respectively), they demonstrated an explicit and consistent concern for Isan and referred to themselves as Northerners. Both of them also took part in the peace movement against the Korean War and the government's pro-American decision to send Thai troops to Korea. Consequently, both were imprisoned in a mass arrest in 1952 known

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361 The reader only knows that Chanta's village in Isan produces silk clothes and farms rice. The villagers are poor and have a harsh life, but most of them have a good heart.

362 Si Burapha, *Looking to the Future*, 284-6.

363 Jit Phumisak was one of the most prominent leftist intellectuals in Thailand. He emphasised the exploitation of farmers' labour and production in *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism*, probably the most influential leftist literature in modern Thai politics. He also wrote a well-known poem on Thai farmers' suffering, 'ເືອນຂ້າວ' [Eat Rice], which was later adapted into a song by Surachai Janthimathorn. Platt, *Isan Writers*, 85.

as the Peace Rebellion.<sup>364</sup> Their stories of people in Isan do not merely concern drought and famine, rather, they connect the government's pro-American stance and involvement in the Korean War to suffering in Isan by utilising the leftist concepts of imperialist colonisation and capitalist exploitation. Pleuang's speech, 'Thailand's Way Out', in the Surin province during his political campaign in 1957 is a case in point.<sup>365</sup> His speech began by addressing the global situation, including war and western imperialism. He pointed out that American intervention in Egypt and the Eisenhower Doctrine illustrated America's imperialist ambition. He also commented that these international issues were connected to current problems in Thailand because the Thai government took the American imperialist side as evidenced by America joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). This move caused grave damages to Thailand's economy, politics, and culture.<sup>366</sup> It was not only the Surin people who confronted economic difficulties and hardship. Other provinces faced similar situations. Pleuang pointed out that these problems were related to 'a problem of the nation's survival. If our nation has unsolved problems, we as a part of nation, whichever province we are in, we always have problems'.<sup>367</sup> In short, Pleuang suggested that the problems in Surin and in other provinces were the same, since they originated from the international military situation. This implies that from Pleuang's perspective, the Isan people in Surin were a part of the Thai nation because they suffered the same consequences of American imperialism in Thailand.<sup>368</sup>

Suchart Phumiborirak's book *Isan, Land of Blood and Tears* is another illustrative example. Similar to Pleuang's work, this book shows the connection between the government's failure to solve problems in Isan, and American imperialism in Thailand. In the final chapter, Suchart encouraged readers to pressure the government to withdraw from

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364 During the Peace Rebellion, massive anti-war intellectuals and activists were arrested including Kulap Saipradit. Nai Phi was on a warrant list too, but he successfully escaped arrest. After the incident, the Thai government revived the anti-communist law.

365 It is said that Pleuang's speeches during his political campaign attracted massive audiences. He was praised for his captivating speaking style and loved by the people in Surin province. Surachai Jantimathorn, a famous singer, even attended Pleuang's speech in Surin when he was young. See, *Pleuang Wannasri Poet-Thinker Writer-Fighter*, 16-17. Kasidit Ananthanathorn, "เปลื้องจวรรณศรีผู้มีปากกาเป็นอาวุธ" [Pleuang Wannasri who wields the pen as a weapon], *The101*, last modified February 1, 2018, <https://www.the101.world/plueng-wannasri/>

366 Pleuang, "An Outdoor Speech 'Thailand's Way Out'", 38.

367 Pleuang, "An Outdoor Speech 'Thailand's Way Out'", 37.

368 Other works by Pleuang showing a similar perspective include Pleuang Wannasri, "ปฏิวัติสังคม" [Social Revolution] and his speech "หนังสือพิมพ์กับสังคม" [Newspapers and Society]. See, A Committee of Memorial Event for Pleuang Wannasri, ed., *Pleuang Wannasri Poet-Thinker Writer-Fighter*, 47-76, and 109-111.

the anti-communist collaboration with the United States because it caused financial burdens and hampered industrial and agricultural development that would benefit the country at large and Isan.<sup>369</sup> However, what makes the book particularly interesting is Suchart's Marxist analysis of class exploitation in Isan from feudalism to capitalism, which made the book first of its kind.<sup>370</sup> In other words, Suchart pointed out that the history of Isan was indeed a history of class struggle.<sup>371</sup> However, the class struggle in his book did not only relate to Isan, but had implications for the whole Thai nation. Suchart strongly emphasised that Isan is a part of Thailand and that Isan people are also Thai. Hence, they do not deserve to be discriminated against and merit equal treatment. A few chapters in the book are dedicated to explaining that Isan's traditions, way of life, and language are parts of Thai culture.<sup>372</sup> Suchart's view on Isan and Thailand is in line with that of Pleuang Wannasi. For these leftists, who both came from Isan, their choice to subsume Isan-ness under a combination of leftist ideologies, and ethnic-based Thai culture and history was an approach that differed from that of other Isan leftists in the second intellectual movement.

### **Isan in Counter-narratives in the Second Intellectual Movement: the 1960s to 1970s**

After Sarit died in 1963, leftist intellectuals re-emerged and student activists started to become more involved in politics, which led to the second intellectual movement. The second intellectual movement began in the mid-1960s to the 6 October incident in 1976. Factors that contributed to the revival of the leftist intellectual movement included decreased censorship under the Thanom government, an increase in the number of university students, and American pressure on the Thai government to liberalise Thai

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369 Suchart, *Isan, Land of Blood and Tears*, 136-149.

370 Suchart, *Isan, Land of Blood and Tears*, chap. 5-6.

371 Suchart's approach on reworking the history of Isan is similar to Jit Phumisak's most well-known work, *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism* [โฉมหน้าศักดินาไทย]. By employing Marxist historical materialism, Jit critically revisited the history of Thailand by illustrating that its history was actually a history of class exploitation. *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism* was printed in 1957, one year before *Isan, Land of Blood and Tears*. There is no evidence that Suchart was influenced by Jit's *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism*. However, the Marxist approach clearly influenced some radical intellectuals to challenge existing Thai historiography.

372 Suchart, *Isan, Land of Blood and Tears*, 82-3. However, Suchart's purpose is not to correct misperception towards Isan culture *per se*, rather, the book points out how the Isan way of life is not corrupted by capitalism.

politics. It ultimately resulted in a promulgation of the constitution and national elections in 1968 and 1969 respectively, and the growing conflict in the Indochina.<sup>373</sup> Many leftist literary works were published and widely circulated among student activists. These works also included leftist writings from the first intellectual movement, such as Si Burapha's *Looking to the Future* and Nai Phi's 'Isan'.<sup>374</sup> Literature on Isan villagers, written by leftist intellectuals and activists, also dramatically grew as well due to the increasing awareness of Isan identity among the Northeasterners, caused by growing interaction between Isan and Bangkok. Other reasons for the proliferation of literature on the suffering Isan people included an increase in the number of educated Northeasterners and their participation in Thai literary society. University students, who were allowed to arrange non-political group activities including 'volunteer development' trips to the countryside to rural areas like Isan, produced writings on Isan based on their experiences from these trips.<sup>375</sup>

Similar to leftist intellectuals and activists in the first intellectual movement, the younger generation of Thai leftists also challenged the government's authority and legitimacy by narrating that Isan villagers had a harsh life because of drought, famine, Thailand's oppressive economic structure, and the government.<sup>376</sup> Another illustration of leftist narrative material describing the difficulties of the Isan people is *Tongpan*, a feature film produced in 1976 by a group of Thai students and intellectuals involved in the 1973 popular uprising, including Pajong Laisakul, Surachai Jantimathorn, Euthana Mukdasanit, Khamsing Srinawk, and Withayakorn Chiengkul.<sup>377</sup> One central theme in *Tongpan* is criticism against the building of a massive dam in Isan, which was part of the regional development

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373 For example, university students were allowed to organise non-political group activities or political activities that solely concern their own university, such as the university election in Thammasat University and protests against corruption in Thammasat and Chulalongkorn University. Kanokrat Lertchoosakul, "The Rise of the Octobrists: Power and Conflict among Former Left Wing Student Activists in Contemporary Thai Politics" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012), 48-9.

374 On the revival of leftist writings by student movements in 1970s, see, Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 335-8.

375 This activity was very popular among university students in the late 1960s to early 1970s. Some students later developed political consciousness and participated in political activities because of the volunteer development camp. Tyrell Haberkorn, *Revolution Interrupted: Farmers, Students, Law, and Violence in Northern Thailand* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 89, and, Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 36.

376 Some examples include Udorn Thongnoi's poem 'อีสานนงู' [My Isan] (1969), Prasert Jandam's poems 'ฝนแดด' [Rain in Sunny Day] and 'มื้อค่ำ' [Supper] (1974), and Surachai Jantimathorn's short story 'แล้งเข็ญ' [Drought] (1968). Udorn Thongnoi, Prasert Jandam, and Surachai Jantimathorn are well-known leftist activists with Isan backgrounds.

377 Charnvit Kasetsiri, ed., *จาก 14 ถึง 6 ตุลาคมและทองปาน* [From October 14, 1973 to October 6, 1976: Bangkok and Tongpan's Isan] (Bangkok: The Foundation of Social Science and Humanities Textbooks, 2006), 144.

plan. While construction of the dam benefited urban people, it caused hardship to the Isan people like Tongpan and his family. The story contradicted and countered state-promoted propaganda films (with American support) such as *Cold Fire*, a film that depicted the Thai state and its national development plans as truly helping villagers whose lives were threatened by communist infiltration. In *Tongpan*, there is no communist presence in the Isan village; there are only Thai officials and foreign experts trying to initiate a development project (Pa-Mong dam construction) that actually abuses the villagers.

The principal interests of literary works on Isan in the second intellectual movement were similar to those prevalent in the previous intellectual movement. Both narrated Isan as a land of drought and poverty where the people were starved and suffered at the hands of the Thai government, capitalists, and American imperialism. However, in the literary works produced in the second intellectual movement there is a stronger sense of Isan identity and an emphasis on Isan specifically, not rural Thailand in general, as a victim of the Thai state and the United States. The leftists used an opposite story on Isan villagers to counter the Thai government in two respects. Firstly, because the leftist portrayal of Isan villagers rejected the government's stories about Isan as a communist target, it directly challenged the government's reason for collaborating with the United States and the resulting legitimization of its power. Secondly, the depiction of Isan in the leftist counter-narratives was used to challenge the superior identity of Bangkok that represented the Central authority. By referring to the agonistic dichotomy between Bangkok and Isan, and the increase of Isan's presence in leftist publications, the second leftist movement demonstrated a stronger sense of Isan regionalism compared to the first intellectual movement. Some leftists, particularly those from Isan, deemed the region and its people as the object of a political struggle rather than solely focusing on the emancipation of the exploited mass of which Isan was a part.

To counter the government's stories of the Isan people as the target of communists, leftist publications in this period emphasised that the problems of the Isan people were caused by American military operations and American bases in the Northeast. This is related to the escalation of the Indochina conflict, the growing anti-war movement in Thailand, and an inflow of reports of American military operations in Isan and neighbouring countries, for



example.<sup>378</sup> The topic of whether Isan suffered from the American presence was raised in the *Social Science Review*, the leading intellectual journal in the 1960s to 1970s.<sup>379</sup> However, the journal generally criticised the American problems, such as the increase of drugs and prostitution, and the Thai government's anti-communist killings in Isan from liberal and humanist perspectives instead of relying heavily on leftist approaches like those of Suchart Phumiborirak and Pleuang Wannasri. The writings in the *Social Science Review* included Wiboon Shamsheun's poem 'Villagers in the Indochina War Era', that described Udon province as morally corrupt due to the American military base, and Weeraprawat Wongpuapan's *Tahkli: War Garbage*.<sup>380</sup> The latter concerned the growing problem of prostitution in Isan caused by the American military bases.<sup>381</sup> Noticeably, Isan's presence in the *Social Science Review* concerned only two main issues: the Americans as the reason for social decay in Thailand and the Thai government's collaboration with American on anti-communist killings. This implies that the depiction of Isan was constituted through stories propagated by the Thai government and the United States.<sup>382</sup>

Besides the *Social Science Review*, Isan's suffering from the American military bases and operation appeared in Rom Ratiwan's short story, 'Farewell, Priang Pathum' (1972), Khamsing Srinawk's 'Nametag' (1970), and Waochula's 'Tony' (1967).<sup>383</sup> 'Farewell, Priang Pathum' tells the story of an Isan woman who is raped by an American soldier, while 'Nametag' mocks the prostitution problem in Udon province that flourished because of the American bases there. In 'Tony', the author reflected on the problem of unwanted children between the American G.I.s and Thai women through Tony, the young protagonist and

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378 For more detail on the anti-war and anti-American movement in the 1960s to 1970s, please see Chapter 2.

379 The journal played a significant role in the anti-war/anti-American movement by publishing reports from foreign sources on America's inhuman attacks in Indochina.

380 Wiboon Shamsheun, "ชาวบ้านยุคสงครามอินโดจีน" [Villagers in the Indochina War Era], *Social Science Review* 10, no. 7 (1972): 115. Wiboon was born in Kalasin province, Isan. He graduated from Mahasarakham Teachers' College.

381 Weeraprawat Wongpuapan, "ตาคลิ: ขยะสงคราม" [Tahkli: War Garbage], *Social Science Reviews* 8, no. 10 (1972): 44-57.

382 An exception is the 1966 volume whose main theme on development in Isan. This volume aims to correct the misconception about Isan, that even though Isan is underdeveloped, it has a lot of good people. It includes articles on village and education development. Indeed, the content in general does not significantly differ from the government's development programmes in Isan. See, *Social Science Review* 4, no. 1 (June-August, 1966).

383 Rom Ratiwan, "ลาก่อนเปรียงปทุม" [Farewell, Priang Pathum] in *เสียงแคนและเปียโน* [Sound of the Khaen and the Piano] (Bangkok: Prapansan, 1972), 25-34.; Lao Khamhawm, "ป้าย" [Nametag] in *ฟ้าบ่กั้น* [The Politician and Other Stories], 22nd ed. (Bangkok: Aan, 2012), 195-201.; and Waochula, "โทนี่" [Tony] in *เหมือนอย่างไม่เคย* [As If It Had Never Happened], ed. Suchart Sawatsi (Bangkok: Duangkamol, 1976), 79-86.

himself the unwanted child of an American G.I. and an Isan woman. Udorn Thongnoi's poem, 'Bomb-Carrying Man' (1974), tells the story of poor Isan villagers who make a living by selling bomb parts collected from the Phu Phan mountains.<sup>384</sup> If they are killed by bombs or shot dead, 'they will become a communist! They are communist because they struggle to live, because they are a great friend of America'.<sup>385</sup>

Stories of Isan as a victim of the Americans often appeared in works by, though not exclusively, leftists who had Isan backgrounds, such as Rom Ratiwan, Khamsing Srinawk, Udorn Thongnoi, and Wiboon Shamsheun. The trend implies the collective consciousness of Isan leftists and the formation of an Isan identity in the Cold War context. The most illustrative example of the emergence of for-life visual artist groups was in in Korat, one of the provinces in the Northeast where an American military base located. Referring to themselves as Korat-style artists, many of them were inspired by their experiences with American GIs or by the presence of American military bases.<sup>386</sup> For example, Tawee Ratchaneekorn, a master of Isan artist and a pioneer of the 'Korat-style visual art for life', conveyed his experience of changes in Isan in his painting *A Village Girl* (1957), which showed an Isan girl who became a victim of urban development. He also painted an American soldier dating a thin Isan girl in 1957 to reflect problems in Korat.<sup>387</sup> Tawee was one of the first artists in Isan that narrated counter-narrative on Isan through painting.

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384 Udorn Thongnoi was born in Yasothon province in Isan. He went to study Law at Thammasat University where he took part in the student movement. His writings were influenced by the concept of Art for Life. Platt, *Isan Writers*, 100.

385 Udorn Thongnoi, "Bomb-carrying Man" in *อีสานกู* [My Isan] (Bangkok: Prapansan, 1975), 90-97.

386 For example, Chokchai Tukpoe, an Isan artist who played a leading role in the anti-American art exhibition in 1976, stated that his anti-American artwork was inspired from his childhood experience. When he was young, he lived near the American military base and often saw injured soldiers and detained communist suspects. Chokchai Tukpoe, Interview by Rungchai Yensabai, Ubon Ratchathani, 21 October 2016.

387 Natdhanond, *Visual Art for Life's Sake*, abstract, 122.



**A Village Girl (1967) by Tawee Ratchaneekorn <sup>388</sup>**

Although Tawee was not born in Isan, his influence on the formation of Isan artists was immense. After he started teaching art at the North Eastern Technological College (NETC) in Korat, Isan, in 1960, many of the students that Tawee trained adopted his ideology and artistic style, and later formed an Isan artist group. Sanam Chankroh, Tawee's student from the Nongkai province, created artwork made from war garbage dumped in the college, for example, from pieces of weapons or vehicles. He was inspired his American friends' war stories when he worked as a musician at a pub in the American base in Korat.<sup>389</sup> Other students of Tawee that created artwork that opposed the American bases and war include Suksan Meunnirut and Surapol Panyawachira. Surapol explained that he could connect his own experiences in Isan to what he learned at NETC, which made him stand up for the oppressed.<sup>390</sup> Although Chokchai Takpoe did not study with Tawee, his childhood experiences in Isan, he lived near the American base, inspired him to create artwork against the United States.<sup>391</sup> These Isan artists later formed the United Front of Isan Artists (UFIA) in order to work and cooperate with the United Front of Artists of Thailand (UFAT) in Isan.

388 ศิลปินแห่งชาติ [National Artist], accessed February 22, 2018, <http://art2.culture.go.th>.

389 Natdhanond, *Visual Art for Life's Sake*, 125-6.

390 Tawee Ratchaneekorn, Suksan Meunnirut, and Surapol Panyawachira, Interview by Rungchai Yensabai, Ubon Ratchatani, 26 August 2016.

391 Chokchai Tukpoe, Interview by Rungchai Yensabai, Ubon Ratchathani, 21 October 2016.

UFIA worked closely with the massive anti-American art exhibition at Bangkok and Korat in 1976.<sup>392</sup>

Similar to the for-life visual artist groups in Korat, Caravan is another example of how the American presence in the Northeast stimulated the Isan regional sentiment. Caravan was probably the most well-known ‘Song for Life’ band in the mid 1970s.<sup>393</sup> The band was composed of four members: Surachai Janthimathorn (leader), Wirasak Sunthornsi, Thongkran Thana, Pongtep Kradonchamnan, and Mongkol Utoke. All of them were originally from or grew up in Isan, and witnessed the negative consequences of the American military bases in their hometown.<sup>394</sup> Most of their songs concern the harsh conditions of the Thai peasantry, the peasants’ struggle for justice, and their opposition to the Vietnam War and the American presence in Thailand. Noticeably, Caravan’s anti-war and anti-American sentiment was not only very outspoken, but was also often expressed through their use of the Isan language or their incorporation of Isan folk music, such as *molam* and *soeng*, into their work. Illustrative examples include ‘Dangerous American’, ‘Korat Kicks Out the Damn Yanks’, ‘Seong Isan’, and ‘The Great *Lam Phloen* for Kicking Out America’.<sup>395</sup> Because the band used Isan identity in music to counter the Americans, it implied the existence of a binary oppositional relationship between the Isan regional traits and the Americans as foreign Others. In other words, Isan regional sentiment was also stimulated by the American military bases, through musical depictions of the American Other to Isan people.

Lao Khamhwam’s collection of short stories, *The Politician and Other Stories*, is one of the best examples of using depiction of Isan to challenge the superior identity of Bangkok. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the work deliberately uses the ‘inferior’ identity of rural villagers to challenge dominant Thai values and Bangkok.<sup>396</sup> This is a challenge against

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392 Natdhanond, *Visual Art for Life’s Sake*, 136.

393 After the 1973 uprising, many Songs for Life bands were formed and became popular under the relaxed political climate and loosened censorship. They expressed the social and political concerns of the time through music which was normally oriented towards a folk-rock genre. Besides Caravan, there were other bands such as *โคมฉาย* (Shining Latern) and *กรรมมาชน* (Proletariat), but Caravan seemed to be the most influential. The band still occasionally appears in public, particularly during protests. Pratt, *Isan Writers*, 66.

394 Craig A. Lockard, *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 192-194.

395 The songs’ titles in Thai are as follows: อเมริกันอันตราย, โคราชขับไล่ไอ้กัน, เซ็งอีसान, and ลำเพลินจำเริญใจขับไล่อเมริกา. Pratt, *Isan Writers*, 72-73.

396 Other works that used inferior representations of rural villagers to mock and humiliate Bangkok’s supremacy include, for example, Sri Daoruang and Witayakorn Chiengkul.

the identity dichotomy in which rural villagers, particularly those in Isan, were constructed as Bangkok's foreign and inferior Other. However, the challenge against Bangkok's supremacy was done by reversing existing power relations, rather than by eliminating the identity dichotomy.

Secondly, *The Politician and Other Stories* is an illustration of an unspecified place in rural Thailand that is represented or dominated by Isan in the second intellectual movement. The book tells stories about rural villagers in an unspecified countryside but does not particularly focus on the Northeast. When it was published for the first time in 1958, only three out of seven short stories had a recognisable connection to Isan.<sup>397</sup> The first edition was published in 1958. However, it was almost unknown to the Thai public because the book was banned after the coup took place just one month after the book's launch. It was only after its second publication in 1969 that Khamsing's short story collection started to gain reputation.<sup>398</sup> Changing perceptions towards *The Politician and Other Stories*, from its first publication in 1959 to the twenty-second edition in 2012, showed a narrative transition from unspecified rural villagers to Isan villagers among Thai leftists.

Khamsing Srinawk was born to a farmer's family in the Korat province, Isan. He studied journalism at Chulalongkorn University and worked as journalist for a while. In 1952, he decided to leave Bangkok to work for both the Forestry Department in the Lamphun province in the North, and for Cornell University's research project in rural Central Thailand. After the coup in 1959, he returned to farming in Korat and almost completely ceased writing. After the 6 October events in 1976, Khamsing fled to the jungle, then to Laos, and finally went into self-imposed exile in Sweden until 1980.<sup>399</sup> *The Politician and Other Stories* can be regarded as one of the most successful examples of modern Thai literature as it has been published 22 times since its first publication in 1959 to 2012. It was published twice in 1973, a fact that demonstrates its high popularity after the student-led protests in 1973.

*The Politician and Other Stories* challenged Bangkok's identity and values in the following aspects: democracy, royalist/monarchical hierarchy, education, local administration, and *kanpatthana* or development through democracy and education. 'The Politician', one of the short stories in the book, is one of the best illustrative examples. In

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397 The three stories are 'The Gold-Legged Frog', 'The Moneyed Farmer', and 'Pig Person'.

