

The Ambiguous Allure of the West

Traces of the Colonial in Thailand

edited by **Rachel V. Harrison**
and **Peter A. Jackson**



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Contents

Foreword: The Names and Repetitions of Postcolonial History	vii
<i>Dipesh Chakrabarty</i>	
Acknowledgements	xix
Contributors	xxi
Note on Transliteration and Referencing	xxiv
Introduction	
The Allure of Ambiguity: The “West” and the Making of Thai Identities	1
<i>Rachel V. Harrison</i>	
1. The Ambiguities of Semicolonial Power in Thailand	37
<i>Peter A. Jackson</i>	
2. An Ambiguous Intimacy: Farang as Siamese Occidentalism	57
<i>Pattana Kitiarsa</i>	
3. Competitive Colonialisms: Siam and the Malay Muslim South	75
<i>Tamara Loos</i>	
4. Mind the Gap: (En)countering the West and the Making of Thai Identities on Film	93
<i>Rachel V. Harrison</i>	
5. Blissfully Whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur	119
<i>May Adadol Ingawanij and Richard Lowell MacDonald</i>	
6. Coming to Terms with the West: Intellectual Strategies of Bifurcation and Post-Westernism in Siam	135
<i>Thongchai Winichakul</i>	

vi *Dipesh Chakrabarty*

7. <i>Wathakam: The Thai Appropriation of Foucault's "Discourse"</i>	153
<i>Thanes Wongyannava</i>	
8. The Conceptual Allure of the West: Dilemmas and Ambiguities of Crypto-Colonialism in Thailand	173
<i>Michael Herzfeld</i>	
Afterword: Postcolonial Theories and Thai Semicolonial Hybridities	187
<i>Peter A. Jackson</i>	
Notes	207
Bibliography	223

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Introduction

The Allure of Ambiguity: The “West” and the Making of Thai Identities

*Rachel Harrison*¹

... Palipana wrote lucidly, basing his work on exhaustive research deeply knowledgeable about the context of the ancient cultures. While the West saw Asian history as a faint horizon where Europe joined the East, Palipana saw his country in fathoms and colour, and Europe simply as a landmass on the end of the peninsula of Asia.

(Michael Ondaatje 2000, 79)

Must the project of our liberationist aesthetics be forever part of a totalising Utopian vision of Being and History that seeks to transcend the contradictions and ambivalences that constitute the very structure of human subjectivity and its systems of cultural representation?

(Homi Bhabha 2004, 29)

Overviews

Reviewing the Tate Britain gallery’s 2008 exhibition of British Orientalist painting—“The Lure of the East”—Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif takes exception to the work of William Holman Hunt. She decries him for having come east primed with “an ideology and a fantasy to impose upon the landscape and the people.”² Her mistrust, echoing Edward Said’s monumental text, *Orientalism* (1978), is directed at the ways in which power and fantasy combine in a manipulation of “The East” and its peoples. There is little need to rehearse the detail here of Said’s well-known views on the hegemonic construction by the (arguably monolithic) West of a stereotypically archaic, irrational, fantastical, uncivilized and (equally) monolithic East.³ But it is these processes of cultural construction that lie at the core of our approach to *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, taking as its foundation a strategic reversal of the dominant Orientalizing gaze that Said and others have called into question. The effect here is in part to emphasize, as Dipesh Chakrabarty eloquently argues in both his wider work *Provincializing Europe* (2000) and in the foreword above, “the limits of European thought”, highlighting instead the benefits of displacing European categories from the locus of their original signification.

In taking the concept of Orientalism as the starting point of this study we acknowledge, however, that the projects of power entailed in the converse processes of “Occidentalism” differ in their dynamic. Orientalism, as Rana Kabbani (2008, 43) argues, has always rested on the premise that the West knows more about the Orient than the Orient knows about itself. The same cannot be said of the construction and commodification of the “West” by the “East”, as we examine in this volume through a specific focus on Siam/Thailand’s relationship to Western Europe and the United States, from 1850 to the present.⁴ This relationship encompasses the aesthetic, the social, the political and the psychological. At the same time, we strive to recognize the fractured multiplicity of cultural and racial identities, features which pervade the construction of Thainess (*khwam-pen-thai*) in the face of its encounters with and absorption of Westernness (*khwam-pen-farang*), and the ensuing *farang*-ization, as Pattana Kitiarsa phrases it here, of Thai identities. The repeated use of the Thai term *farang* in this volume refers literally to a “white person” or Caucasian, though it emerges more broadly from “a set of pan-Asian identification markers for the West, Western peoples, and Western-derived things” (see Pattana in this volume). Glossed in *Hobson-Jobson* (Yule and Burnell 1903, 352–4), the cognate word *Firinghee* is noted to have derived from the Farsi: *Farangi* or *Firingi* and the Arabic: *Al-Faranj*, *Ifranji* or *Firanji* referring to a Frank. As both Michael Herzfeld and Pattana Kitiarsa observe in this volume and define at greater length in their chapters, the term reached Siam via Arabic- and Farsi-speaking traders.

The focus in this volume on the Thai encounter with the *farang*, and all that it constitutes, generates an emphasis on convergence, assimilation, transculturation, transmediation, each recalling Said’s observation in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, xxix) that, “all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic”.

Linked to this is the importance of ambiguity, a term brought into play in the volume’s title, its theoretical underpinnings and the evidence of its empirical findings. Chakrabarty acknowledges this when he raises in his foreword the difficulty/deferral of naming or categorizing, or of definition. Bhabha’s assertion (1986, xv), that the “very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a place of splitting”, provides an important indication here of the association between ambiguity, identity and allure.

Driven by the acknowledgement of the failure of binary oppositions to capture the complexities of the topic at hand, this volume brings the categories of contradiction and ambiguity to the critical fore. In doing so we see it as having evolved from the perspectives proposed in such works as Victor Lieberman’s *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-imagining Eurasia to c.1830* (1999) and his work on the need for “Transcending East-West Dichotomies” (1997). With reference to Southeast Asia, we draw inspiration from the “seminal contradictions” that John Pemberton locates in his study *On the Subject of “Java”* (1994). Likewise, we heed Keith Foulcher’s assessment (2002, 106) that: “Ambiguities are still subversive; there is still an ‘elsewhere’ waiting to be formed.”

Given that Siam/Thailand’s encounter with the *farang* Other has often been imagined in scholarly literature through the constraining lenses of dualities, this

introductory chapter proposes that a heightened sensitivity to and respect for notions of multiplicity should be moved centre-stage among the analytical tools at our disposal. A displacement of comfortable binaries with an alternative emphasis on the contradictions and ambiguities that colour cultural interactions between Siam/Thailand and the West, further opens up space for the insertion of Bhabha's concept of liminality into this volume. Integral, as he sees it, to the creation of new cultural meaning, the liminal functions as a vital space *between* settled cultural forms or identities.

The work of Bhabha, and of postcolonial and poststructuralist thinkers more widely, has motivated significant aspects of our approach, providing a theoretical framework by which Thai cultural studies can be brought into a wider critical dialogue with its neighbours and beyond. Our aim has been to investigate ways of drawing Siam/Thailand into potential comparative debate with a broader, global field via an engagement with postcolonial thought. We take intellectual prompts, therefore, from such texts as Benedict Anderson's *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998), and Lieberman's *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in a Global Context* (2003). Similarly, we acknowledge several of the studies undertaken in regard to interactions with the foreign, colonial Other in different areas of Southeast Asia, such as those of Vicente Rafael (1993 [1988], 2000 and 2006) on the Philippines; Pemberton (1994) on the subject of "Java"; Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (2002) on the literature of modern Indonesia; and Tamara Wagner (2005) on Occidentalism in the novels of Malaysia and Singapore. Each of their works denotes how the issues of identity construction/subjectivities, Occidentalism and the ambiguous or "vaguely defined 'third space'" (Foulcher and Day 2002, 11) are in no way peculiar to Siam/Thailand.

Present in this heady concoction of mimicry, ambivalence and identity brought together against a colonial backdrop is the additional and potent ingredient of allure. Similar confections were to be seen in the lure held by the "East" for British travellers recorded in the Orientalist painting, noted at the opening of this chapter. Their adoption of local tastes and styles was based on the cachet it held for them in their position of imperial power. Orientalist cross-dressing in portraiture, for example, functioned as an assertion of one's role as artist/explorer with a defined place in a colonialist tradition and a flaunting of exotic experiences to an audience back home (Riding 2008, 48). By contrast, dressing as Occidental Others by the directly colonized peoples of countries such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines was much more closely associated with what Bhabha sees as part of a complex strategy of political and cultural resistance to colonial authority. But the allure of the West as a charismatic and appealing cultural site, worthy of imitation, is more nuanced in the case of Siam/Thailand, since what makes it apparently different from many of the parts of the world subject to postcolonial critique is that it was never formally colonized. It is the task of this introductory chapter to interrogate the issues at play with the ambiguous allure that the West has generated for Siam/Thailand in the development of new cultural identities post-1850. The key concepts and intellectual concerns that motivate this investigation receive further illumination below, incorporating the contributing arguments made by each of the authors included in this volume.

As a preliminary to this undertaking, however, I foreground the importance of Bhabha's cautionary perspective:

Bhabha acknowledges that the middle of things is where we find ourselves and no amount of elaborate thinking will ever get us out of this contingent situation, so we had better get used to working at our projects with no absolute guarantees, no final assurances, and no excessive rigidity of purpose. What we have is likely to become clear only after the fact, if at all. (Huddart 2006, 19)

Shaping Approaches: Theoretical Concerns

Although *The Ambiguous Allure of the West* draws on the empirical evidence of Siam/Thailand's relations with Europe and North America from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, its interests have simultaneously focused on the need for a sharpened theoretical awareness in the field of Thai cultural studies, most notably as a framework for future comparative work (see, in particular, Peter Jackson in this volume). Further to examining the data surrounding Siamese politico-cultural interactions with the West, this volume also refers to Thailand's engagement, or relative absence thereof, with "Western" theory (*thritsadi*). As Thanés Wongyannava discusses here, theoretical texts, such as those of Derrida, Baudrillard and (though less so) Foucault, have met with limited interest on the part of Thai academics, whose penchant tends instead to be for concrete issues and for the imagined certainties that empirical data can supply. Similarly, Craig Reynolds (1999, 264) points to the complex reasons why revisionist critical theories do not flourish in Thai language studies, "having to do with the peculiar characteristics of Thailand's political culture, the way the Thai language filters certain conceptual categories from European languages, and the insistence of educated Thais that their country, unlike any other in Southeast Asia, avoided direct colonization".⁵

This volume questions in particular the latter assertion, arguing for an understanding of the country's experience as semicolonial/crypto-colonial/auto-colonial and hence logically also in part postcolonial. (The precise difficulties of categorizing these features are debated in the chapters by Jackson and Tamara Loos and critically framed here in Chakrabarty's foreword.) The lack of resonance between postcolonial theory and local experience in Thailand, noted by Reynolds (*ibid.*, 264–5), provides a crucial springboard for the ideas we pursue here.

As Thanés elucidates with respect to the study of social science in Thailand, theory tends to be accepted only when it is deemed useful or practical for distinctly local purposes; and then only once it has been rendered "edible and digestible". For Thanés, the reception among the more radical of Thailand's social scientists of works by Foucault presents a good case in point, marked as it is by appropriation, localization and reinterpretation.

The reasons for the relative popularity of Foucault are, Thanés believes, twofold: among all the French thinkers, Foucault's *oeuvre* is the most strongly based on the analysis of historical sources rather than the exploration of purely theoretical

or philosophical concepts. As such, it serves to reinforce existing predilections for empiricism and functionality in Thai academe, so rendering it apparently more palatable than other morsels of French intellectual thought. Furthermore, local engagement with Foucault comes as a result of what Thanés views as Thailand's veneration of the United States, as opposed to its interest in French thought per se. As he contends in this volume: "Thai studies, like everything else in post-War Thailand from everyday life to intellectual life, has been dominated by America." By contrast, "modern French philosophy undoubtedly represents an alien space", a point which Thanés humorously takes up in this resumé of Thai social science perspectives: "The Foucault that is sympathetic to the path of development is a 'nice guy'. Jacques Lacan—no, the worst approach to psychoanalysis, and does not make sense to a society where family values are central to national ideology. The Oedipus Complex is definitely out. Jacques Derrida—no, sorry, too complicated."⁶

Not that quoting Thanés here is to suggest Thai academia has any form of monopoly on the distaste for poststructuralism and deconstruction. Cambridge University's controversial and much-debated award of an honorary degree to Derrida in 1992 provides proof positive of this, succinctly summarized by the caption which appeared beneath a photograph of the recipient in a British broadsheet: "Nice suit. Pity about the philosophy!"⁷

In the limited space that *has* opened up in contemporary Thailand to the reception of some elements of "Western" critical theory as Thanés defines it, it is important to reiterate that this takes the form of a mapping of external influences onto pre-existing tastes and a subsequent localization that produces a distinct, hybridised outcome. These larger processes of adoption and adaptation are ones to which we repeatedly return in *The Ambiguous Allure of the West*.

In Siam/Thailand, as elsewhere, adaptation is not simply a case of replication, but of reinvention and reinterpretation, capturing Chakrabarty's important emphasis here on the power of transgression. Whatever the motive, from the adapter's perspective, Linda Hutcheon argues "adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (Hutcheon 2006, 20).

This broad assessment is verified, for example, by the experience of adaptation in what I have elsewhere termed "late Victorian Siam", and the publication by Crown Prince Vajiravudh in 1904–05 of the *Tales of Mr Thorng-In*, short detective stories modelled on a composite of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Poe's Auguste Dupin (see Harrison 2010). Nor was the appropriation of the brilliant freelance detective peculiar to Siam, as Doris Jedamski's (1995, 2002 and 2010) work on the evolution of crime fiction in early twentieth century Indonesia has demonstrated.

Distinct parallels are discernible here between the field of literary reinvention and the adoption and adaptation, as Thanés describes it, of Foucauldian theory—illustrated, for example, by the Thai term *wathakam*, a translation of Foucauldian "discourse", whose increasingly popular usage among academics and journalists alike has transformed it into something of a "free-floating signifier". Thanés warns of the danger, inherent in the

detachment of these concepts from their original “Western” source, that they become reharnessed to the tradition of empiricism, rather than performing the necessary task of interrogating and disrupting it.

Yet while wary of the (mis)uses to which acclimatized theory can be put, he conversely counsels against the perils implicit in a lack of contextualization: “Taking Foucault’s concepts as a ready-made tool kit for analyzing and revealing the mechanisms by which power and domination are concealed has made scholars, particularly in Thai area studies, careless about the historical specificity of Foucault’s works”, Thanes argues here.

The Western philosophical and cultural specificity of high theory is a feature found similarly disconcerting by Jackson in its applicability to the analysis of Thai cultural history, as he reiterates in this volume, building on previous works (see Jackson, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). His bio-history of Thailand’s same sex and transgender cultures, for example, provides detailed arguments for the “necessary limits of Western theory” (Jackson 2003c, 6), urging us to “forget” some of the conclusions Foucault draws on French history (while nevertheless seeking recourse to his method). As Jackson goes on to insist (like Thanes), the place of theory is to function as an effective and accurate tool which engages with, rather than erases, the specificities of local circumstance. Integral to the process of interrogating the ambiguous allure of the West and traces of the colonial in Thailand, is the interrelationship between well-grounded empirical study and a critical interpretation of its findings through nuanced theoretical perspectives appropriate and adapted to the Thai case. To apply “Western” theory without attention to local specificities, Jackson (2003c, 6) advocates “may reproduce at the level of theory the hegemonic violence that attends the history of imperialism”. It is important to add, however, that this position is not entirely at odds with certain arguments made under the rubric of “Western” theory itself, a field which is in turn neither static nor uncontested. Nor is it beyond being able to deconstruct its own premises, as Bhabha’s work on the limitations of Western thinkers to engage meaningfully with cultural Otherness keenly communicates in “The Commitment to Theory”,

[T]he site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power. Montesquieu’s Turkish Despot, Barthes’s Japan, Kristeva’s China, Derrida’s Nambikwara Indians, Lyotard’s Cashinahua pagans are part of this strategy of containment where the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation. [. . .] However impeccably the content of an ‘other’ culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its *location* as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination and is the most serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory.

There is, however, a distinction to be made between the institutional history of critical theory and its conceptual potential for change and innovation. (Bhabha 2004, 46)

It is critical theory's "conceptual potential for change and innovation", as Bhabha sees it, that we aim to foreground in our own "commitment to theory" in this volume.⁸ Our view here is that a theoretical approach is essential to the work of Thai studies to assure its capacity for contributing to broader, comparative debates from which it has to date remained relatively aloof for reasons discussed in greater detail below. Jackson asserts the need for theory in his analysis of Thai culture as a "regime of images", "By engaging critical theory, a re-imagined Thai studies can lift the field out of its essentialism and historical isolation" (Jackson 2004a, 213). He revisits and revivifies this argument in the current volume through, in particular, a discussion of theory as a method of comparison in Southeast Asian Studies, one which constitutes a key move in his aim to clear the ground for "engaging postcolonial theory in studies of Thai history, culture, and identity". Forthcoming publications relating to this project also take up the theoretical premises put forward in this initial volume, to further explore the comparative and theoretical implications of this approach.⁹

The aim in this volume has been to open up the possibility of relocating Thai studies in a wider intellectual landscape, allowing for the inclusion of the Thai experience in comparative analyses of, for instance, literatures and cultural studies. The potential for fruitful literary comparison across Southeast Asia as a region is unquestionable, as typified by the work of Vladimir Braginsky (1996 and 2001), Thelma Kintanar (1988), Lily Rose Roxas-Topé (1998), and Luisa J. Mallari-Hall and Roxas-Topé (1999). My own attempts to develop a wider comparative understanding of the place of modern Thai literature in the evolution of prose fiction across the region drew on their scholarship (see Harrison 2000c and 2001); or pulled contemporary Thai fiction into focus with modern Indonesian short story writing (Harrison, 2000a) or with the pan-Asian *Ramayana*, in its various forms, past and present (Harrison, 2004a). Yet none of these publications address frameworks for comparison via a sustained engagement with theory as opposed to an examination of comparative empirical data.

Concerns such as these have been central to the unfolding of the work Peter Jackson and I have undertaken on the *Ambiguous Allure of the West* as a research project housed under the umbrella of the SOAS Centre for Asian and African Literatures at the University of London and operational from 2000–2005. The establishment of the Centre came in response to the intellectual need for frameworks of comparison to be identified between Asian and African literatures, a requirement recognized in SOAS' teaching of a masters programme in Comparative Literature (Asia and Africa), which had begun in the mid-1990s. In conjunction with the Western literature departments of University College, a fellow institution within the University of London, the SOAS Centre embarked on a series of international workshops across a wide variety of literary themes and dedicated to establishing shared lines of communication regarding the specificities of our individual fields.¹⁰ The location of "Western" theory played an inevitable role in our dialogues, predicated upon keynote lectures by Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmad, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Terry Eagleton, Benedict Anderson and others. But, as we noted from our participation in several of the workshops, the potential for Thai literary analysis to fully participate in this venture was

impeded by the relative lack of openness to theoretical engagements, which has coloured scholarship in this area to date. And while it is also the case that the national literatures of other Southeast Asian countries have contributed less to these debates than the more “internationally-recognized” (by dint of translation or original authorship in English) texts of China, Japan, South Asia, the Middle East and parts of Africa, their colonial pasts have nonetheless integrated them into the field of contemporary postcolonial studies. Nowhere is this better evidenced than by Foulcher and Day’s groundbreaking collection of essays (2002)—*Clearing a Space*—which serves to place modern Indonesian literature under the interrogative spotlight of postcolonial theory and criticism.

By stark contrast, the study of Thai literature has, I would argue, remained somewhat unwilling to engage in theoretically directed analysis, part of a larger picture that Thongchai Winichakul discerns as a greater resistance to theory in the humanities than in the social sciences in Thailand. The humanities, he hypothesizes, come closer to notions of “self” and “identity”, thus rendering them more resistant to “outside” influences such as theory.¹¹ Thai literary studies, with its profound investment in the projection and preservation of an aesthetically pleasing and morally dignified national image, seems never to have recovered from the initial shock of its encounter with theoretical influences posed by Chonthira Satayawatthana’s controversial M.A. thesis “The Application of Western Methods of Modern Literary Criticism to the Study of Traditional Thai Literature” (*Kan-nam wannakhadi wijan phaen-mai baep tawan-tok ma chai kap wannakhadi thai*) completed at Chulalongkorn University in 1969.

Prefaced by a compilation of sources available in Western criticism, Chonthira’s dissertation proceeds to analyse Thai literary texts from the perspective of this theoretical material. Her key emphasis on the relationship between literary criticism and Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis results in postulations largely supported by reference to Western literary texts; but it was her subsequent study of the venerated Thai literary classics *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, *Sangthorn* and *Phra Aphaimani* that was to prove deeply unpalatable.

Among Chonthira’s most provocative claims was her discussion of the sexual drives of classical protagonists through the psychoanalytical lens of sado-masochism. In its exposure of revered literary characters to psychoanalytical and sexual scrutiny, Chonthira’s thesis had the unwelcome effect of stripping them of their symbolic power, rendering them all too human in a cultural context that might, even to date, prefer to raise literature onto a super-human plane. Whereas the readers of Shakespeare (be they British, French, Thai, Chinese or of any other nationality) might be comfortable with an interpretation of Hamlet or Lady Macbeth in terms of their psychosexual drives, Thai scholars have, on the whole, acted with analytical reserve in the face of scrutinizing their own noble literary heroes and heroines in the same way; this even despite the fact that traditional Thai literature is laced with erotic interludes, or *bot atsajan*.¹²

The real affront posed by Chonthira’s dissertation relates to her supposition that the protagonists whose behaviour she assesses are akin to actual human beings, and are marked by the virtues and foibles of being so. Her reconceptualization achieved something largely unfamiliar to Thai literary criticism, moving away from a static

position of veneration and opening up instead to the analytical “manhandling” of the text fostered by the theoretically driven scrutiny of, for example, feminist, psychoanalytical or poststructuralist thought.

