

reprint figure 5; to the British Library for permission and duplication of figures 9 and 10, and to Andrew Turton who worked with the library until the duplication was finished. I am also grateful to Thawarthanaphant Co. for permission to reprint figures 13–19 from the geographical atlas it publishes. My special thanks to Conrad Taylor for permission to reprint figure 20. Thanks also to Pamela Kelley of the University of Hawaii Press who worked hard on this manuscript and kept pushing me to finish it despite so many problems on my part. I wish I could mention all the people who are part of this book in many ways. Their encouragement, their care, and their assistance will always be remembered.

Finally, although I do not like to follow convention, I must admit that without the care, hard work, and sacrifice of my wife, Somrudee, I might not have been able to finish this book.

I do not know whether or not this book will contribute in some way to making this a better world. My hope is humble: that someday all the irrational rationality will be exposed so that people may become more tolerant and considerate.

Introduction

The Presence of Nationhood

AFTER DENMARK DEFEATED Scotland in the first round of the World Cup soccer tournament in 1986, it was reported that 97 percent of Denmark's population of five million had tuned in to the telecast of the match. A TV announcer commented on the remaining 3 percent: "Only the Swedes and the traitors must not have been watching."¹ The humor of this comment is revealing. It is a comic reference to the significance of nationhood in modern times. Yet its tragic aspects are countless. As the world approaches the twenty-first century, we witness the breakup of socialist Eastern Europe into serious ethnic and nationalist conflicts among the would-be states. Indeed, all over the planet there is conflict among people who identify themselves as part of a particular nation against another. The comment about the audience of the soccer match makes sense because the international competition evident in the statement implies the wider context of hostilities, rivalries, and antagonism among nations in other spheres. The comment was intelligible because it played with the normative perception of the nature of a nation and its relations to modern individuals.

The Two-Way Identification of Nationhood

On the one hand, it is generally supposed that a nation is a collective body to which individuals must belong. It is further presumed that a nation is an entity whose atoms or parts—its nationals—possess a similar nature. A nation has essential traits commonly imbued in its members, who, moreover, have the same national interest. Patriotism, loyalty, and other affiliations in terms of ideas, sentiments, and practices appear to be natural relationships. On the other hand, it is always supposed that a nation exists in the global community of nations. That is to say, there are other nations who have other

essences and interests dissimilar to ours, competing with us, or even antagonistic to us. The discourse of a modern nation usually presupposes this two-way identification: positively by some common nature, identity, or interests; negatively by the differences with other nations. Our modern civilization is to a great extent based on these identities and differences.