398 Chusak, *Re-read*, 108.

399 Platt, *Isan Writers*, 49-50.

the book, the author mocked Sarit's coup and situation of democracy in Thailand through Kehr, a former monk and the village drunkard, who is ironically called 'Professor'<sup>400</sup> by the locals, stated:

'Democracy, nut! Not "cracy",' Kehr said severely, 'They call it a "coup d'état", see. You have to have a lot of coups d'état. Otherwise it isn't democracy.'<sup>401</sup>

Kehr and his former disciples' understanding of political representation is another example. Kwan, one of Kehr's former disciples encourages him to run for election because Kehr shares the same qualities as current representatives. Through this depiction of Kehr, Khamsing destroys the noble status of representatives, who symbolised Bangkok's power, by comparing them to an impudent drunkard like Kehr. Kwan stated that:

I think to be a representative nowadays you've got to be a hooligan, shout a lot, and put people off by cursing their families right back to their great grandfathers. You saw the bunch running for office last time. No better than us, shouting around, swearing in the middle of the street.<sup>402</sup>

At first, Kehr is reluctant to run for election because he feels ashamed of lying a lot to people like 'people hungry for office'. Although he is a drunk, he still defines himself through his prior occupation as a monk particularly a virtue of honesty. This is evident in his statement, 'if you want me to lie and crow... well, it sticks in the mouth.'<sup>403</sup> Eventually, Kehr decides to run for election. During the campaign, Kehr convinces the villagers that he will be a more suitable representative than the other elite candidates. He explains their noble ranks and class to the villagers when he states that, 'a knight looks after horses and sometimes feeds and waters chickens, ducks and elephants. They do it at night. I know because I've been to Bangkok. Sir we ought to say as "Sire", and we know that sires are kept for our mares that don't have any foals yet...' He also calls one of candidates, a general, 'childish' because he pins 'a row of seashells on his chest', and another candidate, a lawyer, as 'someone who likes trouble where he finds it', and added that 'no money to give him,

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400 Domnern Garden, a translator of *The Politician and Other Stories*, translated อาจารย์ [ajarn] as 'Professor'. In Thai society the meaning of professor is different from the western definition. Any person considered knowledgeable and respectable may be referred to as 'ajarn'.

401 Khamsing Srinawak, *The Politician and Other Stories*, trans. Domnern Garden (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2. This quotation was slightly adjusted to match the original version in Thai.

402 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 4.

403 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 4.

and you land in jail.’<sup>404</sup> Kehr shows the villagers that only he truly knows their lives well, and he will ‘do anything you want. Kick a dog, cut up a man’.<sup>405</sup>

Kehr is elected, which is a huge shock to Kehr himself. Soon he realises that his victory is actually a misfortune.<sup>406</sup> Kehr becomes anxious when he thinks that he has to go to Bangkok and might have to wear ‘an outer garment that looked like a whole blanket, with a silly shred of cloth swinging from his neck’ like the previous representative.<sup>407</sup> At the end of the story, Kehr secretly leaves the village and no one ever sees him again.

In ‘Dust Underfoot’, Khamsing bluntly challenged the inferior and backward depiction of rural villagers in Bangkok’s perception through Inta, a boy from the Kamu ethnic tribe who works for a company in a forest in the North of Thailand. In the previous section which examined the concept of *siwilai* and *kanpatthana*, the rural villagers were deemed the ‘Other within’ according to Bangkok’s standard of development and definition of being ‘civilised’.<sup>408</sup> As the people in Bangkok often defined superior and *siwilai* status through the royalist or monarchical hierarchy, the conversation between Inta, and Chert, a man from Bangkok, is a cruel comeback. The conversation takes place after a visit of *Mom Ratchawong*<sup>409</sup> Paipeen Ratchapruet, the nephew of the company owner and general manager. The conversation is as follows:

‘Boss, the man you call Mong Mong, is he a Burmese?’ Inta asked in dialect confusing the title Mom with the local word for a Burmese.

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I laughed. ‘That’s no Burmese, Inta. He’s a Mom, not a Mong.’

‘What’s a Mom?’ he persisted.

‘That’s what we call a prince or a lord. We can’t address him like an ordinary person.’ I spoke very slowly.

‘What kind of lord?’ he interjected in a miserable voice.

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404 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 9-10.

405 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 10.

406 It is ‘เสียด’ [sa-niad] in Thai. Although it means misfortune in English, the term implies that the object is considered low and filthy. Therefore, it is an absolute insult to a representative when Kehr considers becoming a ‘sa-niad’.

407 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 12

408 Indeed, according to Thongchai’s the ‘Other within’, Inta is not a rural villager (*chaobannok*) but a jungle person (*chao pa*). Unlike rural villagers who are loyal to Siamese rulers, jungle people have no loyalty and are uncivilised. They are thus a lower class than rural villagers.

409 *Mom Ratchawong* or *Mom Rajawongse* is a noble title that is assumed by children of the king’s great-grandchildren.

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'Well, he's descended from a long line of lords, that is he is a distant relative of our Lord of Life, Inta, whom we also call the Lord of the Land, the King.'

He listened thoughtfully and then shook his head sadly.

'Boss, I don't understand. Lord of what land? Where?'

'All of it, everywhere, Inta.'

'You mean here and there?' he said pointing ahead and to the line of hills to the side.

'Yes, we pretend it belongs to him but in fact it doesn't really, but he has great virtue and authority we hold him up as being the lord of all things. Ordinary people like you and me, Inta, are treated like his property and are called "servants of the sky, slaves of the land" or "subjects".... the prince with us is only a relative, a distant cousin but still we respect him as a lord.'

'Balls! Some lord! He's an ordinary man. I see him eat food everyday.'

I laughed at Inta's innocence.

'Who said he's not a man, Inta? The fact is he's just like you or me but he has certain magnificent qualities about him that it would be useless to try to explain. Where would a dope like you find the brains to understand?'

We were engulfed in strained silence. Still feeling superior, I tried to make out the reaction on his barely visible face but it was he who broke the stillness with a question that stunned me.

'Boss, how is it that plain people can be lords?'

Were the starlight a little brighter, Inta would have seen my consternation. When I did not reply, he raised his voice to me, 'Boss, you've gone mad. You keep saying "pretend." To hell with lords.'

'Mind your words. Inta,' I warned him. 'Don't forget, we're just ordinary people. Compared to him, we're only a speck of dust underfoot.<sup>410</sup> You have to accept what everyone else does.'

'Who's under whose foot—you or me?'<sup>411</sup>

It is Inta's 'innocence', or 'stupidity' in Chert's perception, that reveals the normalised hierarchical power relations found in Thai society. In addition, while *Mom Ratchawong* Paipen Ratchapruek calls Inta 'Ear Holes' and does not consider him a human being because Inta is a Kamu, Inta's view of *Mom Ratchawong* Paipen as an ordinary person like himself and Chert is a drastic response. Ironically, whether it was the author's

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410 'A speck of dust underfoot' is a phrase used to address oneself to a royal person.

411 Based on an English translation by Domnern Garden with some corrections according to the original version in Thai. Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 88-89.



intention or not, the name 'Paipen Ratchapruek' also sounds inhuman as it literally means 'climbing a tree'; the name therefore possibly suggests 'a monkey' to some readers.

Both Kehr and Inta challenge a set of values fundamentally supporting Bangkok's dominant position. Their naivety, innocence, and straightforwardness, in other words, the common qualities of villagers, turns out to be a destructive weapon against the ruling elites. A similar style of challenge also appears in 'The Gold-Legged Frog' and 'The Quack Doctor' when local administrative officers and an agent of *kanpatthana* were the stories' respective targets. In 'The Gold-Legged Frog', a deputy who makes fun of farmers becomes stunned and feels awkward after a naïve answer from Nark Na-ngarm, a poor villager, about the reason why he has many children.<sup>412</sup>

In 'The Quack Doctor', a conversation between Grandfather Sah's and a physician from Bangkok in a rural village deliberately mocks the government's development policy and also the highly revered medical profession. When Grandfather Sah's son-in-law tells him that the physician gives injections to people, Grandfather Sah replies, 'then they're the same as the water buffalo doctors, ain't they?'<sup>413</sup> Another time when a physician examines him by thumping and tapping his spine and ribs, Sah says, 'you're behaving just like a farmer... we tap just like that to tell whether a watermelon is ripe. If it's ripe it goes, "ook", "ook", or when we're looking for turnips to dig up, we pound the ground and if it goes "chu", "chu". You dig there and find one.'<sup>414</sup>

The set of values shoring up Bangkok's dominant position is challenged and questioned by 'naïve and stupid' villagers like Khern, Inta, and Grandfather Sah. *The Politician and Other Stories* is very successful in using the image of villagers prevalent in official narratives against the promoters themselves. In Anderson's collection of stories, 'In the Mirror', 'Soon You'll Know Enough', one of the short stories from Khamsing's *The Politician and Other Stories* was included. To Anderson, 'Soon You'll Know Enough' shares the same central theme of 'a transformation engendered by the spread of modern capitalism and the remorseless expansion of the state' relating to the 'American Era'.<sup>415</sup>

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412 Chusak, *Reread*, 108-110.

413 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 56.

414 Khamsing, *The Politician and Other Stories*, 58.

415 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 40-43.

However, 'Soon You'll Know Enough' and other short stories do not only illuminate this 'transformation', but also challenge Bangkok's supremacy through the villagers.

The government's *kanpatthana* was also challenged by Thongmuan, a village girl in *Soon You'll Know Enough*. In the story, Thongmuan learns many new things when she brings melons from home to sell in town. She now realises in what ways the Community Hall brings development to the village and the nation. Specifically, she learns that more visitors from Bangkok come to her village to build a bridge and to bring medicine and clothing to the villagers.<sup>416</sup> More cars and townspeople in the village confirm Thongmuan's understanding that her village is not too far from the city. Although Thongmuan comes to 'know' about the connection between the hall and *kanpatthana*, there is more that Thongmuan does not yet know. For example, she unknowingly confronts the petty extortions of government officials and is puzzled when they tell her that the road is owned by a commissionaire. Whether it is intentional or not, the story of Thongmuan taking melons to town is similar to the end of *The Community Development Worker*, the USIS film mentioned in the previous section which discussed the influence of official narrative on the depiction of Isan. Unlike the villagers in the USIS film who cheerfully get on a train with a load of melons, a government inspector 'asks' for some melons from Thongmuan. In the end, Thongmuan and the other villagers fail to sell their products in town because the 'road commissionaire' does not allow their vehicle to pass.

*The Politician and Other Stories* is an illustrative example of the narrative transition from stories of oppression in an unspecified countryside to Isan in leftist writings during the second intellectual movement. *The Politician and Other Stories* did not particularly focus on rural villagers in Isan but on rural Thailand in general when it was printed in 1958. Five more stories were added to the second edition in 1969, and four more to the printing in 1979 that took place under the editorship of Suchart. The 1979 edition collects all of Khamsing's available short stories and has been used as a model edition for reprinting the book.<sup>417</sup> Out of the nine stories added after the first printing, four show explicit connections to Isan.

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416 Khamsing's 'Soon You'll Know Enough' is the sequel to Witayakorn Chiengkul's 'As If It Had Never Happened'. The former was published in 1974, the latter in 1968. Both use the same persona, Thongmuan, as a leading character, and the same village as a setting. In 'As If It Had Never Happened', Thongmuan questions the purpose of building the Community Hall in her village because it seems to be useless to her. Both 'As If It Had Never Happened' and 'Soon You'll Know Enough' appear in *In the Mirror*.

417 Chusak, *Reread*, 108-110.

Interestingly, *The Politician and Other Stories* has been widely praised as an excellent example of Isan literature.<sup>418</sup> Chusak Pattarakulvanich dedicated one lengthy chapter in *Re-read: the Urban and Rural in Thai Literature*, to argue that *The Politician and Other Stories* aims to counter the 'Isan identity created by the Thai state'.<sup>419</sup> He complains that people who view the contribution of *The Politician and Other Stories* as merely a realistic portrait of 'poor, bitter, and naïve' Isan are trapped in a state-promoted depiction of Isan. He sets out the state's narrative of Isan as a land of drought and of naive villagers that are subject to the Thai state's ideas of development and modernisation in the Sarit and Thanom era.<sup>420</sup> But since Chusak views that this is *The Politician and Other Stories* telling Isan stories, does this mean that Chusak is also trapped in state-promoted depiction of Isan? Benedict Anderson also believed that Thongmuan's village is in the Northeast.<sup>421</sup> In this regard, it seems that it is the readers who impose the 'Isan identity created by the Thai state' on the book by assuming that stories about drought, famine, oppressed villagers and farmers equate to 'Isan', although these problems did not exclusively happen in Isan.<sup>422</sup>

This point was also raised by Martin Platt, a scholar of Thai studies, who proposed that the book was influenced by Khamsing's experiences in the Northern and Central regions where he spent eight to ten years working for the Ministry of Forest in the North and as a researcher for the Cornell Project in the Central region alongside Herbert Phillips.<sup>423</sup> It was when Khamsing started working with Cornell that he seriously resumed writing the short stories that were later published in *The Politician and Other Stories*.<sup>424</sup> At least two short stories are related to these experiences: 'Dust Underfoot' and 'The Peasant and the White Man'. In addition, the title of *The Politician and Other Stories*, which in Thai is *Fa Bo Kan* and means the sky does not divide us, is often taken as an example of the Lao language,

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418 Critics and comments on *The Politician and Other Stories* were gathered in *หอมคำ ...ลาวคำหอม* [Fragrant Words... Lao Kamhawm], a book celebrating the 36th anniversary of *The Politician and Other Stories*. On comments from many critics applauding the book as an excellent representation of Isan, please see, *หอมคำ ลาว คำหอม ...* [Fragrant Words... Lao Kamhawm] (Mahasarakham: Mahasarakham Teacher College, 1994), 99, 137-138, 141, and 143.

419 Chusak, *Re-read*, 106-141.

420 Chusak, *Re-read*, 129-130.

421 Anderson, introduction to *In the Mirror*, 48.

422 Similar situations also happened to farmers in the Central region. Please see, Tawee Srisongkram et al., *ชาวนาไทยปฏิวัติ* [Revolutionary Thai Farmers], (Bangkok: Charoentam, 1974).

423 Martin B. Platt, *Isan Writers*, 56-57.

424 "Youth," in *Fragrant Words... Lao Kamhawm*, 24.

but it can also be from the Northern language.<sup>425</sup> Platt further pointed out that Khamsing Srinawk started to embrace his Isan identity after the public perceived him as an Isan writer. Platt showed that Khamsing's writings and public activities started to assume an Isan/Lao identity in the 1990s. Some illustrative examples include the Lao expressions in the publisher's forward in *Wall of Wind* (1993), a collection of Khamsing's written accounts from 1971 to 1973. Khamsing's speech at a seminar on Isan in 1994 asked people 'to look more deeply at Isan and see more than just poverty,' and thus demonstrated his sentimental concern for Isan. Khamsing also wrote a forward to the Thai edition of the collection of short stories by the Lao writer, Uthin Bunnyavong. Additionally, Khamsing gave a speech on his connection to Laos in a party at his house for the Lao ambassador to Thailand in 1999.<sup>426</sup> Indeed, Khamsing clearly linked his best-known work, *The Politician and Other Stories* to Lao/Isan-ness for the first time in the preface to the Swedish version of the book in 1979. The preface begins with a line of an Isan folk song usually sung in the traditional Isan ceremony, Boonphravet. The line contains the Lao words 'missing home', which suggested both the author's connection to Isan as well as his intention to express this connection to the reader.<sup>427</sup>

Indeed, *The Politician and Other Stories* is a part of the first intellectual movement in which Isan identity was less emphasised than the rural-urban conflict in general and class oppression. The book was first printed in 1958. However, eleven out of seventeen short stories in the most complete edition of the book were published between 1958 and 1962 (eight stories in 1958). The book was banned and removed from all bookstores after being available no more than a month. It disappeared from public notice until 1969, when Sulak Sivaraksa and friends came across the forgotten book during their visit to Khamsing in Korat and decided to reprint the book despite Khamsing's hesitation.<sup>428</sup> This second edition was the real debut of the book since it became more well-known among the intellectuals and the student activists. After the student-led uprising in 1973, *The Politician and Other Stories* was regarded as a must-read book for leftists and radical young intellectuals, along with Seni's *The Spectre* and Maxim Gorky's *Mother*. The book was reprinted twice in 1974, and

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425 Platt, *Isan Writers*, 56.

426 Platt, *Isan Writers*, 51, 58-59.

427 Lao Khamhawm, "Preface" in *Fragrant Words... Lao Kamhawm*, 42-44.

428 "Youth" in *Fragrant Words... Lao Kamhawm*, 24-25.

many short stories from the book were published in university books and student journals.<sup>429</sup>

The fact that *The Politician and Other Stories* was perceived as a representation of Isan literature was a part of the rise of Isan regional identity in leftist activists in the second intellectual movement, particularly those who had Isan backgrounds. As Isan regionalism grew, some works by Isan leftists believed that Isan itself was the objective of political struggles instead of the fight for the exploited mass, which included the Isan people as the landless agrarian proletariat and small peasants. This sometimes even caused cleavages and dilemmas between Isan regionalism and leftist ideologies. A case in point is Rom Ratiwan's *Thon Thewada, Fighter from the Plateau*.<sup>430</sup> Although the book and the author are much less well-known than Khamsing's *The Politician and Other Stories*, partially due to Rom's untimely death, *Thon Thewada, Fighter from the Plateau* is worth studying not only because it was written by a prominent leftist writer but it also because it illustrates the leftist influence and discordances between Isan identity and class struggle, a missing piece in studies on Isan leftists in the Cold War period.<sup>431</sup>

*Thon Thewada* is the name of a young boy from Isan, who fearlessly fights against difficulties and injustice. He is an orphan raised by local monks. Although the villagers are generally good, their superstitious beliefs, poverty, and underdevelopment lead to the death and departure of everyone Thon holds dear to him. The only two things left for the boy are solitariness and a notebook from Teacher Sin whom Thon greatly admires. The book inspires the young Thon through its descriptions about the fight between the 'old' and the 'new' and its emphasis on uniting people to fight. It links drought and the difficulties in Isan that Thon experiences to the Thai political system and encourages Thon to join the fight between the rural and urban people and their class struggle. Thon always keeps the notebook with him and reads it every time he needs ideological guidance. Thon becomes a ticket boy on a bus in downtown Loei before moving to work at a train station in Korat.<sup>432</sup> There he rescues Sida, a girl from a poor village in Isan that is similar to his home village,

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429 Chusak, *Re-read*, 109.

430 Title in Thai is โทณ เทวดา: นักสู้จากที่ราบสูง.

431 The novel was first published in 1980, but it was written many years before. Its author passed away in 1974 at age 42. Platt, *Isan Writers*, 38.

432 Both Loei and Korat are big provinces in Isan. However, Korat is more developed, while Loei, due to its remote and mountainous location, was the CPT's stronghold.

from a brothel in town. After Thon and his friend accompany her back to her village, Thon leaves his friends and starts a new journey, this time to Bangkok. He accidentally helps Thongtae, a wealthy and corrupt politician, and finally stays at Thongtae's mansion. Thon is assigned to 'take care' of workers escaping from labour camps located deep in the mountains. When Thon learns that these workers are from Isan and brutally forced to illegally clear the forest for Thongtae's sugar plantation, he decides to destroy the camp and help the workers escape. After the incident, Thon becomes an industrial worker and organises a worker's coalition and a labour strike against the industry's owners. The workers win and Thon decides to return to his home village in Isan, where he intends to 'revive the poor and unfortunate village'. The story ends with Thon's reuniting with Teacher Sin in the court, where Teacher Sin is found guilty of rebellion in Tambon Khusod, located in Sisaket province in the Isan region.<sup>433</sup> Teacher Sin's last words ask Thon to pursue a leftist strategy 'surrounding the cities from the countryside' by strengthening his home village.<sup>434</sup>

Thon's life is a sequence of struggles. The identities he assumes to fight against unjust power are that of Isan and an industrial worker. As an Isan man and a worker, Thon rises against Thongtae, a symbol of greedy Bangkok. He never considers himself a farmer, an identity that Chanta embraces as it connects him to his fellow villagers. To Thon, 'I don't have rice fields, but the land there is like mine. I don't have a home, but I can eat at any house. I don't have any siblings, but everyone loves me'.<sup>435</sup> It is this sense of belonging to his home village and to his Isan identity that linked Thon to his fellow workers and the people he meets. They might be from different villages, but all refer to themselves as 'people from the same home'.<sup>436</sup> When Thon introduces himself to Isan workers, telling them that he is also from Isan, they welcome him and accept Thon as 'people from the same home' and 'a real brother'.<sup>437</sup> On the contrary, being excluded from his Isan community causes Thon emotional vulnerability. Before the workers know that Thon is also from Isan, they give him a cold empty look making Thon feel frightened and lost.

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433 The only political struggle directly related to Khusod that is referred to in the novel was an act of political resistance by a group of Khusod villagers in the 1952 Peace Rebellion.

434 Rom Ratiwan, *โทนเทวดา: นักสู้จากที่ราบสูง* [Thon Thewada Fighter from the Plateau] (Bangkok: Komthong, 1980), 466. Noticeably, the leftist strategy that Teacher Sin suggests is the same strategy that Mao Zedong used to promote the CCP's campaign during the Chinese Civil War.

435 Rom Ratiwan, *Thon Thewada*, 119.

436 In Thai is คนบ้านเดียวกัน.

437 Rom Ratiwan, *Thon Thewada*, 265.

A stranger... He could feel a strange fear attacking his heart. Has he become a stranger to them?... He wished to shout as loud as he could that he was one of them, sharing the same flesh and blood.<sup>438</sup>

Another example is when Thon refers himself and Sida as 'us'. Thon stresses to Sida that, 'we have land, forest and sky. Albeit lack of water, one day we will use our hands to dig it up from the ground. *People like us* can do anything. If *we* unite, *we* can make the mountain bow for *us*, and the land become a river. (italics mine)<sup>439</sup> In this case, to Thon, it is not 'all workers in the world, unite!' but it is the Isan people that needed to unite as Nai Phi suggests in the end of the poem 'Isan' that, 'Isan's many millions, Is there anyone to defeat us?'<sup>440</sup>

In *Thon Thewada, Fighter from the Plateau* there was also a conflict between a sense of belonging to the Isan community and leftist ideology.<sup>441</sup> Thongtae offers Thon a good sum of money and other necessary equipment for agricultural cultivation, or even an irrigation canal, if Thon simply halts the workers' strike. To Thon, the offer is very attractive. Thon feels that his head is numb when he has to choose between his village and the workers' struggle, or in other words, the proletarian struggle in the leftist ideology. He dreams of seeing his home village in Isan turn into a 'new village' where the villagers and people he loves could return to, rice fields are no longer dry, and the village is free from superstitious beliefs. Although Thon decides to refuse Thongtae's tempting offer in the end, it is not because he prioritises the worker struggle *per se*. It is because he is convinced that only him and his Isan fellows can truly revive the village.<sup>442</sup> It is Isan villagers who are their own saviours. Therefore, to Thon, only the Isan people can save themselves as no one truly understands the pain and suffering they have. This perspective indicates a sense of Isan regionalism rather than the leftist struggle where all oppressed people unite and rise under the guidance of intellectuals as in *Looking to the Future*.

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438 Rom Ratiwan, *Thon Thewada*, 264.

439 Rom Ratiwan, *Thon Thewada*, 147.

440 Nai Phi, *Isan*, translated and quoted in Platt, *Isan Writers*, 106.

441 Rom Ratiwan, *Thon Thewada*, 156, 313.

442 Rom Ratiwan, *Thon Thewada*, 392-4.

## Isan in the Counter-narratives and (Re)construction of Identity of Leftists

### Narrators

In the end, Thon does not reject his identity as a worker. He fights for both his fellow workers and Isan brothers. For leftist intellectuals and students, no matter how explicit the feeling of Isan-ness or Isan regionalism that they have and express, class struggle reigns supreme in their writings. In Prasert Jandam's poems, 'Night's Anger' and 'If You Sell Your Pride' (both published in 1975), villagers in Isan were referred to as the proletariat and the farmers exploited by the capitalists. To Prasert, these exploited masses are the majority of Thailand's population and thus the country's true owner.<sup>443</sup> Narrating Isan villagers as oppressed poor farmers in leftist writings is related to the activities and movements of leftist students and intellectuals in the 1970s. Under the guidance of leftist students, whose roles dramatically grew after the October 14 event in 1973, a triple alliance between students, farmers, and workers was formed. Farmer-led protests considerably increased, and their movements became active because of support from student activists.<sup>444</sup> This partially explains why Chinese identity and ethnicity were almost unseen in leftist writings and why the leftists never represented themselves as Chinese or for the Chinese in Thailand although many of them were from Chinese families (see Chapter 5 for in-depth discussion).