It is pertinent, therefore, that what theoretically engaged treatment of Thai literature does currently exist in Thailand occurs as an offshoot of the study of English and French literature as, for example, in the work of Chusak Pattarakulvanit and his pioneering engagement with semiotics, poststructuralism and postmodernism in his analysis of modern Thai fiction (see Chusak, 1996; 2002 and 2006). Chusak’s provocatively named monograph *An mai ao reuang* (Reading Against the Grain) provides an excellent case in point of Derridean deconstruction. The title is based on a play of words in Thai, conjuring up the spectre of *ao reuang*, meaning “to pick a fight”, and which drives at the heart of conservative cultural sensitivities. Alternatively, literary criticism finds itself a place in the departments of Comparative Literature, such as that established at Chulalongkorn University by Trisilpa Bunkhachorn following her research on the relevance of intertextuality to the Thai case (Trisilpa, 1992).¹³

The experience of Thai literary studies and the particular difficulties it faces in engaging in wider, theoretically determined comparative debates on world literatures resonate with Anderson’s provocative quotation of the question “What damn good is this country—you can’t compare it with anything!” in the opening of his 1978 review of the field. It is these concerns that motivate much of the intellectual energies of *The Ambiguous Allure of the West*.

The Allure of the West: Colonialist Traces, Without and Within

Our aim to address “the larger problems of approach or method”, which Anderson (1978, 194) was among the first to call for in Thai studies, is undertaken here through an examination of Siam/Thailand’s interactions with the West from 1850 to the present day. The chapters in this volume focus on the period from the signing of the Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855 to the present, drawing together from across three centuries and a range of disciplinary perspectives (history, film studies, literature, cultural studies, and anthropology) insights that typify the key concerns of Siam’s interaction with a powerful cultural Other. It is beyond the scope, and indeed the aim, of this volume to provide a comprehensive survey of the entirety of Siamese/Thai relations with the West. Some topics not considered in detail here are post-World War II relations with the United States and wider discussion of the regimes of Field Marshals Plaek Phibunsongkhram and Sarit Thanarat in the Cold War era. Likewise, we do not provide an extensive commentary on issues of gender, despite a keen awareness of and intellectual sympathy for its significance in investigating Siam/Thailand’s experience of “Western” Otherness and an acknowledgement of the importance of gender in the study of the colonial experience elsewhere. (See, for example, Ann Laura Stoler [1995, 2002 and 2009], Anne McClintock [1995], Laurie J. Sears [1996] and Tineke Hellwig [1994].) Both Peter Jackson and I have considered the issues of gender in Thai/Western relations in other places. (See in particular Harrison 2000a, 2000b, 2004b, and Jackson 2003c.) The volume does not

provide detailed comparison with Japan, in terms of its shared experience of never having been formally colonized. Nor does it focus in depth on Siam's experience with France as a colonial power, despite the importance of this historical relationship. These, and other issues, remain to be taken up on another occasion and in future publications.

Particular emphasis is required in delineating the intellectual concerns of this volume on our recognition that it constitutes only one possible research trajectory of many. Although cognizant of the importance of Siam/Thailand's relations with additional cultural Others—most notably with China and with the diasporic Chinese—in providing a continuously shaping force in the structuring of Thai identities, we acknowledge that to be a topic beyond the capacities of a single research endeavour.¹⁴ Our chosen emphasis on the West derives from a number of assumptions most notably, as several contributors to this volume observe, that since the mid-nineteenth century the West has represented a privileged Other in the Thai imagination (see, for example, Thongchai, Pattana, Herzfeld and Loos). While the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851–1868) saw the consolidation of links with Britain through the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855, it simultaneously marked the decline of Chinese influence following the defeat of China by the British in the Opium Wars in 1842. Over the next forty-five years, following the despatch of its final tributary mission to China in 1854, Siam contrastingly signed trade treaties with thirteen other Western powers, as well as with Japan.¹⁵

Moreover, the widespread disengagement from theory in Thai studies, with which this volume is in part concerned, is intimately linked, Jackson argues here, with the history of Siamese responses to, and historiographical representations of, the challenges of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century. Throughout its history, Siam has maintained political, economic, and cultural relations with a range of non-Western powers, most notably China and Japan. Yet while Chinese culture has had a major and continuing impact in Thailand, at the epistemological level of theory and forms of cultural representation it is the changing shape of relations with the West that has proved most significant over the past two centuries. As Jackson puts it in this volume, understanding “Siam/Thailand's relation to the colonial order is central to attempts to respond to the interrelated problems of the lack of theory and absence of comparison in Thai studies”. This is not to argue that the outward forms of Thai culture have been Sinicized to any lesser extent than they have been Westernized, but instead to propose that it is the West which has had the greatest impact on forms of knowledge and modes of representation in Thailand, both locally in Thai language discourses and internationally in European language accounts.

The era of high imperialism from the mid-nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth is a key historical period with regard to the status and relevance of postcolonial and other critical approaches in Thai studies. With the rise of American power in Asia after World War II, came a radical reorientation and reconfiguration of Thai political, economic, and cultural relations from Europe to North America. Despite this, however, it is accounts of the earlier period when Britain and France directly challenged Siamese autonomy that are central to the theoretical debates with which this volume engages. It is the issue of whether Siam really did escape European imperial domination

in the nineteenth century, and hence whether the terms “colonial”, “semicolonial”, and “postcolonial” have any legitimate place in Thai historiography, that can be argued to lie at the centre of debates on the place of critical theory in Thai studies today.¹⁶

Integral to this debate is a probing of the persistent mythology of Siam/Thailand’s claim to unique status as a result of never having been formally colonized by the West. Anderson is notably critical of the master narrative of Siam’s alleged uniqueness as an unqualified blessing, one “typically celebrated, rather than studied or concretely demonstrated” (1978, 197). This lack of analysis comes as a result, he argues, of nationalist political investment in the assertion of unbroken Siamese independence in the colonial era, an achievement ensured by the clever diplomacy, astute adaptability and modernizing outlook of the Chakri monarchs Mongkut and Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, r. 1868–1910). Not only is the mythology of Thai uniqueness appropriated for promotional purposes by the national Tourist Board, but it also lies at the heart of nationalist discourses for internal consumption, as popular cinema often exemplifies. The closing scene, for example, of the 1999 blockbuster *Bang Rajan* (*The Legend of the Village Warriors of Bang Rajan*, dir. Thanit Jitnukul) (see Figure I.1) emphasizes the continuity of Siamese history from the date of the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya in 1767, that since that time the nation has, unlike its colonized neighbours, remained steadfastly independent and free of foreign interference (see Harrison 2005 and this volume for further details).



Figure I.1: Promotional DVD cover of *Bang Rajan* (*The Legend of the Village Warriors of Bang Rajan*, dir. Thanit Jitnukul) :The Contender Entertainment Group.

The story of the villagers of Bang Rajan and their last-ditch attempt against ruthless Burmese invasion forms part of the Thai school curriculum, alongside similar narratives of independence and the claimed uniqueness of Thai historical identities; and these tales are often retold in popular cartoon form for children as supplementary reading (*nangseu an nork wela*), such as those published on the monarchs of the Chakri dynasty (see Team E Q Plus Adventure 2007a, b and c).

The uncontested resilience of these master narratives of Thai history, Anderson (1978, 195–6) controversially maintains, has been both disadvantageous to the Thais in certain ways and detrimental to Western scholars of the field. His subsequent interrogation of the very validity of Siam's claim to non-colonized status is one revisited by Jackson (2005) and interrogated by his chapter in this volume, as well as being taken up by other contributors such as Loos, Herzfeld, and Thongchai.

Jackson's contention here is that developing the notion of semicolonialism—taken as denoting the form of Siam/Thailand's relation to the colonial order—is central to the critical task of comparison. In addressing this topic, he revisits debates that were initiated in Thailand in the late 1940s by Marxist critics such as Udom Srisuwan with the publication of his “Thailand, a Semi-Colony” (*Thai keung-meuang-kheun*) and taken up in the 1970s by the Political Economy group, led by historian Chatthip Nartsupha. As Hong Lysa (2004, 328) notes of their contribution to the semicolonial debate, “These radical studies which seriously questioned the cornerstone of Thai history and national ideology: that Thailand remained independent amidst the tide of colonialism that swept Southeast Asia from the nineteenth century, focused on the mode of production and the economy as their thrust.”

These and other authors (such as Chaiyan Rajchagool, 1994, Hong Lysa, 2004; and Kasian Tejapira, 2001) take a significant number of factors as evidence of Siam's semicoloniality. It includes the shaping of Siam's borders by France and Britain at the close of the nineteenth century, with the loss to French Indochina of former Siamese territories held along the east bank of the River Mekhong following the Paknam Crisis of 1893 and the establishment of Siam as a buffer zone between French and British imperial interests in the agreement of 1896. It encompasses the “Westernization” of the face of the Thai royal elite in terms, as Maurizio Peleggi (2002, 9) notes, of novel forms of etiquette, dress, habitation, patronage and pageantry, and for the dual purpose of “the establishment of the monarchy's authority over a newly bounded ‘national’ territory and the uplifting of its prestige in the international arena”. And it refers most specifically to the impact of imperial influence in the economic and juridical spheres, created by trade agreements such as the Bowring Treaty, which deprived Thai sovereigns of control over foreign trade and of traditional, royal commercial monopolies and led to the introduction of extraterritoriality—“in essence simply another term for the privileged supra-legal status that white colonials enjoyed elsewhere in indirectly ruled Asia under different nomenclature” (B. Anderson 1978, 209).¹⁷

As Loos defines it in *Subject Siam* (2006, 17), a work which has also proved vital in underpinning the themes of the current volume, “Scholars of the political economy of imperialism argue that Siam, far from being independent, suffered a form of indirect

colonization.”¹⁸ Moreover, as Loos observes in this volume, the attenuation of Siam’s sovereignty by extraterritoriality clauses and the economic limitations established by unequal trading treaties that conferred on Siam its “semicolonial” status persisted until the 1930s (though the term semicolonial is not one Loos herself favours, as she explains in her chapter here). Imposed on the grounds that Siam’s own courts were insufficiently “advanced” to try foreign subjects, the cessation of extraterritoriality was made conditional on the country’s willingness to reform its legal system and other state bureaucracies in accordance with Western standards.

Other chapters in this volume similarly concur with a definition of Siam/Thailand as semicolonial, or at least partially so. More comfortable with the terminology crypto-colonialism, Herzfeld points to the fact that, under British and French pressure in the nineteenth century, Siam was obliged not only to cede territory but also to reform its administrative institutions in order to win grudging acceptance of its right to self-administration within its newly constricted, Western-defined borders. The nature of the struggle for such acceptance was, as Anderson argued over three decades ago, in no way redolent of independence from imperial influence but instead directly analogous to centralizations of state “carried out both in neighbouring indirectly-ruled territories by ‘native rulers’ and in directly-ruled zones by white administrators” (B. Anderson 1978, 210).

The effect of this enforced self-modernization of Siam for the purposes of appeasing the West was, however, of benefit to the ruling Bangkok elite in terms of the increased centralization of the State which it implied. As a result, the institution of the Bangkok monarchy shored up its strength vis-à-vis regional nobilities under external imperial incentives, turning instead to an assumption of augmented powers over its own people in an imitation of colonial rule—not as a victim to it. As Thongchai (1994), Peleggi (2002), Baker and Pasuk (2005) and Loos (2006) all acknowledge, the definition of Siam’s boundaries at the hands of the British and the French led to a heightened focus on the territory that remained. In consequence, Peleggi (2002, 6) concludes, “colonialism actually engendered—rather than endangered—modern Siam as a political entity”, therefore rendering it little different from its colonized neighbours in other parts of Southeast Asia. Pemberton (1994, 23) for example, reveals as much in his observation that the construction of “Java” as a cultural entity flourished both in spite of colonial conditions and because of them.

In her study of late-nineteenth-century elite rule over southern Siam/Thailand, Loos (2006, 15) notes that the “monarch used the reform process to centralize his power, suppress ethnic minorities, strengthen pre-existing domestic class and gender hierarchies, and deploy the threat of colonial intervention to justify new territorial boundaries”. By the close of the nineteenth century the alleged menace posed by imperial aggrandizement to Siamese national integrity had clearly receded in favour of a highly agential and imitative relationship with the West on the part of Siam’s ruling elite, marked—and this is crucial—not by a sense of inferiority but one of spirited aspirations to equality. Under this active allegiance to imperial discourses the relationship between Britain and Siam, Loos postulates in this volume, “devolved into direct competition—a kind of keeping up with the Joneses—or the Swettenhams in this instance—mentality”.

Despite the persuasiveness of the case made by Udom, Chatthip, Anderson, Jackson, Herzfeld and others for the consideration of Siam as a semicolony, scholars such as Loos provide more nuanced perspectives. Viewed through a differently configured lens, or from an angle other than that of the mode of production, of the economy and of extraterritoriality, Loos maintains that an entirely contrary picture simultaneously emerges of Siam's relationship to Western imperialism, one borne not of subordination but of a mimicry coloured by distinct expression of agency. But this is not unique to Siam: similar forms of identification with Western powers are noted by Norman Owen (2005, 245) to have typified the response of much of colonized Southeast Asia. The Tagalog printer Tomas Pinpin who, at the outset of Spanish rule in the Philippines, urged people to learn Spanish as a "cure" for their weakness as part of a wider strategy to appropriate the resources and behaviour of their colonial overlords, provides a case in point. And Rafael (2006, 4) records the significance of taking in the foreign roots of the Filipino nation as a site of survival, "Thus is the nation indebted to colonialism. Thanks to its exposure to the foreign, it has developed a powerful immunity to further alien assaults."

While still related to Siam's acknowledgement of the West as a site of power, Loos' evidence of the colonialism exercised by the Bangkok elite in the deep south speaks not to their fear of extinction at the hands of British imperial interventions but on the contrary, exposes their desire to be considered an equal to European colonial states in the region and to operate accordingly. The broad political trajectories pursued by British officials in the Straits Settlements and the Siamese monarchy in Bangkok share much in common; and, as Loos clearly argues in this volume, the fact that Siam's legal reforms in the south so closely resemble those enforced by Dutch and British colonial regimes results not from mere coincidence but from direct visits paid by the Bangkok elite to their territories in the region.

This assessment is lent ample support by Kasian's stinging summary of the role played by the ruling elite at the close of the nineteenth century, "Regarding themselves subjectively as almost a supra-ethnic or supranational cosmopolitan ruling caste, they lorded it over the Siamese nation-people as colonial masters with a royal Thai face" (Kasian 2001, 6) .

Imitation, Absorption, Localization and Power

The ability of the Siamese rulers to "lord it over" their own people in the way Kasian defines was predicated on their adoption and imitation of models of legitimizing power in use by the colonial West. As Thongchai discerns, the historical roots of this will to power evidenced in the Siamese court's adoption and imitation of Western imperial strategies on a national scale can be explained neither as naïve pretension nor ambitious delusion. The British Empire, he asserts,

... was not entirely dissimilar to the premodern policy of overlordship and empire that Siam was. For the Siamese elite, the traditional empire and modern colonialism were in certain ways compatible. As a result, the latter

was comprehensible through the conception of the former with which they were familiar. This was how Bangkok was likened to London. (Thongchai 2000b, 543)

The degree of similarity Thongchai pinpoints here facilitated the processes of mimicry and assimilation which typified Bangkok elite engagement with elements of Western political culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The nature of these processes has been argued by some to mark a continuum with traditional Siamese strategies of engagement with powerful foreign Others: as “The Father of Thai History” (and brother of Chulalongkorn), Prince Damrong Rachanuphap noted in his early-twentieth-century project to define an (imagined) timeless Thai national character: “The Tai knew how to pick and choose. When they saw some good feature in the culture of other peoples, if it was not in conflict with their own interests, they did not hesitate to borrow it and adapt it to their own requirements” (quoted in Peleggi 2002, 12). In a speech given at the Society for University Lecturers (*Samakkhayajan samakhom*) on 8 October 1927, Damrong officially proclaimed the three key qualities of Thai identity, as he saw them: “A dedication to national freedom (*itsara khong chat*); tolerance; and an acuity in assimilation (*prasan-prayote*)” (quoted in Saichon Sattayanurak 2003, 115).

Damrong’s judicious construction of Thainess was further echoed by his contemporary Georges Coedès and both establish necessary continuities with pre-modern Siamese history in their reference back to the periods of “Indianization” in the first millennium and subsequent Sinicization that predate cultural contact with the West (see Peleggi 2004 and Jackson in this volume). Several of the chapters in this volume provide in-depth examples of how the processes of assimilation and adaptation of the Western Other play out in various different spheres and historical moments (see May Adadol and MacDonald, Pattana, Thanés, Thongchai and Harrison), hence apparently confirming the Damrong/Coedès cultural classification. At the same time, however, the comfortable assumptions that have evolved from this influential yet somewhat stereotypical categorization of Siam/Thailand’s cultural relations with the outside world require critical attention. As noted above, the practice of widespread cultural borrowing from afar was characteristic not only of Siam/Thailand but of most of its neighbours in the region. Rafael (2006, 2) puts forward the view that the Spanish legacy in the Philippines was to transform disparate peoples into a nation capable of “assimilating” yet another civilization. Nationhood in this sense is the condition of being endowed with the power to incorporate that which lies outside the nation, and to do so without any sense of loss. The nation is “a site of survival, a living on that comes from taking the foreign in and remaking it into an element of oneself” (Rafael 2006, 4). Likewise, as Owen (2005, 245) notes, other Southeast Asians have responded to Western industrial and colonial hegemony by “Orientalizing” themselves, Java being, at least for a while, a case in point.

Furthermore, it is by no means certain that even Southeast Asia was distinctive from the rest of the world in its propensity for the assimilation of outside influence. Dipping a toe into the waters of broader comparative research generates instances

of a similarly intense appropriation and absorption of external cultural features from numerous parts of the world. The case of Roman influence on the shaping of “British” culture during the Roman occupation of Britain (43–410 CE) provides only one of many possible examples.¹⁹ So too does that of Japan, most notably during the Meiji period (1868–1912) when everything Western, from natural science to literary realism, was, as Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit describe it, “hungrily soaked up by Japanese intellectuals. European dress, Prussian constitutional law, British naval strategies, German philosophy, American cinema, French architecture, and much, much more” (Buruma and Margalit 2005, 3–4).

It is worth repeating here, too, our concerns regarding the “West” and its contribution to the shaping of Thai cultural identities, past and present: that few cultures can ever be stable or monolithic in nature; nor can they resist being porous to continual external stimulus, most especially when the effects may prove to be of benefit. In this we follow Lieberman’s view (which he in turn credits to Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Tessa Morris-Suzuki) of “regional or national culture not as a ‘coherently structured whole,’ but as an ‘unsutured’ complex of identities that normally fluctuated according to locale, class, corporate group, even individual” (Lieberman 1997, 481).

Herzfeld reiterates this volume’s commitment to the unstable and fluid nature of cultural identities when he reminds us that even the definition of the “West” is itself problematic; and we acknowledge too that our own frame of reference in this volume has been predominantly to Britain as Siam’s Western Other, at the expense of attention to France, North America and the remainder of Europe. Herzfeld usefully places emphasis on “the indeterminacy of cultural influence” and refutes, by way of example, the assumption that “adoption of multinational logos and designer goods must mean adoption of their ideological implications”. Heeding his warning of a reproduction of the kind of cultural imperialism these items in themselves so often represent, the current volume instead focuses its intellectual concerns on the agency pertaining to the processes of cultural borrowing actively instituted by the recipient culture.

As Loos (2006), Thak (2007 and 2009), Thongchai (1994, 2000a and 2000b) and others have observed, the appropriation of elements of Western culture was, and remains, coloured by the distinct features of pragmatism, profit and the exercise of agency. As a result, commentators such as Peleggi (2002, 11) have rightly questioned the extent to which the Thai experience undermines Said’s assessment of “the Orient” as a passive object of the West’s imperial domination and ideological representation. The reverse Orientalist—i.e. Occidentalist—practice in the Thai case clearly reveals ways in which an auto-, or crypto-colonizing elite voluntarily adopted and adapted strategies of power from the West at a time when the latter was a dominant political and cultural force in the region; and this because of the distinct gains to be made from doing so.²⁰

Herzfeld observes a tendency in Thai cultural practice to select elements of a “West” that remained ill-defined at the level of imagination; and to interpret those cultural borrowings in ways that did not necessarily entail any corresponding acceptance of their meanings in the West itself, as Thanet notes regarding the reception of Foucault, discussed above. It is therefore, Herzfeld concludes here, “merely prejudicial to say

that Thais are ‘imitating’ the West. They are, rather, engaging in a subtle deployment of cultural markers in which they invest meanings of preponderantly local relevance”.