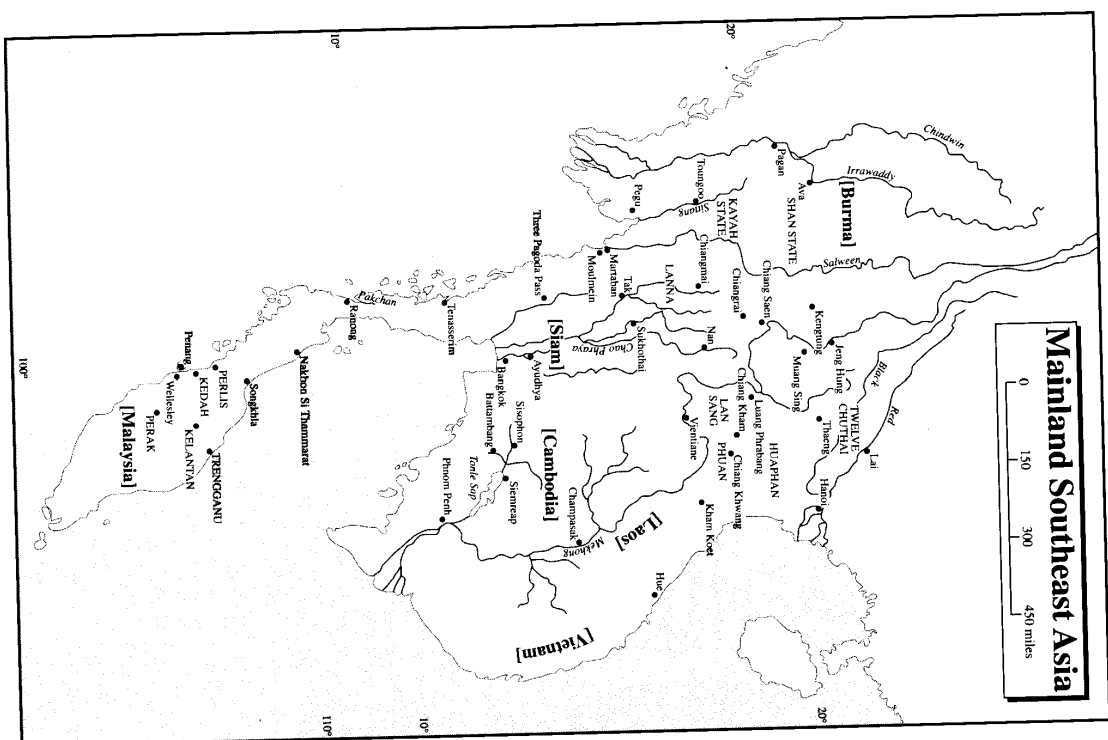
How does the identity of a nation and its opposition to others—that is, the two-way identification of a nation—come about? Or how is it made? How can modern human beings talk, know, or act in relation to the nation? Indeed, how has the knowledge of a nation been constructed in our civilization? The answer to these questions should not be framed as just another study about the rise of a nation-state or nation building. Rather, this will be a study of the discourse of nationhood. This study concerns the case of what has been known as Siam or Thailand. But its significance goes far beyond the case study. It applies to many other modern nations which have appeared on the globe during the last two centuries.

The Positive and Negative Identification of Thainess

In Thailand today there is a widespread assumption that there is such a thing as a common Thai nature or identity: *khwampenhai* (Thainess). It is believed to have existed for a long time, and all Thai are supposed to be well aware of its virtue. The essence of Thainess has been well preserved up to the present time despite the fact that Siam has been transformed greatly toward modernization in the past hundred years. Like other nationalist discourse, it presumes that the great leaders (in this case monarchs) selectively adopted only good things from the West for the country while preserving the traditional values at their best. Although a skeptic might doubt the validity of such a view, the notion prevails even among scholars.

One of the most quoted illustrations of this selective modernization based on Thainess was the reaffirmation of Buddhism as the state religion vis-à-vis the adoption of Western science and technology throughout the period of modernization. Another famous proof was the instruction by certain prominent Siamese kings regarding the extent to which Western knowledge should be adopted: it must be based on its suitability to Siam, they argued, not on the models or standards of its origins. But it is hard to determine exactly what constituted the needs, appropriateness, goodness, usefulness, or right things. The “right” things have never been clearly defined; indeed, it would be impossible to do so. Thus various interpretations of Thainess are advanced from time to time. This has been happening since the last century.

What was not “good”? King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) declared in



Mainland Southeast Asia before Modern Boundaries

1885 that the concepts of political party and parliamentary system were not appropriate to the Siamese political tradition.² On another occasion he even suggested that the Chinese attempt to form a political party in Siam was contrary to the interest of Siam and must be opposed whenever possible.³ King Vajiravudh (r. 1910–1925) banned the first text on economics in Thai because it was not suitable to Thai society. Apart from the monarch, he argued, Thai people were all equal under him. Thus economics might cause disunity or disruption because it concerns social strata of rich and poor. Instead, he proposed his own economic philosophy based on a Buddhist precept that one should be satisfied with what one has. Not only was economics forbidden to be written about, but in 1927 legislation against the teaching of economics was passed.⁴

Exactly which things should be preserved is vague because the definition of Thainess has been discursively defined and claimed by the authorities of diverse ideological camps. It is well known among scholars of Thailand that the monarchical institution and Buddhism are the most important elements of the nation. King Vajiravudh proposed that the monarchy was most important to nationhood. Prince Damrong Rajanubhap (hereafter Damrong), a great historian and administrator, once suggested that the three moral pillars of Thai people were the love of national independence, tolerance, and compromise or assimilation.⁵ The Phibun government during World War II (1938–1945) initiated many ambitious attempts to civilize Thai culture.⁶ Many commissions were established to stipulate what Thai culture should be and to supervise its dissemination. A number of detailed practices—from private affairs to public ones, from domestic matters to social ones—were prescribed for people to follow.⁷ Ironically, traditional clothing and the traditional practice of chewing the betel nut were prohibited, while trousers, skirts, and kissing before going out to work in the morning were prescribed. Some of these new elements of Thai culture did not survive beyond the life of the government, but others have continued to the present day.