Similar to the friendship between Nitat, Chanta, and Seng as a representation of a class alliance led by Nitat in Sri Burapha's *Looking to the Future*, the triple alliance in the 1970 was also guided by students; this implies that there was an unequal relationship between the students and the other two parties: farmers and workers. Leftist writings often imply that the narrators claim that they are Isan farmers, or part of the exploited masses, but that they are different from the rest at the same time because it was their responsibility and commitment to 'lead' the masses. In other words, leftist students and intellectuals

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443 Titles in Thai are เคื่องขุนของราตรี and หากท่านขายชาติขายศักดิ์ศรี. Prasert Jandam, *ร้อยกรองจากซบแดง* [Verses from Sap Daeng], 3rd ed. (Bangkok: Eaurarthorn, 1995), 34-35, 53-54. The book was first published in 1974 by Khon Kaen University students and was later banned by the Ministry of Interior in 1977. Prasert Jandam is one of the leading activists from Isan. He was born in Srisaket then continued his studies in Suan Kulab Academy and Thammasat University in Bangkok. Platt, *Isan Writers*, 86-87. Similar examples include Udorn Thongnoi's poem 'My Isan' (1969) and Somkhith Singsong's short story 'เรายังไม่ชนะดอกหรือ พ่อ?' [Haven't We Won, Father Dear?] (1975). The latter explicitly demonstrates ideological continuation from Nai Phi's *We Have Won, Mother Dear*, but the difference is that farmers are the victims, not industrial workers. Somkhith Singsong, "เรายังไม่ชนะดอกหรือ พ่อ?" [Haven't We Won, Father Dear?] in *Drought*, 303-313.

444 The movement provoked violent retaliation from the Thai state. Many farmers' leaders were killed or 'disappeared'.



included and excluded Isan farmers and the masses at the same time. Some illustrations on the assertion of leftist students and intellectuals as a part of the masses include Prasert Jandam's *Verses from Sap Daeng* and Udorn Thongnoi's *My Isan*. Prasert proclaims his sense of the mass as 'we-ness' in *Poor Farmers* as follows: 'poor farmers are us. Like meaningless dust, plenty on a backward land'.<sup>445</sup> However, many writings also criticised villagers for being deceived by religious and superstitious beliefs, which were the main obstacle that prevented the villagers from striking back their oppressors.<sup>446</sup> A sense of alienation between the leftists and the exploited masses is also demonstrated when leftist students and intellectuals claimed that they were the voice that speaks for the masses. Khamsing's reasons for writing the short stories in *The Politician and Other Stories* is an illustrative example. According to Khamsing, 'I wrote them with a feeling that I was writing a petition by depicting poverty, degeneration, and underdevelopment of farmers, a majority group of up to 85 percent of the citizens. (I wish to) call for conscience of the urban people, the ruling class, and wealthy capitalists... and intend to present these problems to the intellectuals, a minority group that have a high potential of changing...'<sup>447</sup>

In short, the leftists used stories of Isan villagers as a part of narrating themselves as the leading and crucial component in the exploited masses that is better than the rest (of the mass). Their primary responsibility concerned 'awakening' the oppressed masses, which included Isan villagers, to strike back. Phusit Nakrong's short story *Red Thai* (1974) is a good example.<sup>448</sup> The story takes place in a village in Isan, where innocent villagers fall prey to a snobbish district officer and his wife who plans to acquire villagers' lands by secretly adjusting their mortgage contracts and runs an illegal lottery. Desperate to protect the villagers from losing their farmland, Sui, a village headman, decides to kill the district officer and his wife and burns all the contracts. The killing is said to be done by the communists. As he intentionally drops his gun at the crime scene, the police come to arrest Sui who feels satisfied that he can protect his village.<sup>449</sup> Other illustrations also include Rawee

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445 Prasert Jandam, *Verses from Sap Daeng*, 1.

446 There are a lot of examples here. Prathip Chumphon's *Water and Earth* and Sri Daoruang's *Mother of Waters, Thaokae Bak, and a Dog* in Anderson's *In the Mirror* are good examples. Others include Nimit Phumthavorn's *ไปเรื่อยไป* [Fund Raising] (1972), and Mor Nor Methi's *ยาย* [Grandmother] (1973), to name a few. These two short stories are included in *Drought*, Suchart's anthology of Thai short stories.

447 Lao Kamhawm, preface to *Fragrant Words*, 43.

448 In Thai is ไทยแดง.

449 Phusit Nakrong, "ไทยแดง" [Red Thai], *Social Science Review* 12, no. 12 (December, 1974): 92-96.

Domeprachan's *The Red Sun* (1975), Udon Thongnoi's poems 'Spectre of Freedom' (1973) and 'Freedom' (1963), and *Thon Tewada*, to name a few.<sup>450</sup> As the better part of the masses leading the rest to fight, Thai leftists asserted their new identity as the leader of the people oppressed by the Thai government, one that powerful enough to challenge state authority. Counter-narrative of the Cold War fits and connects to this framing very well. By asserting their role as the leader of the exploited masses, they resisted and countered being depicted as the un-Thai communist insurgents in official narratives of the Cold War, and, for those who had Isan background such as Prasert Jandam, Udon Thongnoi, Rom Ratiwan, Rawee Domeprachan, as an inferior representation of Isan people.

Some leftists became aware of the consequences of assuming the role of leading/helping the masses, that is, an incorrect or incomplete understanding of the villagers' problems and needs. Stories of Thongmuan and the film *Tongpan* and demonstrate these consequences. Thongmuan is a young girl in a rural village who experiences changes caused by changing Bangkok-countryside relations. She is the leading character in Khamsing's 'You'll Learn Soon Enough' and Witayakorn Chiengkul's 'As If It Had Never Happened' and her village appears in both short stories.<sup>451</sup>

In 'As If It Had Never Happened', Witayakorn uses a sardonic tone to mock the student volunteers building the Community Hall in Thongmuan's village. The story begins with student volunteers arriving in the village and singing the phrase 'We've Come to Develop, Working Together for Our Country's Good...' with loud voices, 'as though to make sure that the whole world understood'.<sup>452</sup> Thongmuan is surprised to see the students look at the village with great excitement when they first arrive. Because their school is out, these students from Bangkok 'had the time to make the *sacrifice* of coming out to help improve

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450 Rawee's *The Red Sun* [ตะวันแดง] was also banned by the Thai government. Many writings in the book are emotionally provocative and sympathise with the farmers' movement. They also encourage an aggressive response to the government as a solution. For example, 'เอาเลือดเอาเหงื่อกลับมา!' [Return My Blood and Tears!], 'ฝนสีแดงเหนือฟ้าเมืองไทย' [Blood-coloured Rain from Thailand's Sky], 'ผงคลีดิน' [Dust], and 'ยืนตระหง่านฟ้า' [Standing against Sky]. Rawee Domeprachan, *ตะวันแดง* [The Red Sun] (Bangkok: Economics Club, Thammasat University, 1975). Udon Thongnoi's *Spectre of Freedom* (1973) and *Freedom* (1963) in Thai is ปิศาจเสรี and เสรี. Udon, *My Isan*, 58-59, 62-63.

451 'You'll Learn Soon Enough', first published in 1974, and was included in the fifth edition of *The Politician of and Other Stories* in 1979, eleven years after 'As If It Had Never Happened' was published in 1968. 'As If It Had Never Happened' tells the story of Thongmuan and her village's first exposure to the student volunteers, while Khamsing's 'You'll Learn Soon Enough' is its sequel and describes the changes that Thongmuan encounters after rural development policies were intensively promoted.

452 Witayakorn Chiengkul, "As If It Had Never Happened" in *In the Mirror*, 112.

the quality of the villagers' lives (*italics mine*)'.<sup>453</sup> Although Thongmuan does not understand what the Community Hall is that these volunteers are trying to build, she thinks, 'it must be something worth-while. Otherwise these 60-odd people would never have come all this way to build it. And then they were students, whose schooling was so many grades higher than her own. They must surely be far cleverer than anyone in the village'.<sup>454</sup> However, these 'clever students' often astonish Thongmuan during their stay in the village. When she sees the games they play, and one of them is ordered to kneel down to beg for love from another girl, Thongmuan thinks that 'she had never seen anyone act so shamelessly in her whole life'. Another example is when the students came up with an idea of behaving like the villagers by dressing like them, but it turns out that the clothes they wear are not the type that the villagers wear, and that their clothes are unaffordable to the villagers.

They streamed in with beaming smiles, and greeted one another saying: "What do you think? Exactly like the villagers, don't you agree?" Thongmuan wanted to laugh, but she couldn't. She didn't know why. Maybe it was from her feeling of pity that lingered in her tender heart.<sup>455</sup>

We can see the reversed position between the naïve volunteers and the village girl. It is Thongmuan who feels pity for the students, not the other way around; this often appears in the students' perception of going to develop the countryside. Many things the students did made no sense to the villagers, but they do not mind letting the students stay in the village. Over time, the villagers regard them as a part of the village and 'of the cows and water-buffaloes'.<sup>456</sup> When the 'clever' students finished building the Community Hall, 'no one really knew what they could use the Community Hall for.' Thongmuan, wishes that the hall had walls to protect against the rain, so it could be used as a rice barn for the people in her village to store the rice until they decided to sell it for a good price. However, almost immediately, Thongmuan feels sorry for questioning the 'clever' students' decision to build the Community Hall. The little girl convinces herself after the students left that 'it had to be a Community Hall... so that the Country could develop' although she has no idea what the Country was.<sup>457</sup>

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453 Witayakorn, "As If It Had Never Happened," 113.

454 Witayakorn, "As If It Had Never Happened," 115.

455 Witayakorn, "As If It Had Never Happened," 117-118.

456 Witayakorn, "As If It Had Never Happened," 119.

457 Witayakorn, "As If It Had Never Happened," 114, 121.

Tongpan also shares a view towards students and Isan villagers that is similar to 'As If It Had Never Happened', but one that is more ambitious because it also targeted other parties too. Although Tongpan does not show any pity towards the intellectuals and experts in the way Thongmuan does to the students, they relay the same implied message to student activists and leftist intellectuals, or the implied audience, by questioning if their movements benefited villagers. *Tongpan* is the story of a poor farmer who loses his land to dam construction some years before moving to Loei province in Isan. He has a wife and two kids living in poverty. Tongpan is invited by a Thai student from Bangkok to join a seminar to discuss the advantages and the impact of the construction of the Pa-Mong dam project, a massive dam on the Mekong River. Tongpan is reluctant at first because he is afraid of possible consequences from government officials if he gets involved with the students. However, he changes his mind, hoping that it might make his life better. The highlight of the film is a seminar scene when people from different sectors, namely government officials, foreign experts from the World Bank, and intellectuals discuss the Pa-Mong dam project and show conflicting views among the participants. While the foreign experts emphasise that the high power generation of Pa-Mong dam would benefit Thailand, a critic argues that the project ignores local people directly impacted by the project, who do not get any benefit from increased electricity. The Thai officials disagree with the critic, countering that the development of the country should be prioritised. During the heated discussion, audiences can feel Tongpan's awkwardness and alienation as the participants use a highly academic, technical language, and even English terms. Tongpan stays silent during the discussion then quietly leaves the seminar without anyone noticing. The film ends with tragedy: Tongpan's finds his wife dead when he returns home.

Although Thongmuan and Tongpan raised interesting concerns about leftist students' incorrect understanding of villagers' problems, they did not deny that the students' role in leading the masses and helping villagers. This suggests some discordances between Thai leftists and Isan villagers that the authors tried to represent. More importantly, no one seemed to notice that leftist students and intellectuals confirmed the identity of Isan as the foreign Other to Bangkok. While Thai leftists legitimised their political struggle by using the depiction of poor and underdeveloped Isan villagers consequently

abused by the corrupt government, this depiction was constituted in relation to Bangkok.<sup>458</sup> Also, Thai leftists sometimes used Bangkok's narrow view of rural villagers when they claimed that it was them, Thai leftists, who represented Isan. As a result, Thai leftists excluded the Isan people while simultaneously depicting them as dependent on their guidance.

## Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that Thai leftists promoted stories of Isan villagers as victims of the Thai state and of the American intervention in Thailand to counter the depiction of Isan as a main target of the communist insurgency, which was a crucial component of the account of Thailand under communist threats produced by the Thai state and the United States. By examining 'we-ness' or how leftist narrators defined their 'Self' in their works, this research also argued that the alternative version of Isan villagers allowed Thai leftists to resist state authority in terms of identity construction/reconstruction. Thai leftists justified their resistance by asserting their identity as the true saviour of the Isan people while depicting the Thai government as the un-Thai Other who betrayed the country. Also, because Thai leftists included Isan villagers as part of the oppressed masses but excluded them from those who needed to be guided by leftist intellectuals and students, they could assert their identity as the leader of the exploited masses. Depictions of Isan in counter-narratives, particularly in the second intellectual movement, were frequently paired and contrasted with corrupt yet powerful and advanced Bangkok-ness, which supported the same dichotomy between Bangkok and Isan, or Isan as Bangkok's foreign Other that was found in official narratives. This shows that counter-narratives do not have to be completely in conflict with official or dominant narratives, as illustrated by the dichotomy between inferior Isan and superior Bangkok in this case.

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458 Some demonstrated that they adopted a perception towards rural villagers similar to Bangkok elites. A student activist shared his experience of a development camp in Isan where he encountered a villager boy named Pisai, who piqued his interest because of 'appearances that different from normal human'. The boy had, according to the writing, a small body, disproportionately big feet, and a large head. The author described himself teaching Thai-ness and Thai patriotic feeling to the boy as he believed these were what the boy lacked. See, Chawachat Naiyapat, "พิสัย" [Pisai], *Volunteer* [อาสา], 24 July 1969: 23-24. *Volunteer* is a publication printed by university students. This type of printing was very popular during the student movements. Thammasat University Archives (7) Mor Tho 8.1/192

Similar to the Isan villagers in official narratives, the presence of Isan in leftist publications changed according to the Cold War situation, the leftist confrontation with the Thai government, and the role of leftists from Isan in the movement. This is a crucial point in explaining how the Cold War situation shaped the depiction of Isan villagers that Thai leftist employed in their struggles against the Thai state. So far, this issue has not been raised in any study. In the first leftist intellectual movement, there were only a few writings about Isan created by Sri Burapha, Nai Phi, and Pleuang Wannasri. However, none of them committed themselves to writing about Isan specifically. By contrast, during the second intellectual movement, leftist literary works concerning Isan villagers considerably increased. It was in the second intellectual movement that the Isan region and villagers became a representation of the oppressed and exploited rural countryside in general. *The Politician and Other Stories* is a good example here, as it illustrates how readers perceived the book as Isan literature even though it was originally intended to give a voice to rural villagers in general.

The growing attention paid to Isan in counter-narratives during the second intellectual movement was also bolstered by leftists from Isan. These leftists, including people from the Northeast or who had an Isan background in general, were regarded as one of the 'outgroups' in Thai society that were 'un-Thai' or 'less Thai'. The Isan leftists who embraced the identity of nationalist fighters and as part of the international anti-American/anti-war movement, refused the marginalised representation that the Thai state imposed on them. Many of them also had experiences with the American military bases and personnel in the Northeast whose presence had increased after the United States decided to escalate its intervention in the Indochina conflict in the 1960s. This contributed to the formation of Isan regionalism as seen in the emergence of the Isan for-life artist group, evidences that Keyes' argument on Isan regionalism was misleading (Chapter 3). Stories of Isan people suffering from the consequences of the American military operation in the Northeast were also produced by Isan leftists such as Prasert Jandam and Udorn Thongnoi.

This chapter proposes that the conflict and dilemma between Isan and oppression in leftist publications, particularly during the second movement, demonstrated the rocky transition from the dominant leftist movement to the rise of Isan regionalism after the 1970s. As Isan's presence in the Thai leftist movement grew and the dichotomy between Isan and Bangkok in leftist materials was sharpened, Isan regionalist sentiment in the leftist

movement became more apparent. Some of them rallied people to support the political movement against the Thai state, capitalists-feudalists, and American imperialism using Isan identity as an incentive. This sometimes caused a conflict between leftist ideology and Isan regionalism among leftists who had Isan backgrounds. Rom Ratiwan's *Thon Tewada* is a case in point. This finding contributes to a better understanding of the development of internal conflicts between leftist ideologies and Isan regionalist sentiment in the Thai leftist movement.

## Chapter 5 The Chinese Other in Cold War Narratives

Previous chapters demonstrated that both the Thai state and Thai leftists constructed Thai-ness by narrating foreign Others in the Cold War context. The American Other was narrated as being in opposition to Thai tradition and culture, while Isan villagers were presented as Bangkok's foreign Other. However, 'Thai-ness' contains ethnic implications, a notion of Thai ethnicity derived from royal-nationalist history. This notion often appeared in stories of the Chinese in Thailand during the Cold War period. This chapter examines the Chinese Other to explain how Chinese ethnicity figured in the construction of Thai-ness.

Similar to the Americans and Isan villagers as foreign Others to Thai-ness, both the Thai state and Thai leftists contributed to constructing the Chinese Other in the Cold War context. However, unlike other foreign Others that demonstrated a sharp conflict between official narratives and counter-narratives, leftist intellectuals and activists never challenged the depictions of the Chinese in Thailand promoted by the Thai government. However, they did counter the demonised depictions of Red China propagated by the government and the United States. According to anti-communist propaganda, the Chinese in Thailand were prone to communism because of their potential connection to Red China. Representations of the 'bad' and 'good' Chinese, the dangerous and distrustful Chinese as opposed to the Thai-ified Chinese who were loyal to the Thai nation, were constructed and promoted by the Thai authorities. While Thai leftists criticised the government for using allegations of communism to suppress anti-government activities, they left the government's stories of the communist-prone Chinese and the Chinese who love the Thai nation unchallenged. None of the leftist publications or political activities of the 1970s presented the life of the Chinese in Thailand, although many prominent student leftists were themselves Sino-Thai. Moreover, Thai leftist activists also demonstrated some acceptance of the Thai state's narratives on the Chinese. Their collusion with this narrative helped facilitate the unprecedented rise of the Thai monarchy and the popular discourse of a 'democratic king' after the popular uprising in 1973. This myth backfired against the leftists particularly during the events of 6 October 1976, when student leftist-activists were attacked and killed by royalist-rightist forces on the pretext of accusations of anti-monarchism.

This chapter focuses on investigating a major transition of Chinese identity in the Cold War period, from the external and untrustworthy Chinese, to the harmless Chinese



who had been integrated into Thai society: the early stages of the formation of *luk chin rak chat* (the Thai-born Chinese who love the nation) identity. It argues that both sides of the political conflict, the government and Thai leftists, contributed to the transformation of the Chinese identity and the formation of *luk chin rak chat*. This explains the role of the leftists in constructing the Chinese identity in the Cold War, a discussion that has been left unclarified in previous studies of the Chinese in Thailand. This study also provides an alternative explanation of the movement's defeat during the confrontation with the rightists in the mid-1970s. Influential arguments on the Chinese in Thailand proposed by William Skinner and Kasian Tejapira will also be revisited in this chapter to point out the ideological influences of the Thai elites on Skinner and an alternative reading of Kasian's 'Thai-ness Deficiency Syndrome'.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the different groups of Chinese people in Thailand and how they were depicted by the Thai government and the United States. It will then investigate the emergence of stories of the 'good' Chinese who love the Thai nation found in official narratives of the Cold War. To study stories of the Chinese and the narrative transitions that take place in the official narrative, the study examines materials produced by the Department of Public Relations and the United States of Information Services such as radio programmes, the *Seripharb* magazine and the anti-communist poster *Communism vs. Freedom*. The study also illustrates the impact of anthropological knowledge on the depiction of the Chinese in official narratives by examining research from the Cornell Project, the National Defence College of Thailand, the National Institute of Development (NIDA), and Chulalongkorn University that was produced from the 1950s to the 1970s. It traces how this body of academic work affected the government's decisions in relation to the Chinese in Thailand. Highly popular films and novels are also discussed to illustrate the influence of official narratives on the Thai public. For depictions of the Chinese in oppositional narratives, the *Social Science Review*, *Pithuphum*, and publications by prominent leftist/anti-government intellectuals such as Kulap Saipradit, Jit Phumisak, Nai Phi, Suwat Woradilok, are discussed. Additionally, Sino-Thai intellectuals and their writings on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand will receive special attention in order to explain their contributions on the narrative transition of the Chinese. The final part will examine contributions of Thai leftists and counter-narratives of the Cold War in encouraging the formation of *luk chin rak chat* identity. The rise of royal-nationalist sentiment in the leftist

movement, the identity dilemma of Sino-Thai leftists, and materials produced by Sino-Thai leftists are emphasised.

### **Studies of the Chinese and Sino-Thais in Cold War Thailand**

Studies of the Chinese in Thailand written by American scholars became more common in the 1950s when the Cold War in Asia loomed large. The most prominent work was produced by the anthropologist and sinologist, G. William Skinner. His PhD thesis 'A Study of Chinese Community Leadership in Bangkok, Together with a Historical Survey of Chinese Society in Thailand' (1954) was published as two separate books: *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (1957) and *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community in Thailand* (1958). One of Skinner's contributions to the study of the Chinese in Thailand is his explanation of the 'Chinese Problem' in Thailand, a situation in which the unassimilable Chinese hold economic influence in their host countries but are politically oriented toward China.<sup>459</sup> The Chinese minority were seen as potential communists and untrustworthy outsiders in Thai society unless they were Thai-ified. His contributions include the first comprehensive historical study of the Chinese in Thailand that dates back to the thirteenth century, and his argument on that Chinese complete assimilation would take place within four generations.<sup>460</sup> Noticeably, Skinner's history of the Chinese in Thailand involves recurring cycles of resistance and compliance on the part of the Chinese, and is similar to mainstream narratives about the Isan villagers whose loyalty to the Thai state was in doubt due to their un-Thai character and their 'betrayals and rebellions' against earlier Siamese kings. In this case, assimilation was also suggested as a solution to secure the loyalty of the troublesome Isan region.<sup>461</sup>

Skinner's arguments have been reproduced by both Thai and foreign scholars from the 1950s to the present day. However, from the 1990s onwards, there emerged a new trend of studying the Chinese in Thailand by examining the construction of Chinese identity

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459 Leo Suryadinata, "Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia: Problems and Prospect," *Journal of International Affairs* 47, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 1987): 135.