The nature of this re-deployment of meaning reiterates patterns of cultural borrowing which prevailed across pre-modern Southeast Asia in the period of its “Indianization”. One of the most pertinent examples of this process of “localization” as it continued to occur in the colonial period is provided by the Siamese notion of *siwilai*, a modified version of the English term “civilized” that was first introduced in the reign of King Mongkut and which Thongchai argues to be intensely “hybridized” in flavour,

[I]deas on how to make Siam *siwilai* ranged from etiquette to material progress, including new roads, electricity, new bureaucracy, courts and judicial system, law codes, dress codes, and white teeth. The list could be much longer. But unlike the European experience, the Siamese quest for *siwilai* was a transcultural process in which ideas and practices from Europe, via colonialism, had been transferred, localized, and hybridised in the Siamese setting. (Thongchai 2000b, 529)²¹

Siwilai served as a technique by which Siam could stake a claim to social, cultural and technological parity with the West. But in addition to its purpose as a display of civilizational standards to the West, it simultaneously functioned as local legitimization, shoring up both the real and the symbolic powers of the Siamese elite, which could in turn be exercised more effectively over the provinces, and proving particularly indispensable following the centralization under Chulalongkorn of Lanna, Lanhang and Pattani. Thongchai (2000b, 539 and 545) confirms this in an argument integral to his work on the Siamese “quest for *siwilai*”: that although outward looking, it was fundamentally linked to a project of self-confirmation and operated as such because the imitation and consumption of Western culture had become the most pertinent method of gaining access to cosmic power, a perspective endorsed by both Peleggi (2002) and Jackson (2004a). Noting that the Siamese response to the challenges of Western imperialism was performative rather than military in nature, Jackson (2004b, 220) proceeds to argue that as part of the performative process a “regime of images” was introduced as a new form of local power. The regime created a sharp divide between a “civilized”, Westernized public domain on the one hand and a private domain that remained local and Thai on the other (Jackson 2004b, 249). To adopt the postcolonial terminology made popular currency by novelist V. S. Naipaul, the Siamese elite can be determined at this point to have become fully-fledged “mimic men”, driving preceding cultural practices undercover and resurfacing them with a newly Westernized veneer. This process, Jackson (2004a, 181) contends, has resulted in Thai power’s distinctive and intense “concern to monitor and police surface effects, images, public behaviours, and representations combined with a relative disinterest in controlling the private domain of life”. While his reference to these functions pertains primarily to the contemporary moment, Jackson’s assertion is that:

[T]he regime of images emerged in this semi-colonial nexus of ascendant absolute power, becoming a core element of a local system of biopower that subjected the populace to a more intense form of state authority while

representing this as a form of liberty, from the West, rather than as subjection to a new form of local tyranny. (Jackson 2004b, 235)

It is within this semicolonial and autocolonizing quest for *siwilai* that the purpose of Chulalongkorn's state visit to Europe in 1897—the first to be conducted by a Siamese monarch to the West—can similarly be comprehended.²² Deeply concerned by the need to occupy an acclaimed position among the world's nations, the Siamese elite believed that such a journey would place them on the civilizational map: the implication did not go unnoticed by the French colonial minister, who knowingly remarked that, "it will give the impression that the kingdom of Siam, whose sovereign has been received in the manner due to a European head of state, is a civilized country which should be treated like a European power" (quoted in Baker and Pasuk 2005, 69). Nor did it go amiss with Western expatriates resident in Siam, who saw the royal visit as "proof of his submission to the regime of an enlightened semicolonialism and hence deserving of their patronage and tutelage" (Hong 2004, 339). But as Thongchai (2000b), Peleggi (2002) and others are keen to emphasize, there was additional credit to be gained from such international recognition in terms of the weight it bore in the local context. Although frequently lauded in royalist-nationalist Thai discourse as a highly successful diplomatic mission through which the king effectively diverted colonial attentions away from his territories, Chulalongkorn's visit to Europe was of apparently negligible consequence in these terms, coming as it did a year after the Anglo-French agreement to retain Siam as a buffer state between their colonial territories. What the king conclusively achieved through his travels, however, was the standing of a significant political player on the world stage in Thai eyes, hence seeking enhanced legitimation at a time when his claim to divine status was diminished, most crucially among rival factions within the Siamese court. Furthermore, he gained the extensive opportunity to acquire symbols of Westernization as attributes of status and markers of prestige, as catalogued by Peleggi's study of the tour,

Reading Rama V's letters written from overseas, one is left with the impression that as much as fraternizing with European monarchs, a highlight of these travels was the acquisition (through purchase and gifts) of luxury goods such as paintings and sculptures in Florence, porcelain sets in Sèvres, Tiffany vases in London, Fabergé *objets* in St. Petersburg, and jewelry in Berlin. (Peleggi 2002, 26–7)

The king's acquisitive energies differed little from those of other Southeast Asian elites in the colonial era. Rafael's work on *The Promise of the Foreign* (2006) in the Philippines remarks upon how, by the 1880s, the bourgeoisie had begun sending their offspring to study in Europe, as below,

They acquired cosmopolitan tastes in dress, furniture, food and entertainment while absorbing liberal ideas from abroad. [. . .] Translating money into status symbols and consumable objects, this colonial middle class "gave proof of their intelligence and aspirations by . . . buying pianos, carriages, objects

imported from the United States and Europe which came their way, owing to foreign trade.” (Rafael 2006, 8, quoting T.H. Pardo de Tavera).

In terms of the significance that this excess of conspicuous international consumption held for local audiences, the monarch’s overseas visits overtly symbolized the attainment of *siwilai* status as one aspect of a wider strategy to mimic the imperial aggressor for the purposes of cementing the elite’s grip on power.

Reviewing this strategy of Siamese engagement with the West a century later, Thai public intellectual Sulak Sivaraksa typifies the Siamese defence against Western imperial aggrandizement as an act of fending off the “wolves” by donning their “clothing”.²³ His analogy evolves from the 1893 caricature that appeared in the British magazine *Punch*, depicting a French wolf braced on the east banks of the Mekhong River and towering over a vulnerable Siamese lamb on the opposite side.



Figure 1.2: Cartoon depiction of French aggression against Siam on the banks of the Mekhong. Swain in *Punch*, 5 August 1893.²⁴ Copyright: CartoonStock, 2009.

Taking up this pictorial identification of Siam as the lamb and reversing the common English axiom of the wolf in sheep’s attire, Sulak attests to the Thai cultural strategy of resurfacing the persecuted and fragile nation with the (allegedly) defensive garb of antagonistic alien sources, symbolized by the wolf. As such, his analogy privileges the wolf as emblematic of predatory power and a cause for Siamese anxiety. But what he

interestingly stops short of exploring its position as a source of fascination, cloaked with an intense allure deemed highly worthy of imitation.

The body of evidence and opinion presented above and encapsulated by Sulak elucidates the fact that in several key ways Siam/Thailand might be better understood as semicolonial rather than fully independent of imperial influence; and that in addition to this, further substantiations provide a contrary view of Siam as highly imitative of Western imperial strategies in its aggressive policies of “internal colonization”. As Loos has persuasively contended (2006 and in this volume, though again with an avoidance of the term internal colonization), and as this volume seeks to confirm through its theoretical emphases, Siam/Thailand at the close of the nineteenth century was both of these things. It was arguably located, as Loos (2006, 21) would have it “at the crossroads of colonized countries and sovereign, imperial powers, sharing some of the traits of both but reducible to neither”. The implication of this location for a reading of Siam/Thailand in light of the concerns of *The Ambiguous Allure of the West* is again succinctly drawn into a conclusion by Loos (2006, 3). “Rather than isolate Siam as exceptional, Siam’s split identity as colonizer and colonized makes it eminently comparable to both and simultaneously capable of illuminating the limits of the categories.”

Declining Binaries, Facing New Horizons: From Janus to Thotsakan, from Thotsakan to the Bayon

Loos’ endeavour in *Subject Siam* to explore the limits of the categories reiterates the postcolonial perspective expressed by Bhabha regarding the impossibility of maintaining rigid distinctions between colonizer and colonized, one which is of considerable pertinence to the material discussed in the present volume. Much of the work to date on Siam/Thailand as a semicolonial-cum-autocolonial power has resorted, as in other areas of Thai studies, to the comfort of binary oppositions and unresolved dualisms that too often present crude depictions of the complex situation at hand.

As Thongchai usefully argues in this volume, the binary divisions made with reference to Siam/Thailand’s relationship to the West, though tempting in terms of their inherent simplicity, are in effect an “imprecise intellectual tool constructed to try to make sense of when to accommodate and when to reject the West”. Loos (2006, 3) develops this perspective on “the limits of the binary logic of cultural exchange between colonizer and colonized that dominates the cultural encounter” in Siam and its failure to capture what she rightly emphasises as “the proliferating conditions of difference at work”.

For Loos the qualification of colonialism, imperialism and modernity by the term “semi” with reference to Siam, fails in similar ways; it positions the country, she argues in her chapter here, “in between the very binaries—tradition/modernity, colony/empire—that critical scholarship seeks to dismantle”. Her aim instead is to counter this with an attempt to “expose the complex and multiple power hierarchies at work in their relevant contexts” (Loos 2006, 17). In this volume Jackson responds to Loos’ position with broad agreement, while pointing out that to date we regretfully

have no better terminology at our disposal. His assertion, echoed in the framework Chakrabarty provides for this volume in his foreword, is vital for the work of *The Ambiguous Allure of the West* in its search for an apt analytical phraseology and driven by the important acknowledgement of the failure of binary oppositions to capture the complexities of the topic at hand. While Siam/Thailand's encounter with the West is often imagined in scholarly literature through the constraining lenses of dualities, this introductory chapter argues for a heightened sensitivity to and respect for notions of multiplicity. Repeated analogies between Siamese outlooks on the West and Janus, the Roman deity of gates and doors, with his two faces gazing in opposite directions, need to begin to yield to more exacting and locally specific metaphors. Taken together, the chapters in this volume point to a need to shift analytical perspective from the dualist, European view that Janus furnishes, to the multiplicities of the ten-headed demon king Ravana/Dasakantha, long since adopted into Siam from the Indian *Ramayana* under the modified name of Thotsakan; or the manifold faces that stare out authoritatively over the territories surrounding the thirteenth-century Khmer temple of the Bayon.

Moreover, in the case of both Thotsakan and the faces of the Bayon, their hybrid credentials signify a pertinent connection to the issues of hybridity at play in this volume and given fuller critical attention in Jackson's Afterword. Their multiple viewing trajectories critically allow for the opening up of spaces *in between* that have proved crucial to this volume's findings with regard to the ambiguities of Siam/Thailand's encounters with the West.



Figure I.3: The multiple faces on the walls of the Bayon, Angkor temple complex, Cambodia. <http://malaysiantraveller.files.wordpress.com/2007/03/faces-of-bayon.JPG>, last accessed 18 January 2009.

The task of this volume in addressing these perspectives has inevitably drawn on the work of postcolonial theory, inspired in turn by elements of poststructuralist and psychoanalytical thought.²⁵ Derridean notions of *différance* are called into play in our conviction that meaning is not immediately present but produced via an open, never-ending system of differences, deferrals and delay. Our expression of the limitations of binary thinking draws on Fanon's refutation of oppositional categories such as black/white, subject/object, self/Other which are, in his psychoanalytically inflected views, never stable because of the disruptive, excessive nature of desire, fantasy and neurosis (Lane 2006, 88). With reference to Fanon's observations in *Black Skin, White Masks*, notably provocative in the questions it raises for the current volume, Bhabha emphasises the intellectual necessity of recognizing the "interstitial spaces of thought and representation with contradictions perceived as and remaining unresolved" (Lane 2006, 32).²⁶ His emphasis on the deeply ambivalent character of cultural meaning implies perpetual flux that is always open to possible further interpretation. Alluding to "the space of hybridity itself, the space in which cultural meanings and identities always contain the traces of other meanings and identities", Bhabha (2004, 56) coins the term Third Space, indicating that:

the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. [. . .] And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.

The concluding section of this introductory chapter presents a selection of scenes that serve to exemplify the Third Space of the intercultural encounter between Siam/Thailand and the West, and the emergent hybridities which ensue from this state of "inbetween-ness". Each of the episodes defined below functions as no more than a representative "snapshot" among many of the varied, multiple and complex themes that lie enmeshed in the fabric of Siam/Thailand's interactions with this dominant cultural Other. Between them, the episodes embody the varying concerns that have come to structure this project: such concerns as influence, interpretation, appropriation, assimilation, reinvention, imitation, masquerade, commodification, fetishization, transculturation, localization; rejection, anxiety, desire, mediation; and mimesis, hybridity, liminality, identity, otherness, difference and the exploration of meanings betwixt and between; all of which are underpinned throughout by the telling effects of power.

Telling Tales: Towards the Making of Thai Identities in Encounters with the West

Four episodes of cultural encounter, elision and colonial traces epitomize and encapsulate the major concerns of *The Ambiguous Allure of the West*, interweaving themselves achronologically across its timeframe of 1850 to the present day.

Episode 1: Liminal Space

In 1997—the year in which Thailand’s much coveted global ranking as a “Newly Industrialized Country” (or NIC) was marred by serious economic meltdown—a young man from the Northeast (*Isan*) graduated in filmmaking at the Chicago Art Institute. Having accrued the “cultural capital” of a training at one of America’s most prestigious film schools, and successfully concluded his educational “pilgrimage” to the West, Apichatpong Weerasethakul returned home. His career trajectory from birthplace Khon Kaen via Chicago and on to critical acclaim in the cinephile centres of Rotterdam, New York and Cannes is shrewdly traced in this volume by May Adadol and MacDonald.²⁷ As these authors reveal, Apichatpong’s “highly personalised mode of filmmaking” owes much to the inspiration of his educational exposure to experimental forms and traditions of cinema in the US, in particular the American post-war avant-garde so little known in Thailand. May and MacDonald refer to this phase of educational experience as liminal in nature, marked by the subject’s detachment from her/his position in the social structure, and thus allowing new kinds of experiences and relations to take place. (In my own chapter in this volume I take up this notion of liminality and reinvention of the self in the world of the Other through an examination of Yuthlert Sippapak’s 2003 film *February (Kumphaphan)*, set in New York.)

While Apichatpong’s subsequent filmmaking has resonated for the art-house audiences of “World Cinema”, urban Thai audiences remain contrastingly disinterested in and mystified by the artistic import of Apichatpong’s cinematic *oeuvre*. In interviews conducted with a number of Bangkok celebrities invited to view *Tropical Malady (Sat pralat)*, 2004) in the wake of the film’s international success, members of the modern urban elite audience refer to the film as opaque, unentertaining (*mai sanuk*) and very “international” (*sakon mak-mak*), terms they use broadly to denote the “un-Thai” and hence culturally inaccessible.²⁸ The filmmaker’s distinctive blend of “Western”-inspired cinematic form with local setting and subject matter appeal not, therefore, at the local level but rather to a global cinephile minority audience whose formalized praise of him through international awards has ironically reshaped him back home as an all-Thai symbol of cultural success. As May and MacDonald discuss in this volume, Apichatpong’s international acclaim is the global currency that has strangely rendered him a national figure whose creative efforts are nonetheless considered irrelevant to Thai public life.

Episode 2: Mimesis and Alterity

Over a century earlier, on 7 April 1897, King Chulalongkorn embarked upon a nine-month state visit to Europe, the significance of which, as discussed in detail above, was in part diplomatic, in part “civilizational”. Its official aim was to make a positive impression on the West; to assert Siam’s significance on the world stage; and to acquire the trappings of *siwilai* in the process. But with what cultural and psychological preconceptions did the king depart and to what extent were his expectations met, compounded or contested at the points of actual encounter?

Throughout his lengthy sojourn in Britain, magazines such as *The Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic* committed themselves to regular visual depictions of the various stages of Chulalongkorn's journey, among them images of the monarch's arrival at London's Victoria Station to be welcomed by the Duke of Cambridge; the reception given in his honour at the Siam Legation; and his royal yacht the *Mahachakri* at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight. In many of these illustrations the king appears in full Victorian attire, sporting a boater or a top hat, waistcoat and tails. Back home in Siam, ladies of the court had assumed the hybridized fashion of combining lacy, high-collared, mutton-leg-sleeved blouses with traditional *jongkraben* pantaloons, as exemplified by the photographs of Chulalongkorn's chief consort, Queen Saowapha (see Figure I.4).



Figure I.4: Queen Saowapha, clothed in part Siamese, part Victorian fashion. Reproduced in Krairoek Nana, *Sadet praphat yurop* (The royal visit to Europe), Bangkok: *Sinlapa wathanatham*, 2006, p. 217.

Did this reflect a similar situation to that of the colonial Philippines, to which Rafael refers: notably that the foreign languages, dress, ideas, and machineries that increasingly

penetrated and permeated colonial society throughout the nineteenth century can be thought of as “infrastructures with which to extend one’s reach while simultaneously bringing distant others up close” (Rafael 2006, 5)? And/or could the Bangkok elite have indulged in fantasies reversing those of European travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who adorned themselves in “Oriental” attire for their own social amusement (see Figures I.5 and I.6)?

As Kabbani observes (2008, 43), the disguise that Oriental dress—whether donned for convenience, amusement, polite integration or espionage—permitted its wearer to move as if by magic from one racial category to another. The reverse Thai experience must surely have held comparable appeal, allowing Chulalongkorn to appear the Occidental gentleman while on tour, and observed as such by the leading British trade journal *Tailor and Cutter*:

The King, judged by his dress, looks like a typical English gentleman. Perhaps the silk-facing on the lapel of his neatly-fitting coat is a little too heavy for the real West-End article, and, in one or two small matters of details, criticism might be justifiable; but taking the dress as a whole, it does credit both to His Majesty’s good taste and to the tailor who produced the garment. (Quoted in Peleggi 2002, 65.)



Figure I.5: Captain Colin Mackenzie, c. 1824, by James Sant, Copyright: National Army Museum, London, 2009.



Figure 1.6: Colonel T.E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”), 1919, by Augustus John. Copyright: Tate Publishing, 2009.

Although largely successful in his acquisition of a Western façade through haute couture, Chulalongkorn evidently stopped short of becoming a “true” gentleman in English eyes. The passing criticism of the Thai monarch’s “silk-facing” recalls Bhabha’s commentary on the interpretation of colonial mimicry by imperial powers: “almost the same but not quite”; “almost the same but not white” (Bhabha 2004, 127 and 128). For Bhabha the effects of a flawed colonial mimesis portend that “to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English” (2004, 125) .

Taking Bhabha’s notions of mimicry and ambivalence in the colonial context as an analytical framework here raises questions of the degree to which Chulalongkorn’s sartorial engagement with “Westernness” might take on the resonance of mockery and menace, hence implicitly undermining colonial power and placing Chulalongkorn on a more equal footing with Europe. Or did it instead represent an allusion to the forces of Westernizing “civilization” that in turn read as the apparatus of legitimization to the Siamese elite? Could it have, simultaneously yet contradictorily, been both, and more? And might it invalidate or otherwise temper the contention made by Craig Reynolds (1999), Thongchai (2000b) and Herzfeld (2002) to which Jackson draws attention in this volume—that “the “colonized” versus “colonizer” model that underpins postcolonial studies does not fully capture the complexity of the Siamese/Thai situation?

Certainly the “anxiety of influence” (to use a term made popular by Harold Bloom and likewise deployed by Herzfeld in this volume) kindled by exposure to the colonial

motherlands was arguably more keenly experienced by Chulalongkorn's son and heir apparent, Vajiravudh, who began his schooling in England in 1893. Having studied at Eton, at Oxford and with the Durham Light Infantry, Vajiravudh went on to adapt traditional Thai dance drama (*lakhorn*) into Western-style spoken theatre (*lakhorn phut*); to translate several works by William Shakespeare into Thai; to cast himself in the role of Scheherazade in his own revision of *The Arabian Nights*; and to earn the accolade of "father of Thai detective fiction" thanks to an avid interest in re-scripting *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding a full nine formative years of education in England, the crown prince trenchantly announced to the crowd gathered to bid him farewell at the Siamese Legation in London in 1902: "I shall return to Siam more Siamese than when I left it" (quoted in Batson 1984, 14). Vajiravudh's turn of phrase is reminiscent of the expression "To be more English than the English", with its reverberations of Bhabha's "white but not quite". Was it becoming possible at the time of his exposure to the allure of Victorian Britain to become "more Siamese than the Siamese"—and/or to face the apprehension that to be too Anglicized merged dangerously and beguilingly with emergent (elite) Siamese identities?²⁹

Episode 3: Aesthetic Appeal

In May 2005 Thailand hosted the annual "Miss Universe" beauty contest, featuring participants from over 88 nations across the world and broadcast to 127 countries. Sponsored by the Tourism Authority, the pageant was a vehicle for promoting the lure of Thailand as a tourist destination, a point that had become economically crucial in the wake of the devastation and bad publicity of the Asian tsunami, six months previously.³⁰ The competition further revived local memories of the national success that had been met in 1988, when the title was won by the California-raised Miss Thailand, Phornthip Nakhirankanok (aka Pui), an achievement which in turn echoed that of Apasara Hongsakula in 1965 as the first ever Thai to win a Miss Universe pageant (see Figure I.7).

The international acknowledgement of Apasara's unsurpassed physical beauty explicitly laid to rest the spectre of Siamese gender ambiguity and feminine unsightliness in the eyes of the West that had been raised by Victorian traveller accounts and which had become synonymous with semi-barbarousness and the non-*siwilai* (see Jackson, 2003c). No surprise then that the announcement of her title, though relatively insignificant in the scale of world affairs, was so momentous a local achievement that it was marked by the immediate closure of Thai schools and government offices for the purpose of impromptu celebrations of a national triumph.³¹ Apasara's success bestowed upon the nation a longed-for aesthetic cachet on the world stage in ways similar to that evoked by the elite endeavour towards recognition for Siam in the West through the acquisition of *siwilai* or the participation in the World Fairs of the late nineteenth century (see Thongchai 2000b and Peleggi 2002); or through the international appreciation of Apichatpong as, in the words of one Western journalist, "Thailand's most significant filmmaker".



Figure I. 7: Apasara Hongsakula as the first Thai Miss Universe, 1965. Commemorative Thai postcard from the time of the event.

The symbolic function Apasara, Pui, Apichatpong and others, from Olympic Gold medal-winning kickboxers to international tennis stars and snooker champions, perform for the nation is to fulfil Thai society's "utopian desire to be on an equal footing with the West in globalization", as May and MacDonald phrase it here. Renowned historian Nidhi Eoseewong endorses this criticism of the international aspirations of the Thai middle classes in his 1988 newspaper piece on "Sucking up to Pui and the Culture of the Thai Middle Classes" (*Chalia norng Pui kap watthanatham chan-klang thai*) in which he pertinently suggests that as a result of Pui's victory, "'we' Thais feel we are *all* the most beautiful people in the world, just like her!"³²

Nevertheless, whereas Apasara was clearly deemed a paradigm of Thai national femininity, the reception of Pui was coloured with the spectre of cultural "impurities". Having accepted her crown with *de rigueur* tears and with a *wai* greeting, Pui was subsequently criticised in the Thai media for her inability to enunciate clearly in Thai. Some even questioned the authenticity of her Thai origins, rumouring that she was instead the mixed-race progeny of an American GI and his low class "rent-a-wife" (*mia chao*).³³

Although the international acknowledgement of Pui's physical beauty evoked a sense of national pride, the fact that she had spent her formative years in California called

into question the authenticity of her “Thainess” in a manner not dissimilar to that which threatened to compromise Vajiravudh’s claim to an authentic Thai identity courtesy of a British education. While the prince attempted to curtail criticism by staking a claim to Western knowledge in the confined sense of its function as inspiration for a reinforced “Thai” identity, Pui’s long-term association with the US threatened to detract from her achievement on the country’s behalf.³⁴ Penny Van Esterik captures Pui’s dilemma well when she writes that, “cultural hybridity won her the title, but her representation of Thai femininity was problematic” (Van Esterik 2000, 150).