There are many other views about Thainess, and the definitions never end. Thailand is a nation, though not the only one, which concerns itself with the preservation and promotion of the national culture as if it might suddenly disappear. Therefore a government body has always existed for this purpose, though its name and its tasks vary from time to time. One of the present entities is the Commission for National Identity, which has had to define Thainess in order to clarify its tasks for planning, coordination, and consultation on the security of the institutions of the nation, religion, and monarchy. The commission has concluded that the nation is composed of eight elements: territory, population, independence and sovereignty, government and admin-

istration, religion, monarchy, culture, and dignity. The commission, however, has expressed its concern that, “as we shall see, the meaning of the term ‘national identity’ is quite broad, covering all aspects of the nation to the extent that it may cause some confusion and unclear understanding. Even the eight elements as defined are not agreed upon by everyone” (in the commission).⁸ In fact, in a small booklet of twenty-six pages, *Ekkalak khong chat* (National Identity), three eminent persons have given various interpretations of the elements of Thai identity. The elements are not in contradiction to each other. Indeed, they all count, and readers are expected to accept all of them.⁹ The number of traits and institutions regarded as Thai seems unlimited. Redundancy is necessary and useful.

Although Thainess is never clearly defined, it is supposed that every Thai knows it is there. One of the most prominent statesmen and scholars in modern Thailand, Kukrit Pramoj, confessed that he was not quite sure what identity means. Yet he was confident that it was imbued in him: “The identity belonging to the people of a nation . . . is ascribed to oneself at birth. Thainess for the most part arises together with Thai people. Being a Thai means having such and such feelings, having a certain character. No one can change these things.”¹⁰ If the domain of what is Thainess is hard to define clearly, the domain of what is not Thai—that is, un-Thai—is identified from time to time. Simultaneously, this identification helps us to define the domain of Thainess from the outside. As Edmund Leach has pointed out in the case of Upper Burma, ethnic peoples define themselves in terms of the differences among ethnic groups, rather than in accordance with a set of shared characteristics of a tribe which is merely a sociological fiction.¹¹ This is what I call “negative identification.”

Quite often, reference to otherness is made by identifying it as belonging to another nation. But the referent nation or ethnicity is usually ill defined. In Thai, for example, *farang* is a well-known adjective and noun referring to Western people without any specification of nationality, culture, ethnicity, language, or whatever. *Khaek* is another term which covers the peoples and countries of the Malay peninsula, the East Indies, South Asia, and the Middle East without any distinction. *Khaek* also denotes Muslim, but by no means exclusively so. That is to say, a reference is sometimes made regardless of whether or not a certain characteristic really belongs to any particular nation or ethnic group, because the aim of the discourse is to identify the un-Thainess rather than to define the characteristic of any particular people. Once the un-Thainess can be identified, its opposite, Thainess, is apparent.

Examples of negative identification are not hard to find in everyday life. In a conversation between the Thai ambassador in Canberra and Thai students

in mid-February 1987 about Asian people in Australia, the ambassador instructed the students "not to behave like the Vietnamese." It is not clear whether he meant the Vietnamese in Australia, the communist Vietnamese in Vietnam, or both. Probably he did not care what his term specifically referred to. In this case, the term "Vietnam" represented a sort of otherness or un-Thainess one should avoid, regardless of whether or not the Vietnamese actually behave in such a way.