460 G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 381.

461 For further information, see Chapter 3.

and Skinner's advocacy of complete assimilation was critiqued.<sup>462</sup> The Chinese communities in Thailand nowadays have invalidated Skinner's arguments about the ultimate assimilation of the Chinese minority. Additionally, as Skinner proposed that one could only be either Thai or Chinese, he believed that an ambiguous identity that combined both Thai and Chinese traits was impossible. This argument has been critically examined by Kasian Tejapira, a prominent Sino-Thai political scientist. His work engaging with the Sino-Thai issue can be traced back to his doctoral dissertation submitted to Cornell University in 1992, which later was adapted into the book *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958* (2001). One of the main components of his research includes the identity fluidity of the *lookjin* communists and their role in introducing communism into Thailand through their Sino-Thai identity. Most of his other work also deals with the *lookjin* identity and 'Sino-Siameseness', a unique kind of Chineseness that only exists in Thailand.<sup>463</sup>

Kasian's pioneering studies on the Sino-Thais have influenced many other scholars. For example, Thak Chaleomtiarana's article, 'Are We Them? Textual and Literary Representations of the Chinese in Twentieth-Century Thailand' (2014), traced the evolution of the Chinese identity from the 'Other Within' Thai society to the Sino-Thai who 'we (Thai) are them (Sino-Thai)' through textual analysis of representations of the Chinese in Thai literature from the reign of King Vajiravudh to 1990s. Thak concluded that the Sino-Thais are now a part of modern Thai identity and 'accepting Sino-Thai as an aspect of Thai national identity does not diminish that identity, nor does accepting a Thai identity diminish the pride in ancestral ties of the Sino-Thai'.<sup>464</sup> This is in line with Tong Chee Kiong and Chan

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462 Some examples of works challenging Skinner's assimilation argument include Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun's article 'Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand' (2001), Kasian Tejapira's 'Pigtail: A Prehistory of Chineseness in Siam' (1992) and แลลอดดลายนังกร [Looking through the Dragon Design] (1994), and Sittitthep Eaksittipong's 'Textualizing the "Chinese of Thailand": Politics, Knowledge, and the Chinese in Thailand during the Cold War' (2017) and กบฏจีนจน "บนถนนพลับพลาไชย" [The Poor Chinese Rebels "on Plubpla Chai Road"] (2012). However, a few works support Skinner's assimilation paradigm. For example, Disaphol Chansiri, "Overseas Chinese in Thailand: A Case Study of Chinese Emigres in Thailand in the Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2005).

463 Kasian's "Sino-Siameseness" in Thai is ความเป็นจีนสยาม. Kasian Tejapira, "Chineseness in Siam (Final)" [ความเป็นจีนในสยาม ตอนจบ] in แลลอดดลายนังกร: รวมข้อเขียนว่าด้วยความเป็นจีนในสยาม [Looking through the Dragon Design: Selected Writings on Chineseness in Siam] (Bangkok: Kobfai, 1994), 52-53. The ethno-ideology of Thai-ness is a crucial element of official Thai nationalism based on the belief that the Thai 'race' is a justified leader of the country and has absolute rights to define Thai-ness. See, Kasian Tejapira, จินตนาการชาติที่ไม่เป็นชุมชน: คนชั้นกลางลูกจีนกับชาตินิยมโดยรัฐของไทย [Imagined Uncommunity: Lookjin Middle Class and Thai Official Nationalism] (Bangkok: Manager Newspaper, 1994), 8.

464 Thak, "Are We Them," 520.

Kwok Bun's argument that 'assimilation is a two-way process which, in the long run, will leave the Chinese with something Thai and the Thai with something Chinese'.<sup>465</sup>

Chineseness in Thailand has become something different from Chineseness in mainland China and other Chinese diasporas.

In more recent work on the Chinese in Thailand, only a few studies investigate Chineseness and the Cold War in the 1950s to 1970s. Even less studies address the early formation of the Sino-Thai identity. Yet during the Cold War period the depiction and the political position of the Chinese identity underwent a significant change, from the evil communist Chinese to their Sino-Thai descendants who pledged their loyalty to Thai nation and the King. Although Kasian Tejapira's work marked a key milestone in the study of Chineseness and Sino-Thai identity in contemporary politics, and Thak interestingly investigated politics and Thai-ness through Chineseness in Thai literature, neither particularly focused on explaining the factors that shaped depictions and representations of the Chinese in the Cold War period such as the construction of knowledge on the Chinese minority, the revitalised Thai monarchy, the growing conflicts between the rightists and the leftists, and the changing Cold War situation.

Sittitthep Eaksittipong's studies are probably the only work that directly examines the construction of Chinese and Sino-Thai identity in the Cold War.<sup>466</sup> He elaborates on Kasian's investigation of the '*luk chin rak chat*' slogan during the protest in 2005-2006 by exploring the emergence of *lookjin* historical consciousness connected to the Thai monarchy in the 1970s and the rise of the 'patriotic Thai-born Chinese' in the 1980s-1990s.<sup>467</sup> The study is

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465 Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok, "Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand" in *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*, eds. Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2001), 9.

466 His work includes, Sittitthep Eaksittipong, "ลูกจีนรักชาติ: สำนักประวัติศาสตร์และนิยามประชาธิปไตย" [The Patriotic Thai-born Chinese: Their Historical Consciousness and Defined Democracy], *Journal of Human Sciences* 17, no. 2 (2015): 112-157; and Sittitthep Eaksittipong, "Textualizing the 'Chinese of Thailand': Politics, Knowledge, and the Chinese in Thailand during the Cold War" (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 2017). Another example of research on the Chinese during the Cold War is Kornpanat Tungkeunkunt's PhD dissertation, *The Urban Culture of Chinese Society in Bangkok: Cinemas, Broadcast and Literature, 1950s-1970s*, submitted to the National University of Singapore in 2012. Although it does not directly concern Chineseness and the Sino-Thai identity in the Cold war period, Kornpanat interestingly challenged the perception of Chinese society in Thailand as unilateral, monolithic, and race-based by exploring a wide range of 'urban culture' in Yaowarat, a Chinatown in Bangkok. She argued that the Chinese community in Thailand became a multicultural community due to the impact of the Cold War in Asia. Kornpanat Tungkeunkunt, "The Urban Culture of Chinese Society in Bangkok: Cinemas, Broadcast and Literature, 1950s-1970s" (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 2012), ii, 4.

467 Sittitthep, "The Patriotic Thai-born Chinese," 112-157.

further elaborated in his doctoral research that investigated the role of American and mainland Chinese scholars in the construction of Chineseness in Thailand during the Cold War. Sittithev proposed that at the onset of the Cold War, American scholars played an influential role in ‘textualising’ the Chinese in Thailand as ‘the Other’, whose loyalty to Thai nation needed to be confirmed through a Thai-ification process or complete assimilation into Thai society. Due to the development of China-Thailand diplomatic relations and the rise of Thai intellectual nationalism in the late Cold War period, scholars from mainland China ‘revisited’ the history of Sino-Thai relations and knowledge on the ethnic Chinese in order to strengthen the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. The amicable relationship between the Chinese and local Thais in the past was emphasised as well as the past brother-like relationship between the two kingdoms which is supported by studies from both Thai and Chinese scholars.<sup>468</sup>

Sittithev’s studies on Chinese and Sino-Thai identity in the Cold War are interesting, especially his insights on Chinese scholars’ contributions to shaping the history of the Sino-Thai relationship. However, his studies left some points on the Sino-Thai identity in Cold War Thailand unclarified. Although Sittithev pointed out the shift in attention to academic studies of the Chinese society in Thailand from the ‘Chinese Problem’ to amicable relations between the ethnic Chinese and the local, he did not particularly engage with the rise of royalist-rightist forces in Cold War Thailand. By excluding the rise of royalist-rightist influences in different parts of Thai society, his study gives too much credit to *Letters from Thailand* (1969) and *Life with Grandfather* (1976) by claiming that the novels significantly shaped the positive depiction of the Chinese and Sino-Thai in the eyes of the Thai public.<sup>469</sup> If the state authority had not attached itself to a revitalised Thai monarchy and to the rise of rightist political forces, it is unlikely that these novels would have received such high popularity and recognition.<sup>470</sup> Additionally, leftist movements and Sino-Thai activists also contributed to the formation of *lookjin* identity in the Cold War. However, this point is also absent from his studies.

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468 Sittithev, “Textualizing the Chinese,” 40.

469 *Letters from Thailand* and *Life with Grandfather* are popular novels telling stories about the good Chinese and their descendants who are loyal to the Thai nation and monarchy.

470 *Letters from Thailand* and *Life with Grandfather* received national awards and were on the required reading list for Thai schools.

## The Chinese and Sino-Thais in the Cold War

In the early Cold War period, the Chinese population in Thailand was already very high. According to the Thai census, 12 percent of the total Thai population in 1947, or approximately 2,251,000 people, were Chinese (4.34 percent were Chinese nationals).<sup>471</sup> The total number of the Chinese population slightly dropped in 1952, from 12 percent to 11.5 percent, due to the decrease of Chinese nationals despite a slight increase in the number of Thai-born Chinese.<sup>472</sup> Although Chinese settlements could be found in all regions of Thailand, a clear majority of the Chinese population resided in the lower central part of Thailand, particularly in Bangkok, the main port of entry for Chinese immigrants. In 1955, the Chinese population in Bangkok (all ethnic Chinese) reached 45.7 percent or approximately 483,000 out of the total population of 1,057,280.<sup>473</sup> Although most Chinese immigrants in Thailand came from the Guangdong and Fujian provinces in China, Chinese societies in Thailand were not homogenous but subdivided into language groups. The Teochiu, Hakka, Hainanesem, Cantonese, and Hokkien are five important language speaking groups in Thailand, here ranked from the largest to smallest number of speakers. In 1955, 56 percent, or 1,297,000 people were Teochiu Chinese, the most influential Chinese group in the country to this day.<sup>474</sup>

Besides these language groups, the Chinese minority in Thailand can be categorised into two main groups based on their birthplace: the China-born Chinese and the Thai-born Chinese. As the former often had Chinese citizenship, they are referred to as Chinese nationals in this research. According to Skinner, half of the Chinese nationals in Thailand in the 1950s migrated between 1918 and 1931. The migration rate between 1918 and 1931 was high, but, unlike the waves of migration from 1906 to 1917, it was also accompanied by a high departure rate. A large number of Chinese migrants between 1918 and 1931 chose to remain in Thailand (at least for a longer term than the previous waves) leading to a half million immigration surplus in the fourteen years.<sup>475</sup> A similar pattern of Chinese migration,

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471 Skinner and Kasian pointed out flaws in Thai censuses and questioned the accuracy of the censuses. However, they are the main source that provides a consist record of the Chinese population in Thailand in the Cold war period.

472 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 183.

473 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 207.

474 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 212.

475 Prior to the late 1910s, both Chinese arrivals to and departures from Thailand were high. As a result, Chinese population in Thailand did not dramatically change. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 172.

in that departures of the Chinese were much lower than their arrivals, took place again in 1946 due to the Chinese Civil War and the better political and economic conditions in Thailand after the second World War. However, when harsh immigration restrictions were enforced and the annual immigration quota for every nationality was reduced to 200 individuals according to the Immigration Act of 1950, Chinese mass migration to Thailand came to an end. Some Chinese immigrants still came to Thailand from mainland China after the migration restriction. Most of them were no longer poor coolies but were people fleeing the communist regime that had enough money to avoid the restrictions by bribing Thai officials.<sup>476</sup>

Chinese nationals and non-national Sino-Thais during the Cold War can be separated into three groups based on their political ideologies: the pro-Kuomintang (KMT), the pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the 'neutral' Chinese who were not aligned with either side. From the 1910s until the early Cold War period, some groups of Chinese nationals were actively involved in political activities that related to the situation in mainland China. One illustrative example is the anti-Japanese movement when the Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1937 and political struggles ensued between the KMT and the CCP. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of Chinese nationals that engaged in politics concerning the PRC, most Chinese political activities took place in Bangkok and were often associated with Chinese schools and newspapers. These politically active Chinese nationals can be separated into two sides that were in opposition to each other: the pro-KMT and the pro-CCP. The pro-KMT Chinese in Thailand became apparent and active in the 1900s particularly after Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese revolutionary leader against the Qing dynasty, travelled to Thailand to recruit Chinese immigrants and the Sino-Thai to his revolutionary movement, and again in 1907 to establish a branch of the *Tongmenghui* (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) in Bangkok. His visits contributed to changes in Chinese society and the decline of Chinese secret societies, or *Hongmen*. Being captured by Dr. Sun's nationalist revolutionary ideology, some secret societies dissolved or reorganised themselves for the revolutionary cause and many members joined Dr. Sun's *Tongmenghui*.<sup>477</sup> Other examples of Dr. Sun's and KMT's

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476 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 177-8.

477 Wu Jiyue, *60 ปีโพ้นทะเล* [60 Years Overseas], trans. Panadda Lertlam-ampai (Bangkok: Post Books, 2010), 168. This is also because Dr. Sun avoided involving secret societies in the revolutionary movement in Siam because of their corrupt character. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 157.

popularity among the Chinese in Thailand included support from Chinese newspapers for Dr. Sun's struggle to reunify China in the early 1920s, and the celebration of KMT's victory over Chinese warlords in 1927.<sup>478</sup>

It was during this period that the number of pro-CCP Chinese immigrants also increased. In the 1920s, Chinese communist activities became particularly apparent after the breakdown of the Kuomintang-CCP alliance and Jiang Kaishek's violent suppression in 1927. After the suppression, many communist Chinese fled to Thailand to lead more active and organised communist movements. Chinese communists in Thailand were more connected to the overseas Chinese communist organisations than to the Chinese Communist Party in China. They were particularly connected to the Nan Yang or South Seas Communist Party in Singapore (later the Communist Party of Malaya), which was under the control of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai.<sup>479</sup> Under the guidance of the South Seas Communist Party in Singapore, the Siam Special Committee was established in Thailand. It soon supported the sawmill workers' strike in 1929 and distributed pamphlets on the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution in November that same year.<sup>480</sup>

Conflicts between the pro-KMT and pro-CCP Chinese in Thailand became more intense at the dawn of the Cold War. This involved the Chinese in Thailand and their relationship with the Thai state. Although the KMT was a dominant force in the Chinese community in the late 1940s due to diplomatic relations between the Thai government and the Nanking government, it was challenged by the growing Chinese communist influence and a branch of the China Democratic League that was established in Thailand, a political party from China that aimed to provide an alternative, 'third choice' in Chinese politics. Also, the KMT's reputation was questioned when KMT officials embezzled a huge amount of rice contributed by the Chinese in Thailand for famine relief in South China.<sup>481</sup> Tensions between the pro-PRC and pro-KMT views were best illustrated in Chinese newspapers. After World War II, Chinese journalism in Thailand was at its peak. More than ten Chinese newspapers

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478 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 237-8.

479 Kasian, *Commodifying Marxism*, 11-13.

480 Eiji Murashima, *กำเนิดพรรคคอมมิวนิสต์สยาม (พ.ศ. 2473-2479)* [Early Years of Communist Party in Thailand, 1930-1936], trans. Kosit Tiptiempong (Bangkok: Matichon, 2012), 15.

481 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 291-2.



were launched.<sup>482</sup> Chinese newspapers under Chinese communist influence included *Chen-hua Pao* and *Ch'üan-min Pao*, while *Chung-kuo-jen Pao*, *Min-sheng Jih-pao*, and *Cheng-yen Jih-pao* were under the KMT's control. *Min-chu Hsin-wen* was affiliated with the China Democratic League while other Chinese newspapers were neutral and more concerned about peace in China and the living conditions of the Chinese in Thailand.<sup>483</sup> Immediately after the CCP's victory in 1949, verbal clashes between the pro-KMT and communist Chinese newspapers grew considerably. However, when the Thai government allied itself with Washington and supported the anti-communist campaign, pro-CCP newspapers became a target of the government harassment and censorship.<sup>484</sup>

For Chinese nationals, regardless of the side they supported, their political orientation towards their motherland demonstrated their bond with and connection to mainland China. Nevertheless, the majority of their descendants born in Thailand were not China-focused in their attitudes even when they became politically active in the 1960s and 1970s. One exception included some *lookjin* from the previous generation who joined the Communist Party of Siam established in 1930.<sup>485</sup> However, after the 1960s, when the Sino-Thai rather than Chinese nationals became the dominant group in the Chinese community, their political orientation was generally towards Thailand. According to Skinner's model of Chinese population growth in Thailand from 1919 to 1947, there was a sharp rise of the Thai-born Chinese population from 1937 onwards.<sup>486</sup> In 1952, there were 1,524,000 Thai-born Chinese and 727,000 China-born Chinese out of the total population of 19,384,000 people, the first time that Thai-born Chinese twice outnumbered China-born Chinese.<sup>487</sup> Particularly after 1950, when strict immigration controls were imposed making it difficult to travel between China and Thailand, many Chinese immigrants decided to permanently

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482 Vipha Uttamachat, Narumit Sordsuk, and Panida Lertlam-amphai, *บทบาทและสถานภาพหนังสือพิมพ์จีนในประเทศไทย* [The Role and Status of Chinese Newspapers in Thailand] (Bangkok: The Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1985), 22.

483 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 291-3.

484 Skinner, *Leadership and Power*, 133.

485 At a young age, these *lookjin* communists were recruited and politically educated by senior Chinese communist immigrants. A few went to study in China and developed communist idea there. According to Kasian, it was these *lookjin* communists who later became a core of the new Thai communist party (later the Communist Party of Thailand) formed during World War II and that ended in the 1980s. Some *lookjin* communists Thai-ified themselves in order to attract more Thais to participate in the revolution in Thailand. They adopted Thai names and learned to read and write the Thai language to translate communism into Thai. Kasian, *Commodifying Marxism*, 22-24

486 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 77.

487 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 183.

settle in Thailand and as such their descendants received a Thai education. An illustrative example is the rising trend of Sino-Thai students in universities in Bangkok in the late 1960s.<sup>488</sup> According to a study by USIS in 1958, approximately one fourth of 518 students surveyed from five universities in Bangkok had Chinese blood.<sup>489</sup> However, in Boonsanong Punyodyana's study of the Chinese in Bangkok and Thonburi from 1966 to 1967, between 87.7 percent and 96.7 percent of 900 sampled had children or siblings in Thai schools. The majority of the sampled ethnic Chinese would like or would have liked their offspring to receive a Thai education, and particularly to attend Thai universities.<sup>490</sup> The Sino-Thais who went through a Thai-ification process such as receiving a Thai education, adopting Thai names, and belonging to Thai organisations, can be divided into two groups according to their political ideologies: rightist and leftist *lookjin*. At the same time, not many of the Sino-Thais were politically active, either on the rightist or leftist side. The majority of the *lookjin* kept their political preferences to themselves and tried to humour the Thai authorities to avoid problems.<sup>491</sup> This group, therefore, indirectly supported the Thai state's treatment towards the Chinese minority in Thailand. The leftist Sino-Thais, by contrast, had a strong political consciousness, but did not engage in the internal political situation in mainland China as their immigrant predecessors had done in the 1940s-1950s. They often joined political movements against the authoritarian military regime and American imperialism as Thai nationalists and/or leftist activists.

The Thai-ified Sino-Thais, no matter which political side they were on, often identified themselves as Thai, or 'Chinese who love the Thai nation and the king'. However,

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488 Benedict Anderson, "Murder and Progress in Modern Siam" in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 180. Another possible explanation for the increase in Sino-Thai students in universities is that the Sino-Thai had only a few choices for tertiary education. They could not apply to any military-related colleges or institutions because their parents/parent were Chinese immigrants. My mother is an example. She could not enter the Army Nursing College because her father was a Chinese immigrant. She therefore attended Thammasat University instead, where she took part in the student-led demonstration.

489 However, this number is not realistic, and their answers might not have been honest. The study does not explain how they identified 'Chinese blood' and many students, likely activists, refused to cooperate in the survey. Those who participated might have been aware of the political purpose of the survey and might not give honest answers. *A Study of University Student Attitudes in (Bangkok) Thailand* (Bangkok: USIS, 1958), 10. (TIC 120)

490 In Boonsanong's study, the Chinese language is used to identify Chinese identity. Boonsanong Punyodyana, *Chinese-Thai Differential Assimilation in Bangkok: An Exploratory Study*, Data Paper 79 (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1971), 21-23.

491 However, there were a few violent confrontations between Thai officials and the ethnic Chinese in Chinatown, Bangkok, in 1945 and 1977.

the Sino-Thais born and/or raised in a Chinese environment were less affected by the Thai-ification process. Instead of identifying themselves in relation to Thai-ness, they often viewed themselves as ‘incomplete’ Chinese. Unlike the previous Sino-Thai group, they demonstrated Chinese language proficiency. An illustrative example includes the ethnic Chinese writers of Sinophone Thai literature, or ‘Thai literature on ethnic Chinese written in the Chinese language’.<sup>492</sup> Many of these writers, popular during the 1950s and 1960s, were born in Thailand but their works were first published in Chinese newspapers and magazines. They also had connections with other Chinese writer communities abroad such as in Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, information about this ethnic Chinese group is very limited and only a small part of their work has been translated from Chinese into Thai.

### **The Chinese in Official Narratives of the Cold War: From the ‘Chinese Problem’ to the ‘Chinese who Love the Thai Nation’**

Although the Chinese minority in Thailand showed diversity in terms of political engagement, ideology and ethnic self-identification, both Thai state officials and the United States were suspicious of the Chinese people born overseas and their Chinese descendants born in Thailand. Both countries feared that Thailand’s Chinese population might work for the CCP because of their bond with mainland China. This concern was rationalised by Mao Zedong’s assistance towards Maoist parties abroad including those in Thailand. The CCP provided training and morale support to the communist movement in Thailand that included providing Maoist publications in different occasions.<sup>493</sup> Additionally, the CPT was influenced by the CCP from the beginning and the party closely followed Maoist ideology particularly in the early 1960s.<sup>494</sup>

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492 Kornphanat Tungkeunkunt and Sorapong Ladsuan, “อ่านวรรณกรรมไทยพหุภาษาจีนในสังคมไทยยุคพัฒนา” [Reading Sinophone Thai Literature in the Context of Thailand’s “Era of Development”], *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 2 (July-December 2005): 98.

493 According to some Thai military officials and Viet Cong sappers, or Viet Cong commado units, in a Thai prison in 1976, it was the USSR not the PRC who provided the most armed support to the communist movement in Thailand. General Saiyud Kerdpol, interviewed by the *Social Science Review* editorial department, in *ขบวนการคอมมิวนิสต์ในประเทศไทย* [Communist Movement in Thailand], ed. Suchart Sawatsi (Bangkok: Social Science Review editorial department, 1974), 7-8. And, Arom Pongpa-Ngan, *จากคุกถึงคุก* [From Prison to Prison] (Bangkok: Noomsao, 1979), 149.

494 This was related to the fact that many high leaders of the CCP were Chinese or Sino-Chinese. On the Maoist ideology’s influence on the CCP, see, Rasamee Sriworapongpunt, “อิทธิพลทางอุดมการณ์ของพรรคคอมมิวนิสต์จีน

To counter the communist movement in Thailand, both the Thai government and the United States joined hand in hand to publicise China's situation under the communist regime. In Thai and American media, the PRC, often referred to as Red China, was demonised as a land of all evils. Moreover, stories of an oppressive and tyrannical Red China were heavily promoted to warn Thai people about the deceitful and brutal Chinese communists. They publicised stories of the Chinese people's misery and suffering in the mainland due to a failure of the people's commune system, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>495</sup> These horrifying stories were not all fanciful, but that is not to say that they were unbiased or politically neutral. The Thai government and the United States, through these stories, represented themselves as free and prosperous.<sup>496</sup> Ironically enough, despite the Thai military's announcement that Thailand was a 'free country', the military used abusive measures and censorship to ensure their authoritative power. Most of the time in the Cold War period the country was under military rule. The United States, a leader of the Free World, also provided support to many dictators in order to win the anti-communist war. In this regard, stories about an evil Red China and external threats towards Thailand also distracted public attention away from the fact that the country was under authoritarian military rule.

One reason that official narratives on Red China were powerful and caused great fear among the Thai public was due to the government's censorship; this made the Thai government and the United States the main sources of information about the PRC. Frightening depictions of Red China were frequently publicised far and wide through different channels of communication owned either by the Thai government or the USIS.

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ต่อพรรคคอมมิวนิสต์แห่งประเทศไทย” [The Ideological Influence of the Communist Party of China on the Communist Party of Thailand] (master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1976), chap. 5.