For Miss Universe “Pui”, the processes of cultural reintegration back into modes of Thai femininity untainted by Western mores was keenly observed in the press, as reported in the popular daily newspaper *Thai Rath*:

Miss Phornthip’s return to Thailand will include studying Thai traditions and customs, the Thai language and the manners by which Thai women abide. In addition she will try to learn how to curtsy properly, Thai-style (*thorn sai-bua*) in readiness for a visit to the Queen, which will also involve her in the use of Royal Thai idiom (*rachasap*) in which the meeting will be conducted.³⁵

Pui’s position illuminates the fact that since their inception in Thailand, beauty contests have always had a strong political association, supported by the fact that her picture was appropriated for the political purposes of a candidate running for election in her birthplace of Chachoengsao to elicit a shared sense of local pride.³⁶ As Van Esterik (2000, 139–140) demonstrates, beauty contests have long had significant investiture in the construction of Thai identity, functioning during the years of Phibun Songkram’s first premiership (1938–1944) to “further his nation-building [. . .] and to provide a setting to display the new Western fashions he wanted Thai women to adopt”. In this sense the pageants have regularly been implicated in the negotiation of the Thai encounter with forms and images of Western Otherness. The dichotomy underlined by the case of “Pui” relates to persistent questions over the degree to which “Thainess” must be modified by “Westernization” before it can gain recognition on the world stage.

Episode 4: Knowledge and Power

In Thailand, 18 August is proclaimed National Science Day, in commemoration of the full solar eclipse that occurred on that date in 1868, correctly predicted by King Mongkut. The accuracy of Mongkut’s calculations was achieved as a result of another kind of hybrid force—the epistemological hybrid that combined indigenous astrology and time measurement with the methods of Western science introduced to him by missionaries from America and Europe (Thongchai 1994, 45). In this, Peleggi’s reference (2002, 23) to the tour of Mongkut’s private apartments offered to British envoy Sir John Bowring on the occasion of the trade treaty signed in his name in 1855, is apposite. Bowring observed there an array of pendulums, watches, barometers, thermometers and microscopes—“all the instruments and appliances which might be found in the study or library of an opulent

philosopher in Europe [. . .] Almost everything seemed English” (quoted in Peleggi 2002, 23). The same objects in Mongkut’s study are adoringly depicted in a scene from the movie *Thawiphop (The Siam Renaissance*, dir. Surapong Piniikhhar, 2004) which adopts the dominant Thai perspective of venerating the monarch’s scientific skills and the wisdom of the Siamese royalty as the key factor in the fight against colonization. (See Pattana and Harrison in this volume for further details.) In doing so it re-states the conservative master narratives, such as those authored by Damrong Rachanuphap, “The Father of Thai History”, or the royalist cultural commentator Khukrit Pramoj and supported by such works as the heavily illustrated popular histories of Krairoek Nana (see, for example, 2007, 2008a, and 2008b), narratives which this volume and others have sought to critique.

As Thanet Aphornsuvan (2009) discusses in his analysis of Western influence on Siam’s quest for modernity in the reign of King Rama IV, the presence of American missionaries set the tone of Western impact in Siam as a peaceful and intellectual encounter between both parties. Rather than introduce arms or coercive trade treaties as others had done in the past, the missionaries arrived with books, initially on Christianity, but later also on subjects such as modern sciences, medicines and news. Among them was the American Presbyterian, Dr. Dan Beach Bradley who brought with him the printing press in 1835, and who became, as Thanet explains, a close friend of Mongkut until the king’s death in 1868, shortly after the eclipse.

As with other Siamese encounters with the West discussed in this chapter, whether through filmmaking, royal tours or beauty pageantry, Mongkut’s forecast of the eclipse holds political connotations. More than a mere intellectual exercise, his calculations demonstrated the scientific knowledge he had acquired from the West and hence reflected on his credibility as a monarch (Thongchai 1994, 45).

Having determined Wakor—“a wilderness in the middle of a disease-ridden rainforest” (Thongchai 1994, 46)—as the best position in the kingdom from which to view the event, Mongkut travelled there together with his own entourage and an invited group of high-ranking European officials.³⁷ Although proven correct in his forecast, the king paid a high price for the demonstration of his skills, contracting malaria as a result of his journey through this difficult and remote terrain. Subsequent treatment with Western medicine by Drs. Bradley and Campbell, which might have saved his life, was refused. As Thanet (2009) concludes, despite Mongkut’s keen scientific interests, it was as if, in the final instance he had decided to follow his Buddhist *karma* instead of resisting it by means of Western knowledge. Mongkut’s counterbalancing religious resistance to Westernization instead led him to allow disease to follow its “natural” path and to renounce life in a gesture more easily comprehended in terms of a persistence in the traditions of Buddhist kingship.

While this was in part related to strict proscriptions against contact with all but the closest courtiers during the king’s final hours, the situation also speaks of the contradictions and ambiguities that repeatedly colour instances of Siamese relations with Others and “outsiders”.

Developing Ambiguities, Facing Thai Identities, Revisiting Thotsakan: Some Conclusions

The four episodes of encounter related above each provide their own series of insights into the ambiguous allure of the West and the making of Thai identities. They raise multiple themes and questions regarding the nature of the intercultural exchanges which are open to interrogation through the historically informed and theoretically critical lenses this volume adopts. What elements, for example, of the marginal, American post-war genre of avant-garde cinema resonated for a young man such as Apichatpong from the altogether “different” and provincial background of *Isan* as he trained to become a filmmaker on the opposite side of the globe? With what sets of meanings did his assimilation and reinvention of these genres invest his own cinematic style and how were they in turn interpreted by local audiences? What implications did consequent accolades on the part of international art-house cinephiles hold for the Thai nation as it bore witness to his success? How did this recognition by the West of his achievements compromise the radical intent of his *oeuvre* by having rendered him a national cultural icon and hence harnessed him to a conservative cultural narrative, despite himself? And, more recently, by what processes does Thai officialdom come to terms with the apparent contradictions of censoring his 2006 movie *Saeng sathawat* (*Syndromes and a Century*) for local release while at the same time revelling in the success the film has met among international audiences abroad?³⁸ In short, how does the trajectory from Khon Kaen boy to international film festival darling and on to reluctant national icon in a cultural milieu where few understand or concern themselves with his work, open up spaces of interrogation marked by the liminality of his experience?

Apichatpong’s exemplification of notions of liminality serves the important project, identified by Bhabha, of undermining “solid”, “authentic” culture. The significance of hybridities is explored at greater length in the Afterword here, hence opening up an important space from which to critique versions of the solid and the authentic that have traditionally dominated the study of Thai culture to date. Issues of hybridity are further called into play in relation to the case of the Thai beauty queen Pui whose acquisition of the title “Miss Universe” modelled her as signifier of a global recognition of Thailand’s aesthetic prowess. Invested with this status as symbol of national success on the world stage, Pui’s achievement implies the need for a negotiation of the interstices between being “sufficiently Westernized” as a result of her childhood in California (a state boasting the largest Thai community outside Thailand) in order to appeal to international competition judges on the one hand; and being “Thai” enough to meet the approval of her compatriots as symbolic of the national feminine. In the process of learning to perform Thainess better, Pui’s education in curtsying before the Queen goes unnoticed as an act of distinctly Western accretions. How did Pui’s presentation of Western-inflected Thai beauty both replicate and impact upon Thai constructions of femininity in an increasingly globalizing world? Did her cultural and aesthetic hybridity prefigure the fetishization of the half-Thai, half-*farang* or *luk-khreung* celebrities that have come to dominate Thailand’s cinema and television screens, its advertising hordes, its popular music scene and the pages of its glossy magazines? (See Figures I.8. I.9 and I.10.)



Figure I.10: Actress and singer, Tata Young. www.palm-plaza.cc/cgi-bin/CCforum/board.cgi?az=post&forum=DCForumID1&om=26420&omm=0 accessed 18 January 2009.

Traditionally bound up with negative views of miscegenation, the mixed-race offspring of Thai/Western unions—as plainly opposed to those of other racial combinations such as those between black or Indo-Arab (*khaek*) and Thai—have, in recent decades, become the aesthetic face of Thailand in a globalized age. Pattana’s examination in this volume of the “*luk-khreung* phenomenon” cites it as the latest stage in the *farang*-ization of the Thai at both the individual and the national levels; and in my own chapter I discuss the politico-cultural implications of the mixed-race film star, with reference to the casting of Florence “Vanida” Faivre as the repatriated all-Thai heroine of *The Siam Renaissance* (see Figure I.11).

But what influences have shaped the changing reception of mixed-race progeny in twentieth-century Siam/Thailand? What forces have quelled the anxieties regarding miscegenation that marked the reigns of Ramas V, VI and VII, concerns so clearly typified by the negative reception of Russian-educated Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath’s marriage to the St Petersburg ballerina Ekaterina Desnitskaya in 1906? Perhaps as much a result of class difference (cf. Britain’s King Edward VIII and Mrs Simpson) as of racial incompatibility, “Katya” was never received by her father-in-law Chulalongkorn and the effect of the marriage was to deny her husband the title of heir presumptive in succession to his half-brother Vajiravudh. The weight of their transgression was similarly echoed in the quasi-autobiographical fiction of Prince Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat, writing at the close of the 1920s on the fraught nature of love and relationships between Siamese men and European women in *Lakhorn haeng chiwit* (*The Circus of Life*). Akatdamkoeng’s

(1984 [1930]) sequel, *Phiw leuang phiw khao* (*Yellow Skin, White Skin*) expands upon this set of anxieties, highlighting them with his account of the English wife of an Indian prince who commits suicide as a result of their unhappy union.



Figure I.11: Florence “Vanida” Faivre in *The Siam Renaissance* (dir. Surapong Pinijkhar, Promotional DVD cover, Film Bangkok).

Pattana’s citation in this volume of Akatdamkoeng’s work is further developed by his discussion of the contrastingly penetrating cultural visibility of mixed-race Thai-*farang* offspring in the contemporary moment, taking them as emblematic of a hybrid identity that holds distinct power as a present-day cultural force. His assertion is corroborated by the thrust of the argument made in *The Siam Renaissance* to which Pattana refers in the opening of his chapter; for the movie confirms his contentions that the *farang*-ization of Thai aesthetics, culture and identities is now so intense that it has become an impossible and a pointless task to separate out the strands (a view moreover supported by Thongchai in this volume). This attests to the fact that, in the twenty-first century, the question of Thainess and of Thai identities cannot be examined in isolation from the powerful cultural influences of the outside world and, in particular, of the “West”.³⁹ Pattana’s conclusion in this volume is therefore worth re-emphasizing at this point, not least for the way in which it substantiates a need for the recognition of interstitial space:

From whatever angle Thainess is now viewed, *farang* influences are simply inevitable and contemporary forms of Thainess are incomplete without the allure of *farang*-ness. It is also crucial to understand that from the perspective of Siamese/Thai popular culture, while *farang* may be positioned in ambiguous ways they are not in a diametrically oppositional relationship with Thainess as is so often understood by nationalist Thai scholars.

The focus of Pattana's discussions validates his assertion that in contemporary times what he refers to as "the Siamese occidental project" is seen to have "moved from its originary site as an elite-defined and elite-led discourse to the broader domain of popular cultural practices."

This shift is an important one regarding our emphasis on the ambiguous and the interstitial in the understanding of Thai identities we seek to delineate here. It would appear from each of the episodes of encounter related above, that explanations of intent shaped around the binary divisions of "either"/"or" are neither sufficiently porous nor adequately nuanced to capture the complexity of the cultural encounters at stake in Siam/Thailand's engagement with the West, whether past or present. Instead, the significance of the four episodes presented above lies in their capacity to illustrate ways in which simple binaries collapse and fall short of functioning as an effective framework to illuminate the multiple meanings at play. And yet, the comfort of binaries persists in Thai cultural studies, driven by dominant conservative narratives that have their historical roots in an elite-led strategy for "coming to terms with the West" (as Thongchai phrases it here). Thongchai's explanation in this volume of the origins of bifurcation as a strategic epistemological response to the colonial West, is essential to our broader understanding of how the definition of cultural identities has been moulded in mainstream Thai discourse. In the schism that was constructed in the reign of Mongkut between the worldly, as personified by the West, and the spiritual, as personified by Buddhist Siam, the latter was perceived as spiritually more advanced, and the realm of the spiritual was affirmed as one of the "true essences" of Thainess, in contrast to Western materiality.

Through reference to the work of postcolonial critic Partha Chatterjee on Bengal as a point of comparison, whereby European power is argued to have failed in colonizing the inner, "essential identity" of the East, Thongchai shows how the cultural hegemony of the imperial West is argued to have been resisted, courtesy of an unwaveringly pure Thai spiritual core.⁴⁰ The irony, as he points out, however, is that "the currently existing Thai Buddhism that is so widely praised in nationalist discourses as the core of "Thainess" is the product of a local transformation induced by Western influences".

The assurance of a resolute Thai core is proposed by these discourses as a device for wider cultural assimilation and the incorporation of external influences at the level (only) of surface/outer appearance. Hence the dominant nationalist narrative in the Thai case—exemplified by films such as *The Siam Renaissance*—supports the local absorption of the surface values of the West in the name of diplomacy, compromise, assimilation, mimicry and masquerade, providing that these appropriations constitute part of an agenda to remain "essentially Thai". (For further details see Harrison in this volume.)

Note the similarities of perspective that by absorbing the influences of an Other, the nation retains its integrity, observed by Rafael (2006, 2) in his quotation of the speech (given in 1937) by Philippine Commonwealth President Quezon:

The “basic and distinct elements of our personality,” as Quezon puts it, do not change. They cannot “be carried away by strange currents.” In his view, the nation absorbs outside forces without itself becoming different. This magical capacity to remain immune to that which comes from the elsewhere, to harbor and domesticate the foreign, including the foreignness of its own origins, while remaining unaltered: such is Spain’s grant to the Philippines.

As Thongchai points out with reference to the characterization of “Thainess”, the quest to locate and pinpoint such an “essential” cultural identity as opposed to the foreign can only ever be a spurious one. Something further may be learned here from the experience of the postcolonial Philippines, as Rafael defines it:

Filipinos acknowledge the ineluctably foreign origins of the nation, converting this foreignness from a sign of shame into a signal of impending sovereignty. Put differently, they regard colonialism as that which brings with it the promise of the foreign. The promise is felt as the coming of a power with which to absorb and domesticate the otherness that lies at the foundation of the nation. (Rafael 2006, 4)

Given that so many aspects of Thai identity are transculturated (to deploy a term from Mary Louise Pratt’s work [1992] on imperial travel writing), that is, originally foreign but now localized phenomena, Thongchai’s assessment of the issue central to this volume is worth quoting verbatim from his chapter here:

[A] Western, or any other foreign, element stops being purely Western (if it ever was) and becomes a localized Western element the moment that it is translated into a Thai context. To put it the other way round, that element becomes Thai-ized and is no longer Western in the sense that it comes to exist and operate in a Thai context. In Thailand “The West” is in fact always the Thai-ized West.

The pertinence of this appraisal for the task that faces the *Ambiguous Allure of the West* returns us to questions raised over constructions of Thainess by Anderson in 1978: “Ambiguous rubrics like ‘uniquely Thai values’, anachronisms such as [nineteenth-century] ‘Thai nationalism’, and questionable axioms such as ‘The monarchy is essential to the Thai national identity’ encourage us to base our thinking on a wholly imaginary eternal Thai essence.”

The eternity of this “essence” is critiqued through the lens of Siam/Thailand’s interactions with the West from 1850 to the present in the subsequent pages of this work, and with intended heed to Bhabha’s vital warning, entirely pertinent to Thai cultural studies, that “claims to inherent originality or purity of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity” (Bhabha 2004, 55).

Notes

FOREWORD

1. The importance of the royal family in the histories of Thai modernity and modernization comes out very clearly in the essays in this book. But this has been a theme emphasized at least since the 1970s. David Wyatt wrote his essays on King Chulalongkorn “at the height of the Vietnam war controversy in the United States (and Thailand)” when he says “one of the overriding intellectual fashions of the day was a general underestimation of the positive features of the old monarchy” (Wyatt 2005, v). See also Wyatt’s chapter “King Chulalongkorn the Great: Founder of Modern Thailand” (Wyatt 2005, 273–84). This focus is what has led Craig Reynolds (2006, 127) to complain about the prevalence of elitism in Thai history.
2. The credit for the expression “connected histories” goes to Sanjay Subrahmaniam.
3. See, for example, R. C. Majumdar (1927) for sentiments of nationalist-chauvinist historiography. The second volume of Majumdar’s book, concerning Indonesia, was published in two volumes under the title *Suvarnavdipa* (vol. 1 Dhaka: Published by Asoke Kumar Majumdar, 1937; and vol. 2 from Calcutta: Modern Publishing Syndicate, 1938) and was appropriately dedicated to “The Dutch Savants whose labours have unfolded a new and glorious chapter of the History of Ancient Culture and Civilisation of India . . .”.
4. See, for example, Tamara Loos in this volume.
5. Pattana Kitiarsa and Michael Herzfeld provide genealogies of the term *farang* in this book.
6. Pattana here refers to Thongchai’s (2000a) arguments regarding the *farang* being the “Other within” for the Thai modern.
7. See, in particular, the contributions in this volume of Thongchai, Loos, Jackson, and Thanés Wongyannava. Thanés here remarks that Foucault is popular among Thai intellectuals who “consider the Enlightenment project to be part of Western imperialism”.
8. I discuss this point in more detail in my essay, “A Small History of *Subaltern Studies*” (see Chakrabarty 2002).
9. See the discussion in the Introduction to my book *Provincializing Europe* (Chakrabarty 2007 [2000]).
10. See Gyanendra Pandey’s essay on the topic in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988).

11. For an excellent discussion of this point see Andrzej Walicki (1989), especially his discussion of “The Privilege of Backwardness” in chapters 1 and 2.
12. See essays by Shahid Amin (“De-Ghettoising the Histories of the non-West”), Gyan Prakash (“The Location of Scholarship”) and myself (“Globalization, Democracy, and the Evacuation of History?”) in Jackie Assayag and Veronique Benei (2003).
13. See Bhabha’s (1994) chapter “The Commitment to Theory”.

INTRODUCTION

1. Although the introductory chapter to this volume is primarily single-authored it could not have been undertaken or completed without the intellectual input and contributions of Peter Jackson to whom I owe my gratitude as a continued source of inspiration and challenge throughout this project.
2. Ahdaf Soueif, ‘Visions of the Harem’. In *The Guardian*, 5 July 2008, pages 2 and 3.
3. Soueif, ‘Visions’, p. 2. As Michael Herzfeld notes in his chapter here, the terms “West” and “Western” are used in this volume as indication of a historically specific discursive construction rather than either a geographical location or a clearly defined cultural entity.
4. Peter Jackson and I both utilize the term “Siam/Thailand” in this volume to accommodate the country’s change in name in 1939 from Siam to Thailand, directed by the fascist-inspired ethno-nationalist policy-making of the then Prime Minister Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram. The terms “Siam” and “Thailand” are used alone when referring to events and processes specifically associated with the pre-1939 and post-1939 periods, respectively, whereas the compound “Siam/Thailand” refers here to processes that have been continuous across the modern era from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.
5. Thongchai Winichakul confirms Reynolds’ emphasis on the effect of Thai language, identifying it as a significant barrier between local (Thai) knowledge and “universal knowledge” that is mediated by the more “universal” language of English. For Thongchai, the result of this feature is that there is a greater resistance to theory in the field of the humanities in Thailand than in the social sciences. Personal correspondence, August 2008.
6. Email correspondence with the author, 16 July 2008.
7. *The Observer*, 17 May 1992, p. 19.
8. Similarly we seek to undertake this in the subsequent works in Thai Cultural Studies that the broader collaborative project between Peter Jackson and myself has elicited.
9. My own exploration of the interaction with Victorian fiction in the development of early Thai prose fiction from 1900 to 1932 in a forthcoming study, *Roots of Comparison: Thai Literature and the West*, provides a case in point.
10. Projects within the Centre included “Gender and Literature in Cross-Cultural Contexts”, “Tradition and the Modern”, “The Social Context of Literary Production and Consumption”, “The City and Literature”, “Literature and Performance”, “Narrating and Imaging the Nation”, “Translations and Translation Theories East and West”, and “Genre Ideologies and Narrative Transformation”.
11. Personal correspondence, 9 August 2008.
12. A similar pattern is noted in the local reception of contemporary erotic/sexually explicit fiction, for further details of which see Harrison (2000b). Despite the fact that Chonthira concludes her analysis of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* with a pragmatic assurance of her respect and praise for the text, (Chonthira, 1969, 121–2) the award of an M.A. degree on the basis of her thesis provoked considerable debate.

13. See also Soison Sakolrak (2003).
14. On this topic we instead draw attention to the discussions raised by, for example, Scot Barmé (1993), Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (2005), Maurizio Peleggi (2002 and 2007), Craig Reynolds (2002) and William G. Skinner (1957).
15. These comprised the United States, France, Denmark, the Hanseatic Republic, Prussia, the Grand Duchies of Mecklenburg-Scherin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Sweden and Norway, Belgium, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Spain. See Jackson (2004b, 232).
16. I am grateful to Peter Jackson for delineating these arguments and phrasing them here for this section of the introduction.
17. See also Hong (2004, 328). Referred to in Thai as *sapayek* (from the English word “subject”), these extraterritorials included not only European and American nationals but also the subjects of their colonial regimes resident in Siam such as Indians, Burmese, Malays, Chinese from the Straits Settlement, Hong Kong, Macao and Indochina, Vietnamese and subjects of the Dutch East Indies (see Hong 2004, 329). According to Hong, the annexation of Annam by France and of Upper Burma by Britain therefore led to a large increase in the number of foreign subjects in Siam who were exempt from its courts. For a discussion of Siamese suspicion of the *sapayek* as a character in early Thai crime fiction, see Harrison (2010).
18. Loos (2006, 17–8) goes on to note that, “Seventy percent of Siam’s export trade was under British control by the late nineteenth century, and up to 95 percent of the export economy was in the hands of foreigners, if the ethnic Chinese are included among them. In addition, British interests and advisers dominated Siam’s Ministry of Finance, the construction of the southern railway, and other key economic sectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, extraterritoriality provided most foreign nationals, even those who were ‘Asiatics,’ with legal protections similar to those enjoyed by foreign nationals generally in colonized areas.”
19. See Pryor (2005).
20. The term Occidentalism is used by several authors in this volume, most notably Pattana, while others find the expression Westernization more appropriate to their discussions.
21. For a full discussion of the Siamese quest for *siwilai* see in particular Thongchai (2000b).
22. Undertaken between 7 April and 16 December 1897, King Chulalongkorn’s journey encompassed Italy, Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The King undertook a second, private visit to Europe a decade later in 1907. See Peleggi (2002, 26).
23. See Sulak Sivaraksa, “Siam fought off the ‘wolves’ by donning their ‘clothing’”, *The Nation*, 27 April 1998, p. C6.
24. The same image is reproduced on the front cover of Patrick Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995.
25. The use of psychoanalytic concepts is central to Bhabha’s work for the reason that postcolonial criticism is itself a project aiming to analyse the repressed ideas and histories that allowed the West to dominate so much of the world (Huddart 2006, 77).
26. Bhabha refers to Fanon’s most effective contributions as those which hail, “from the uncertain interstices of historical change: from the area of ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality” (Bhabha 1986, ix).
27. The evocative terminology of “cultural capital” and the notion of “pilgrimage” as transferable to the contemporary context are drawn from their chapter in this book.