Un-Thainess is sometimes not a matter of nation or ethnicity. A reporter said that he once teased a Thai about being a communist, but the Thai did not find the remark funny and quickly replied: "I am not a communist. I am a Thai."¹² This is how the Thai state officially views communism as well. In a nutshell, the rationality of the anticommunist act (1952), whose model was the un-American activities legislation, was that communism is un-Thai in its ideas and as a way of life.¹³ Twenty or thirty years ago, during the Cold War, a poster about the threat of communism was widely distributed to all primary schools. In the picture, a tiny map of Thailand stood under the threat of a huge red demon originating from the mass of the Asian mainland to the north. Here communism and other nations were combined as a demonic otherness. (A similar but more recent poster will be discussed extensively later in the book.)

The radical movement during 1973–1976 was from time to time accused of collaborating with the enemy. The enemy in this case seemed to be communism plus other nations. Student leaders were alleged to be Vietnamese descendants, since Vietnam after 1975 had become a symbol of the worst otherness in the official Thai view. In the massacre of students on 6 October 1976, when thousands of demonstrators were attacked by police and right-wing paramilitary groups, some were lynched because the wild mob had been indoctrinated to think that the victims were Vietnamese. Vietnam, communism, and radicals in this context function in a similar way to the Swedes and traitors for the TV announcer. The existence of otherness, un-Thainess, is as necessary as the positive definition of Thainess. Perhaps we can say that the former is indispensable to the latter.

Thai Studies

Despite the unclear identification or constitution of Thainess, the notion is obvious enough in the minds of Thai people. It is a "thing" on earth, and in history, which possesses particular features, all of which are distinct from others. For many Thai scholars, a study of the thing is what Thai people profoundly know better than anyone else.

Thai people, scholars or not, have always been warned not to *tamkon jang* ("tag along behind the Westerners"). For them, Thainess, Thailand, Thai people, Thai studies, or whatever Thai, is something the *jang* can approach but never reach with the utmost intimacy that Thai people can. This Thainess is what Thai people belong to and are part of. In another sense, it is what belongs to them and is a common part of their lives. The sense of identity as a part of each other enables Thai scholars to presume a privileged status in the field of Thai studies because "Thai" is not just an area of study but an intrinsic part of them. By contrast, *jang* scholars have to overcome an enormous distance between the writing self and the subject written about.

Sometimes the distance is explicitly and concretely measured, even along Thailand's borders. A leading political scientist on foreign policy once took issue with foreign scholars on the Cambodian question, saying that those foreign scholars were remote from what was happening in Cambodia and along the borders, unlike Thai (people? scholars? soldiers?) who directly experience the effects. Therefore, he said, "I am sorry for the fact that some [Thai scholars] are convinced by the reasons given by those foreigners who look at the problem more superficially than Thai."¹⁴

Edward Said has argued that the discourses on the countries and peoples outside Europe, particularly "the Oriental," have been a part of the European's power relations that constitute the presence of "the Other" in order to confirm the identification and, more often than not, the superiority of the European metropolis itself, rather than being the documentation of what "the Oriental" actually is.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the awareness of Eurocentrism and its prejudice against others has been common among Western scholars for quite some time. As a correction, apology, or cure for what the Orientalists had done before, this guilty conscience has pushed Western scholars in the opposite direction—that is, to recognize indigenous perspective. A recent study on Southeast Asia declares that the work was done with "styles of research which do less injustice to the peoples with whom . . . we work."¹⁶ But this opposite direction sometimes goes too far. Unlike the cases of other colonial countries, the fact that there was no struggle between colonial and anticolonial scholarship in Thai studies has sometimes led to uncritical intellectual cooperation by pro-indigenous Western scholars who have tended to accept the established views of the Siamese elite as *the* legitimate discourse about Thailand.¹⁷ If the intellectual enterprise is constituted by power relations as Said suggests, in this context being indigenous becomes a privilege, at least for many indigenous scholars.

While Orientalism has been inscribed basically as the Other of Western civilization, the Thai of Thai people is the field of "We" or one's own self.

The spoken, studied, or imagined reality is not a “counter-part” but a self, a social and collective one. For this reason, a national community and its numerous aspects—nationalism, patriotism, identity, culture, history, image, worldview, and so on—are not merely the objects of scientific study. They are aspects, physically and spiritually, of We-self for studies as well as for empathy, loyalty, partiality, and obsession.