495 These stories were often broadcast on Radio Thailand, the most effective way during the Cold War for the Thai government to reach nationwide audiences regardless of their literacy. See, Public Relations Department, *บทความบางเรื่องจากวิทยุกระจายเสียง* [Selected Articles from Radio Thailand] (Buranakanpim: Bangkok, 1966), and, Public Relations Department, *How Do the Communists Cause Evil?* Another example is the USIS anti-communist posters *Communism vs. Freedom*, a series of anti-communist posters comparing life in communist China or North Vietnam to a life full of freedom in Thailand. In 1966, 150,000 copies of each poster in this series were printed in four colours and distributed to public centres and community leaders such as schools, temples, libraries, armed force units and village leaders. The USIS also launched another anti-communist poster series, *Be Aware of Agitators*, for the Thai police to distribute nationwide. USIS, *USIS: Thailand*, 1966, 8. (TIC 5097)

496 For example, “การผจญภัยของเซ่งเม้งยู” [An Adventure of Cheng Meng Yu], *Seripharb* 12 (1956): 24-25. “จากดวงตาของหลงเม่ย” [From the Eyes of Long Mei], *Seripharb* 46 (1960): 13. And, Jao Fu, “การตัดสินใจเลือกเสรีภาพ” [Decision to Choose Freedom], *Seripharb* 98 (1964): 33-37.

Another way for people in Thailand, particularly the Chinese, to learn about the situation in China, was from relatives and friends who lived there. Many Chinese in Thailand experienced imprisonment and the execution of people they knew in the PRC, the loss of land under the CCP's land reform, and extortion from Chinese communist authorities who held their families hostage.<sup>497</sup> Although there was an effort from Beijing to counter these negative images of the CCP through radio broadcasting, their audiences were small and limited to specific areas.

### ***Empowering the Narrative: Skinner's 'the Chinese Problem' and Knowledge Construction of the Chinese in Thailand***

Modern studies on the Chinese in Thai society contributed to the emergence of the Chinese as the un-Thai Other in the Cold War period. Stories of the Chinese and their communist inclinations in official narratives were influential because such stories were endorsed by scholars and academic institutions. Similar to the narratives on Isan villagers and how they became a 'problem', American scholars and anthropological studies examining the overseas Chinese in Thailand played an important role in empowering the official narratives. Since the 1950s, the amount of studies by American anthropologists on the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, including Thailand, has grown considerably. Indeed, the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia became an important research issue and was used in training seminars held by the Department of Far Eastern Studies, at Cornell University from in 1949 to 1950. This was around the same time that China turned 'red'. The topic on the overseas Chinese was also selected as one of the three major subjects of study by the Cornell Southeast Asia Program to understand the economic and political situation in the region.<sup>498</sup>

Skinner's *Report on The Chinese in Southeast Asia* in 1950 offered an insight into 'the Chinese Problem', the serious communist situation that existed throughout Southeast Asia in relation to the overseas Chinese living in each country. Skinner pointed out that situation of the overseas Chinese in Thailand needed more attention than other countries due to the

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497 Skinner, *The Chinese Society in Thailand*, 328-9.

498 The other two topics included technological and economic development, and political structures and ideologies in Southeast Asia. Lauriston Sharp, preface to *Report on the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, G. William Skinner (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1951), i.

presence of Chinese communist activities and the large Chinese community in the country. Thailand also had a vigorous communist party and the highest circulation of leftist Chinese newspapers among the Southeast Asian countries, rendering Skinner's assessment of the Chinese Problem in Thailand worrisome.<sup>499</sup> The report received special attention from the Office of Chinese Affairs in the United States Department of State and was considered by the United States Information Agency to design effective anti-communist propaganda among the overseas Chinese.<sup>500</sup> Skinner later elaborated on the genesis of the Chinese Problem in Thailand in his PhD dissertation by proposing a history of the Chinese in Thailand, which involved recurring cycles of Chinese resistance and compliance.<sup>501</sup>

Skinner emphasised that Chinese assimilation into Thai society was the solution to the Chinese Problem, and furthermore, that without a Chinese education, the Chinese would become Thai within four generations.<sup>502</sup> He confirmed his assumption by pointing out the high degree of Thai-ness in Chinese leaders. Skinner concluded that Chinese leaders and their families would completely assimilate into Thai society first due to their relationship and connection to Thai elites, then by 'following the example of their leaders, and weakened by their defection, the entire Chinese community will inevitably move more rapidly toward complete assimilation to Thai society'.<sup>503</sup>

Skinner's argument on Chinese assimilation contrasts with what Richard J. Coughlin's proposed in his Yale doctoral research, 'The Chinese in Bangkok: A Study of Cultural Persistence' (1953), which was later published as the book *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (1960). Although both Skinner and Coughlin did fieldwork at the same time, between 1951 and 1952, Coughlin came to the different conclusion that 'assimilation may not be inevitable' and the Chinese community in Thailand was perpetuating itself. Chinese immigrants and their Thai-born children preferred to attach themselves to their ethnic community rather than becoming a part of Thai society. Some of his evidence included the fact that Chinese commercial business organisations and Chinese residential

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499 Skinner, *Report on the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 79, 85-86, 88.

500 Meredith Oyen, "Communism, Containment and the Chinese Overseas," in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle of Hearts and Minds*, ed. Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 64.

501 Sittitthep, "Textualizing the Chinese," 73.

502 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 381.

503 G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958), 319.

areas and schools adopted Chinese holidays.<sup>504</sup> Ethnic prejudice between the Thais and Chinese was also an important factor that prevented assimilation.<sup>505</sup> Coughlin explained that assimilation in Thailand was merely ‘the social mixing of the two peoples’ without a genuine desire for a thorough assimilation. He added that on some occasions the Chinese became a part of Thai social groupings, or vice versa, or both belonged to a third-party group (especially the westerners). Therefore, the Chinese in Thailand had a ‘double identity’, as both Thai and Chinese. They would use the Thai identity on some occasions for its benefits, which Coughlin termed ‘assimilation for convenience’.<sup>506</sup> Nevertheless, despite the differences between Skinner and Coughlin’s conclusions about Chinese assimilation, Coughlin’s research was also a part of the growing American interest in the Chinese Problem in Asia. His PhD project was funded by the Social Science Research Council and the United States Educational Foundation in Thailand.<sup>507</sup>

Thai scholars and technocrats in the field of Chinese studies were influenced by Skinner’s research and by other anthropological studies on the overseas Chinese including Richard Coughlin’s *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (1960) and Lois Mitchison’s *The Overseas Chinese* (1961). These authors shared similar concerns about the Chinese Problem in Thailand and aimed to solve it. When the first surge of studies on Chinese society by Thai scholars appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s, many of them were produced by bureaucratic academic institutions such as the National Defence College of Thailand and the National Institute of Development (NIDA).<sup>508</sup> Khachatphai Burutphat is a good example of a Thai technocrat who was influenced by Skinner’s assimilation theory. He was a government agent whose work examined national security policies related to ethnic immigrants.<sup>509</sup> In his book, *Ethnic Minority Problems in Thailand* (1972), Khachatphai

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504 Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong: Honk Kong University Press, 1960), 433.

505 Coughlin, *Double Identity*, 71-80.

506 Coughlin, *Double Identity*, 192-3.

507 Richard J. Coughlin, “The Chinese in Bangkok: A Study of Cultural Persistence” (PhD diss. Yale University, 1953), i-v.

508 Some examples of studies on the Chinese minority by the NDC include Kriang Iamsakul’s thesis ‘The Thai-born Chinese in Thailand’ (1966), Lieutenant General Chalor Jarukalas’ thesis ‘The Chinese Problem in Thailand’ (1958) and Major General Somkit Saratunsil’s and Air Vice Marshal Sidhi Savetsila’s lectures on the communist Chinese and Thailand’s national security in 1965-1966. For NIDA, Sawang Rattanamongkolmas’ dissertation ‘Administration of the Chinese Association: A Study of Teochew Association in Thailand’ (1966) was one of the earliest researches on the Chinese in Thailand.

509 Khachatphai Burutphat’s work at the NSC involved national security issues related to ethnic minority groups and refugee problems. He was the Secretary of the NSC from 1998 to 2002.

admired Skinner's research on the Chinese in Thailand more than other academic work by foreign scholars, and shared with Skinner the belief that the majority of the Thai-born Chinese were assimilated and had become Thai.<sup>510</sup> He was concerned by the Chinese Problem, specifically that the Chinese in Thailand could be influenced by communist China. He also worried that the Chinese problem would worsen if the United States decided to stop supporting Thailand.<sup>511</sup> In order to effectively deal with the issue, Khachatphai emphasised the need to estimate the number of unassimilated Chinese and that it was necessary to know which political side they supported.<sup>512</sup> The Chinese could be fully trusted only when they were fully assimilated into Thai society and no longer Chinese. This was deemed the only way that the Chinese could be free from outside influences (meaning both Taiwan and communist China), the cause of the Chinese political disturbances in Thailand.<sup>513</sup>

A dramatic increase in studies on the Chinese during the Cold War in Thailand and their focus on assimilation encouraged the depiction of the Thai Self as opposite to the Chinese Other. To be able to assimilate the Chinese into Thai society, firstly Chineseness and Thai-ness must be distinguished and identified. As a result, these studies constructed and demarcated Thai-ness and Chineseness as each other's opposite and positioned the Chinese in Thailand as alien outsiders through an anthropological lens.<sup>514</sup> In this regard, studies of Thai society and the Chinese in Thailand complemented each other and powerfully demarcated the Thai-Chinese imagined boundaries, while the objective of assimilating the Chinese into Thai society clearly set hierarchical relationship between Thai-ness and Chineseness. The following section looks at the construction of the identity boundary in studies of the Chinese in Thailand by focusing on two aspects: the construction of Chinese society as the opposite of Thai society and the history of the Chinese in Thailand.

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510 Khachatphai Burutphat, *ปัญหาชนกลุ่มน้อยในประเทศไทย* [Ethnic Minority Problems in Thailand] (Bangkok: Praepitaya, 1972), 17, 95.

511 Khachatphai, *Ethnic Minority Problems in Thailand*, 59.

512 Khachatphai Burutphat, preface to *ชาวจีนในประเทศไทย* [The Chinese in Thailand], ed. Khachatphai Burutphat (Bangkok: Praepitaya, 1974), ก [kor-kai].

513 Khachatphai Burutphat, "บทบาททางการเมืองของชาวจีน" [The Political Role of the Chinese], in *The Chinese in Thailand*, 43, 76.

514 Lauriston Sharp's view of studies on the Chinese and Thai society was also cited in the article. He believed that the two fields were two sides of the same coin. Koizumi Junko, "Studies of the Chinese in Thai Studies in the United States in Historical and Geopolitical Contexts," *Acta Asiatica* 104 (2013): 54-55.



Firstly, the idea of a 'loosely-structured' Thai society influenced Skinner and Coughlin as both of their research was supervised by Sharp and Embree, respectively.<sup>515</sup> Sharp and Embree saw Thai society as a highly-individualistic peasant society and perceived Thai people as deeply religious (Buddhism and spirits), strongly nationalistic, submissive to authority, hedonistic, and adverse to conflict. According to Embree, Thai society lacked cohesive social organisations and thus had a 'loose structure'.<sup>516</sup> This suggested political indifference, if not ignorance on his part, and the complete absence of conflict between classes in Thai society.<sup>517</sup> The Chinese society in Thailand was perceived as having the opposite characteristics and was thus considered alien in relation to Thai society. As suggested by Sittitthep, in Skinner's and Coughlin's research, the Chinese society in Thailand was described as 'closely structured' and, contrary to the pleasure-oriented Thai peasantry who enjoyed uncompetitive lives, the Chinese were associated with trade and business and enthusiastically sought money and profit.<sup>518</sup> As the Chinese society was often explained in comparison with the Thai way of life, a binary opposition between the Thai Self and the Chinese Other was imagined. The following is illustrative of Skinner's comparison between the Chinese and Thais and is thus worth quoting at length:

The Chinese were characterized as displaying extreme industriousness, willingness to labor long and hard, steadiness of purpose, ambition, desire for wealth and economic advancement, innovativeness, venturesomeness, and independence. The Thai, by comparison, were generally said to be indolent, unwilling to labor for more than immediate needs, contented with their lot, uninterested in money or economic advancement, conservative, and satisfied with a dependent status. Insofar as these contrasting characterizations have any validity, they should be considered and explained in terms of the distinctive cultures of the two peoples as formed by two unique and largely independent historical process.<sup>519</sup>

In addition, Skinner also compared Chinese and Thai family values, noting that while the Chinese had a kin-centred world view and devoted themselves to the past and future of

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515 Before becoming the Director of Southeast Asia Studies, John Embree had been involved in the US government's foreign affairs. His last position before returning to the United States was Cultural Attaché in Bangkok and Saigon. Coughlin himself worked with Embree in Saigon as Vice Consul from 1946 to 1948, then later studied under Embree's supervision at Yale. Fred Eggan, "John Fee Embree, 1908-1950," *American Anthropologist* 53, no. 3 (July-September 1951): 377-8.

516 For further detail see Chapter 2.

517 Bell, "Western Conceptions of Thai Society," 68-69.

518 Sittitthep, "Textualizing the Chinese," 72-73.

519 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 91-2.

their extended family, the Thais 'had no place in a historical continuum of kin' as the Thais did not use surnames (until the Reign of King Rama VI), tended to forget their ancestors, and had 'no kin responsibility outside their immediate or extended family'.<sup>520</sup>

Chinese society's 'close structure', such as their business organisations and associations, were considered beneficial to the success of their businesses. The view that intrinsic ethnic traits explained the occupational skills of the Chinese and Thais strengthened the belief that there were natural differences between them. The Chinese people's success in business and their trading skills were therefore due to their Chinese characteristics, qualities that Thais naturally lacked. Trading skill was thus viewed as an ethnic indicator to identify Thai-ness and Chineseness. This belief was often shared by Thai scholars such as Khachatphai and Yupparet. While Khachatphai declared that unlike the Chinese, the Thais were not good in trade, Yupparet further elaborated on this occupational difference by pointing out how Chinese characteristics were linked to their trading skills.<sup>521</sup> She noted that the Chinese in general did not feel ashamed of illegal actions such as bribing officials and tax evasion. Taking advantage in trading was justifying and considered normal by the Chinese.<sup>522</sup> As a result, Yupparet showed strong support for the government's nationalist economic policy as she considered it crucial to protect the Thais who were unfamiliar with the tricks of the trade performed by profit-seeking Chinese merchants.

Modern studies of Thai society and the overseas Chinese in Thailand shored up the assumption that Thai society was more immune to communism due to the values and institutions of indigenous Thais.<sup>523</sup> On the contrary, these studies perceived the overseas Chinese as more susceptible to communist influence due to their bond with mainland China, hence the Chinese Problem. Indeed, the Chinese Problem appeared as the key concept in most studies of Chinese society in Thailand during the Cold War. The dichotomy of 'free' Thailand and 'communist' China in the American poster *Communism vs. Freedom* was also based on this perspective.

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520 Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, 92-3

521 Khachatphai Burutphat, *Ethnic Minority Problems in Thailand*, 93.

522 Yupparet Milligan, "บทบาทของชาวจีนในประเทศไทย" [The Role of the Chinese in Thailand] (master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1967), 74-5. And, Yupparet Milligan, "อิทธิพลของชาวจีนในด้านเศรษฐกิจ" [The Chinese Influence in Economy] in *The Chinese in Thailand*, 106.

523 Examples of Western scholars who argued that Thai-ness could resist communism and Marxism included David Wilson and Charles McLane. However, this argument was heavily challenged in the 1970s due to Thailand's political turmoil and the movement of Thai intellectual activists. Craig J. Reynold and Hong Lysa, "Marxism in Thai Historical Studies," *Journal of Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (November 1983): 77.

Within this political context, many popular novels and films about the threat of Red China were produced. In the 1950s, a connection between the dangerous Chinese from abroad and the Chinese in Thailand appeared in many famous novels such as *Red Eagle* (1955) and *The Garuda's Talons* (1957).<sup>524</sup> Popular media's portrayal of dangerous Chinese outsiders who infiltrated Thailand demonstrated the public's fear of the external communist threat from the PRC.<sup>525</sup> Phanom Thian's *The Garuda's Talons* was originally serialised in *Ploenchit Weekly Magazine* for 14 months making the novel longer than 3,000 pages. Its first printing reached 100,000 copies, making it the best-selling novel at that time.<sup>526</sup> The novel tells the story of the army Lieutenant Khom Sorakupt's undercover mission to infiltrate and eliminate Sing Eng (a Taechiu term that means Eagle), an underground criminal organisation operated by Chinese men from Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and mainland China. Sing Eng's supreme leader, Chang Su Liang, wishes to return to China and rule both the country and the world using the secret formula of the most powerful weapon. The formula was found underneath an eagle sculpture that came from the Soviet Union.<sup>527</sup> Sek Dusit's *The Red Eagle* has a similar plot as *The Garuda's Talons* as it tells the story of a masked vigilante, the Red Eagle, who fights against criminals and injustice. In the first episode of the series, the Red Eagle destroyed the Yellow Tiger gang run by the Chinese and a corrupt Thai official.<sup>528</sup> Other examples of Chinese villains in popular films include *Cold Fire* (1965) and *Scum of the Earth* (1977).<sup>529</sup>

### **Formation of the 'Patriotic lookjin' in Official Narratives**

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524 The titles in Thai are เล็บครุฑ and อินทรีแดง. They were a highly popular action series and adapted into films which also received overwhelming success. The first film of *The Red Eagle* series, เจ้านักเลง [The Gangster], was released in 1959 and became one of the highest-grossing movies at that time. Mit Chaibancha's role as the Red Eagle marked a start of his career as a great Thai movie star. The rest of the series was adapted into film in 1962, 1966, 1968, and finally 1970. In was during the production of the last film of the series, อินทรีทอง [The Golden Eagle], that Mit died after falling from a helicopter in the previous scene. *The Garuda's Talon* film series was released in 1957, 1968, and 1982. The film series were popular but less successful than *The Red Eagle*. For analysis of *The Red Eagle* and Mit Chaibancha during the Cold War, please see Harrison, "The Man with the Golden Gauntlets," 195-226.

525 Thak, "Are We Them," 491.

526 Thak, "Are We Them," 491.

527 Phanom Thian, เล็บครุฑ [The Garuda's Talons], vol. 6, 3rd ed. (Bangkok: Na Baanwannagum, 2008), 530-4.

528 See, Sek Dusit, อินทรีแดง ตอนเจ้ามังกร [The Red Eagle: White Dragon] (Bangkok: Aksorn Smith, 1956).

529 Like *Cold Fire*, *Scum of the Earth* or หนักแผ่นดิน is also anti-communist propaganda film promoted by the Thai government.

In the late 1960s, stories of the Chinese as harmless and grateful to Thai kings and to the Thai nation, the characteristics of the ‘patriotic *lookjin*’ or the Sino-Thai who love the Thai nation, started to become popular. These narratives often told the story of poor Chinese immigrants who came to Siam/Thailand with just ‘a straw mat and a pillow to seek the protection of the king’s righteous generosity’.<sup>530</sup> The emergence of these new narratives was the result of the domestic and external political situation. In terms of Thai politics, the revival of the monarchy and the growing influence of the rightists played a crucial role in constructing and supporting these new narratives. The Thai government under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1959-1963) revitalised the Thai monarchy to legitimise its military dictatorship and its anti-communist struggle by arranging the King’s presence in public spaces. This included scheduling domestic and interstate visits, for example, and the revival of traditional festivals and ceremonies connected to the monarchy.<sup>531</sup> As a result, the Thai monarchy gradually regained its prestigious status after the Siamese Revolution in 1932. From a young and powerless monarch in 1950, King Bhumibol went on to become the most powerful figure in Thailand in the early 1970s, a phenomenon that marked the onset of ‘network monarchy’, a palace-centred political network that engaged heavily with contemporary Thai politics.<sup>532</sup> The return of the Thai monarchy was accompanied by ‘stories’ about benevolent Siamese/Thai kings of the past and their selfless dedication to the nation’s development and democracy. These stories narrated the heroic role played by the Thai monarchy that had protected the nation from foreign enemies. Moreover, these stories narrated that Thai monarchs brought development and modernity to the land from the late reign of King Rama V to the early reign of King Rama VI.<sup>533</sup>

These stories about Thailand’s royal heroes and its benevolent and wise monarchs were cultivated and promoted by the Thai state and royalist-rightist scholars to stimulate Thai royal nationalism. For example, the Sarit government brought back traditional ceremonies and festivals celebrating Thai monarchs and their ‘dedication’ to the country’s prosperity throughout history; this tactic also increased the King’s publicity.<sup>534</sup> As such, all

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530 In Thai is เลือฝืนหมอนใบมาพึ่งพระบรมโพธิสมภาร. The phrase is translated into English by Thak Chaloehtiarana. See, Thak, “Are We Them,” 481.

531 Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 204-214.

532 Duncan McCargo, “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand,” *The Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005): 503-4.

533 Thongchai, “The Royal-nationalist Historiography in Thailand,” 56-65.

534 Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 210-2.

subjects in Thailand, including the Chinese, were made to feel indebted to the monarchy; this paved the way to the emergence of the story of the Chinese as loyal subjects under royal protection. This belief was also endorsed by Thai royalist-rightist scholars. M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a Thai rightist-royalist intellectual known for *Four Reigns* (1951), is one of the most illustrative examples. This novel is not only the first work in which Kukrit publicly presented himself as a royalist who had dedicated himself to the throne and was a guru of Thai court life and monarchical traditions, but was also the first novel that associated the Chinese with the monarchy and categorised them into good and bad Chinese according to their loyalty to the Thai monarch.<sup>535</sup>

In *Four Reigns*, Mae Ploy's husband, Prem, is a wealthy Chinese man who dedicates himself to serving the Thai court, just as his ancestors did. Prem and his family represent the Chinese in Thailand who successfully became a part of Thai noble society by marrying noble Thai women (Mae Ploy is also from a wealthy noble family and serves as a court lady before marrying Prem). Unlike Prem, Sevi, Mae Ploy's son-in-law, is a 'bad' Chinese who shows no loyalty to the king (defying Thai-ness) and prioritises his own benefits. Because Sevi's family has no connection to the court and his father still uses a Chinese name, Mae Ploy calls Sevi's family *Jek*, a term with a strong connotation of racial discrimination.<sup>536</sup> Both Prem and Sevi are wealthy Sino-Thais and serve the Thai government, but the crucial difference is their relationship and loyalty to the monarchy, the decisive factor of being a 'good' Chinese. Contrary to Prem, Sevi has a connection with the People's Party, takes the Japanese side during the Second World War, and is a heartless war profiteer. As such, Sevi is deemed a 'misbehaving *jek*' in Kasian's term, or an ungrateful Sino-Thai to the monarchs. To Mae Ploy, the Thai monarchs were like the 'Bodhi tree' that protects her family and the ethnic Chinese, such as Prem's Chinese ancestors who came to Siam from China by boat<sup>537</sup>

However, from the late 1960s onwards, literature about Chinese loyalty to the Thai nation started to grow and competed with stories about the 'bad' Chinese in Thailand. *Four*

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535 *Four Reigns* is the story of Mae Ploy, a female protagonist, who lives through the reign of four Thai kings, Rama V to Rama VIII and witnesses significant political and social changes in Thailand such as the influx of western culture and the Siamese Revolution in 1932. Throughout the story, Kukrit shows how domestic political events disturb a peaceful and prosperous land under absolute rule.

536 Kukrit Pramoj, *สี่แผ่นดิน* [Four Reigns], vol. 2 (Bangkok: Nanmeebooks, 2005), 406.

537 Kukrit, *Four Reigns*, vol. 1, 502. Mae Ploy's second son also joins the People's Party in the Siamese Revolution and is on the same side as Sevi. However, he later regrets it and realises Sevi is actually a bad person.