28. These “sound bites” are drawn from interviews with Bangkokian celebrities featured in a “mockumentary” by amateur filmmaker Alongkot Maiduang on the reception of *Tropical Malady* in Thailand, entitled *Bite the Beast* (2005).
29. I owe this observation of the similarity between Vajiravudh’s expression and the English idiom to Chusak Pattarakulvanit.
30. See also Penny van Esterik (2000, 144–5) for a discussion of the financial implications and rewards for the Thai tourist industry associated with the country’s hosting of the Miss Universe contest in 1992.
31. Nopporn Prachakul, lecture on gender and postcolonialism, Thammasat University, Bangkok, August 2003.
32. Nidhi, *Matchon Daily*, 28 June 1988, page 9. Nidhi’s surname is variously romanized as Aeosrivongse, Aeusriwongse and Eosewong. The first spelling was preferred by Nidhi himself until recently, while the last more closely reflects actual pronunciation. The spellings given in the chapters in this volume depend on how they are rendered in the publications by Nidhi to which they refer. There are also two different ways of spelling the first name in English, either as Nidhi or as Nithi. Both are used in this volume, depending on authorial preference.
33. *Phoey tong phak phroh phlia* (“Exhaustion Demands Rest”), author unknown, *Ban-meuang* newspaper, 25 May 1988, page unknown.
34. A gender-inflected interpretation of this difference points to the male assumption of knowledge/rationality as a strategy of identity formation in clichéd contrast to the limitations of physical embodiment at play in the case of the feminine. Again I owe this observation to discussions with Chusak Pattarakulvanit, April 2008.
35. See *Thai Rath*, 21 August 1988, p. 14. The irony of this is that the action of curtsying (or *thorn sai-bua*) has its origins not in “traditional Thai culture” at all, but as a Victorian British accretion.
36. See Nidhi, “Sucking up. . .”, 1988.
37. Thongchai (1994, 183–4 n. 47) explains that the precise location of Wakor is no longer known. Local informants indicate it to be in Prachuap Khiri Khan province to the south of Bangkok.
38. *Syndromes and a Century* was first screened at the 2006 Venice International Film Festival, soon after which it received numerous accolades, and was voted one of the top five films for the BBC’s World Cinema Award. Despite this, the Thai Board of Censors took exception to *Syndromes*, eventually permitting its limited release in Thailand only following the deletion of six scenes they found offensive on the basis that they harmed the national image. These included images of a Buddhist monk playing a guitar; a doctor kissing his girlfriend, resulting in an erection; doctors drinking alcohol on state hospital premises; a statue of the Prince of Songkhla, the “Father of Thai medicine”; and two monks playing with a remote-control flying saucer. For the limited-release screening of the film in Bangkok in April 2008, Apichatpong replaced the six deleted scenes with silent black frames for the equivalent time of the original scenes, the longest running for seven minutes. For further details see “Cover Story”, *The Daily Express*, 17 March 2008 (Vol 1, no. 13, p.1 and 4); and “The Long Road Home”, *Bangkok Post* (Real Time), 4 April 2008, p. R1.
39. Parallels are to be found in contemporary Indonesia. Quoting the veteran author Mangunwijaya, Hunter points to the pervasiveness in Indonesian identities of “being Indo” in terms of thought and tastes. Mangunwijaya therefore finds it unsurprising that the Indonesian film world has delighted in promoting stars who have an Indo

appearance, instead strengthening his impression that “the Indonesian people are at the most basic level ‘Indonesian’—but with the major stress on the ‘Indo’ part” (Hunter 2002, 110).

40. It is interesting to note in this regard Tapan Raychaudhuri’s characterization, quoted in Chakrabarty (2000, 4), of the modern Bengali educated middle classes “the first Asian social group of any size whose mental world was transformed through its interactions with the West” (see Raychaudhuri 1988, ix).

CHAPTER 1

1. Sections of this chapter appeared previously in the article “Autonomy and Subordination in Thai History: The Case for Semicolonial Analysis” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8 (3) 2007, 329–48.
2. See Alberto Moreiras (1999, 395) for a critique of the Eurocentrism of postcolonial studies.
3. Today Ji Giles Ungphakorn (2003) is one of the few voices for the tradition of Thai Marxist scholarship.
4. Thongchai’s use of Foucauldian approaches in *Siam Mapped* (1994) has been influential in both Thai- and English-language Thai studies. In addition to his own publications, Thanes has nurtured Thai poststructuralist scholarship through his editorship of *Rattasatsan* (Journal of Political Science). While the idiom of Nidhi’s writings relies upon local terminologies, his analyses draw implicitly upon his familiarity with Western critical thought. In contrast to Thongchai’s, Thanes’s, Nidhi’s, and Kanjana’s familiarity with Anglophone critical thought, Nopporn’s studies in France mean that his work has provided an alternative, Francophone route for the entry of poststructuralism to Thai studies.
5. The ethnonym “Thai” is widely rendered as “free” or “independent” in Thai dictionaries and nationalist literature. The term *that* (from Pali/Sanskrit *dasa*) means “slave” or “servant”. Nationalist historians often state that the Thai, by definition being a “free” people, have never been anyone’s slave (*that*).

CHAPTER 2

1. This film is based on a 1993 novel of the same title by Thommayanti, a popular novelist known for her ultra-royalist nationalism. This novel has been adapted into several popular TV drama series and movies. I thank Davisakd and Chanida Puaksom for bringing this film to my attention.
2. I quote the original English subtitles from the film.
3. Thai does not mark singular and plural forms, and the term *farang* is here used to variously denote “The West”, “A Westerner”, “Westerners”, etc.
4. Pratt (1992, 6) uses the expression “contact zone” to describe the locus of colonial encounters and defines it as “the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”.
5. I here follow Wyatt’s (1984) periodization of Siamese/Thai history from the Ayutthaya period to the 1980s.
6. These dates were given by Damrong at a famous speech on the history of Siam’s contact with the West delivered to dignitaries at a dinner of the Rotarian Club in Bangkok in 1929 (The Executive Committee of the Eighth Congress 1930, 29–41). See also the

Thai version of his speech in Damrong (2002, Chapter 10). A portion from his speech also appears in his memoirs (2003). Damrong noted that the first American missionaries came to new capital of Bangkok in 1818.

7. *Luk-thung mor-lam* refers to one of the most popular musical genres in contemporary Thailand. It includes a wide-range of songs and musical performances from the countryside and reflects folk life and musical-cultural voices from rural villages and small towns. The Northeast region—or *Isan*—is widely known for its musical wealth and dynamic contribution to the *luk-thung mor-lam* music industry.
8. Another phenomenon reflecting the intensification of Thai-*farang* intimacy is the popularity of the “*farang wife*” or *mia farang* (see Ratana Tosakul Boonmathya 2005).

CHAPTER 3

1. The author would like to thank the editors and reviewers for their generous feedback. Portions of this article appear in a revised form in Tamara Loos (2006), chapters 1 and 3.
2. The Siamese government created Islamic family courts in Satun in 1917 under different circumstances and thus the province is not analyzed herein.
3. Chakrabarty is aware that advocating an “alternative” modernity distinct from that of Europe might play into the hands of cultural nationalists, but he argues that this polarization is a result of “the pathologies of modernity itself” (Chakrabarty 2002, xvi).
4. But see Andrew Huxley (1990, 224–52). Since the violence that erupted in the south in 2004, scholars have produced probing histories of the relationship between greater Patani and Bangkok since the nineteenth century. See for example James Ockey (2004, 100–9) on Haji Sulong, and Thanet Aphornsuvan (2007).
5. As a result, I rely partially on Somchot Ongsakum’s 1978 study, which utilizes sources from this archive.
6. One of these judges is avidly interested in the history of the Islamic courts in the south. He collects documents about the Islamic court system and teaches young Muslim men about the duties of a *dato*. He graciously lent me his collection, which stemmed almost entirely from Thai government documents rather than Malay language sources.
7. In 1917, Satun was the last of these four provinces to be allowed to establish Islamic family courts.
8. According to one of the judges interviewed, Pattani and Narathiwat see 300 or more cases while Yala and Satun review only around 200 cases. He estimated the number of cases and maintains that no government office collects statistics on the number or types of cases adjudicated annually in the Islamic family court system. I also have been unable to find any government statistics.
9. These are the latest official census figures. *Pramuan khor-mun sathiti thi samkhan khornng prathet thai phor. sor. 2546* (Key Statistics of Thailand 2003), (Bangkok: National Statistical Office, 2003), <http://web.nso.go.th/eng/pub/keystat/key03/Chapter3.xls>, accessed 6 January 2006).
10. For examples in other contexts, see Richard Lariviere (1989, 757–69) and Sally Engle Merry (2000). The colonial ideology that located authenticity in family and religion is largely a product of the nineteenth century and applies to British and Dutch colonial projects, not those of the Spanish.
11. This legal duality is important today because in postcolonial nations the sites of family and religion continue to operate as sources of indigenous cultural authenticity that

- legitimate the postcolonial state, regardless of its politics. See for example Michael Peletz (2002a, 221–58; 2002b).
12. Hong (2004, 327–8) has provided the most sustained discussion of Udom’s book .
 13. For a contextualized analysis of Chit’s impact, see Craig Reynolds (1987).
 14. See Sathian Laiyalak (1908, 4). Similarly, Tej Bunnag (1977) argues that this was the main impetus behind the monumentally transformative provincial administrative reforms that Prince Damrong initiated in the late nineteenth century.
 15. Those who offer the most critical assessments of the institution of the monarchy reside outside Thailand. For a brief discussion of the role that the politics of location plays in Thai studies, see Thongchai (2005).
 16. Parricide rather than regicide is apropos because official discourse has represented Thai monarchs historically as father figures.
 17. Satun was not a part of this region nor was it ethnically Malay so its history is not relevant here. *Patani* hereafter refers to the historical areas encompassed by the present day provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. By contrast, *Pattani* refers to the modern province of Pattani or indicates the view of the area from the perspective of Thai language sources. *Patani* is the Malay spelling, whereas *Pattani* is the romanized spelling of the Thai name for the southern province of the kingdom. On their usage, see Thanet Aphornsuvan, (2004, 1 n2).
 18. For an examination of later acts of resistance see James Ockey (2004) on Haji Sulong, and Thanet Aphornsuvan (2007).
 19. NA MR 5 M.49/27 *Reuang phon-prayote meuang norng-jik lae meuang khaek 7 hua-meuang, phrarachathathalekha r. ha theung krommameun Damrong Rachanuphap* (Regarding the profit of Meuang Norng-J and the seven Malay provinces, royal correspondence from Rama V to Prince Damrong), Confidential correspondence 187/696, 6 March 114/1896. Cited in Somchot (1978, 128).
 20. This is my translation of the quote that I first discovered in Thamsook Numnonda (1966, 200).
 21. NA Rama 5 Microfilm 49/28 *Phra Wijitworasat krap-thun krommameun damrong rachanuphap* (Phra Wijitworasat informs Prince Damrong), copy number 42196, written on 26 Feb. 114 [1896], quoted in Somchot, (1978, 86, 132). Pan’s detailed report filters conditions in the seven Malay states through an imperial lens in which administrative and legal practices are described in ways that locate them as backward, disorderly, unjust, and arbitrary bordering on despotic.
 22. NA MR 5 M 49/27, cited in Somchot (1978, 403).
 23. For additional examples see Loos (2006: chapter three).
 24. From articles nine and five, respectively, in *1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand* (Bangkok: Office of the Council of State, 1997), (emphasis added).
 25. *Bangkok Post*, 21 September 2002, “Bid to End Religious Discord: Senate Vote in Favour of ‘Culture Ministry,’” (Internet edition, www.bangkokpost.com, accessed 1 September 2003).
 26. For example, see *The Nation*, 26 December 2001, “Security Alert After Killings”, (Internet edition, www.nationmultimedia.com, accessed 9 January 2009); Don Pathan, “Same Faces, but Motives have Changed,” *The Nation*, 3 April 2002. (Internet edition, www.nationmultimedia.com, accessed 9 January 2009.)
 27. Don Pathan, “Violence in the South,” *The Nation*, 17 July 2002, (Internet edition, www.nationmultimedia.com, accessed 9 January 2009).
 28. One media outlet, *Islam Online*, regularly draws parallels between the Thai government and colonial regimes. For example, one article compares Thailand’s “annexation” of

- the south to Indonesia's "annexation" of East Timor. Others publicize the grievances of the Pattani United Liberation Organization, one of the separatist organizations that now operate out of Malaysia. See for example, Iqbal Ragataf, "Thailand: Hunting Muslims to Death," 13 February 2000, www.islamonline.net (accessed 3 April 2003).
29. Supalak Ganjanakhundee and Don Pathan, "New face of violence in southern Thailand," *The Nation*, 9 January 2006 (Internet edition, www.nationmultimedia.com, accessed 10 January 2006).
 30. *Hadith* refers to a secondary body of Islamic scripture that describes laws and customs. See Narong Siripachana (1975, 21–37).
 31. See Tejaswini Niranjana (1992, 2) and Lariviere (1989). For an example that is more about representations of the colonized than about translations, see Lata Mani (1987, 119–56).

CHAPTER 4

1. The term 'Mind the Gap' has a distinct and recognizable meaning in British English, derived from its usage on the London Underground network: alighting passengers are warned by a recorded announcement to take care traversing the gap between train and platform.
2. Newspaper report amalgamated from *The Independent* (23 October 2006) and Caroline Wyatt reporting for the BBC News, Paris, on the same date. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6197921.stm> (accessed 19 December 2008).
3. Several non-Thai viewers of this film have observed its similarity to the 2001 movie *Sweet November* (dir. Pat O'Connor), set in San Francisco and which enjoyed some popularity when released in Thailand. Parallels exist in terms of the bittersweet romantic thrust of both narratives, their tragedy hinging on the ill health of the heroine and the capacity of love to transform the personalities of the key protagonists. It is debatable whether Yuthlert knowingly attempted to re-create elements of this film, or its original 1968 version, or was directly influenced by either. Further parallels may also be suggested with *The Mothman Prophecies* (dir. Mark Pellington, 2002) in which a woman dying of a brain tumour draws pictures in her notebook which are strikingly similar to those produced by I.

CHAPTER 5

1. This is a revised version of our article "Blissfully whose? Jungle pleasures, ultra-modernist cinema and the cosmopolitan Thai auteur", in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 4 (1), 2006, pp. 37–54. We would like to thank Rachel Harrison, Peter Jackson, Ben Anderson, Laura Mulvey and Travis Miles for provoking further thoughts on Apichatpong.
2. Suthep Khlamnakorn. "'Sat pralat' lae 'Phan X'" (Tropical Malady and Generation X). *Khao Sod*, 1 July 2004 (www.matichon.co.th/khaosod/ Accessed 19 July 2004).
3. Rungmanee Meksophon. "'Gay' kap 'Phi li-lap'" ("Gays" and "Mysterious Ghosts"). *Manager Online* (29 June 2004, www.manager.co.th/Entertainment, accessed 19 July 2004).
4. *Nang:Thai*. 'Khui kap Apichatpong Weerasethakul' (A Conversation with Apichatpong Weerasethakul). 2 (6) (July–September 1999): 30–31.
5. Stone, Tammy. 'Blissfully in demand'. *The Nation*, 22 September 2002, (www.nationmultimedia.com, accessed 22 April 2003).

6. *Nang:Thai*. ‘Khui kap Apichatpong Weerasethakul’ (A Conversation with Apichatpong Weerasethakul), 31.
7. Siwaporn Pongsuwan. ‘Apichatpong Weerasethakul “khon tham nang Thai nork rabop”’ (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, an Alternative Thai Filmmaker). *Cinemas* 6 (141) (January 2000): 97–99.
8. Stone. ‘Blissfully in demand’.
9. Siwaporn. ‘Apichatpong Weerasethakul “khon tham nang Thai nork rabop”’ (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, an Alternative Thai Filmmaker), 97–8.
10. The surrealist technique of exquisite corpse was based on an old parlour game in which each player would write a word or phrase on a piece of paper, and then fold the paper to conceal what had been written before passing it on to the next player for their contribution. For the surrealists the resulting collage of words was regarded as a representation of the group’s collective unconscious.
11. This is taken from an interview with Apichatpong in the US DVD release of *Mysterious Object at Noon* (pFlexifilm 2003).
12. Fulvi, Giovanna. No title. *Toronto International Film Festival* programme (5–14 September 2002): 112.
13. Rayns, Tony. No title. *Regus London Film Festival* programme (6–21 November 2002): 56.
14. Jeerawat Na Thalang. ‘Blissfully Received’. *The Nation*, 28 May 2002, (www.nationmultimedia.com, accessed 22 April 2003)
15. *Bioscope*. “‘Sat pralat’ buk Cannes’ (*Tropical Malady* Invades Cannes). 30 (May 2004): 14.
16. This article was written in the summer of 2004 prior to an eruption of the conservatives’ hostility against Apichatpong in Thailand. (In other words, before it became public knowledge that Apichatpong and his collaborators had been in serious dispute with the dominant film production and distribution company there over *Blissfully Yours* and *Tropical Malady*; and of course before the controversial censoring of *Syndromes and a Century* in his motherland in 2007.) In the light of these subsequent events, the speculation with which we ended this article has—gratifying to say—proven to be wide of the mark. We could not have foreseen then that another royalist military coup would be just around the corner in September 2006. One of the consequences of the fascist drift since September 2006 is that the burden of dissidence now falls hard, and seemingly suddenly, on the generation to which Apichatpong and one half of this writing partnership belongs. In hindsight, the generational experience which this article tries to delineate reads like the struggle of one bourgeois daughter to understand what it is like to rebel in the treacherously conservative landscape of a globalizing society. We began writing this article out of a fascination with Apichatpong’s work and the way that it is discussed internationally. Little could we have known then that the process of thinking and writing about this would so fundamentally change what we hold to be of value about cinema.

CHAPTER 6

1. For an account of Buddhadasa’s ideas see Jackson (2003d).
2. Similar views can be found in several of Thammapidok’s previous writings, such as Thammapidok (1987). One can learn more about *Phra* Thammapidok from the views of his critical admirer *Phra* Paisal Wisalo (1999).

3. For discussions on the bifurcation trend in this book and in nineteenth-century Siam in general see C. Reynolds (1976).
4. In Thai “*Latthi phram*”. The use of the word *latthi*, from Pali *laddhi* (lit. faith, belief) marks an inferior belief to Buddhism or a cult that emerged in the nineteenth century. (My thanks to my student Sarah Calhoun for this observation.) The idea that “Brahmanism” is a contamination of Thai Buddhism has become conventional since this time. Both issues are, however, beyond the scope of this article.
5. Heinz Bechert (1991) calls this “Buddhist Modernism”. For Sri Lanka see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988, 4–15, 202–40), in which new Buddhism since the nineteenth century is referred to as “Protestant Buddhism”; for Burma see Bechert (1991) and Sankisyanz (1965).
6. For references to the imaginary, and often false, ideas of Europe as a mere construct that reflected what it meant to be Thai in the late nineteenth century, see Thongchai (2000b, 537–40). In his study of the Western Apache people’s perceptions of White men, Keith Basso (1979, 4–5) makes observations that are highly pertinent to understanding the relations between “the West” and the Self in the Thai spiritual/worldly bifurcation,

[I]t should not be assumed that the content of symbol [the Whiteman] is everywhere the same. To the contrary, . . . “the Whiteman” comes in different versions. This diversity arises from the fact that models of “the Whiteman” are consistently formulated in relation to corresponding models of “the Indian”. More precisely, it appears to be the case that in all Indian cultures “the Whiteman” serves as a conspicuous vehicle for conceptions that define and characterize what “the Indian” is not. And because conceptions of what “the Indian” is vary markedly . . . , conceptions of “the Whiteman” vary as well. In other words, whereas the opposition “Indian” versus “Whitemen” is fixed and culturally general, the manner in which this opposition is interpreted is mutable and culturally specific.

Perhaps the various definitions of Orientalism by Edward Said, as a style of knowledge, as social institutions, and as imaginary geography, are also applicable to the West in this bifurcation. However, exploring this issue is beyond the scope of this article.

7. Abundant literature representing this view was published after the 1997 crisis. The Thailand Research Fund (TRF), one of the most powerful research funding agencies in the country, provided funds for the publication of a series by Withithat [Vision Project] that propagated these ideas. The two series in this project, the Globalization Series and the Local Knowledge Series, advocate Thai local knowledge as a way to fight the threat of globalization. For an extensive discussion of books in this project and of Thai/local intellect see Craig Reynolds (2001) and (1998, 134–41).
8. In response to the 1997 economic crisis, King Bhumiphol put forward his ideas of a “Sufficiency Economy” (SE) as a guide for Thailand to cope in the short term with the crisis and in the long term with global capitalism. SE ideas have been strongly promoted in the country since the September 2006 coup in order to contrast the coup regime with the ousted elected government of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, which was depicted as supporting the unfettered agency of global capitalism. SE is, however, somewhat vaguely formulated and subject to various interpretations. While it does not oppose capitalism, it is clearly morally based on economic ideas that address the perils of consumerism and capitalism. For further details see the website of the Chaipattana Foundation, under the patronage of the king, (www.chaipat.or.th/chaipat/journal/)

[dec00/eng/e_economy.html](#)). For critics of the SE proposition as a form of neo-liberal economy for Thailand see Glassman (2008) and Bell (2008).