In the guise of scientific method and academic format (especially footnotes, quotations, and bibliography), studies of Thai by Thai people have been located deep within the paradigmatic discourse of We-self. This provides them with certain viewpoints, sentiments, and values as well as constraints, taboos, alibis, and plausibility. The field of We-self also has its own political economy and its own questions dissimilar to the field of Thai study by foreigners. Thailand as seen and studied by Thai academics may not be the same as that of non-Thai academics.¹⁸ As part of the discourse of We-self, a study seems to attain a natural authority and becomes the inside view on what is good or bad for Thai, what is Thai or not. One famous subject which claims this inside view as an incomparable advantage is the ethnographic study of ideas or worldview. As one study claims:

[This book] would . . . try to achieve some of the benefits of the new trend derived from the emic or “inside view” approach to ethnography by looking at the Thai world view through the eyes of Thais. Though many writers in this volume studied in the West, one expects that they are basically Thai in their thinking and behavior. The writings in this volume then should reflect the cognition and perception of Thai and not Western people.¹⁹

The notion of “Thai”—worldview, people, eyes, thinking, behavior, cognition, and perception—in this statement seems to be homogeneous and demands no further clarification because it is embodied in the writing subjects, or authors. This kind of research has become abundant recently, mostly carried out by centers of ethnographic studies in each region and by historians. Consequently, we have worldviews of northern, northeastern, and southern Thai and worldviews of Thai people in the Sukhothai, Ayudhya, and the early Bangkok periods.²⁰ The methodology is virtually the same—that is, the cataloging of source materials according to the researchers’ predetermined notion of what constitutes a Thai worldview. The writers then paraphrase from their sources—folk tales, songs, proverbs, games—and offer the results as an analysis of Thai worldviews.²¹ None of them ever questions whether the results are Thai worldviews or the outcome of the writers’ taxonomies which are specified at the beginning of each research as a methodology. Probably it is assumed that both are the same thing. Again the source of

the Thai worldview is a writing subject. The materials are merely the substantiation of the Thai-worldview subject.

This criticism is not a rejection of the particularity of a society. But the discourse of We-self is not only an exaggeration of such particularity—hence an overemphasis of the significance of familiarity—but also a claim by certain people and texts to have privilege, rights, or power over the field of Thai studies or Thainess because of their ascriptive relationship, or having been *insiders*. An indigenous view is a good antidote to the power relations of the Orientalist discourse. But the discourse of Thainess has its own sphere of power relations as well. In the context of global power relations, it may represent the periphery’s resistance to the metropolis. But in the context of power relations within Thai society, it is a claim to legitimacy of, more often than not, the official or hegemonic discourse operating in its own particular cosmos over the subordinated or marginal ones. As has been the case in the postcolonial era, an anti-Western discourse may belong to an oppressor, not the oppressed, to reaffirm its grip over its own sphere of power. Since the definition of Thainess has never been (and never will be) clear, therefore, the domain of what is Thainess and the power relations arising from it constitute an arena over which different interpretations from various positions struggle to gain hegemony.

Struggles for Interpretation

Since the late 1970s, the network of army-owned radio stations, which comprises two-thirds of the radio stations in Thailand, has broadcast two programs daily at 6:45 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. to call for order and unity and to stimulate nationalism and the awareness of national security amid the communist threats from within and without. Its topics range from political commentary on social issues, including attacks on the civilian and elected governments from time to time, to letters and obituaries. But the themes are clear: what is right and wrong for Thai people, how they should behave, and how to think on every issue. It attempts to impose social and intellectual discipline, an overt brainwashing program which penetrates into every house and every bus two times a day. Quite often the legitimization given to such a standard view is no more than “according to Thai . . . [culture, values, tradition, history].”²² Positively, the commentaries often quote history, the king’s speeches, and the words of the incumbent army commander as authority for particular aspects of Thainess. Negatively, they usually refer to what is happening in other countries, especially in Indochina, as examples of evil, degradation, and the values Thai must avoid. To speak more precisely, the evil and degradation are

often alleged to be whatever is happening in those countries: the Other. Apart from mobilizing popular support behind the army, the broadcast is clearly part of the official industry to produce a standard of Thainess.²³