*Reigns* also became increasingly popular in this period. In fact, the novel was reprinted at least five times between 1963 and 1974, approximately once every two years. It was also twice adapted into a TV programme and became a musical. Botan's *Letters from Thailand* (1969) and Yok Burapha's *Life with Grandfather* (1976) are the two best known novels about the Chinese minority's escape from poverty and hardship in China, and their new life in the prosperous Kingdom of Thailand. Both novels are often regarded as the debut of the 'good' Chinese in Thai literature.<sup>538</sup> As they are given the opportunity to have a better life, they feel grateful to the Thai nation and king and willingly assimilate into Thai society.<sup>539</sup>

*Life with Grandfather* expresses the Chinese minority's sense of gratitude to the Thai king's generosity more explicitly than *Letters from Thailand*. The last paragraph of the novel is the best illustration. In Yok's voice, 'Ah Kong is Chinese, both nationality and ethnicity. He comes to Thailand seeking the Thai king's royal protection and serves as a good royal subject for the rest of his impoverished life. He respects Thai jurisdiction, loves Thailand, and understands Thai people. And the soil that will cover his face is the soil from the Thai king's land. The End'.<sup>540</sup> The ultra-royalist tone is the result of the author's intention to counter the Sino-Thai leftist activists who participated in the student movement in the mid-1970s. Yok Burapha states his objective of *Life with Grandfather* in that he hopes 'the Chinese who can read Thai' would make the right choice between living as 'people of the land' or 'enemies of the land'.<sup>541</sup> Although Yok Burapha does not clarify what he means by 'the Chinese who can read Thai', it is likely that he is referring to the Sino-Thai student activists who were involved in the leftist movements and the October events in 1973 and 1976, the same period of time in which this novel was published. They also match Yok's

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538 Botan, *จดหมายจากเมืองไทย* [Letters from Thailand], 3rd ed. (Bangkok: Praepitaya, 1970). Yok Burapha, *อยู่กับกึ่ง* [Life with Grandfather] (Bangkok: Bannakij, 2005).

539 *Letters from Thailand* tells the rags-to-riches story of a Chinese immigrant, Tan Suang U, through his 96 letters from Thailand to his mother in China between 1945 and 1967. The novel starts with the Thai police general confiscating Suang U's letters from the Chinese who escape the People's Republic of China and find refuge in Thailand in 1967. In Suang U's letters, we learn about his life beginning with his journey from China to Thailand when he was young, his struggles to settle up and start his own business, and his family issues. *Life with Grandfather* tells a story of a young boy named Yok, a character created from the writer's childhood memories and his life with his Chinese immigrant grandfather, Ah Kong, in a small and crowded Chinese community called 'old market' in a province not far from Bangkok. Most of the residents in 'old market' are poor Chinese but they take care of each other very well. However, unlike Suang U, Ah Kong did not reveal much about the hardships of his life in the past, either when he was in China or when he started his life in Thailand.

540 Yok Burapha, *Life with Grandfather*, 282.

541 'People of the land' and 'enemies of the land' in Thai are คนของแผ่นดิน and ลี้แผ่นดิน. Yok Burapha, "From the Writer," in *Life with Grandfather*.

description of the ‘bad’ Chinese, or the Chinese and their descendants who caused problems and ‘annoyed the owners of this country’ in the novel’s preface. The ‘bad’ Chinese are a minority whose actions do not represent the majority of the ‘good’ Chinese. Indeed, Yok Burapha confirms that ‘all Chinese in Thailand love this land, and they understand their debt and loyalty to the shade (of the king’s protection) that has given them immense freedom and happiness’.<sup>542</sup> This is similar to *Four Reign’s* first appearance in the early 1950s in which the author, Kukrit Pramoj, intended to bolster royal nationalist history in order to counter the growing leftist influence among Thai intellectuals. However, royal nationalist history was also explicitly challenged by Kulap Saipradit. In his well-known novel, *Looking to the Future* (1955), he points out that that the history of Thailand should include the stories of commoners who had sacrificed themselves for the country, including the Chinese. As such, we should not feel indebted to only Siamese elites, but to every person who sacrificed themselves for the country, although their names are not mentioned in the history.<sup>543</sup>

In Chinese studies by Thai scholars in the 1970s, some scholars started to view the Chinese majority as ‘good’ (assimilated, Thai-ified, and loyal to Thai nation) and suggested that the relationships between the Chinese and Thais in the past were generally friendly.<sup>544</sup> They praised the generosity of Siamese kings in the past for their successful assimilation in Thailand. The Chinese under royal protection were treated as equal to Thai subjects and some Chinese leaders who served the government were even given Thai noble titles.<sup>545</sup> Noticeably, this research often referred to Skinner’s studies on the Thai government’s successful assimilation policies before the 1920s, while Skinner’s Chinese Problem received

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542 Yok Burapha, “From the Writer,” in *Life with Grandfather*. 501. The translation is from Thak, “Are We Them,” 496.

543 Sri Burapha’s challenge to the royalist nationalist history is acute and explicit. After hearing Nitat’s challenging view on unmentioned commoners in history, a royalist student, Rujirek, furiously yells at Nitat, ‘Are you insulting my ancestors? Do you want to re-write the history?’ However, Nitat is attacked by Rujirek before he can answer these questions. Sri Burapha, *Looking to the Future*, 190-193.

544 For example, Phuwadol Songprasert, “นโยบายของรัฐบาลที่มีต่อชาวจีนในประเทศไทย (พ.ศ.2475-2500)” [The Thai Governemnt’s Policies towards the Chinese in Thailand A.D. 1932-1957] (master’s thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1976), 213; Thavi Theerawongseri, “สถานภาพทางกฎหมายของชาวจีนในประเทศไทย” [The Legal Status of the Chinese in Thailand], (master’s thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1973), 2-3.

545 For example, Mullika Ruangrapee, “บทบาทของชาวจีนในด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม และศิลปกรรมไทย สมัยรัชกาลที่ 1 ถึงรัชกาลที่ 4 แห่งกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์” [The Role of The Chinese in Thai Economy, Society and Art from Rama I to Rama IV] (master’s thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1975), 218; Thavi, “The Legal Status of the Chinese in Thailand,” 169; Pollakun Angkinan, *บทบาทชาวจีนในประเทศไทยรัชสมัยพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว* [Roles of the Chinese in Thailand in the Reign of King Ram V] (Bangkok: Prajakkanpim, 1972), 23.

less attention and at times was even overlooked due to international events<sup>546</sup> Therefore, it shows the shift in attention away from Skinner's explanation of the problems that the Chinese had caused Siam/Thailand since ancient times, and illustrates that Skinner's influential studies on the Chinese in Thailand were also subject to an internal struggle related to the Cold war context.

However, the concept of assimilation, or Thai-ifying foreigners, did not exist in Siam before the emergence of ethno-nationalism during the reign of King Rama VI. Being a 'foreigner' to Siamese rulers meant being outside the corvee system (*phrai* system) in which people were categorised by their class, namely *phrai* (commoners) and *nai* (nobles and officials), but not by ethnicity. The Chinese, therefore, were never perceived as foreigners in ancient Siam, but as *phrai* or *nai* who served Siamese kings.<sup>547</sup> Therefore, ethnic assimilation in Siam was unseen until the late nineteenth to early twentieth century when the concept of ethnicity relating to nationhood was introduced in Siam.<sup>548</sup> It is indeed a myth constructed to shore up stories of generous and benevolent Siamese kings, the very core of royal-nationalist history.<sup>549</sup>

Although narratives of the 'good' Chinese were apparent in the 1970s, they did not wipe out prevailing concerns about the Chinese Problem. On the contrary, there was an increase in the public's anxiety about the Red Evil in Thai society and the Chinese Problem continued to receive attention from Thai academic circles.<sup>550</sup> This is due to changes in the Cold War situation in the 1970s, the distribution of pro-PRC publications, and the activities of radical student activists. The Sino-American rapprochement and President Richard Nixon's visit to the PRC in 1972 shocked the United States' Free World allies including Thailand. Despite complaining to Washington that the Americans had failed to inform their

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546 They also rely on other foreign anthropologists too such as Richard Coughlin, Victor Purcell, Kenneth P. Landon, and Louis Mitchison, but most often refer to Skinner's research on Chinese assimilation in Thailand.

547 Kasian, *Looking through the Dragon Design*, 92-93.

548 For more detail on the origin and development of ethnographic classification in the eyes of Siamese rulers, please see Thongchai, "The Others Within," 38-62.

549 Siamese kings welcomed Chinese migration not because of their good will, but because they could directly exploit the Chinese labour force. The kings also appointed wealthy Chinese leaders in Siam to be in charge of taxing Chinese labour, and expanding opium and gambling businesses. The main aim of this was to prevent Chinese immigrants from sending their income back to China. Anderson, *Studies of the Thai State*, 37-42.

550 Khachatphai Burutphat's *Ethnic Minority Problems in Thailand* is a good example. The book was reprinted at least three times between 1972 and 1983. For Thai academic books, this is an impressive number.



allies about the Beijing visit, the Thai military government under Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn decided to change the direction of its foreign policy towards the PRC accordingly. Thanom began to talk about the longstanding peaceful coexistence between the Thai and Chinese people in Thailand and proceeded to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC.<sup>551</sup> This led to the government's legitimacy crisis and the spread of communist paranoia among the Thai public. After decades of anti-communist campaigns, the fear of Red China and communism ran deep in Thai society.<sup>552</sup> In Thailand, Washington's and Bangkok's sharp turn in foreign policy towards the PRC stimulated public fear over the spread of communism and caused a resurgence of Chinese nationalism which could have led to the type of turmoil seen in the 1945 Yaowarat incident.<sup>553</sup> In addition, for anti-government groups, the new policy direction showed that the military government could no longer use the Chinese communist threat to justify their rule, and that the PRC's status in the international area was rising. These reinforced depictions of the PRC as a successful political model capable of challenging the Thai military government and the United States in the anti-government movement.<sup>554</sup> Therefore, publications on Chinese issues in Thailand noticeably grew in the 1970s, including work expressing concerns over the Chinese and pro-China writings.<sup>555</sup>

### ***Lookjin* in Thai Politics: The Sino-Thai Ethnic Identity Dilemma**

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551 Sittitthep, "Textualizing the Chinese," 170.

552 Communist fear did not spread uniformly across Thailand. There are surveys and studies that point out that Bangkok and urban areas demonstrated more 'Red paranoia' than rural areas. For example, a survey by the Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies in 1963 showed that students in Bangkok showed a good understanding of the communist threat and Red China. However, the 1969 USIS survey on the *Communism vs Freedom* poster indicated a low level of understanding of the PRC and communism in the North, the Northeast and the South. *Student Study: Thailand* (Bangkok: Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1963), TIC 218. And, *Communism vs Freedom Poster Survey* (Bangkok: USIS, 1969).

553 In 1945, the Chinese in Yaowarat joyfully celebrated the victory of the PRC after the second World War ended by singing Chinese national anthem and raising Chinese national flags without Thai national flags. This violated Thai law and caused dissatisfaction among the Thais, which later escalated into a riot in Yaowarat.

554 Sittitthep, "Textualizing the Chinese in Thailand," 170-176.

555 Khien Theerawit, *ทรรศนะของคนไทยที่มีต่อคนจีนและญี่ปุ่น* [The Thai Perception of China and Japan] (Bangkok: Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 1975), 110-126. The *Social Science Review* released a special edition 'Introducing the PRC' in 1971. As 8,000 copies was sold in a short time, Thai officials found it concerning and thus gave Suchart, the editor, a warning. Prajak, *And then the Movement Emerged*, 282.

Besides the changing Cold War situation, the increase of pro-PRC publications and activities among radical student activists also caused the Thai public anxiety in the 1970s. To counter the official narratives, radical student activists promoted an oppositional story of the Cold War that depicted the PRC and Chinese communists as a successful people's struggle against American imperialism and corrupt government. Indeed, pro-PRC or CCP publications by the Thai leftists and anti-government/anti-American intellectuals that appeared after the second World War admired both the Sino-Thai, and Thai communists because of the CCP's rapid growth and successful revolution the late 1949.<sup>556</sup> Kulap Saipradit, a prominent author and journalist, expressed his disappointment in the political stagnation seen after the 1932 Siamese Revolution in comparison with the Chinese Communist Party's success.<sup>557</sup> Nai Phi (Atsani Phonlajan's pen name), a prominent poet and a member of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), wrote poems dedicated to the communist revolution in China. Another example included an article in *Aksornsan* written by Sanao Phanichjareon, a Thammasat student-cum-CPT-member.<sup>558</sup> However, Sod Kuramarohita's well-known novels, such as *Peking: A City of Memory* (1943) and *Free China Movement* (1949), are an exception.<sup>559</sup> In his work, Sod condemned western imperialism, the KMT, and the CCP as he directly witnessed their cruelty and violence towards the Chinese people.<sup>560</sup> Despite his criticism of the CCP, Sod was often mistreated and accused of being a communist by government officials because of his devotion to promote cooperatives in Thailand.<sup>561</sup>

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556 For example, 'Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries' [ประเทศเมืองขึ้น กึ่งเมืองขึ้น] and 'The Great Victory of the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army' [ชัยชนะอันยิ่งใหญ่ของกองทัพปลดแอกประชาชนจีน] in *Mahachon*, 4 May 1947 and 21 March 1948, respectively, quoted in Kasian, *Commodifying Marxism*, 239. The Party changed its name to the Communist Party of Thailand or CPT during its Second Congress in February 1952 to stress its 'national' instead of 'ethnic' connotation. For more details on the communist party in Thailand, please see the introduction. Also, *Pituphum* (or *La Patrie*), a left-wing weekly newspaper, published cartoons admiring the CCP army's devotion to the Chinese people. See, *ปิตุภูมิ* [*La Patrie*] 2, no. 72 (1947): 26-27.

557 According to Kulap, what caused the stagnation was that Thai leaders abandoned the ideology of revolution, unlike the CCP that fought for this ideology. Kulap Saipradit, "อุดมการณ์ของการปฏิวัติ" [Ideology of Revolution], *สยามสมัย* [The Siam Times Weekly] 3, no. 111 (June 24, 1949): 6-7, 33.

558 The article's title is "สงครามกลางเมืองในจีนปัจจุบันคือสะพานปฏิวัติสังคมนิยม" [The Present Civil War in China is the Bridge to Socialist Revolution]. Kasian, *Commodifying Marxism*, 239.

559 The titles in Thai are *บักกึ่งนครแห่งความหลัง* and *ขบวนการเสรีจีน*, respectively. The latter was adapted into a film in 1959 and won a national film award.

560 Sod's resentment towards the Chinese Communist Party and communism was clearly expressed in *Peking: A City of Memory* that, "the communist menace in China destroyed society's peace and order. Sod Kurmarohita, *บักกึ่งนครแห่งความหลัง* [Peking: A City of Memory], quoted in *One Hundred Best Books that a Thai Should Read*, 257.

561 Sod started writing about cooperatives when he was in China. The writings caused him trouble when he returned to Thailand. He was 'invited' to meet the deputy chief of police about his article on

When Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, then Prime Minister of Thailand, decided to create a more liberal political ambience in Thailand after his visit to the United States in 1955, many Thai leftist politicians, merchants, journalists, and writers visited the PRC between 1955 and 1958, which led to more publications boosting the PRC's image.<sup>562</sup> For example, Suwat Woradilok's *Red Dove*, one of the most influential novels for the student-led movement in the mid-1970s, was written after his trip to the PRC in 1957.<sup>563</sup> Suchart Phumiborirak, a member of a Thai artist and journalist group that visited the PRC in 1958, became a translation editor in China after his decision to remain in exile there following Sarit's coup that same year.<sup>564</sup> Under his editorship, work by influential mainland Chinese writers, such as Mao Dun, Lao She and Lu Xun, were introduced to Thai readers. These Chinese nationalist activist-cum-authors and their work played a crucial role in forming the Art for Life movement in Thailand, a distinct and unique art movement in Thai history, where artists in different fields were driven by the leftist ideology that art's ultimate purpose is to serve the exploited and oppressed.<sup>565</sup>

After Sarit's death in 1963, the leftist movement resumed. Unlike the previous movement, the second surge of the leftist movement was more organised and mainly driven by radical student activists.<sup>566</sup> Another difference is the noticeable presence of Sino-Thai students in the movement, which, according to Kasian, explained their interest in the

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cooperatives. *อนุสรณ์รับพระราชทานเพลิงศพ นายสด กุรมะโรหิต* [Sod Kurmarohita's Cremation Memorial Book] (Bangkok: Yaikasem, 1978), 31-36.

562 For further details and the reason behind Phibun's democratic project after his trip to the United States, see, Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 69-71. Thai writers and journalists who visited the PRC included Thongbai Thongpao, Issara Amantakul, Thawan Woradilok, Karuna Kusalasai, and Prayoon Julphamorn, for example, but only a few of them produced literary work inspired by the visit. Kasian, *Commodifying Marxism*, 66.

563 In April 1957, Suwat accepted an invitation from the PRC to lead a troupe of performing artists that included a few merchants to perform in China for two months. The troupe was also invited to attend the 1957 May Day celebration, an important setting in *Red Dove*.

564 Suchart Phumiborirak was an Isan intellectual who wrote *Isan: A Land of Blood and Tears*. For more detail about the book see Chapter 4.

565 The most illustrative example is Jit Phumisak's manifesto for the Art for Life's Sake movement. *Art for Life, Art for the People* (1957) was also influenced by Lu Xun and Mao Zedong. Natdhond, "Visual Art for Life's Sake," 43.

566 In the second leftist movement, there was an increase in the number of student unions, workers and farmer groups. They often collaborated to pressure the government more effectively. More detail in chapter 4.

PRC and Chinese identity.<sup>567</sup> At least 18 of the 69 victims killed in the 14 October incident were from Chinese families, or approximately 4 out of 10.<sup>568</sup>

In the second leftist movement, pro-PRC publications dramatically increased and were recirculated in Thai society, particularly among radical students and intellectuals. Leftist literature from the 1950s praising communist China were reprinted particularly in the 1970s, for example, Jit Phumisak's *Art for Life, Art for the People* and Suwat Woradilok's 'Meet Sri Pracha in Beijing' (1957).<sup>569</sup> Sri Burapha's *Looking to the Future* (1957), a novel where a *lookjin* boy is depicted as part of a new political force challenging the 'old' political system, was also reprinted and became even more popular as a result.<sup>570</sup> To showcase new literary work that depicted Chinese communist leaders as heroes fighting against western imperialism, the *Social Science Review*, a leading intellectual journal in the 1960s and 1970s, launched a special issue on the PRC in 1971 and books promoting successful revolution in the PRC. The journal particularly highlighted *China's Revolution* (1974) and *Asian Heroes* (1972). *Asian Heroes* (1972) is notable because it lists Mao Zedong as one of seven Asian heroes.<sup>571</sup> Another example of a book that promoted successful revolution in the PRC is *People's Fighters, Revolutionary Heroes* (1974). *People's Fighters, Revolutionary Heroes* (1974) is a collection of seven stories of popular fighters against imperialism and capitalism in Asia. Four of them are stories about Chinese communists and their struggles against capitalists and imperialism in the PRC. Other stories include Udorn Thongnoi's *The Guiding*

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567 Kasian, "มรดกเดี่ยวที่เฮียลืม" [*Tia's Heritage That Hia Forgot-Final*] in *Looking through the Dragon Design*, 25-26. *Tia* and *hia* are Chinese terms for father and older brother, respectively. Vorasak Mahattanobon even pointed out that half of the student leaders in the 14 October event were Sino-Thai. Vorasak Mahattanobon, "จีนสยามในความสัมพันธ์ไทย-จีน" [The Sino-Siamese in the Sino-Thai Relation] in *จักรวาลวิทยา: บทความเพื่อเป็นเกียรติแก่ นิดิ เอียวศรีวงศ์* [Cosmology: A Compilation of Articles Commemorating Nidhi Eoseewong], ed. Thanet Wongyannawa (Bangkok: Matichon, 2006), 307.

568 Sombat Thamrongthanyawong et al. *พระราชทานเพลิงศพวีรชน ณ เมรุสนามหลวง 14 ตุลาคม 2517* [Royal Cremation of Heroes at the Royal Field 14 October 1974] (Bangkok: Khurusapa Ladprao, 1974). According to the 14 October Foundation, 77 not 69, were killed. However, since I need to estimate the number of Sino-Thai victims, I chose to rely on the book since it provides the family background of each victim. Many Sino-Thai victims did not have Chinese names or surnames. One way to identify their Chinese background is from their parents' Chinese names.

569 Suwat Woradilok's 'Meet Sri Pracha in Beijing' tells the story of a meeting between the author and 'Sri Pracha' in Beijing in 1957, a Thai woman who went into exile in the PRC and studied politics there. Suwat Woradilok, "พบ ศรี ประชา ที่ปักกิ่ง" [Meet Sri Pracha in Beijing] in *นักรบประชาชน วีรชนปฏิวัติ* [People's Fighters, Revolutionary Heroes] (Bangkok: Pikanas, 1974), 65-85.

570 More detail on *Looking to the Future* is in Chapter 4.

571 Suchart Sawatsi, ed., *วีรชนเอเชีย* [Asia Heroes] (Bangkok: editor department, the Social Science Review, 1974).

*Red Sun* (1976) and the Thammasat University Student Union's *Face of New China* (1976).<sup>572</sup> In addition to printed media, Thammasat University students hosted a Red China exhibition at their university in 1974 and a 'political Chinese opera' that they wrote. The opera was a parody of Thai politicians and military leaders in the form of Chinese opera sung in Thai in the late 1960s to the mid 1970s.<sup>573</sup> The opera was not pro-PRC *per se*, but the use of Chinese opera in itself is significant because it demonstrates a connection to China, the land under the communist rule.<sup>574</sup>

However, some Sino-Thai turned 'right' and chose to be on the same side as the Thai state. In terms of the narrative conflicts over the Chinese, the Thai state promoted stories of the Chinese who are loyal to the Thai nation and monarchy. Botan and Yok Burapha are cases in point.<sup>575</sup> In other words, Sino-Thai roles appeared on both sides of the debate during the turning-point period of Thai politics. Although their political ideologies were divided, the two sides of the Sino-Thai had many things in common. Firstly, they grew up during a period of revitalisation of the Thai monarchy and experienced Thai nationalist education. They also grew up during the American presence and the 'Red paranoia' in Thailand. They were of Chinese descent, but did not know the Chinese language well, and particularly struggled with writing it. They also had difficulty imagining themselves and their Chinese ancestors as a part of Thailand's ethno-nationalist history. Therefore they welcomed Skinner's history of the Chinese in Thailand and it became a part of stories of the Chinese in Siam. Many felt alienated and inferior in Thai schools or universities and developed what Kasian termed 'Thai-ness Deficiency Syndrome' (TDS). Kasian described this 'syndrome' as 'an unending, desperate but doomed attempt to out-Thai the Thais'.<sup>576</sup>

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572 Udorn Thongnoi, *ตะวันสีแดงส่องทาง* [The Guiding Red Sun] (Bangkok: Sunchan, 1976). Thammasat University Student Union, *โฉมหน้าจีนใหม่* [Face of New China] (Bangkok: Thammasat University Student Union, 1976).

573 Anthony Reid, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 131-132. The Chinese opera by Thammasat students, or the Thammasat Chinese opera (จิ๊วธรรมศาสตร์) is very popular. It was also performed for the PAD during the protests in the mid-2000s, the same period when the patriotic *lookjin* movement was politically active.

574 For Kukrit Pramoj, Chinese opera at Thammasat University was a little bit too much. He decided to teach *Khon*, a traditional Thai dance, to Thammasat University students, particularly the Sino-Thais, in order to bestow Thai-ness and a perception of hierarchical social class on them. Kukrit also started teaching 'Thai Civilisation', a Thai-ifying module, to all Thammasat first-year students in 1971. For more information on Kukrit's Thai-ification of Sino-Thai Thammasat students, please see, Saichol, *Kukrit and the Construction of "Thai-ness"*, vol. 2, 272-308.