9. While Nidhi points out the tension between constitutional traditions in Thailand and the West, a very similar explanation can be found among the advocates of the Thai cultural constitution, typically royalist conservatives such as M.R. Thongnoi Thongyai (1990, 155), who argues that a written constitution is merely lifeless paper, while the stable and permanent feature of Thai society is the monarchy. The monarchy should therefore be regarded as the foundation and pillar of Thai society, as the constitution is to the US.
10. Part Two is based on an earlier article presented at the conference on “Asian Identities in the Age of Globalization”, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan, December 7–8, 2003, with substantive revisions.
11. The full title of the series is “*Khvam-ru buranakan lae thort-reu khvam-khit tawan-tok-niyom*” (Holistic knowledge and deconstructing Westernist ideas)
12. For example, in Thirayuth (2003c, 22-8) he discusses the reason why Western ideas are also deeply rooted in the thinking of the non-Western elites. Reasons #1–4 are relevant to the question he himself raises, while #5–12 are less relevant or irrelevant. The author seems to get lost in his own argumentative maze. Similar confusion also occurs in Thirayuth (2003a, 36–40).
13. See *Matichon* (daily newspaper), 10 April 2003; *Nechan Sutsapda* (The Nation Weekend), 12 (569) (28 April-4 May 2003); *Khao Sod* (daily newspaper), 13 September 2003; *The Nation* (daily newspaper in English), 15 April 2003, with further discussions on 18 April, 24 April and 19 May 2003. A discussion by Michael Wright appears in *Matichon Sutsapda* (Matichon Weekend) 30 May 2003 and 4 July 2003, and a few other issues in the same year.
14. The Council was chaired by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun. The full text of Thirayuth’s speech was published in *Matichon Sutsapda*, 19 September 2003.
15. The award is the Chukiat Uthakaphan Prize, a recent but prestigious book prize for academic publications, named after a respected publisher. The committee for the award comprises several top national scholars.
16. An elaboration of this ideological tendency is to be found in Anonymous (1990). The term in English was first used by Sulak Sivaraksa, a prominent intellectual leader of this tendency, to describe his own ideas. No Thai translation is provided. The ideas can be found in innumerable publications by activist groups and Thai intelligentsia. Again, Sulak is probably the best lens through which to understand the whole tendency (Swearer 1991).
17. Thirayuth Boonmi, “A late reply to my two critics,” *The Nation*, 19 May 2003. His appreciation of Western arts is obvious in the series, especially Thirayuth (2003b and c).
18. Popular nationalism is never an elaborated ideology. It is simply an anti-elitist or bourgeois nationalism. A representative of this view of elitist/bourgeois versus popular nationalisms is Nidhi (1995c), especially the last article in this book, *Chat-niyom nai khabuankan prachathipatai* (Nationalism in the democratic movement) (Nidhi 1995c, 172–194).
19. Benedict Anderson (1978) breaks the taboo by asking this question.
20. One of the long-term consequences of this situation is the huge gap between Thai studies in Thai (mostly in Thailand) and in foreign languages (mostly outside Thailand). I discussed this problem briefly in a conference presentation, “Thai studies in different worlds”, Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Chicago Il., 31 March – 1 April 2005.

21. Apart from the transformation in the nineteenth century, as mentioned earlier major Thai Buddhist thinkers in recent history are also influenced by non-Thai ideas. The most important twentieth-century rationalizer of Buddhist doctrine, the renowned scholar-monk Buddhadasa, for example, has been influenced by Western and Japanese ideas (see Jackson 2003d).
22. Buddhist scholars in Thailand have not fully recognized that currently existing Buddhism is a rationalized product of the encounter with the West in the nineteenth century. An important recognition of this history is provided in *Phra Paisal Wisalo* (2003). Paisal, nevertheless, sees this rationalization as part of the origin of the current crisis of Thai Buddhism.

CHAPTER 7

1. This chapter is a shortened version of the paper “Postmodernization as the Anglo-Americanization of Contemporary French Thought and the Re-Modernization of Postmodern Thai Studies: A Historical Trajectory of Thai Intellectuals” presented at the International Conference on Postmodernity and Thai Studies, 13–14 December, 2003, convened by the Suranaree University of Technology at the Surasammanakan Convention Centre, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. I would like to thank Farung Srikhaw, Patrick Jory, Sutharin Koonphol, Kamolthip Changkamol and Jeeraphol Ketchumphol for their assistance and helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
2. For a history of political economy in Thailand see Naphaphorn (1988) and C.Reynolds and Hong (1983).
3. For Thai examples see Suntharee Asawai (1985) and Kanjana Kaewthep (1987). For an English language example see Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe (1984).
4. See Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (1991); Andrew Barry, Nikolos Rose and Thomas Osborne (1996); Mitchell Dean (1999).
5. See Davisakd Puaksom (2000), Thanee Wongyannava (2003), Shigeharu Tanabe (forthcoming), Pundit Chanrochanakit (2006, 93–123) .
6. Madness was quite an unusual topic for the Thai social sciences at the time. See Sukdina Chatkul Na Ayudhaya (1988) and Somkiat Wanthana (1988).
7. Ananya Puchongkakul (1990, 307).
8. Michel Foucault, “Wa-duay kan-pok-khroong” (Governmentality), *Julasan Thai khadi* (Petit-Journal of Thai Khadi Research Institute), 4 (2) (December, 1986) 96–103.
9. Michel Foucault, “Wa-duay kan-pok-khroong” (Governmentality), *Warasan sangkhomsat*, 30 (3) (1996) 114–20.
10. Michel Foucault, “Satja kap amnat” translated by Somkiat Wantana, *Warasan sethasat kan-meuang* (Journal of Political Economy), 6 (3–4) (1988) 133–60.
11. Roland Barthes, *Mayakhati* (Mythologies), translated from the French by Wanpimol Ungkasan. Bangkok: Khopfai, 2001.
12. Michel Foucault, *Rangkai tai bongkan* (The Docile Body), translated by Thongkorn Pokenadham with an introduction by Nopporn Prachakul. Bangkok: Khopfai, 2004.
13. Monique Plaza, “*Khwaam sia-hai khong rao lae kan-hotchai khong phuak-khao kan-khomkheun: jettana thi ja mai ru khong Michel Foucault*”, translated by Thanee Wongyannava from “*Our Damages and Their Compensations, Rape: The Will not to Know of Michel Foucault*”, *Ratthasatsan*, 12–13 (1986–1987), 146–65.
14. Hubert Dreyfus admitted to Habermas that his aim is to undermine Western society. See Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus (1991, 111).

15. Malee Chantharothorn (1993, 52) is another person who has taken a critical perspective on Foucault's work.
16. For hybridity see Néstor García Canclini (1995) and the afterword to this volume.
17. For the politics of area studies in Asia see Harry Harootunian (2000).

CHAPTER 8

1. I wish to thank Henry Delcore, Rachel Harrison, Peter Jackson, Maurizio Peleggi and Saipin Suputtamongkol for their insights and criticisms.
2. See especially the excellent account of McDonald's in East Asia edited by Watson (2005, 1–38), who lays out the weaknesses of such assumptions and offers an alternative, ethnographically grounded strategy for addressing the meanings of such items for local populations. In this essay I use the terms “West” and “Western” to indicate a historically specific discursive construction rather than either a geographical location or a clearly defined cultural entity.
3. *Farang* is cognate with “Frank” (a Germanic people), “France” and the modern Greek derivative *frangos*, meaning blond-haired northern European (already seen in medieval times as geopolitically dominant). The term arrived in Siam via Arabic- and Farsi-speaking traders (Farsi: *farangi*). See also Pattana in this volume.
4. Woranuch, (2002) adopting my model following a presentation by Thongchai Winichakul, has adopted the Thai translation *ananikhom amphrang*.
5. Loos (2006, 68–9) offers a fascinating account of the term *itsaraphap*, usually translated as “freedom” or “independence”, as contextually dependent on the position of the person described in the *sakdina* hierarchy; subordinates possessing this quality were “not . . . subject to the power of a superior” (Loos 2006, 68) but this did not diminish the lowliness of their status. Such a concept of conditional and relative freedom perhaps partially explains the Thais' agile adaptation to the ambiguities of the crypto-colonial situation.
6. Parts of Greece — e.g. the Ionian Islands — were incorporated into the British Empire which, like its French counterpart, also gobbled up parts of Siam even while continuing to treat what was left of the country with guarded condescension. Western comments to the effect that the Greeks were tawdry remnants of their glorious ancestors match the exaggerated respect accorded to the “semi-civilized” representatives of the Siamese monarchy; both attitudes reflect the prevailing functionalism that undergirded not only imperial power but also its dealing with those who provided a buffer between colonial possessions and the as yet unconquered world beyond.
7. The marginality of modern Greece underscores the symbolic geographies established by European colonialism. The combination of Greece's modern marginality with its attributed ancient role in the genesis of Western civilization furnishes a useful dislocation of received wisdom for scholars wishing to analyze the dynamics of Western dominance in Asia, as one astute Thai social critic has at least cursorily noted (Thirayuth 2003e, 94).
8. Maurizio Peleggi has nevertheless reminded me (personal communication) that Chulalongkorn himself, despite his often cited admiration for things Western, also favoured polygamy and endogamy, these being superseded only with the emergence of a more secure and independent bourgeoisie in the 1920s and then as a matter of law rather than practice (see for example Barmé 2002; Loos 2006). To speak of bourgeois culture as I have done here may in fact be too conflatory, but Peleggi's point serves

my argument well; Thai society was quite selective in what it took from which parts of an ill-defined “West” and did not always interpret those cultural borrowings in ways that a Westerner might have predicted. Although the gradual consolidation of the nation-state also demanded greater semantic transparency, even this could serve as an effective disguise for acts and attitudes that owed nothing to foreign influence. Cultural agency does not always declare its means or ends.

9. Perhaps even Foucault, usefully cited by Jackson (2004a) and Morris (2000), fell part-way into the ironically Cartesian trap of exalting “the West” as uniquely and invariantly concerned with material truth, and consequently missed the relationship — which Jackson does capture when he relates the concern with images to the response to international political pressure — between power inequalities and stereotypical attributions of profundity and superficiality. The point is not to deny that Thais (and Greeks) are concerned with images (see Morris 2000, 47–8), but — as again Jackson acknowledges — to ask why, and with what implications, Westerners should find this so different from their own attitudes.
10. Jackson cites the term *riap-roi* (to be neat, tidy, well-behaved); the term *mi rabiap* (to be orderly, self-disciplined) may represent less of a response to external pressure, but in any case it is the very vagueness and complexity of the origins of such concepts that permits their ideological manipulation.
11. Compare the popular invocation of an Ottoman underlay as the “explanation” of perceived weaknesses in the practices of the Greek national bureaucracy, which was imposed, in the early years of independence, by imported advisers to the Bavarian first king of Greece, Otho. These self-orientalizing excuses for malfunction are what I have called “secular theodicy” in the operation of nation-states (Herzfeld 1992, 5–6), and represent a defensive response to the global hierarchy of value in both Thailand and Greece.
12. In Europe, ironically, the term sometimes connoted hegemony rather than liberation, as in Gramsci’s work; see Hann (1996, 5).
13. See also Hinton (1992), on Thai meetings as ritual.
14. The alleged prudishness of southern European peasants may similarly be more a product of crypto-colonial dynamics than of endemic aversion to sexual explicitness; see Herzfeld (1987, 11).
15. This pattern may be of Hindu origin. In India, the European bidet increasingly signals the local use of a Western instrument of modernity in conjunction with a bodily symbolism that remains Indian, being contrasted with what to many Indians is the disgusting use of paper to remove faeces from the body (Krina Patel, personal communication, 2006).
16. They also reflect the hierarchy of what Fabian (1983) calls “allochronism” — relegation to a past and more primitive time. On the relationship between the body personal and the body politic in the Greek context, see Herzfeld (2004).
17. See also Jackson (2005) on the convergence of Thai aesthetics with Western norms.
18. Values themselves change; yesterday’s morality may be today’s repression, yielding changes in the surface definition of cultural intimacy even at the local level (see especially Maddox [2004, 149–51] on Spain). Those wielding power must adapt accordingly or risk losing their legitimacy. Gentrification, for example, presupposes that people will value living in “historic” houses — something that has happened in northern Europe and Italy, for example, but which is just beginning to take hold in Greece and is virtually absent from Thailand — where modernity still entails a rejection of anything that seems cramped or disorderly.

19. There are many lively discussions of what Jackson (2004a) calls the “regime of images” in Thai society; see also Morris (2000, 2004). I am not persuaded that Thais are *actually* more concerned with images than are, for example, Americans or Australians; but I do suspect that they are more apt to stereotype themselves that way — their self-description as “insincere” (*ti sorng na*, literally “two-faced”), for example, may actually be a pragmatic adaptation to crypto-colonial realities through the ironic adoption of perceived *farang* views of the Thais.
20. Some of the NGO slum clearance schemes are themselves inclined to house forms that represent new departures for the residents. Partly this is a matter of practicality, but the social allure of Western-derived suburban models is considerable.
21. Here there is a striking parallel with the invention of a category of “folk religion”, which, as Stewart (1989) has argued for Greece, is a hegemonic device serving the exaltation of ecclesiastical authority over local belief. If Thai officials uphold the modernist notion of rational government as inherently superior to indigenous models, their attitude reflects both the success of crypto-colonial penetration and the importance for their own claims to legitimacy of obscuring any possible affinity between bureaucratic authority and feudal power.
22. See also Jackson (2004b) for a very similar argument.
23. See Somsak Jiemthirasakul (*Prathet thai mai chai ruam leuat neua chat cheua thai: chat-niyom khana ratsadorn thotsawat 2480 kap panha phak-tai*), *Matichon*, 24 June 2004: 7. A royalist attempt to revive the name of Siam appears to have had a more celebratory intention; see the report in *Bangkok Post*, 13 May 2005.
24. This literature itself merits a careful analysis for its role in calibrating Thai business to foreign values and power structures.
25. Mulder (1996) recognized an empirically observable issue, but underestimated the significance of Thais’ own perceptions of it. His analysis forms part of a larger attempt to explain “Thai culture”, an essentialist conceptual formulation that itself sits uncomfortably with any open-ended model of what he would call “substantive” rather than “procedural” democratic participation.
26. The former Thaksin government planned to use both this space and part of the commercial area alongside the new version of Rajdamnoen avenue to showcase its “one *tambon*, one product” (OTOP) policy. The ironies hardly need spelling out.

AFTERWORD

1. Sections of this chapter appeared previously in the article “Thai Semicolonial Hybridities: Bhabha and García Canclini in Dialogue on Power and Cultural Blending”, *Asian Studies Review*, June 2008, 32 (2), 147–70.
2. Here I consider only García Canclini’s earlier work. The somewhat different positions presented in more recent publications (e.g. García Canclini 2001) are not dealt with here.
3. While not engaging each other directly, there are parallels between García Canclini and Bhabha’s respective accounts. Both authors draw on similar conceptual metaphors, including notions of multiple temporalities of modernity. For García Canclini, the contemporary period is marked by a multitemporal heterogeneity of the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern, and he defines Latin American postmodernity, “not as a stage or tendency that replaces the modern world, but rather as a way of problematizing the equivocal links that the latter has formed with the traditions it tried to exclude or overcome in constituting itself” (García Canclini 1995, 9). This is an implicitly

psychoanalytic model that defines postmodernity as the return of premodern traditions that modernizing regimes repressed in the attempt to establish their own modernity. As noted above, Bhabha also draws upon psychoanalytic notions of the return of the repressed in his account of hybridity.

4. Suradech Chotiudompant (2008) provides an example of parallels between Thai and Latin American cultural engagements with the contemporary West, arguing that in both societies the literary genre of magical realism can be read as a response to globalization.
5. Kraidy also notes, “In the United States, the ideology of the melting pot was adopted as a nation-building strategy used to integrate ethnic difference” (Kraidy 2005, 52–3). To this one could add contemporary discourses of multiculturalism in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Britain, and elsewhere.
6. When he visited Bangkok in 1855 to negotiate with King Mongkut (r. 1851–1868) on behalf of Britain, Sir John Bowring, “saw portraits of the pope, Queen Victoria, the U.S. president, and the Chinese emperor on display in the Grand Palace’s audience hall” (Peleggi 2002, 47). This combination of images reflected an historical moment when the old power of China and the new power of the West overlapped in the imagination of Siam’s then ruler.
7. Thongchai observes that the spelling *sriwilai* tended to be used “only in stylish prose, poetry . . . and proper names such as Princess Sriwilailak, a daughter of King Chulalongkorn, and a famous Thai actor of the 1970s, Krung Sriwilai” (Thongchai 2000b, 530 n. 1). Sriwilailak literally means “possessing the characteristics of *sriwilai*”, while the stage name Krung Sriwilai means “the city of *sriwilai*”. Thongchai also notes (personal correspondence) that the spelling of the term was highly variable when it was first coined in the nineteenth century and was only standardized in the twentieth century.

Index

- A
- Adaptation 5, 15, 63, 203; *see also*
Reinterpretation; Reinvention
cultural 183
- Adoption, cultural 3, 5, 14
of Western forms 16, 68, 106, 173,
176-178
- Aesthetics 149, 179, 181, 183
and crypto-colonial hierarchy 185
and *sivilai* 200
female aesthetic appeal 27-29, 31-34,
97, 116
in filmmaking of Apichatpong
Weerasethakul 121, 123, 124, 126-
128, 132
Thai literary aesthetics 8
Western aesthetics 198
- Agency 74, 130, 174, 186
in construction of *farang* 60
in crypto-colonialism 178
in cultural borrowing 45, 14, 16, 148,
189
in engagement with the West 50, 116
in postcolonial analysis 38, 199
in *sivilai* 199
- Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat, *Mom Chao* 33,
34, 69, 99-103
- Alavi, Hamza 46, 48, 50
- Allure
and ambiguity 2, 6, 51, 135
and identity 31, 109, 118
of Thai-*farang* mixed race (*luk-
khreung*) 73
of the *farang* 61, 70, 72-74
of the West 2-14, 20-27, 118, 184, 205
- Alternative culture 120, 124, 126
- Alternative film culture 119, 123, 132-133
and Apichatpong Weerasethakul 121
- Alternative history 113
- Althusser, Louis 159, 160, 162
- Ambassadors to France, 1686
96-98; *see also* Kosa Pan
- Ambiguity xvi, 1-3, 31-37, 46, 117-118
and duality 51
and *farang* 71, 74
and gender 27
and identity formation 35, 107
and Otherness 30
and Thainess 107, 109, 112, 181
and the West 21
of Thai semicolonialism 51-54
of Western power 39
in Thai studies 37, 49, 51
Siamese/Thai ambiguity 50
- Ambivalence 3, 22, 26, 51, 52, 67, 203;
see also Ambiguity
and *farang* 67, 203
in postcolonial analysis 38, 54, 199
- Amporn Jirattikorn 96, 118
- Ananda Everingham 32
- Ananya Puchongkakul 163
on discourse 166
- Anderson, Benedict 7, 14, 40, 45, 123
and comparative theory 3, 42
and critique of master narratives 9, 11-13,
36, 79, 80
and semicolonialism 46, 49
- Anderson, Perry 120, 125, 128, 158
- Anglo-French agreement, 1896 18, 83
- Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention, 1897

- Anti-colonial nationalism xv
 Anti-colonialism xii, 79
 Anti-*farang* 67, 69-70, 73
 Anti-globalization (*tor-tan lokaphiwat*)
 144, 150
 Anti-Westernism 59, 73, 144, 145, 148; *see also* Anti-*farang*
 Anti-Western discourse 149, 203
 Anti-Western sentiment 111, 201
 Anxiety
 and miscegenation 33, 34
 and modernity 60, 150
 and the West 105, 109, 117-118, 150-151, 200
 cultural 96, 120, 121, 203
 foreign 179
 in Thai studies 48
 Siamese anxiety 19
 Anxiety of influence 26, 182
 Apasara Hongsakula 27, 28
 Apichatpong Weerasethakul 23, 27, 31, 125, 203
 alternative strategies of 123
 and American avant-garde 122
 and Thai culture industry 133
 as key alternative figure 132
 background of 119-121
 discovery of 126-128
 influences on 121
 local reception of 119
 Appropriation 4, 22, 35, 122, 133; *see also*
 Adoption; Cultural borrowing
 cultural 16, 73, 176, 190, 193
 literary 5
 of Foucault 161
 of Otherness 204
 of Western influence 138, 180, 191
 Architecture 16, 180-182, 185, 196
 Area studies, Asian 40, 42, 43
 Area studies, Thai 6, 169, 170; *see also* Thai studies
 AsiaPacifiQueer project 40
 Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) 158
 Assimilation (*kleun-klai*) 88, 192-194, 197
 and Thai "spiritual core" 15, 35, 201
 by subalterns 201
 of *farang* culture 2, 31
 of the foreign 15, 182, 193
 of Western political culture 15
 Attire 19, 24, 25, 196; *see also* Clothing; Dress; Fashion
 Authoritarianism, political 158, 175, 176, 183, 186
 Auteur 119, 133
 Auto-colonialism 4, 41, 44, 45
 Autonomy 50-53, 148, 188, 197, 204
 and alternative cultural production 120, 125
 of Thai elite 202
 Malay autonomy 83
 Siamese autonomy 10, 80, 81, 194, 195
 Thai cultural autonomy 183, 203
 Avant-garde, in cinema 23, 31, 120-128, 133
 Ayutthaya 67, 195
 anti-foreign movement 63, 98
 ambassadors to France 96-98
 Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) 60-64, 71
 Burmese sack of 11, 111
 foreigners in 62
 B
 Bachelard, Gaston 160
 Baker, Chris 52-3
 and Pasuk Phongpaichit 13, 18, 65
Bang Rajan (The Legend of the Village Warriors of Bang Rajan) 11, 96, 110-111, 112, 117
 Bang Rajan, the village of 12, 110
 Bangkok 45, 75, 99, 109, 113, 119, 181
 and cultural condescension 120-121
 and Malay Muslims 77, 79-85, 88-91
 and nouveau riche kitsch 125
 and power 45, 123, 131
 as Thai cultural centre 126, 180
 celebrities 23, 73
 era (1782- present) 59, 63-64
 high society 69
 middle classes 69, 140, 175, 200
 ruling elite 13, 14, 15, 25, 68, 101, 188, 198, 201; *see also* Elite rule
 Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) 178
 Barmé, Scot 200-201
 Barthes, Roland 6, 161, 162
 Thai translation of 164