While these attempts at standardization aim for inarguable interpretations of Thainess, there are other contending interpretations. In all cases, however, they challenge the official view only in order to propose yet another standard of Thainess. To dissolve the notion of Thainess altogether is perhaps unthinkable. Even the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), the most radical opposition to the Thai establishment in recent history, achieved its successful ideological propagation in the late 1970s partly because of its strong nationalist sentiment, which was on the threshold of anti-Westernism. An obvious sign of this tendency was the somewhat puritanical character of its cultural programs calling for traditional, populist culture while attacking the influx of decadent Western culture and the hypocrisy of the state, which could not prevent the deterioration of Thai culture. A student leader who joined the party in the jungle and finally departed from it once remarked that, "considering traditional values, the Communist Party inherits the Thai legacy more than observers recognize."²⁴ So far, Thai critics of the CPT have been silent on this point. But is it because they have not recognized this conservative characteristic of the CPT or is it an identical tendency commonly held by those critics as well?

Another contending interpretation of Thainess which is more recent and still influential is an intellectual tendency that attracts many people by its conservative radicalism. Basically it attacks the failure of modern Thai society in the light of Buddhist Thai tradition, arguing that modernity, capitalism, and consumerism have uprooted Thai people from the fundamentals of Thai civilization—hence the degradation of modern culture and the deterioration of morality and Buddhism in Thai society as a whole. In turn, it calls for a return to Thainess, the roots or fundamental values of Thai civilization, and the reassertion of Thai intellect, all of which are based on Buddhism.²⁵ These people also oppose militarism and the establishment, since militarism is responsible for the degradation of Thai society and is in no way comparable to the monarchical leadership of the past.²⁶

Some people of this current persuasion, moreover, propagate the idea that Thainess is deeply rooted in the ways of life and the intellect of the people, particularly the peasantry. Thainess and Thai intellect in this view are located in the countryside and originate from the opposite end of the elitist pole.²⁷ Like the elitist Thainess, however, its opposition is Western culture. A book of poetry by a prime propagator of this view claims:

[These verses] go beyond the preponderance of the ways of thinking which follow Western philosophy. . . . [This] leads to the perception of rural villages and development projects in a lively and realistic fashion. . . . [The verses are written by] an artist and thinker who uses Thai intellect to challenge the Western one. . . . in an age when many artists are losing their Thai identity and are moving toward new identities that are pouring in from other lands.²⁸

For the military, despite the constant threat from the left, Thainess is in good health. For the Buddhist radicals, it is in crisis because of the preponderance of Western culture; therefore, it must be urgently restored as the only alternative for the future.²⁹ As one Buddhist radical observed: "The present generation of Thai people has departed from Thainess, feeling alienated and losing pride in their own nation, because the elites of Thai society in the past hundred years, preoccupied with tagging along behind the *jang*, did not use their intellect in the quest for our identity."³⁰ Ironically, the concern about the deterioration of morals is shared by another recently influential Buddhist movement: the Thammakai (Dhammakaya), which is supported by some members of the royal family and military leaders and which the Buddhist radicals detest. This movement expresses its distrust of Western knowledge and culture and their effects on Buddhism.³¹ This concern is not shared, however, by a well-known anticommunist monk, Kittiwutho. He agrees that commercial greed and higher education have caused the decline of morals and spiritual faith in Western countries, but he is confident that in Thailand, where Buddhism is the guiding light, technology and science will further the Buddhist faith.³²

The point is not which interpretation should be regarded as the correct and legitimate meaning of Thainess. Rather, while the alleged ascriptive and natural intimacy is believed to provide Thai people with familiarity or intuitive knowledge about Thainess, it does not guarantee an unambiguous notion of it. Nor are the struggles over this issue among Thai people less violent, oppressive, and hegemonic than the Orientalists' desire to inscribe the Oriental. Charges of communism, subversion, rebellion, and *lèse-majesté* are not uncommon.