575 Another illustration is Chinese leaders and organisations. Their long loyalty to Thai kings who provided them with royal protection was often repeated on several public occasions, such as at a donation event for the king. Sittitthep, *The Poor Chinese Rebels*, 93-94.

576 Kasian, "The Misbehaving *Jeks*," 270

According to Kasian, typical symptoms included using Thai first and last names instead of Chinese names, trying to excel in Thai subjects such as Thai language and literature, and hiding their Chinese traits from schoolmates. However, no matter how hard they tried, these *lookjin* still always felt inadequate, lost, and vulnerable.<sup>577</sup>

Both the ‘good’ Sino-Thai and *lookjin* radical activists suffered from this TDS syndrome to some degree, but it is doubtful that the symptom is as ‘severe’ as Kasian describes. Despite Kasian’s claims that its symptom included ‘hiding or camouflaging one’s embarrassing and shameful Chinese name, surname, accent, language, customs and parents’, many Sino-Thai still chose to keep their Chinese traits.<sup>578</sup> The best illustration of this is that many people incorporated their original Chinese surnames into their new Thai surnames, making it quite easy to tell if someone had a Chinese background. Another useful example is the TDS expressed by Botan. In a recent interview, Botan, Supha Sirisingh’s pen name, described herself as ‘an emotionally repressed *lookjin*’ and further stated that, ‘I become a writer because I want to be famous’. Supha shared her *lookjin* experiences and explained that as the daughter of a Chinese immigrant father, she grew up under a lot of pressure. Supha wrote *Letters from Thailand* (1969) during her study at the prestigious Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, which was a well-known bastion of conservative royalists, to prove to her course mates that she could also write a novel. Interestingly, although Supha felt inferior because of her *lookjin* status, she specifically chose ‘Botan’, or peony in Chinese, as her pen name to express her Chinese identity.<sup>579</sup> For Yok Burapha, his TDS was even less explicit. He never declared that he felt inferior because of his Chinese background. On the contrary, he confirmed in the prefaces of *Living with Grandfather* and *Filial Passion* (1978) that he was proud to be from a poor Chinese family, even though he had a difficult childhood.<sup>580</sup>

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577 Kasian, “The Misbehaving *Jeks*,” 270-1.

578 Kasian, “The Misbehaving *Jeks*,” 271.

579 Supha Sirisingh, speech on May 24, 2014, Bangkok, accessed, 4 October 2018.

<https://www.bloggang.com/mainblog.php?id=akung-klong&month=27-05-2014&group=18&gblog=7>

580 *Filial Passion* in Thai is กตัญญูพิศवास. The novel won a national award that same year. Like *Living with Grandfather*, *Filial Passion* tells the story of the good but poor Chinese in Thailand. The three main protagonists—Jew, Cheng, and Mong—are poor Chinese who are mistreated by the rich Thai and Thai officials. Same as *Living with Grandfather*, the protagonists never fight injustice and manage to overcome all difficulties in the end by support from the Chinese community. Yok Burapha, กตัญญูพิศवास [Filial Passion] (Bangkok: Bannakij, 1990).

The TDS of Sino-Thai student leftists was more complicated. Unlike Botan and Yok Burapha, these *lookjin* did a good job of hiding their Chinese backgrounds, a symptom that matched Kasian's TDS syndrome. *Lookjin* students, like Thai leftist activists in general, never represented the Chinese in their struggles or in their writings. Despite their pro-China perspective and their use of Chinese culture as a form of political expression, they identified themselves with the poor Thai who were exploited by capitalists and American imperialism, rather than with the Chinese who suffered from unjust treatment in Thailand as a result of their ethnicity. Some examples of Sino-Thai student activists who chose to represent and identify themselves with poor farmers and workers, instead of with their Chinese ethnicity, include Rawee Domprachan and Tak Wongrat.<sup>581</sup> Rawee Domprachan, a Sino-Thai from a Hainanese family, had anti-Chinese feelings and thus refused to learn the Chinese language. His Thai nationalism was so strong that he grew up wanting to be a soldier.<sup>582</sup> Similarly, although Tak Wongrat's father was a Chinese immigrant from Shantou, China, Tak's work often focused on changes in rural Thailand (especially Isan where he grew up), and the struggle of rural people in Bangkok.<sup>583</sup> Although 'Brown Shoes, a Gray Cat, and an Old Man' is the only work by Tak, and probably the only work among leftist writings that particularly portrays the life of the poor Chinese in Thailand, the short story targets issues concerning the urban poor more generally, not just those faced by people of Chinese ethnicity.<sup>584</sup>

As the student movement was heavily influenced by Marxist-Maoist ideology, issues of race or ethnicity were 'regarded and treated as a secondary matter destined to be automatically resolved and wither away once the proletariat came to power through a

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581 I used Rawee and Tak as a case in point here because they were Sino-Thai leftists whose Chinese background is still traceable. Rawee Domprachan was Yutthapong Purisamban's pen name. He was one of the most influential poets in the student movement in the 1970s. One of his most well-known poems, "ตื่นเถิด เสรีชน" [Wake Up, Free People] (1972), was reprinted countless times and his other work was widely circulated in leftist student publications. Tak Wongrat is Thitiban Wongratpanya's pen name. He was one of the founders of *The Crescent Moon*, an influential group of intellectuals and artists under the leadership of Suchart Sawatsi. Compared to Rawee, Tak's works are less well-known. However, it is important to raise his name in this chapter because Tak's short story, 'Brown Shoes, a Gray Cat, and an Old Man', is probably the only work about poor Chinese people by Thai leftist in Cold War Thailand. On Rawee's collection of writings, see, Rawee Domprachan, *ตื่นเถิดเสรีชน กวีนิพนธ์คัดสรร* [Wake Up Free People: Selected Poems] (Bangkok: 14 October Academic Institution Foundation, 2003).

582 Kasian, *Imagined Uncommunity*, 15.

583 For Tak's Chinese background, please see Harin Sukkawat, "เที่ยวครั้งสุดท้ายของ ตัก วงศ์รัฐ" [Tak Wongrat's Last Trip], *The Creative for Reading Culture Promotion*, accessed October 7, 2018, <http://www.happyreading.in.th/article/>.

584 One of the protagonists in Kulap Saipradit's *Looking into the Future* is a Sino-Thai named Seng. However, he is not the main protagonist and the novel focuses more on the political enlightenment of a boy from Isan.

revolution'.<sup>585</sup> In practice this means that questions related to ethnicity were never seriously debated or even raised. Due to this shortcoming on ethnicity, leftist students and intellectuals failed to question the ethno-nationalist Thai-ness constructed by the Thai state. It partially explains the royalist-nationalist discourse in the student-led popular uprisings in the 1970s even though the students were strongly under the leftist ideologies. Additionally, many Sino-Thai leftist students were prone to TDS, their embrace of Thai nationalism and loyalty to the King could alleviate their feeling of Thai-ness deficiency. Some illustrations include the reprinting of rightist statements in various student publications that referred to themselves as 'soldiers of the nation and the King' and some parts of Rama VII's abdication letter, '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'.<sup>586</sup> Therefore, it was not a surprise that Rawee Domprachan nominated King Bhumibol for the position of Ramkhamhaeng University president during a debate on whether the university should be an open-enrolment university.<sup>587</sup> Another illustration is the student activists' decision to seek the King's protection in during the 14 October event. In fact, the 14 October event was one of the key events that led to the birth of Thongchai Winichakul's neo-royal nationalism.

The TDS and rightist-nationalist discourse among student activists made coexistence between Maoism and the Thai monarchy possible from the Thai leftist perspective.<sup>588</sup> It also led to stories of the 'good' Chinese under royal protection that were unquestioned by the Sino-Thai leftists. In this regard, Sino-Thai student leftists and Thai rightists shared royal nationalist sentiments, although for different reasons, that led to the leftist's firm support of

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585 Kasian, "The Misbehaving Jeks," 272.

586 Prajak explains that the student movement was also influenced by the former rightist-royalist fighters' work. These works claimed that their fight against the 'authoritative' People's Party was for the sake of democracy and that Thai monarchs were indeed pro-democratic. As many of these fighters ended up imprisoned or executed for 'democratic' struggles, their stories inspired student activists to follow in their steps. Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 434-444. King Rama VII's speech was translated by Federico Ferrara, "The Legend of King Prajadhipok: Tall Tales and Stubborn Facts of the Seventh Reign in Siam," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 4.

587 Before Ramkhamhaeng University was established in 1971, there was a debate if the university should be an open-enrolment university. Rawee wrote an article to support that the university should be open admission, but it has never been published. His article suggested that the King should be the president of the University. Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 404.

588 This view can be seen in Suwat Woradilok's short story, 'Meet Sri Pracha in Beijing'. In this short story, Sri Pracha strongly believes in Chinese communism and 'corrects' his misunderstanding towards the People's Republic of China. Sri Pracha explains that the PRC has no intention of overthrowing the monarchy as seen in the support given to Norodom Sihamoni, the King of Cambodia. Suwat, "Meet Sri Pracha," 65-85.



the king's democratic discourse and the emergence of neo-royal nationalism after the student-led popular uprising in 1973.<sup>589</sup> Sadly, this unprecedented rise in the King's status unexpectedly increased tension between the rightists and the leftists that culminated in the student massacre on 6 October 1976.

Kasian's TDS is indeed an influential drive that demonstrates the ethnic identity dilemma of the Sino-Thais in Thai politics during the Cold War period. However, this concept should be used with caution. Firstly, not all Sino-Thai were equally affected by TDS. The ethnic Chinese writers of Sinophone Thai literature are a case in point. Instead of TDS, they demonstrate what might be termed 'Chinese Deficiency Syndrome' in their work. For example, in *Yaowarat in Rainy Storm* (1983), knowledge on Chinese culture and language indicates one's refinement and is valued over wealth in Chinese society.<sup>590</sup> Li Jun, the poor Sino-Thai protagonist, is highly respected by rich Chinese in Yaowarat simply because he is very knowledgeable about Chinese culture and excels in the Chinese language due to his studies in Penang. Another example is Heng Muay, a Sino-Thai girl in Yaowarat, who feels inferior to and jealous of Sok Huang, another Sino-Thai woman, who has excellent Chinese literary skills. Additionally, this novel does not discuss the ethnic differences between the Thais and Chinese, nor focus on Chinese assimilation. The main concern of the novel is how the Chinese in Yaowarat can best survive exploitation and extortion.

Secondly, Kasian's TDS can be perceived as a manifestation of the Chinese and *lookjin* power over the Thai because *lookjin* did not aim to become as Thai as the Thais, but more Thai than the Thais. It implies that achieving Thai-ness is a goal that they can attain, and one that challenges dominant perceptions of the Chinese and their intrinsically inferior traits as set out in official narratives. This account of TDS challenges the official view by

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589 The 'discourse of a democratic king' appeared in the 1960s and was used to describe the Chakri monarchs in the past who intended to 'give' a constitution to Thai people even before the 1932 revolution. In the Sarit era, the story of the 'democratic' King Rama VII, the last absolute monarch who was overthrown by the authoritarian and power-hungry People's Party, became prevalent in Thai academic circles and among Thai rightist-royalists. Prajak, *And Then the Movement Emerged*, 415-433.

590 *Yaowarat in Rainy Storm* in Thai is เยาวราชในพายุฝน, in Chinese is 风雨耀华力. The novel uses the Chinese literary technique called 接龙小说, or a connecting-dragon novel. Each chapter is written by a different writer, but he/she always ends the chapter with some predicament or problematic situation that challenges the next writer. This technique can be thought of as a game or a form of social interaction between the writers. For *Yaowarat in Rainy Storm*, there are nine Chinese contributors who met weekly at a tea shop to discuss their work. The novel was firstly published in 1963 and 1964 in a Chinese weekly magazine in Thailand. It was published as a book in Hong Kong in 1983. This group of Sino-Thai writers produced another novel using the same technique, but it is not translated into Thai. Arun Rotchanasanti, trans., *เยาวราชในพายุฝน* [*Yaowarat in Rainy Storm*] (Bangkok: Sukkapabjai, 1992).

proposing that the Chinese and Sino-Thais themselves are able to ‘choose’ to adopt Thai-ness. In other words, the Sino-Thais can exercise agency, since their identity is ultimately malleable. In Skinner’s 1952 interview with Huang Yu-luan, one of the top Chinese leaders in Thailand, Yu-luan told Skinner that he had three sons.<sup>591</sup> He had the first and the second son study Chinese and foreign languages. For the third son, whom Yu-luan expected to take over business in Thailand, Yu-luan said, ‘I made him a Siamese boy’ (emphasis in original).<sup>592</sup> Yu-luan’s ‘I made him (his third son) a Siamese boy’ is indeed an intriguing statement because it implies his command over Siamese identity. Also, in the Chinese tradition, the eldest son is the most important while the youngest is considered the least important. The fact that Yu-luan turned his youngest son into a Siamese boy while his older sons studied Chinese therefore implies that Chinese-ness was prioritised over Siamese-ness. Other examples showing that the Chinese and Sino-Thais ‘out-Thai’ the Thais and illustrate their ‘capability’ to overpower the Thai if they so desire include Suang-U telling Meng Ju to defeat a Thai student from a noble family by achieving a better exam result (*Letters from Thailand*), and Ah Kong’s excessive love to the Thai nation. Indeed, it is hard to imagine anyone asking his/her grandson to repeatedly play the national anthem like Ah Kong does in *Life with Grandfather*. Tinnanat, a *lookjin* protagonist in *A Chinese Rattle Drum Heir* (1974), a popular novel by Nalin Bussakorn, was raised by his maternal Chinese grandfather to be more Thai and more successful than the Thai noble family on Tinnanat’s paternal side.<sup>593</sup>

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591 Huang Yu-luan’s Thai name is Luan Wongwanich, or Dr Luan as he was widely known in Thailand at that time. Dr Luan was a Chinese immigrant from Hainan and bought the British Dispensary from Dr Thomas Haywards Hays in 1928. His most famous product is ‘Prickly Heat cooling powder’, otherwise known as ‘Snake brand cooling powder’ to most Thai people. *Legend of the British Dispensary*, accessed by October 5, 2018. <http://www.britishdispensary.com/en/about.php>.

592 Huang Yu-luan, interview by G. William Skinner, Bangkok, 24 April 1952. 14/27/2778, Leaders Interviews-Miscellaneous I (1951-10-1 to 1952-7-22), Skinner’s Box I.

593 The Thai title of *A Chinese Rattle Drum Heir* is ทายาทปี่องเป็ง. As Tinnanat’s mother is from a poor Chinese family, his paternal grandfather, a member of the royal family, does not accept Tinnanat’s mother and severs her relationship with Tinnanat’s father. After his mother’s untimely death, Tinnanat is raised by his maternal Chinese grandfather who swears to retaliate against the humiliation by “making a Siamese boy out of” his grandson. Tinnanat is not allowed to speak Chinese nor Thai with a Chinese accent and is sent to study at Vajiravudh College, the most prestigious royalist all-boys boarding school that was established by King Rama VI. Tinnanat later serves in the Thai army and participates in a military mission during the Vietnam War. His military rank was a colonel, which was very rare for a Sino-Thai in the 1970s. His Chinese grandfather expands his fabric business and becomes a millionaire by controlling the fabric industry in Thailand. At the end, due his improved financial status, Tinnanat renovates his paternal family’s worn out residence because his royalist grandfather cannot afford the maintenance costs. Nalin Bussakorn, *ทายาทปี่องเป็ง* [A Chinese Rattle Drum Heir] (Bangkok: Klangwittaya, 1974).

## Conclusion

This chapter proposed that both the Thai government and Thai leftists in the Cold War period contributed to the transformation of the Chinese Other from the 'bad' Chinese, to the formation of *luk chin rak chat*, or the Sino-Thais who love Thai nation. From the late 1940s to the early 1970s, the Thai government heavily promoted stories about evil Red China and the 'bad' Chinese who caused the 'Chinese Problem' in Thailand to justify their tightened control of the Chinese under the front of their anti-communist policy. The Thai state also promoted stories about the 'good' Chinese, or the Thai-ified Chinese who were loyal to Thai nation, that became apparent in the early 1950s and popular in the late 1960s onwards. Stories of the 'good' Chinese were another means that the Thai state used to control their subjects. This was accomplished through the state's narrative that the Chinese and the Sino-Thais, who wished to live a successful and peaceful life in Thailand, must be assimilated into Thai society or Thai-ified. Although Thai leftist intellectuals and students promoted an alternative story of the PRC to challenge the Thai state's authority and legitimacy, they left the politicised representation of the Chinese and Sino-Thais in the official narrative unquestioned. This led to the depiction of Sino-Thais who both loved and were loyal to Thai nation and the King, a political identity that remains influential to Thai politics in present days.

Through an examination of the representation of Chinese nationals and the Thai-born Chinese in official narratives, specifically the transition from the depiction of the Chinese as a dangerous threat residing in Thai society, to the Chinese who were loyal to Thai nation, this chapter found that this evolving representation was the result of internal politics and the Cold War situation. In terms of Thai politics, the Thai government and ruling elites revitalised and bolstered the Thai monarchy, framing it as the heart of Thai nation and a home to Thai 'race'. In this story, the Chinese in Thailand were narrated as the un-Thai because of ethnic differences, hence, the dichotomy between the Chinese Other and the Thai Self. The ethnic difference between the Thais and the Chinese lies at the ethno-ideology of Thai-ness that can be traced back to the Reign of King Rama VI (1910-1925). This ideology often appears in conventional histories of Thailand that tried to explain the origin

of the 'Thai race', as the owners of the Thai nation.<sup>594</sup> However, it was during the Cold War period that the ethnic differentiation between the Thai and Chinese became concrete and influential, partially due to contributions from anthropology on the Chinese in Thai society. Skinner's research on the Chinese in Thai society did not only provide a history of the Chinese in Thailand, but also marked and identified ethnic differences between the Chinese and the Thai locals. As Skinner relied on a version of ethno-history that served Siamese elites, his historical account of the Chinese confirmed the existence of the Thai 'race' by defining the Chinese as a foreign ethnic group, or the foreign Other in opposition to the ethno-Thai identity.<sup>595</sup>

Studies on the Chinese in Thai society by William Skinner and other western anthropologists demonstrate how the Cold War shaped the Chinese Otherness in Thailand. Despite their different views on the Chinese and the Sino-Thais, the primary objective of such research was to engage with the 'Chinese Problem' in Thailand. However, this chapter pointed out that Thai agents subjectively employed these anthropological studies to serve their changing political aims. When the Cold War situation evolved, the pragmatic Thai government did not hesitate to use the stories of the 'good' Chinese as evidence of the smooth and friendly relationship between Thailand and China, and as evidence of how Siamese/Thai rulers had always cared for the Chinese in Thailand. Thai elites emphasised the long history of harmonious Sino-Thai relations that dated back to the ancient kingdoms along with stories of the successful Chinese under Thai royal protection.

Thai leftists also contributed to the formation of *lukjin* who love the Thai nation when they failed to question the stories of the 'good' Chinese that were supported by the Thai state, even though many leftists were of Chinese descent. As ironic as it may sound, the leftist movement also demonstrated royalist-nationalist sentiment. These Sino-Thais, including Sino-Thai leftists, developed what Kasian Tejapira termed 'Thai-ness Deficiency Syndrome'. Kasian argued that these leftist *lukjin* students asserted Thai-ness because they felt inferior as the ethnic Chinese. However, this chapter pointed out that the over assertion

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594 Siamese/Thai ruling elites such as King Rama VI and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab used the term 'Thai race' in their work in English or referred to the term in English in their Thai works. Please see the introduction for detail on narrating the history of the Thai nation as a story of the 'Thai race' to promote Thai nationalism.

595 Kasian argues that using pigtails to identify the ethnic Chinese in Skinner's research illustrates that Skinner adopted the same ethnic perspective as Thai elites. Kasian Tejapira, "Pigtail: A Prehistory of Chineseness in Siam," *Sojourn* 7, no. 1 (February 1992): 118.

of Thai-ness suggested Sino-Thai defiance against the marginalised Chinese representation that the Thai state imposed on them. Another form of resistance can be seen in the depiction of the PRC as a successful example of overthrowing corrupt rulers, capitalists, and western imperialist enemies, in counter-narratives of the Cold War. However, the relentless leftist admiration of the PRC as an example of successful revolution, and the supposed defeat of American imperialism and corrupt government, further distanced Thai leftists from addressing issues of ethnicity. To them, the class problem needed to be solved and as a consequence they left Thai ethno-nationalist ideology untouched. As a result, although for different reasons, both the Thai government and Thai leftist narratives shared royal nationalist sentiments. This led to the growth of the rightist-royalist forces that were partially responsible for the sharp tension between the two parties and the 6 October 1976 incident, or the Thammasat University massacre. Noticeably, the student activists in the incident were often portrayed pejoratively as *yuan* (Vietnamese), rather than Chinese.<sup>596</sup> This suggested that by the late 1970s, the story of the ‘bad’ Chinese or the Chinese communist insurgency in Thailand had lost its momentum, only to ultimately fade away in the early 1980s.

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596 For example, the biggest headline on the front page of the *Tawan Siam* right-wing newspaper on the 9 October 1976 described the activists in the incident as ‘The Yuan using AK shooting people-police’. Interviewed on the Yan Kroh radio station after the massacre, Salang Bunnag and a moderator joked about the activists being ‘Yuan’ because they did not speak when beaten. See, เหตุการณ์วันที่ 9 ตุลาคม 2519 จาก ดาวดารารายการยูทูป, เดลีไทยเสี่ยงปวงชนและไทยวิจารณ์, microfilm, Cornell University Library (Cornell catalogued the microfilm under the title ‘Hētkān wanthī 9 tulākhom 2519 čhāk Dāo Dārā Yuk Sayām, Deli Thai, Sīang Pūangchon lae Thai wičhān’).

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

The thesis investigated foreign Otherness and Thai-ness in Cold War Thailand as an area of political contention between the Thai state and Thai leftists. Both sides promoted different accounts of Thailand and the Cold War that identified their 'obligation' to defend the Thai nation and people from internal and external threats, but used different explanations to justify their political aims and attacks on their political rivals. The official narrative of the Cold War, that communist threatened Thailand and thus needed American assistance, allowed the Thai government to justify increasing its administrative and military power. Such explanations often appeared in rationales in the government's economic and security policies and programmes. Thai leftists, however, resisted and challenged the government's authority by promoting counter-narratives of the Cold War, asserting that the Thai government and the United States were the real enemies of the Thailand, and that American imperialist ambition was the true cause of the Indochina conflict.

The research argued that the struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists manifested itself through narrative identity construction and reconstruction during the Cold War in Thailand. Because both of these actors narrated themselves as the Thai nation's saviour, they both asserted an influential identity that allowed themselves to represent the Thai nation and its essential Thai-ness, while imposing 'foreignness' or un-Thai identities on opponents and targets of manipulation or control.

The dichotomy between the 'Thai Self' and 'foreign Others' was constructed in Cold War stories. This study examined three foreign Others in particular: the Americans, Isan villagers, and the ethnic Chinese, not only because they are staple and recurring components in both the official narrative and counter-narrative of the Cold War, but also because both sides of the conflict used a set of identities to constitute the Thai-ness they identified themselves with: Americanness in contrast to Central Thai culture and tradition, Isan as opposed to Bangkok, and Chineseness versus Thai ethnicity. These foreign Others constructed the Thai Self with traits that aligned with Central Thai-ness. As this form of Thai-ness centred around the Thai monarchical values, the emergence of foreign Others was a part of the revival of Thai monarchy started in the Sarit era.