- Barton, Thomas 46
- Baudrillard, Jean 4, 156, 162
- Bazin, André 122
- Beauty contests 27, 30, 31, 72
and politics 29
- Belatedness x,
in historiography xi
- Bell, Peter 45
- Bengal 35, 137, 138
- Bhabha, Homi 1-4, 6, 7, 55, 202
and "authenticity" 31
and cultural purity 36
and interstitial space 20, 22
and mimicry 26, 27, 199
and Otherness, cultural, 6
and postcolonial hybridity 51, 54, 188-191, 198, 204
- Bhumiphol Adulyadej, King 80
- Bifurcation 35, 52, 143, 144; *see also*
Binaries; Dualism
spiritual/worldly 136, 137-142
as intellectual strategy 51, 52, 139, 197
- Binaries 40, 48, 176; *see also* Binary
opposition, Dualism
and bifurcation 139
displacement of 3, 21, 49
limitations of 20, 22, 35, 75, 142, 182, 189
- Binary opposition 2, 20-21, 49, 75
- Blissfully Yours (Sut sanaha)* 119, 124, 126-127
liminality of 128-131
naturalism in 122
and rural tropes 132
and transgression 133
and Thainess 125
- Body politic 180
- Botan 72
- Bourgeois culture 125, 133, 140, 175, 178-180, 185
producer of 120
- Bourgeois heritage cinema 94-96, 119, 125
- Bourgeois morality 123, 133
- Bowie, Katherine 131-132
- Bowring Treaty 9, 10, 12, 65, 98, 184, 195
- Bowring, Sir John 29, 78, 113
- Bradley, Dr Dan Beach 30, 113
- Braginsky, Vladimir 7, 42
- Britain 16, 45, 69, 195
and France 10, 12, 82, 83, 114, 194
in Malay states 50, 83-84
Thai comparison with 75
Thai competition with 50
Thai relationship with 10, 13, 83, 84, 98
Victorian Britain 27
- British Burma 85, 151
- British culture 16
- Buddhadasa *Bhikkhu* 136
- Buddhism 70, 89, 90, 138, 182
and ambassadors to US 136
and conversion to Christianity 63
and lay thinkers 141
and modernity 86-88
and Mongkut 30, 65
and morality 67, 146, 175, 176, 184
and reforms 137, 139
and state power 76, 89, 90, 202
and Thai autonomy 203
and Thainess 176, 179
and transculturation 149
and urban order 177
in Malay states 78, 79, 87
in opposition to *farang* 70
- Buppha Rahtree (Rahtree, Flower of the Night)* 108
- Burma 45, 65, 131, 135, 142; *see also*
British Burma, Lower Burma
- Burmese 62, 64, 129
as archetypal enemy 111, 112, 130
invasion of Ayutthaya 11, 12, 110, 111, 117
language 131
military government 142
- Burney Treaty, 1826 65, 83, 98
- Buruma, Ian 16
- C
- Capitalism 46, 78, 145
and culture 127
and the Thai state 140
global 132, 141, 150
- Carnoy, Martin 159
- Centralization 13, 17
and Malay Muslims 77, 81-83, 85, 86

- Chai-anan Samudavanija 70, 158, 159
 Chairat Charoensin-o-larn 165-170
 Chaiwat Satha-Anand 78, 162, 164, 167-170
 Chaiyan Rajchagool 12, 38, 46-52
 Chakrabarty, Dipesh 1-5, 21, 76
 Chakrabongse Bhuvanath, Prince 33
 Chakri dynasty 12, 45, 52, 64, 175
 Chamaree Pitukvong 158
Chao mai mi san (Lords without Palaces, Spirits without Shrines) 102
 Chatrichalerm Yukhol 96, 119
 Chatterjee, Partha 35, 137-138, 189
 on the governed xvi
 Chatthip Nartsupha 12, 80, 114, 140, 158
 Chen Xiaomei 67
 Chetana Nagavajara 47-49, 165, 170
 Chiangmai 45, 181
 China 37, 43, 65, 80; *see also* Sinicization;
 Sino-Thai
 and bifurcation 141
 and cultural impact 138
 as cultural Other 10, 58, 71, 103, 139;
 see also Jek
 luxury goods 194, 195, 196
 merchants of 68
 Occidentalism of 67
 stereotypes of 175
 Chinawut Indracusin 32
 Chit Phumisak *see* Jit Phumisak
 Chonthira Satayawatthana 8
 Christianity 30, 78, 86, 137, 139
 and missionaries in Ayutthaya 63
 Chuay Phunphoem 99
 Chulalongkorn, King 11, 33, 45, 69, 185;
 see also Rama V, King
 and Buddhism 86, 87
 and Malay Muslim states 76, 81, 83-88
 as state protector 86
 European tour 18, 23-25
 Java tour 68
 legal reforms 59, 80
 quest for *siwilai* 26, 66, 67, 180
 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 9, 44, 156, 167
 Civilized 58, 69, 102, 174, 182; *see also*
 Siwilai
 Civilizing discourse 85, 88
 Clammer, John 48
 Clothing 181; *see also* Attire; Dress;
 Fashion
 Coedès, George 15, 42, 192
 Colonialism 8, 11, 22, 67, 75, 150-151;
 see also Semicolonialism; Auto-
 colonialism; Crypto-colonialism;
 Postcolonialism
 and bifurcation 139
 and knowledge 137
 and mimicry 26, 155
 and Siamese independence 111-113,
 146, 149, 173, 175
 British 75-76, 82-86, 154
 European 79, 169, 183
 French 113, 154
 in cinema 112, 113
 in southern Thailand 14, 88-90
 in Thai historiography 38
 Siamese 10, 13, 14, 58, 78-86
 Siam's relationship to 9, 12, 15, 26, 35
 Commodification 2, 124, 125, 127, 133
 Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) 43-47,
 79, 140, 156-157
 Communitas 128, 133
 Community Culture school (*watthanatham*
 chum-chon) 140
 Comparative literature 7, 9
 Comparative studies 3-4, 7, 15, 38-49
 Comparison with the West 137, 173, 175
 Compassion (*metta, nam-jai*) 106, 113; *see*
 also Nam-jai
 Connors, Michael 53, 179, 203
 Conservatism 30, 35, 113, 140, 157
 and culture 9, 31, 69, 144
 and Thai studies 38-39
 and Thai uniqueness 44
 Conservative Thai discourses 38, 53, 55,
 131, 203
 Constitution of Thailand, 1997 142
 religion in 89
 Consumerism 185
 Contact zone 59, 71, 120, 133; *see also*
 Pratt, Mary Louise
 Copeland, Matthew 43, 57, 200-201
 Core self/inner core 117
 spiritual 35
 of Thainess 35, 114, 149
 Cosmology 138, 185, 186

- Cosmopolitanism 120, 123-125
 and alternative culture 125
 and *farang* 61, 68, 73
 and modernism 59, 181
 and Mongkut 65
 and Thai Ruling class 14, 45
 and Thainess 72, 73
- Critical theory 4-7, 11, 31, 154, 157
- Cross-cultural intimacy 74; *see also*
 Cultural intimacy
- Cross-cultural miscommunication 103
- Cross-cultural reception 126-127
- Crypto-colonialism (*ananihom amphrang*)
 ix, 13, 41, 46, 173-185
 and agency 178
 and cultural intimacy 176
 and semicolonialism 4, 44, 51-53
 and Siamese elite 16
- Cult of imitation (*latthi ao yang*) 70, 200,
 202, 203
- Cultural borrowing 15-17, 180, 187, 204;
see also Appropriation; Adoption
 and imperial power 195
 as elite strategy 192, 200
 re-orientation to the West 196, 197
 and *siwilai* 196-197
- Cultural capital 23, 123, 124, 203
- Cultural fusion 187-189; *see also* Cultural
 mixing
- Cultural history 6, 135
- Cultural hybridity 54, 74, 187-191, 194;
see also Hybridity
 geopolitical differences in 194
 postcolonial theories of 188, 189, 199
 subaltern 200-204
- Cultural imperialism 16, 41, 173
- Cultural intimacy 71-74, 176, 179-184
- Cultural markers 17, 180, 181
- Cultural mixing 188, 202 ; *see also* Cultural
 fusion
- Cultural nationalism 46, 81, 148
- Cultural studies, Asian 40
- Customary law 78, 83, 85
- D
- Damrong Rachanuphap, Prince
 and Thainess 15, 197, 201
 and Thai history 30
 on *farang* 60-65
 on Malay Muslim states 83-85
- Data (*khor-mun*) 40, 179, 183, 185, 186
- Davisakd Puaksom 59, 66, 70
- Day, Tony 3
- Deconstruction (*kan-reu-sang*) 5-9, 148,
 150, 156, 167
- Deconstructionism 40
 Bhabha 189
- Deleuze, Gilles x-xi, 156
- Democracy (*prachathipatai*) xvi, 141-142,
 179, 184, 197
- Democrasubjection 53
- Derrida, Jacques 4-6, 55, 156, 160, 167
- Desnitskaya, Ekatrina (Katya) 33
- Development (*kan-phatthana*) 165, 166,
 197
- Dichan mai chai sopheri (I'm No
 Prostitute)* 101
- Différance* x, 22
- Diplomacy, Thai 11, 35, 112-113, 117, 135
- Direct cinema 129
- Discourse (*wathakam*) 44, 169, 203;
see also *Wathakam*
 and bifurcation 139-141
 civilizing 85, 88, 174
 filmic 122, 126, 128
 Foucauldian 5, 153-155, 160-161, 166
 imperial 138
 nationalist 11, 18, 35, 38, 57, 149
 of *farang* 58, 60, 70-72
 of foreign (*nork*) 68-69
 of *siwilai* 188, 191, 198-202
 of semicolonial rule 194-197
 Orientalist 76
 Thai interpretations of 154, 166
 translation of 153-154, 161-163, 165,
 167
- Disguise xi, xv, xvii
 of the new xvi
 of Oriental dress 25
- Dislocation 94, 108, 117
- Displacement x, xi, xvii, 98
 of 'proletariat' xiv-xv
- Dokmaisoit 69
- Dress 110, 173, 176, 180; *see also* Attire;
 Clothing; Fashion
 and cross-dressing 3

- as mimicry 24-25, 196, 198
 - Western 16-18, 57, 69, 176, 181, 114
- Dualism 2, 20-21, 198, 199; *see also*
 - Binaries; Binary opposition
 - in Thai studies 51-52
- Dutch 14, 45, 62, 63, 68
- E
- Education, Western 27, 29, 68-69, 120-124, 157
- Elite rule 13, 14, 51
 - and legitimation 194, 195
- Empiricism 5-6, 38-39, 40, 42, 155
 - in early travel records 96
 - and *wathakam* 169
- English, use of 177
- Epistemological break 160
- Epistemological effect 42, 44
- Essence, Thai 35, 36, 116, 139, 140; *see also* Thainess; Core
- Ethnic minorities 13, 80, 86, 88, 130
- Euro-American centrism 151
- Eurocentric binarism 176
- Eurocentrism 40, 48, 143, 145, 174
- Europe, Thai portrayals of 100, 102
- European categories 1
- European views 21
- Exceptionalism viii-ix, 80, 174, 178; *see also* Uniqueness
- Exoticism 99, 101, 108, 183
- Export trade 45, 153
- Exquisite corpse 122
- Extraterritoriality 12-14, 46, 79, 80
- F
- Family law 75, 77-79, 85, 88
- Faivre, Florence Vanida 33, 34, 111, 112, 115, 116-117
- Fanon, Frantz xiv, 22, 190
- Farang* ix, 57, 63-64, 66-67, 71
 - ambiguity of 74, 173, 203
 - and spiritual/worldly 141
 - as civilized 66, 69
 - as Occidentalism 58-60, 71
 - as Thai Other 65, 57, 139
 - contemporary meanings 61
 - early contact 62, 63, 97, 98
 - etymological origins 2, 60-61
 - imperialism of 65, 70
 - in cinema 101, 109, 113, 116
 - in popular culture 71, 203
 - in Thai novels 68-69, 100
 - popularity of 202-203
 - Thai adoration of (*tam kon farang*) 57, 135, 173
 - Thai-ization of 117
 - travellers to Siam 62
- Farang*-ization 2, 33, 34, 112
 - critiques of 69-70
 - and *luk-khreung* 72-73
 - of Thainess 116-117, 118
 - Thai agency in 60
- Farang*-ness (*khwam-pen-farang*) 2
- Fashion; *see also* Attire; Clothing; Dress
 - hybridized 24
 - Western 29
- Federated Malay States 83
- Femininity 28, 29, 31, 97, 116
- Feudalism (*sakdina*) 54, 177, 182, 183
- Fifth Reign 185 ; *see also* Chulalongkorn, King; Rama V, King
- Film festivals 31, 119, 125, 126, 132
- Filmmaking 30, 112, 118
 - alternative 119, 121, 122, 132
 - and globalization 108, 117
 - and Thainess 118
- Financial crisis, 1997 109, 125, 140, 141, 144
- Firearms 62
- Fishel, Thamora 67, 71
- Footnoting 167
- Foreign idiom of power 196
- Foreign settings 93, 100, 101-102, 108
- Foucault, Michel 4, 160, 169
 - accessibility of 161, 167
 - and governmentality 161-162
 - and neo conservatism 165
 - and pragmatism 170
 - in Thai academia 5-6, 155, 156, 157, 170
 - Thai translation of 161, 164
- Foulcher, Keith 2, 3, 8
- Fragment viii
- France 10, 57, 62, 98, 113
 - Siamese courtiers in 96
- French thinkers
 - in Thai studies 4, 5, 155-165, 167-170
- Fulvi, Giovanna 127

G

- Gallagher, John 44-45
 García Canclini, Néstor 54, 60, 188-192, 198, 204
 and postcolonial Latin America 201
 Geertz, Clifford 87-88
 Gender 9, 49, 71, 80, 97, 130
 Gerschenkron, Alexander xi
 Giddens, Anthony 71
 Glissant, Edouard 188
 Globalization (*lokaphiwat*) viii, 173
 and anthropological theory 177
 and legitimation in 192
 and localization 148
 and Thai anti-Westernism 150
 and Thai culture 175
 and Thai filmmaking 108-109, 124-125
 and Thai studies 55
 and Thainess 73, 117
 Thailand's relationship to 31, 33, 60, 133, 140
 Governmentality 161-162, 173, 178
 Graham, W. A. 90
 Gramsci, Antonio xiii, 53, 158, 162
 and post-CPT Thai Left 159
 Greece 39, 46, 60, 173-176, 182-183
 Guha, Ranajit xiii, xv
 Gutzlaff, Charles 195
- H
- Habermas, Jürgen 164-165
 Hallward, Peter 37
 Hardt, Michael xvi
 Harootunian, Harry 37, 42
 on semicolonialism in Japan 48, 49
 Hegemony, 55, 80
 in García Canclini 54
 in Gramsci 53, 159
 of the West 47, 55
 of Western theory 40
 Herzfeld, Michael 13, 16, 39, 48, 53
 on ambiguities 51
 on crypto-colonialism 46
 on hegemonies 55
 on postcolonial binaries 49
 on theory and non-colonies 42-43
 Hirsh, Arthur 159
 Historical discontinuity 160

- Historiography, Thai 11, 43, 52-53, 59, 79-81
 and conformism 75
 and nationalism 38, 185
 and Thai uniqueness 44
 and the West 141
 of Bangkok-Patani relations 81-82
 Marxist 131, 158
 History from below xi-xii
 Hollywoodization 128
 Holy man rebellions, 1902 86
 Hong, Lysa 12, 46, 54
Hua-jai si si (The Four-Coloured Heart) 101
 Human rights 135, 141, 142
 Hutcheon, Linda 5
 Hybrid ideology of rule 198
 Hybridity ix, 22, 29, 31, 41, 48
 and identity 34
 and *luk-khreung* 72, 116
 and popular culture 201
 and postcolonialism 37, 190-191
 and religion 202
 and Thai history 141
 and Thai identity 96
 and Thai Self 141
 and Thai studies 169
 as elite strategy 197
 cultural 40, 54, 71, 73-74, 187
 in filmmaking 101, 108
 in Thai language terminology (*phan thang*) 61
 Thai subaltern hybridity 201-202
 Hygiene, visual 180
- I
- Identification 14, 60, 131
 Identity reconstruction 106, 107
 Identity transformation 81, 103, 123
 Identity 3, 8
 and Apichatpong Weerasethakul 119-120
 and *farang* influence 71, 93, 96, 100, 114
 and *luk-khreung* 73
 and hybridity 34, 96
 and transculturation 149
 authentic Thai 29, 34, 60, 151

- class 73, 181
- cultural 2, 3, 16, 35, 68, 135
- formation 10, 27, 29, 139
- geo-political 149
- historical 12
- in *Kumphaphan* 106-108
- in *Thawiphop* 116
- loss of 103, 105
- modern Thai identity 141, 149
- split identity 75
- transformation 74
- Identity, national 15, 37, 57-58, 80, 81; *see also* Thainess
 - and localization 149, 151, 182
 - imported 174
 - in cinema 103, 109, 118
 - religious 175
- Ideology (*udomkan*) 159, 162, 166
 - dominant cultural 181
 - of Thai ruling elite 80
 - imperial 79
 - Thai Maoist 43, 160
 - Thai national 12, 110, 144
 - Thai "radical conservative" 144
- IMF era (*yuk ai-em-ef*) 109, 111
- Imitation 20, 143, 184
 - of colonial rule 13, 14
 - of the West 17, 57, 178, 180
- Imperialism (*jakkawat-niyom*) xii, 41, 50, 65, 75
 - and colonialism 79, 81
 - and globalization 144
 - and plural legal systems 78
 - and postcolonial analyses 187-188
 - and Siamese agency 50
 - and theory 10-11, 43
 - cultural 16, 41, 173
 - global impact of 43
 - in cinema 111
 - legitimation in 192
 - of free trade 45
 - Siamese relationship to 41, 43, 48, 52, 67
 - theories of 43, 49
 - Western 10, 17, 40, 109, 191
- In-between space 3, 20-22, 31, 37; *see also* Liminality; Interstitial space; Third space
- Independence 11, 177
 - and Thai uniqueness 174, 178
 - nominal 39-40, 45
 - Thai discourses of 12, 55, 57, 80, 197
- India 3, 38, 45, 60, 193
 - ancient 149
 - and China 37, 193, 194, 195-197
 - colonial 75, 78, 85
- Indian 34
 - department stores 68
 - iconography 149
 - literatures 21, 199
 - nationalists 137, 138
 - Thai prejudice against 103; *see also Khaek*
 - traders 61, 64
 - writing system 199
- Indianization 15, 17, 191-193
- Indirect colonialism 12, 41, 45-46, 83
- Informal empire 41, 45
- Internal colonialism 20, 41, 44, 45, 188, 200-204
- Interstitial space 22, 31, 34, 35, 37; *see also* In-between space; Liminality; Third space
- Intertextuality 9, 108
- Isan* (Northeast Thailand) 73, 119-121, 180, 183
- Islam, in Thailand 78; *see also* Religion
- Islamic courts 75, 77-79, 85, 88, 90
 - and local dignitaries 87
 - as imperialist 79
 - judges 83, 88, 90
 - territoriality of 88
- J
- Jackson 6, 17, 176
 - and semicolonialism 12
 - and terminology 20-21
 - and theory in Thai studies 7
 - and urban order 177
- Janus 21
- Japan 8, 10, 16, 62, 153
 - and tourism to Paris 93, 97
 - semicolonialism of 48, 49, 176
 - Thai reverence for 115
 - treaties with Siam 65, 79, 195
- Jek* 58, 64; *see also* China

- Jeerati Tingsabadh 164
 Jesuits, French 97
 Jit Phumisak 43, 52, 79, 158
 Jon Ungpakorn 158
 Journal of Political Economy (*Warasan setthasat kan-meuang*) 157-158
- K
- Kabbani, Rana 2
 Kanchanakhaphan (Khun Wichitmatra) 68
 Kanjana Kaewthep 44, 159, 162
 on discourse 163-164, 166
 Karmic predestination (*kam*) 105
 Kasian Tejapira 14, 45, 49, 72, 175
 on postmodern Thai identities 74
 on Prince Damrong Rachanuphap 197
 Kedah 83
 Kelantan 83, 84
 Khaek 33, 58, 62, 64, 103; *see also* Indian
Khaek malayu 84, 85; *see also* Malay Muslim
 Khaji Jittasavee 163
Khao nork na (Wild Rice) 72
Khor khae khit theung (Let Me Long for You) 101
 Khukrit Pramoj 30
Khun Chang Khun Phaen 8, 64
Khwam-phit khrang raek (The First Mistake) 69
Killer Tattoo (Meu peun/loke/phra/Jan) 108, 109, 112, 117
 Kintanar, Thelma 7
 Knowledge production 90
Koi thoe gay (Ghost Station) 108
 Kolowkowski, Leszek 157
 Kongsakon Kawinwirakun 161
 Kosa Pan 96-97
 Kraidy, Marwan 187, 189, 190, 191, 193
 Krairoek Nana 30
Kraseu Valentine (Valentine Ghost) 108
 Krasniauskas, John 190
Kumphaphan (February) 93-94, 102-108, 109
- L
- Lady farang dorn (Lady Muck)* 101
Lakhorn haeng chiwit (The Circus of Life) 33, 69, 99, 100, 103
 Language barriers 146-147, 155, 165
Last Life in the Universe (Reuang rak noi nit mahasan) 124
 Latin America 45, 188-193, 198, 201
 Left, Thai 144, 154-160, 163, 167
 Legal reforms 13, 46, 79, 82, 85
 Legal system, in Malay Muslim states 78
 Legitimation 17, 18, 179, 204
 and data 183
 and *siwilai* 198-199
 political 191, 194, 196, 197, 203
 Lèse-majesté 81
 Lieberman, Victor 2, 3, 16
 Liminality 3, 23, 31, 133; *see also* In-between space; Intersitial space; Third space
 in *Blissfully Yours* 128-132
 in education abroad 123, 124
 in *Kumphaphan (February)* 104, 107, 108
 Linguistic theory 167
 Lionnet, Françoise 154
 Literary criticism 7-9, 160, 170
 Localism (*thornng-thin-niyom*) 48
 Localization 4, 5, 138, 150-151, 192
 and power 14-20
 and Thai identity 148, 149
 of Foucauldian thought 154
 of postcolonial studies 143-145
 London, Bruce 45
 Long take 129, 131
 Loos, Tamara 12, 13, 14, 20, 46
 use of the prefix “semi-” 50
 Lower Burma 98
Luk-khreung 34, 71, 74, 101
 and Thainess 72, 116
 in entertainment 31-33, 72-73
 in novels 72
Luk-thung mor-lam 73
- M
- Mai Meuangdoem 110
 Malay Muslim resistance 90
 Malay Muslim states 76-78, 83, 84, 88; *see also* Southern provinces
 in Thai historiography 82
 Mallari-Hall, Luisa J. 7
 Manich Jumsai 65