These examples also point to the fact that no matter which interpretation becomes hegemonic, or what eclecticism is produced, the reign of Thainess would be unchanged. Although the interpretations sharply disagree with each other in many ways, they share a similar concern about Buddhism and the threat of Western culture to Thainess. Despite their political diversity, all struggling forces claim their legitimacy by adherence to Thainess. It is a paradigm of political ideas which no one dares to violate. If one is accused of

violating this fundamental, one loses credibility and authority. This was a strategy the right wing used to counter the rise of the leftist movement in Thailand during 1973–1976, and it was partly the cause for the collapse of the CPT. Having learned firsthand that the CPT had slavishly followed Chinese models for the Thai revolution, and had even been under the direct influence of the CCP, the young radicals who joined it after 1976 became disillusioned.³³ To these young students, the authority of the CPT and the power of its discourse on class struggles and Thai society had virtually disappeared because of its foreign elements.

But Thainess, or Thai nationhood, which Thai people perceive as “We-self,” the source, reference, and justification of legitimacy, criteria, standards, sentiments, inspiration, and antagonism, has never been seriously questioned. Where and how did it come into existence? Is it really natural for Thai people to claim an ascriptive relationship with it? If not, how then is Thainess made?

Siam as a Cultural Construct

Fundamentally, history is a prime database of what may be regarded as Thainess. Most interpretations of Thainess proudly claim to find support for their views in history. In this sense, history also becomes an authority of what is, and is not, Thainess. There is hardly any interpretation of Thainess which does not use history to authorize its validity. It can be said that the *oeuvre* of historical studies is the backbone of the scholastic and scientific discourse on Thai nationhood. For this reason, if anything is to be done for Thai studies, particularly by Thai people, it should not be another text to be incorporated in the existing *oeuvre*. It should, on the contrary, be a challenge: a counter-history.

A conventional historical study about Thailand always presupposes the definite presence of a political or socioeconomic “thing,” a kingdom or a state since time immemorial. Only by doing so can a historian talk about polity, economy, culture, or the development and transformation of the thing. The thing is given; the study only reaffirms it. This study, however, is a history of how Thai nationhood was created. It will examine an episode which is much celebrated by conventional historians as one which confirms the excellence of Thainess—namely, the making of the modern Siamese nation. But instead of discussing the process of nation building, it will show that Siam was a discursive construct. The Thai monarchs were merely the instrument of the new discourse. And Thainess was nothing but a construct of humble origin.

As with other nations outside Europe, history regards Siam's struggles against European imperialism in the nineteenth century as the advent of the modern nation. Unlike others, however, Siam was never formally colonized—a distinctive phenomenon Thai people are always proud of. Therefore, Siam has been regarded as a traditional state which transformed itself into a modern nation, thanks to the intelligence of the monarchs who responded wisely and timely to the threats of the European powers by modernizing the country in the right direction at the right time. Thus continuity, homogeneity, and the persistence of traditions, especially Thai Buddhism and Thai monarchy, have been the distinct characteristics, or even the unique features, of modern Siam. Despite some challenges, this established view of Thai history has occupied a firm place in Thai society, among scholars on Thailand, as well as among the circles of young radicals today.³⁴ Of course, it lends authority to militarism as well.

In Thailand, the established view was questioned by the Thai Marxist historiography of the 1950s and 1970s.³⁵ A number of alternative histories have been proposed, particularly in terms of class struggle and socioeconomic change. The advent of modern Siam in this view was the result of its entry into the global market, symbolically marked by the formal treaty with Britain in 1855. The direct counterargument about the role of the monarchy in building the nation-state emerged, as well, represented by the proposition that the actual start of the nation-state was not before the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 and that Siam from the late nineteenth century to the first three decades of the twentieth century was an absolutist state.³⁶

Alongside the domestic discourse on the Thai state, Western scholars raised similar questions. Siam is regarded as an indirect colonial country, both economically and politically, from the mid-nineteenth century through several dictatorial regimes after World War II.³⁷ The nation building and the role of the monarchy in the late nineteenth century were also critically questioned as anything but the beginning of a nation-state. Central to this argument is the fact that the Thai state has been unable to achieve modern national political integration of minorities of all sorts—ethnic, religious, or ideological—with the majority of Buddhist Thai under monarchical rule.³⁸ In the discourse of Western scholars, the notion of the “thing” known as the modern Thai nation has been recently defined in a heterogeneous way.³⁹