This study found that the dichotomy between the Thai Self and foreign Otherness in Cold War narratives implied Thai-ising foreign Otherness or subordinating it under the

dominant Thai-ness. It suggests both the subjective and active roles of Thai agents in making use of Cold War politics to construct identity, a point that has been overlooked or unclear in previous studies relating to identities in Cold War Thailand. I applied narrative inquiry to investigate the 'authorial intention' of the extensive materials produced by the Thai government and ruling elites (official narrative) and Thai leftists (counter-narratives). From these narrative texts, this thesis pointed out depictions of 'we-ness', or 'Self', and 'them', or 'Other', in relation to the narrators, the Thai nation, and the Cold War situation. This approach also sheds light on changes and development of the Thai Self and foreign Others through the evolution of Cold War narratives by examining narrative texts from the 1940s to 1970s. This point has only been partially examined in previous studies on identity politics in Thailand and the Cold War.<sup>597</sup>

By approaching the study of identity formation in Cold War Thailand from the perspective of Thai agency and applying narrative inquiry techniques to interpret narrative materials from the Cold War era, this thesis revisited some highly influential studies on Cold War Thailand: Benedict Anderson's the 'American Era', Charles Keyes's studies on the Northeasterners in the Cold War, and William Skinner's arguments about the Chinese assimilation in Thailand. These three prominent Cornell-affiliated figures studied different topics and proposed seemingly unrelated arguments. However, their work was subject to Cold War politics and/or the political influence of Thai agents, and thus misrepresented the nature of Cold War Thailand in a variety of ways and to various degrees.

Anderson's the 'American Era' is an illustrative example. Namely, Anderson overstated the American influence on Thailand while overlooking the active roles played by Thai agents in the Cold War period. To Anderson, Thailand was colonised by the United States or completely Americanised, and Thai agents were passive and fully under American influence. Many studies on the changes and transformation of Thailand in the 1950s to the 1970s often referred to the concept of the American Era to explain the overwhelming American influence on Thai society. For example, in regards to Thai culture and identity-related issues, Rachel Harrison and Janit Feungfu relied on the concept of the American Era in their arguments on the Americanisation of Thai popular culture and the American

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597 For example, Thak's article, 'Are We Them', Harrison's 'Mit Chaibancha's Insi Thorng', and Sittitthep's 'Textualizing the Chinese in Thailand'.

influence on the process of ‘becoming modern’ in the Thai literary realm.<sup>598</sup> One of the most recent works on Cold War Thailand, Matthew Phillips’ *Thailand in the Cold War*, also followed in the footsteps of Anderson’s concept by emphasising the impact of the American media on shaping Thai identity.

However, the concept of the American Era is misleading as it oversimplifies the political dynamics in Cold War Thailand. First of all, the Japanese economic and cultural presence in Thailand were unseen in this concept despite their tremendous influence. To illustrate, in 1970, more than 70 percent on average of the paid-up capital of major industries in Thailand was a Japanese investment.<sup>599</sup> Manufactured goods from Japan and Japanese cultural products, such as Japanese comics and music, were also pervasive. In 1970, Thai university students started the anti-Japanese movement by forming the ‘Japanese Goods Boycott Club’ which later escalated into anti-Japanese protests in 1972.

Other misleading points of the American Era concept include its rigid timeline and the way in which the Thais are depicted as passively and completely Americanised. Anderson indicated that the American Era started in 1958, the year that Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat started dictatorship, and ended in 1973 when student-led demonstrations successfully ousted the military government. However, this raises questions about the American influence in Thailand before and after the aforementioned period of time. The view of Thai actors as passively subject to American influence also required serious revision. The concept of the American Era was Anderson’s attempt to explain the neo-colonial status of Thailand in the Cold War, an elaboration on his critique of the dominant historical account of Siam as the sole survivor of imperialist expansion in the region. Anderson proposed the concept based on his interpretation of the thirteen short stories by Thai leftists found in *In the Mirror*. According to Anderson, these stories reflected Thai society under the American influence in various aspects in the book’s introduction. However, Suchart Sawatsi, one of the most prominent Thai intellectuals who selected the short stories for Anderson to translate, viewed these stories and their connections differently. Although he was impressed by the concept of the American Era, Suchart saw the rebellious nature

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598 Rachel Harrison’s ‘Mit Chaibancha’s Insi Thorng and the Hybridization of Red and Yellow Perils in Thai Cold War Action Cinema’ and Janit Feangfu’s PhD research, ‘(Ir)resistibly Modern: The Construction of Modern Thai Identities in Thai Literatures during the Cold War Era, 1958-1976’.

599 The major industries include fabric, automobile, steel, and food. Suphap and Krissana, “The Yellow Peril,” 18, 20.



inherent in these stories and their leftist authors' intention to fight against the dominant authority or to call upon their readers to question it.

To point out what the American Era misses, the research read the short stories from *In the Mirror* 'intentionally' by focusing on the authorial intention. While Anderson points out that Chatcharin's 'The Book-Learners' and 'The Railway Hamlet' demonstrated that provincial people fell prey to the expansion of capitalist culture from Bangkok, the result of Americanisation in Thailand, this thesis argued that Chatcharin asks his readers to make the 'right' decision for voiceless people. A similarly provocative tone and message generally appear in leftist writings, not only in the thirteen stories in *In the Mirror*. These messages demonstrated the rebellious intention of the authors and conveyed their political perspectives that challenged the corrupt and exploitative society. These are the crucial features of leftist writing in the Cold War and also the point that Anderson overlooked.

The Thai government and ruling elites were also not completely Americanised as suggested in the American Era. The concept of 'Thai-style democracy' and '*kanpatthana*' (development) are good examples of the Thai-isation of Americanness by Thai agents. 'Thai-style democracy' emerged for the first time in the Sarit era, or the period when Thailand entered the American Era according to Anderson. The model of democracy that originated from the West was described as unsuitable for the Thai people because it was 'foreign' to their culture and tradition. Democracy in Thailand must be in 'the Thai style' so it would not interrupt the existing order or cause political division. In other words, Thai-style democracy referred to a democracy that did not disturb the prevailing power structure and served the Thai ruling elites. As the United States represented democratic values and was regarded as the leader of the Free World, Thai-style democracy therefore evidenced Thai agents' intention to selectively adopt aspects of Americanness for Thai society in order to create Thai-ised Americanness.

The concept of *kanpatthana* also demonstrated that Americanness was Thai-ised by Thai rulers. Similar to democracy, *kanpatthana* was associated with American technological, scientific, industrial, educational and economic advances. However, when the concept was introduced in Thailand in the Sarit era to justify the government's development programmes and projects supported by the United States, *kanpatthana* was linked to the royal nationalist history of Thailand. Specifically, the ruling elites narrated that *kanpatthana* had been practiced by the benevolent Siamese/Thai rulers since ancient times.

*Kanpatthana*, a representation of Americanness in Thailand, thus served monarchical values and heightened the prestigious status of the King, or the heart of Thai-ness. Thai rulers also employed *kanpatthana* to create an unsymmetrical relationship between the Americans, rural villagers, and themselves. Under the concept of *kanpatthana*, Thai rulers positioned themselves as superior to both rural villagers and to the Americans. The former was quite straightforward as Thai rulers associated Bangkok with *kanpatthana*, the concept that the Thai state required the rural to follow. Thai rulers and elites also categorised *kanpatthana* into 'good' and 'bad' types and applied the latter to Americanness when they found out that the foreign (American) values compromised the existing hierarchical structure. In short, the concepts of *kanpatthana* and Thai-style democracy allowed the Thai government and Thai ruling elites to secure their dominant position in the power structure.

Unlike Anderson's sceptical perspective towards the 'never colonised' status of Thailand and his sympathy towards Thai leftist intellectuals and students, William Skinner and Charles Keyes' studies on ethnicity and communist concerns in Thailand were in line with the Thai government's anti-communist policies. Their arguments required critical re-examination as they generated a flawed understanding of Cold War Thailand on two important ethnic and regional populaces: the Chinese and the Northeasterners. Their erroneous arguments stemmed from two relating causes: the anti-communist agenda of their studies and the conceptual influence of Thai elites. Indeed, the anti-communist agenda at large was the main reason behind the dramatic increase of anthropological studies on Thailand in the 1950s to 1960s, when the Indochina conflict and the leftist movements in Southeast Asian countries grew and began to concern the United States. Skinner and Keyes also constructed a dichotomy between Thai-ness and foreignness by distinguishing the Isan people and the Chinese from Central Thais (Keyes) or local Thais (Skinner) utilising an anthropological approach. As the Isan people and the Chinese were described as 'problems', and the 'Thai' characters contrasted with Chinese and Isan traits were the same as those promoted by Thai elites, this suggested that foreign studies were subject to the dominant narrative power of Thai politics. This point confirms my argument about Thai-ising Americanness through American anthropological knowledge in Cold War Thailand.

Charles Keyes introduced 'the Northeastern Problem' and Isan regionalism in his studies from 1966 to 1967 to explain the conflicts between the Northeast and the central government within the context of the Cold War. Although Keyes emphasised that the

Northeastern Problem, or the scenario that Isan would fall victim to communist expansion due to the ethnic proximity between the people in Isan and Laos, must not be exaggerated, he also urged the Thai government to employ the right approach to manage growing Isan regional identity as a means to prevent further conflict between Isan and the Central Thai region. Keyes suggested that the Thai government must end its suppression of Isan's political opposition and must respect Isan's regional identity. There was no need to forcefully impose Central Thai-ness on the Isan people because they already associated it with the county's elites and were willing to accept it for upward social mobility. Also, according to Keyes economic development needed to be promoted in Isan to improve financial and living conditions. Keyes believed that economic development would help alleviate Isan's antagonistic perception of the Central Thai people that resulted from the economic disparity between these two groups.

Keyes overlooked the American role in the formation of Isan regionalism in Cold War Thailand and its contribution to the emergence of the Northeastern Problem, an immense concern in the Thai mind that Isan might fall under communist rule and separate itself from the country.<sup>600</sup> This misleading assumption has appeared in recent studies engaging with Isan identity or Isan regionalism in Cold War Thailand that refer to Keyes' argument that Bangkok-Isan interactions and Bangkok's discrimination were responsible for the emergence of Isan regionalism.<sup>601</sup> By examining representation of the Self and Other in the narrative materials, this research found that the American military presence in the Northeast caused Isan regional sentiment among some Isan artists and leftists. In their work and political movement, the Isan artists and leftists often referred or expressed themselves as the Isan people who suffered from the American military operation. The Isan artists and leftists promoted depiction of 'we-ness' or 'Self', the people in Isan, and the representation of the United States as 'them' or the 'Other'. The emergence of the for-life visual artist groups in Korat is an illustrative example. Furthermore, the appearance of Isan regionalism in many writings by leftists from the region does not fit Keyes' explanation on Isan regionalism. Instead of being employed to 'improve the status of Isan people' as Keyes suggested, leftists

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600 Keyes, *Peasant and Nation*, 29.

601 Ratana's 'Isan Peasants, Thai Nation and Modernization', Dararut's 'The Political Groupings of Isan Members of Parliament', Streckfuss' 'An 'Ethnic' Reading of 'Thai' History in the Twilight of the Century-old Official 'Thai' National Model', and Platt's *Isan Writer*.

used Isan regionalism to provoke and mobilise the Isan masses to fight back against their oppressors.<sup>602</sup> However, some leftist writings demonstrated that the leftists also employed stories of Isan villagers to construct or reconstruct their 'Self' identity. Because leftists depicted Isan villagers as an exploited population, they asserted the leftist responsibility to lead the mass to strike back. In other words, Isan regional sentiment was stimulated by the leftists to serve their political aims and to create their powerful identity as the leader of the masses.

Keyes' arguments about the Northeastern Problem and Isan regionalism validated the depictions of Isan in official narratives of the Cold War and supported Bangkok's rule over dominant Central Thai-ness. By distinguishing the Isan people from the Central Thais in terms of ethnicity and regional characteristics, Isan as the 'less/un-Thai' was constructed in anthropological academia. Describing Isan as inferior to Central Thai-ness in these studies also supported the hierarchical relationship between the two parties, the very same power structure that the central government and Thai ruling elites imposed on Isan. Furthermore, Keyes' suggestions that the Northeastern Problem was rooted in economic underdevelopment in Isan legitimised the development plans and programmes that served Bangkok's economic and political interests.

William Skinner's arguments on the Chinese in Thailand also needed to be revisited. Skinner was the first anthropological scholar who seriously investigated 'the Chinese Problem', a pressing concern for Thai officials and the United States that the Chinese people overseas in Thailand might be under Chinese communist influence due to their bond with mainland China. To solve this problem, Skinner suggested that the complete assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society must be further encouraged, even though the assimilation process had already started among Chinese leaders in the early 1950s. Skinner concluded that without a Chinese education, the Chinese would become Thai within four generations.

Similar to Keyes, the anti-communist agenda and the ideological influence of Thai elites caused the misrepresentation of the Chinese in Cold War Thailand. Skinner's investigation of Chinese assimilation was meant to deal with the possibility that the Chinese overseas might join the PRC to support the communist insurgency in their host country. As a result, Skinner distinguished Chineseness from Thai-ness by employing an anthropological

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602 Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 60.

approach that connected defining ethnic traits to prevailing assumptions about the ties between the overseas Chinese and the communist rule in the PRC. To illustrate, Skinner described the Chinese society in Thailand as 'closely structured' but that the Chinese had a kin-centred world view and an industrious character that greatly contributed to their commercial success. These characteristics were in contrast to the defining characteristics of Thai society as loosely-structured society and the Thai people as pleasure-oriented. As Skinner's view on the Chinese 'close structure' and tight family network explained the potentially strong bond between the overseas Chinese in Thailand and their motherland, Red China, it supported the view presented in official narratives that Thai society and its indigenous institutions and values were able to resist communism.

Skinner also provided the first extensive history of the Chinese in Thailand that constructed and demarcated the separate existence of Chinese society within Thai history. By pointing at recurring Chinese disturbances and plots against Siamese/Thai rulers in the past, Skinner's history of the Chinese contributed to the representation of the Chinese as foreign and prone to causing trouble in the country. The plot of Thai history that Skinner adopted to narrate Chinese history was in line with the dominant history of Thailand used to justify the central authority, namely that un-Thai groups such as the Chinese sometimes disturbed or burdened Siamese/Thai kings who had benevolently ruled the kingdom of the Thais since ancient times. A similar plot also appeared in Keyes' studies on the Northeast when he explained the origin of the conflict between Isan and Bangkok by referring to the 'betrayal' of Isan (the Lao kingdom) against Bangkok in the past. His historical account of the relationship between Bangkok rulers and King Anouvong in the early Rattanakosin era, and of the uprisings in the Isan region in the Reign of King Rama V, are good examples.

Compared to the American Era, Skinner's and Keyes' arguments on Isan and the Chinese in Thailand have a longer history. After Skinner and Keyes proposed their arguments in 1954 and 1966, respectively, their research soon received attention from Thai and American scholars and technocrats, particularly those who shared the same concern that Thailand's economic and national security might be sabotaged by ethnic and regional groups who felt inspired by the communist movement.<sup>603</sup> After the Cold War, Keyes' and

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603 Examples of scholars who adopted Skinner's views on the Chinese in Thailand and Chinese assimilation include Joseph Jiang (1966), Kriang Iamsakul (1966), Alan Edward Guskin (1968), Chester Galaska (1969), Khachatphai Burutphat (1972, 1974), and Yuparet Milligan (1967). For Keyes' academic influence, see,

Skinner's arguments have been reproduced and further developed by many scholars over the past decades. Their concepts on the Northeast and the Chinese in Thailand have appeared in many studies on different topics that range from political dissidence to the popular culture of Isan, and to the Chinese in Thailand. Because recent studies have been influenced by Keyes and Skinner, many of these newer studies have also inherited their flaws. As a result, Keyes and Skinner's misrepresentation of the Isan and Chinese people in Cold War Thailand have persisted.

Despite academic influence, Skinner's concept of Chinese assimilation has confronted growing criticism in recent studies on the Chinese and Chinese identity in Thailand, particularly since the 1990s.<sup>604</sup> Kasian Tejapira, one of the first scholars who enthusiastically challenged Skinner's studies, argued that the existence of Chinese society in Thailand today proved that Skinner's assumption about Chinese assimilation was invalid. The Chinese society in Thailand still exists and Chinese descendants still preserve some Chinese traits. However, Kasian argues that Chineseness in Thailand is different from Chineseness in China, and 'Sino-Siameseness', or Sino-Thai identity, a unique kind of Chineseness that only exists in Thailand. To Skinner, this ambiguous identity was impossible because one could only be either Chinese or Thai.

Kasian argued that Sino-Thai identity has been influential on the political dynamics of Thailand in his studies on 'Thai-ness Deficiency Syndrome' (TDS) and the political slogan '*luk chin rak chat*', the Thai-born Chinese who love the nation or 'patriotic Thai-born Chinese'. The former engaged with the alienated and inferior feeling of Sino-Thai students in Thai schools or universities because of their Chinese traits. Although these students tried to hide their Chinese background and excel in Thai-ifying subjects such as Thai literature, they found the success of the PRC motivating and a way to temporarily provide relief from the 'symptoms' of the syndrome. This contributed to the craze of Red China in the early 1970s

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Thomas Kirsch (1966), Suthep Suntornpesat (1968), Dalip Saund (1969), and Wichai Bamrungrit (1974), for example.

604 For example, Bun's article 'Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand' (2001), Kasian Tejapira's 'Pigtail: A Prehistory of Chineseness in Siam' (1992) and *Looking through the Dragon Design* (1994), and Sittitthep Eaksittipong's *The Poor Chinese Rebels "on Plubpla Chai Road"* (2012) and 'Textualizing the "Chinese of Thailand": Politics, Knowledge, and the Chinese in Thailand during the Cold War' (2017). However, some work supports Skinner's assimilation paradigm. For example, Disaphol Chansiri, "Overseas Chinese in Thailand: A Case Study of Chinese Emigres in Thailand in the Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2005).

in universities and academic circles. Popularity of the slogan '*luk chin rak chat*' in the 2005 to 2006 protests against Thaksin Shinawatra was an expression of TDS. After the rise of Thai royal hegemony after the 1973 popular uprising, the Sino-Thais, particularly businessmen, sought an attention from the King, not only for a connection to the King's pro-royal allies or 'network monarchy', but also to alleviate their TDS by associating themselves with the ultimate symbol of Thai-ness.<sup>605</sup>

Kasian's studies on Sino-Thai identity influenced many scholars such as Thak Chaleomtiarana, Sittitthep Eaksittipong, and Kornpanat Tungkeunkunt, for example. However, Kasian's TDS should be employed with caution. Not all Sino-Thais were equally influenced by TDS. For example, some Sinophone Thai literature indicated that what might be termed as 'Chinese Deficiency Syndrome' because the Sino-Thai authors expressed a feeling of 'not being Chinese enough' in their stories. Also, the attempt to 'out-Thai the Thais' can also be interpreted as a means for the ethnic Chinese in Thailand to demonstrate their power over Thai people, instead of merely being a 'symptom' that they suffer from. By looking at narrative texts produced by the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, this research found that some Chinese/Sino-Thai narrators aimed to be more Thai than the Thais themselves and claimed that they could master Thai-ness at will. Illustrative examples included Skinner's interview with Huang Yu-luan and Botan's speech.

Kasian's investigation of Sino-Thai identity did not particularly focus on the Cold War period although it was when the formation of '*luk chin rak chat*' took place. Taking cues from Kasian, Sittitthep Eaksittipong examined the emergence of the Sino-Thai consciousness in the Cold War period, a crucial component of the '*luk chin rak chat*' identity in Thai politics in present days. Sittitthep also proposed that American and mainland Chinese scholars contributed to the construction of Chineseness in Cold War Thailand as a result of American and Chinese foreign policy towards Thailand in the Cold War period. However, Sittitthep's investigation did not sufficiently engage with the increasing influence of rightist forces in Thai politics and the leftist contribution to the formation of the '*luk chin rak chat*' in Cold War Thailand. Instead, this research proposed that the '*luk chin rak chat*' identity was rooted in the identity contestation between the Thai state and Thai leftists, particularly the

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605 The term 'network monarchy' was coined by Professor Duncan McCargo to explain the King and his proxies' intervention in Thai politics. On the development of network monarchy from the Cold War period to the 1990s, please see, McCargo, "Network Monarchy," 503-509.

Sino-Thais, developed through Cold War narratives. While the Thai ruling elites constructed stories of the 'good' Chinese in order to promote monarchical values and the King's image that they associated themselves with, they also imposed the depiction of the 'bad' Chinese on their opponents. Notably, this coincided with an increase of Sino-Thai students in universities and their leftist activities. These students, however, did not challenge the story of the 'good' Chinese because, under the leftist influence, the issue of ethnicity was not a priority. As some Sino-Thai students experienced TDS, their acceptance of the narrative of the 'good' Chinese who are loyal to Thai nation and the King seemed to alleviate their feeling of incomplete Thai-ness. This contributed to their Sino-Thai students' choice to resist the dominant power and its depiction of inferior Chineseness by embracing Thai royal ethno-nationalism and demonstrating their superiority over the 'Thais' by 'out-Thai-ing' them.

In sum, by investigating representations of the foreign Others in competing narratives of the Cold War, specifically in relation to the political struggles between the Thai government and Thai leftists, this research illuminated gaps and misunderstandings in studies of Cold War Thailand, particularly those done by Benedict Anderson, Charles Keyes, and William Skinner. By employing a narrative inquiry approach, this study revealed that both Thai leftists and the Thai government did not fully succumb to the American influence, thereby proving that Anderson's American Era was misleading. This research pointed out the rebellious intention of leftist authors and the Thai government's Thai-ising of Americanness in their narrative on *kanpatthana* and the Thai-style democracy. Additionally, many leftist publications and art that criticised the American military presence in the Northeast were created by leftists from Isan or who had an Isan background. The formation of groups and collaboration between Isan artists demonstrated Isan regional sentiment. This challenges Keyes' argument that the United States and their military presence in the Northeast also stimulated Isan regionalism.

By examining various narrative materials produced by the Thai government and Thai elites across the Cold War period, this study found that their foci and references to Keyes' studies on Isan villagers, and to Skinner's argument on the Chinese in Thailand, were flexible and in line with the political climate and the Cold War situation. It showed that these Cornell professors' anthropological studies on Isan and the Chinese in Thailand were subject to the influence of the Thai government and Thai elites. For example, this research found that the



version of Thai history in their work was in accordance with Thai royal history promoted in the 1950s along with the revival of the Thai monarchy. By focusing on reading the narrators' intention, this research shows that popular Sinophone Thai literary works countered Skinner's assumption on the complete Chinese assimilation into Thai society. The Sinophone Thai literary works and Skinner's interview of the Chinese leader also revisited Kasian's TDS by illustrating the varying degrees of TDS and proposing an alternative interpretation of the narrative texts. Particularly Skinner's interview of the Chinese leader, it showed that the ethnic Chinese did not merely perform Thai-ness to alleviate TDS, but to surpass the Thai-ness of the Thais and demonstrate their ability to manoeuvre Thai-ness at will.

The primary contribution of this research sheds light on the connection between three seemingly unrelated foreign Others—the Americans, Isan villagers, and the Chinese—and its evolution during the Cold War period. Because this research examined the narrators of the Cold War stories who constructed foreign Others, it is able to identify that these foreign Others, from different angles, constituted a particular form of Thai-ness that benefited the Central Thais, Bangkok, and the monarchy. Furthermore, the evolution of depiction of foreign Others illustrated the formation of Thai-ness in Cold War Thailand, the development of the political ideologies of Thai leftists and the Thai government, and the influences of Cold War conflicts.

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