- Maoism xiii, 41, 43, 79, 157, 160
 Margalit, Avishai 16
 Marginal culture 31, 121, 124, 125, 126
 Marginality 120, 128-132; *see also*
 Liminality
 Marxism xvii, 12, 169
 in Thai studies 41-55, 131, 140, 157-160
 neo-Marxism 165-166, 190
 post-Marxism 189, 203
Matador jorm phian (The Fake Matador)
 101, 102
Mestizaje 188, 191, 193, 198, 201
 Metropolitan modernity 192
 Mimesis 23-27, 122, 198-199
 Mimicry 3, 199, 204; *see also* Imitation
 Bhabha's notions of 26, 190
 of the colonial West 14, 15, 17, 19
 subaltern hybrid mimicry 202
 surface mimicry 35
 Mingmongkol Sonakul 124
 Minimalism 122
 Miscegenation 33
 Missionaries, American 29, 30, 65, 137
 early missionaries to Siam 62, 63, 194
 Mixed race *see Luk-khreueng*
 Modernist movements 125
 Modernities, alternative 74, 76
 Modernism 70, 120, 123, 124; *see also*
 Cosmopolitan modernism
 and Thai cinema 133
 Modernist cinema 126, 128, 133
 Modernity (*khwam-samai-mai*) ix-x, 76, 137, 183, 197
 and prefix semi- 50
 as opposed to tradition 75
 Buddhist modernity 86-88, 149
 European colonial modernity 75, 79
 García Canclini on 60, 190, 192, 201
 quest for 30, 174, 185, 186
 Thai 47, 52, 57, 83, 177, 201
 Thainess and 181
 Thirayuth on 143
 threat of Western modernity 144
 Modernization 13, 192
 and civilization 45, 85, 155
 and *farang*-ization 60, 63, 66, 73, 114, 140
 and power 40, 130, 132, 182, 202
 and Siamese legal system 46
 and Siamese monarchy 11, 81, 84, 86
 semicolonial 204
 Modernization theory 166
 Modular state 76
 Monarchy 64, 76, 87, 155, 193
 and Buddhism 89
 and centralization of the State 13, 52
 and relationship to rural populace 131
 and relationship to the West 53, 113, 191, 194, 196
 as central to Thai national identity 36, 142, 157
 as civilizing agent 66-67
 critiques of 43, 79-81
 in Thai historiography 44, 53
 in Thailand and Greece 175
 Mongkut, King 10, 11, 65-66, 196; *see also*
 Rama IV, King
 and reform 59, 86
 and Thainess 35
 and *Thawiphop* 57, 113
 and embassy to Europe 98
 and quest for *siwilai* 17, 66
 and solar eclipse 29-30
 and Thammayut Buddhism 86, 137
Monrak Transistor 108, 117, 125
 Moreira, Alberto 190-191
Mor-lam summer (The Summer-Time Northeast Thai Folk Singer) 73
 Morris, Rosalind 44, 45, 51, 52, 177
 Movie adaptations 100
 Multiplicity 2, 3, 21, 51
 Multitude xvi
Mysterious Object at Noon (Dorkfa nai meu man) 122, 125, 127

 N
 Nakhon Sri Thammarat 81
Nam-jai 106, 113, 114
Nang Neramit (The Divine Nymphs) 99
Nangseu sadaeng kitjanukit (A Book Explaining Various Things) 137
 Narai, King 63, 96-98
 Narathiwat 75, 77, 78, 81, 88, 90
 Nationalism (*chat-niyom*) vii, 36, 144, 145, 197; *see also* Cultural nationalism

- and critics of Siam 43
 and *farang* 69
 and romanticism xii
 and Rama VI 67, 203
 elite 66
 in cinema 110, 113, 116
 in fiction 112
- Nationalist discourse, Thai 46, 53, 70, 110, 197; *see also* Discourse, nationalist
- Nationalist historiography 38, 185
- Nationalist master narrative 35, 80, 113
- Nationalist mythology, Thai 46
- Nationalist scholarship 74, 140, 144, 176
- Nationhood 15
- Nation-state 76, 174, 175, 178, 179, 185
- Nativism 47, 48, 144
- Naturalism 122
- Negri, Antonio xvi
- Neo-colonialism 45, 46, 48, 109, 192
- Neo-conservatism 165
- Neo-liberalism 144
- Neoliberal governmentality 178
- New York 23, 73, 102-104, 107-108
- Newness, in history x, xi
- Nidhi Aeosriwongse 57
- Nidhi Aeosriwongse 52, 59, 62, 77, 158;
see also Nidhi Aeosriwongse; Nidhi Eoseewong
 on constitution 142
 on discourse 166
 on Foucault 167, 168, 170
 on images of *farang* 64
- Nidhi Eoseewong 28, 44, 52
- Nirat* (travel poetry) 98
- Nopporn Prachakul 38, 44, 47-48, 164
- Nork* (foreign/western) 68, 69, 72; *see also* *Farang*
- Northeastern Thailand 73, 86, 119, 180, 183; *see also* *Isan*
- Novel, Thai 68-70, 93, 100, 118
 and *luk-khreung* 72
 cum-tele-drama 73
 historical 110
 melodramatic Thai novels 118
 of Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat 99-100
 of Khru Liam 99, 100
 of Thommayanti 112
 of Wat Wanlyangkun 125
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey 128
- O
- O'Connor, Richard 193
- Occidentalism 2, 3, 58-61, 97, 117
 and Rama V 25, 69
 and *siwilai* 198
 Siamese project of 35, 16, 65-67, 70-71, 73
- Opium Wars 10
- Orasom Sutthisakhorn 100
- Oriental despotism 183
- Orientalism 1-3, 15, 16, 58, 76
 American 59
 in dress 25
- Other, the 30, 97, 103
 and localization 148
 and Thainess 112, 114
 assimilation of 36, 191
 Burmese 135
 Chinese 139
 colonial 3
 cultural 9, 10, 22, 58, 118
 dangerous 135
 desire for the 118
 enemy 111, 57
farang 2, 63-64, 96, 116, 135
 in beauty contests 29
 in cinema 101, 111, 130
- Occidental 3
 reviled 203
 rural 131
 vs self 22, 23, 51, 108, 139
 Western 15, 58-60, 67, 73, 101
- Otherness (*khwan-pen-eun*) 61, 93, 135, 165, 204
 cultural 6
 Western 9, 29, 58, 60
- Othering 130
- Owen, Norman 14, 15
- P
- Paknam Crisis 12, 113
- Paris Syndrome 93, 97, 99
- Patani 81-84, 89; *see also* Malay Muslim states
- Pattani 17, 75, 77, 81, 87
- Pattana Kitiarsa 2, 33-35, 51, 187, 202

- Pavin Chachavalpongpun 135, 142
- Peleggi, Maurizio 12, 13, 16, 18, 186, 192
 on duality 52
 on quest for *siwilai* 66
- Pemberton, John 2, 3, 13
- Penal Code, 1908 80
- Pen-ek Ratanaruang 108, 124, 125
- Phaulkon, Konstantin 62, 63, 98
- Phetracha, *Phra* 63, 98
- Phiang rao...mi rao (We Have Only Each Other)* 93, 94, 101
- Philippines 3, 14, 15, 18, 24, 36
- Phiw leuang phiw khao (Yellow Skin, White Skin)* 34
- Phornphot Kanitsen 101
- Phornthip Nakhirankanok (Pui) 27-29, 31
- Phra Aphaimani* 8, 64
- Phrik khi-nu kap mu haem (Chillies and Ham)* 101-102
- Phuying khon nan cheu Bunrort (That Woman's Name is Bunrort)* 72
- Pilgrimage 87, 123, 124
- Pinklao, *Phra* 65
- Pinpin, Tomas 14
- Plaek Phibunsongkhram, Field Marshal 9, 29, 144, 161
- Plaza, Monique 164
- Pluralism 189
- Political Economy group 12, 158
- Political participation 144, 175, 177, 184-186
- Polygyny 76, 78, 183, 184
- Popular culture 35, 67, 71-74, 156, 200-204
 and Thai stereotyping 97
 as hybridized 188, 191
 in cinema 11, 109, 118
 in fiction 93, 100-101, 107
 in music 31
 in popular history 30
 in supplementary reading (*nangseu an nork wela*) 12
 in television 125
- Portugal 42, 86, 98, 192
- Portuguese 60-63
- Postcolonial hybridity 51, 188-190, 199;
see also Hybridity
- Postcolonial theory 4, 11, 22, 26, 90, 187;
see also Bhabha, Homi; Chatterjee, Partha; Fanon, Franz; García Canclini, Néstor; Postcolonialism and Indonesian literature 8 and psychoanalysis 51 in Thai studies 10, 37-41, 42, 43, 50 limitations of 48-49
- Postcolonialism 3, 70, 136, 150, 151
 and academia 145-148
 and bifurcation 139, 182
 and post-Westernism 143-145
 and the Thai self 148-149
- Postmodernism 44, 60, 74, 154
 and Thai scholarship 9, 42, 143, 156, 160
- Poststructuralism 3, 9, 22, 40, 107
 and Thai studies 44, 47, 154, 164
- Post-Westernism (*lang tawan-tok-niyom*) 136, 143-145
- Prabda Yoon 124
- Pragmatism 154, 170, 186
- Prajadhipok, King 66; *see also* Rama VII, King
- Pratheep Nakhornchai 159
- Pratt, Mary Louise 36, 120, 188
- Prawet Wasi 57, 141, 203
- Preecha Charngkwanyeeun 166-167
- Prem Tinsulanond 89
- Prestige (*barami*) 176, 191, 196, 198, 203
- Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn
 Anthropology Centre 44
- Prose fiction 7, 99, 100, 156, 199
- Protectionism 147, 148
- Provincial administrative system (*thesaphiban*) 81-82
- Psychoanalytical thought 8, 22, 51
- Purity, Thai 202, 203
 bucolic 183
- R
- Rachothai, *Mom* 98, 103
- Radical conservatism movement 144
- Rafael, Vicente 3, 14, 15, 18, 24-25, 36
- Rama I, King 62, 89
- Rama II, King 98
- Rama III, King 64, 65, 70, 196
- Rama IV, King 30, 33; *see also* Mongkut, King
- Rama V, King 101, 196; *see also* Chulalongkorn, King

- Rama VI, King *see* Vajiravudh, King
 Rama VII, King 69, 99; *see also*
 Prachadhipok, King
Rao sorn (*We Two*) 93, 94, 101
 Rattanakosin Island 180, 185
 Ravana/Dasakantha *see* Thotsakan
 Reflexivity, avant-garde 122
 Regime of images 7, 17, 201
 Reid, Anthony 193
 Reinterpretation 4, 5, 203; *see also*
 Adaptation; Reinvention
 Reinvention 5, 23; *see also* Adaptation
 Religion (*satsana*) 78, 86, 139, 202; *see also* Buddhism; Christianity; Islam
 and state administration 88, 89
 Repetition xvii, x-xi
 Re-presentation 58
 Residential System 23
 Revolution, 1688 63
 Revolutionary subject xiv-xv
 Reynolds, Craig 4, 48, 54, 199
 Asian area studies 42
 on colonization of Siam 45, 67, 187
 on Thai Marxist historians 43, 52, 54
 Reynolds, Henry xv-xvi
 Robinson, Ronald 44-45
 Romanticism xii, xiv, 100-101, 103, 108
 Roxas-Topé, Lily Rose 7
 Royal tours
 of colonial Southeast Asia 85
 of Europe 18, 23-27, 66, 196
- S
- Saeng sathawat* (*Syndromes and a Century*) 31
 Saichon Sattayanurak 176
 Said, Edward 1, 2, 16, 58, 76, 190
 Saipin Suputtamongkol 161
Sangha 137
 Sangha Act 86
 Saowapha, Queen 24
 Sarit Thanarat, Field Marshal 9, 89, 156
 Sayyid, S. 48
 Schiller, Herbert 50
 School of Art Institute of Chicago 119, 120, 121, 123
 Scotland 94, 100, 101
 Secularism 78-79, 85-89
- Self-calibration 175, 176, 184
 Self-determination 183
 Semicolonialism ix, 11-13, 20, 39-40, 202
 and ambiguity 49, 51
 and comparison 43, 49
 and postcolonial analysis 38, 49
 and *siwilai* 198
 autonomous 198
 cultural impact of 188
 dialectic of 52-54
 in Maoist thought 43
 in post-Marxist Thai studies 44-47
 role of 55
 subordinate 198
 use of 41, 50
 working definition of 46
 Semi-sovereignty 53
 Separatism, Malay Muslim 82, 89, 90
 Seri Wongmontha 113
 Sexual intimacy 74, 78, 99, 130
 Sexual morality 101, 174, 175
 Sexuality 8, 40, 49, 71
 Sheik Ahmad 62
 Sifa 72
 Sinicization 10, 15, 138; *see also* China
 Sino-Thai (*luk jin*) 58, 72, 73, 196
Siwilai (civilized, civilization) 17, 52, 66-67, 188, 197, 198
 ambivalence of 199
 as legitimation of power 191, 196, 197
 as occidentalization 19, 23, 198
 as subaltern resistance 191
 spelling of 199-200
 SOAS Centre for Asian and African Literatures 7
 Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) 158
 Solar eclipse, 1868 29
 Somkiat Wanthana 161-165
 Somching Srisupap 101
 Somrak Chaisingkananon 66
 Somsak Pritsanananthakun 114
 Sophak Suwan 100
 South Asian studies viii
 Southern provinces, of Siam 75, 81-83, 88-90; *see also* Malay Muslim states
 Specificity 128
 cultural 6, 39, 47, 55, 181
 historical 47, 155, 169

- Spiritual/worldly dichotomy 136, 138, 139-141
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 7, 55, 199
- Srisak Vallipodom 167, 182
- Srisuriyawong, *Chao Phraya* 65, 113
- Stephens, Chuck 127
- Stereotypes 65, 97, 103
and femininity 97
cultural forms of 182
of Thainess 184
- Streckfuss, David 38, 45, 180, 192
- Structuralism 156, 160, 162
Thai translation of 164
- Subaltern resistance 188, 202
- Subaltern Studies viii, xi, xii-xiv
populism in xiii
- Subaltern xii-xiii
classes 132
forms of cultural hybridity 189, 200-204
groups and individuals 187, 198
resistance 188, 190-192, 198
- Subjugation 176, 184
- Subordination 46, 50, 128
and postcolonial analysis 38, 182
cultural 181, 192
of Siam/Thailand in relation to the West 37, 39, 50-55, 188, 197, 198
- Sukanya Hantrakul 160, 162
- Sulak Sivaraksa 19-20, 57, 65, 70, 141
- Sunait Chutintaranond 110-111
- Sunthorn Phu 64
- Superstructural turn 158-160, 162
- Superstructure 157, 158
- Surapong Chaiyanam 158
- Surapong Pinijkhar 30, 57, 96, 112
- Suriyothai* 96, 112, 117, 118, 119
- Sutthipun Jirathiwat 162
- Swettenham, Frank 83, 84, 90
- Syncretism 187, 193; *see also* Hybridity
- T
- Taksin, King 63, 111
- Tales of Mr Thorng-In (Nithan Thorng-in)* 5
- Tata Young 33
- Tears of the Black Tiger/Fathalaijone* 108, 117
- Tej Bunnag 52, 82
- Thai* (free) 52, 53
thai/that (slave) contrast 52, 201
- Thai chauvinism (*long chat* or *khlang chat*) 144
- Thai intellect 140 (*phum-panya thai*); *see also* Community Culture school
- Thai Self 139, 141-142; *see also* Thainess; Identity
- Thainess (*khwam-pen-thai*) 145, 177-178, 181, 204
alternative forms of 125, 179, 204
ambiguities of 112
and Buddhism 139, 149, 176
and *farang* 73
and globalization 117
and Thai intellect 140
authenticity of 29, 109, 116
construction of 15, 35, 36, 59, 70
definitions of 183
in relationship to the West 2, 29, 34, 58, 67,
in Thai cinema 94, 112, 114, 117-118, 125
luk-khreung Thainess 72
middle class Thainess 73
performance of 31
postmodernization of 74
stereotypes of 184-185
- Thaksin Shinawatra 89, 141, 177, 181
- Thammapidok, *Phra* 136-137, 140
- Thammayut Buddhism 86, 87, 137
- Thanes Wongyannava 4-6, 44, 164, 203
- Thanet Aphornsuvan 30, 59
- Thanit Jitnukul 11, 96, 110-111
- That* (slave) *see* *Thai* (free)
- Thawiphop (The Siam Renaissance)* 30, 57, 96, 112-117
- Theory (*thritsadi*) 4, 6-8, 10; *see also* Critical theory; Linguistic theory; Modernization theory; Postcolonial theory; Western theory
- Thet* (foreign) 61; *see also* *Farang*
- Thianwan 70
- Thipayachat Chatchai 93, 101
- Thiphakorawong 64, 137
- Thirayuth Boonmi 57, 70, 143-145, 158
- Third space 3, 22, 199; *see also* In-between space; Interstitial space; Liminality

- Thommayanti 112
- Thongchai Winichakul 14, 15, 46, 161, 167, 195
 on binary divisions 20, 35, 51, 52
 on Foucault 165
 on hybridity 51
 on Otherness Within 59, 61
 on resistance to theory 8
 on *siwilai* 17, 52, 66, 191, 197-198
 on spelling of *siwilai* 199-200
 on Thai imperialism 80, 82, 196
 on Thainess 36, 114
 on translation of crypto-colonial 41
- Thongkorn Pokekadham 164
- Thotsakan 20, 21, 31
- Tolerance
 as a defining Thai characteristic 72, 140, 176, 191-194, 197
- Transculturation 36, 148-149, 189
- Transgression 5, 33, 120, 132, 133
- Translation 143, 146, 147
 of Foucault 161, 164
- Transnational cinephilia 119, 120, 124, 128, 133
- Transparency 177
- Travel cinema 100-103
- Travel to the West 93, 96-98, 102, 103
- Travel writing 27, 36, 84, 87, 93
 as Thai prose fiction 99, 100
 in *nirat* form 98, 100
- Trengganu 83, 84
- Trisilpa Bunkhachorn 9
- Tropical Malady (Sat pralat)* 23, 119, 132, 133
- Turner, Victor 123, 124, 128
- U
- Udom Srisuwan 12, 41, 43, 47, 52, 79
- Uniqueness, Thai 11, 12, 14, 39, 42, 44, 174; *see also* Exceptionalism
- United States of America 102, 103, 136-137
- Universality 50, 51, 55, 127, 148
- Urban architecture, Thai 180, 181
- Urban hygiene 174
- Urban order 177
- Urban space 109
- V
- Vagueness 179, 180, 183; *see also* Ambiguity
- Vajiravudh, Crown Prince/King 27, 66, 137, 196, 197
 as author 5
 critique of *farang*-ization 70, 203
 critique of Westernization 200-201
 nationalist vision of 29, 67, 203
- van der Veer, Peter 78-79
- Van Esterik, Penny 29, 42, 45, 72, 199
- W
- Wagner, Tamara 3, 58, 61
- Wanpimol Ungkasan 164
- Warhol, Andy 122
- Wat Tani 87
- Wathakam* 5, 154, 161, 203; *see also* Discourse
 definitions of 166
 history of 162-163
 use of the term 162-163, 165, 166, 169
- Watjana* 163, 167; *see also* *Wathakam*, Discourse
- Weisman, Jan 71, 72
- West, the (*tawan-tok*) 10, 57, 37, 65, 151; *see also* Colonialism; Imperialism
 coming to terms with 135, 150, 151
 definition of 16
 nineteenth century attitudes to 194-195
 stereotypes of 99
- Western academia 12, 54-55, 141-148, 156
- Western culture 107, 108, 139, 140
 and social mores 29, 69
 and table manners 180
 Thai appropriation of 16, 17
- Western education 101-102
 of Apichatpong Weerasethakul 120, 123-125
 of contemporary Thai scholars 157-159, 163-164
 of Thai middle classes 57, 68-70
 of Thai monarchy 27, 29, 200, 66-67
 of Thai elite 83,
- Western influence 37, 138, 173, 175, 178, 181
 and Siamese quest for modernity 30
 and Thai scholarship 167
 and Thainess 35, 139, 149
 Thai criticism of 57
- Western knowledge 29, 30, 70, 136, 137
- Western locale 107, 108, 128

- Western power 39, 40, 43, 47, 51-55
 Western theory 4-8, 40, 43, 47-51
 Westerners *see Farang*
 Westernization 10, 12, 18, 192, 135
 and Buddhism 149
 and “civilization” 26
 and Thai bureaucracy 177
 and Thainess 29, 31, 35, 150, 182, 183
 as façade 26
 as resistance 203
 critique of 200
 definitive moment of 180
 of legal system 79
 of middle class 106, 201
 religious resistance to 30
 Westernness (*khwam-pen-farang*) 2,
 26, 108; *see also* Anti-Westernism;
 Anti-Western discourse; Anti-
 Western sentiment
 Wichit Wathakan, *Luang* 176
 Wichit Worasat, *Phra* (Pan Sukhum, later
 Chao Phraya Yomarat) 83, 84; *see*
 also Chao Phraya Yomarat
 Williams, Raymond 120, 125, 131
 Wisit Sasanatieng 108
 Witthayakorn Chiengkul 164
 Wollen, Peter 122
 Wolters, O. W. 192
 Women’s Studies (*satri seuksa*) 44
Wongsawitthaya (Genealogy) 165
 Wor Winitchaikul 100
 Woranuch Charungratanapong 180, 185
 World Fairs, Siamese participation in 27,
 196
 Wright, Michael 57, 66
 Wyatt, David 45, 52, 63, 64, 66

 Y
 Yala 75, 77, 78, 81, 88, 90
 Yamada Nagamasa 62
 Yomarat, *Chao Phraya* 83, 85, 88, 90
 Yot Chatcharasathian 69
 Young, Robert 37
 Yuthlert Sippapak 93, 102-110