These challenges attempt to counter the exaggerated credit given to the ability of the monarchs and the adaptability of traditional institutions. Instead, they contemplate the impersonal forces in history and even attempt to separate the seemingly nationalist monarchs from the birth of the present

nation, emphasizing the inability of the Thai state, especially under the monarchical regimes, to become a true nation-state. This socioeconomic approach, however, must presuppose an archetype or a number of criteria constituting the notion of a nation-state and then compare Siam, a given socioeconomic entity, to that model. The task is to determine whether Siam was or was not a nation-state or to discover the nature of the state by applying the qualifications stipulated by scholars.

An orthodox king-and-battle history assumes a static old-fashioned definition of the Thai nation-state and applies it to the past. An alternative history proposes dynamism and process but only according to certain scholastic criteria found outside the history it describes. Indeed, scholars have tried throughout the history of the European nation-states to determine the true and natural constitution of a nation, that is, the truth or the identity of it. The entire history of a nation presumes the existence of such an entity or presupposes a definite qualification of it, as if its identity were already given.

This difficulty is not exclusive to the modern history of Southeast Asian nations. One of the major questions yet haunting the historians of early Southeast Asia concerns the formation of states. To be more specific, how one can talk about a state's formation without taking for granted what a state is—the criteria usually prescribed by social scientists, not by the early Southeast Asian peoples themselves. Thus historians sometimes doubt that the state qualifies as a state at all.⁴⁰

Moving beyond the nation, Donald Emmerson has shown that even the identity of the thing called Southeast Asia had not been known as such before World War II. Colonial rulers identified the region in terms of dominions of various imperial powers. It was warfare, not scholarship, particularly the Japanese occupation, that abolished the colonial distinctions. In addition, "making wars means making maps." The National Geographic Society produced a map of Southeast Asia; the Allies established the Southeast Asia Command. After the war, consequently, the term "Southeast Asia" became known even though its definition has been a controversial issue.⁴¹ Even as the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia become separate nations called Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, and so on, who can say for sure whether Burma and Sri Lanka deserve to be unified nations or the separate states of Myanmar, Mon, Karen, Shan, Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu, and others? What has been believed to be a nation's essence, a justifiable identity, could suddenly turn out to be fabrication.

Instead of searching for the true identity of a nation, Ben Anderson takes a nation as an imagined community.⁴² A nation is not a given reality. Rather, it is the effect of imagining about it. Compared to the religious dominion and

the dynastic realm, a nation is conceived as a new era, a new kind of community whose spatial parameters and temporal homogeneity have been formulated in various ways. This identification is possible only through mediation by certain means such as language. As a prime technology of imagining nationhood, a language works a nation out in different manners—for example, by a spoken vernacular, the written language, the printing press, a court's language, a state mechanism like education, or the unified language of a colonial rule. In short, a language enables a certain group of people to think of their community in an unprecedented, spatiotemporal definition. Nationhood is an imagined sphere with no given identity or essence; it is a cultural construct. We can know about it as long as we employ certain technologies to inscribe the possible sphere. In turn, such technologies create the knowledge of it, create a fact of it, and the entity comes into existence.

Anderson's pioneering work does open up a wide range of possible studies on nationhood. Yet it begs more critical questions as well. First of all, the languages mediating the imagined communities in Anderson's study are at the level known as parole to structural linguists—that is, the spoken, operational language of normal conversation. A language in a broader sense is any kind of mediator between human individuals and the external world. What are the other kinds of mediators—technologies, other kinds of languages, apart from a vernacular—and how do they operate in mediating and creating the imagined communities?

Second, Anderson seems too concerned with the imagination, the conceivability of a nation. It sounds as if a nation is produced out of one's head and is sustained only as long as the reproduction remains in one's head—hence an imagined community. One may still wonder how such a mediator formulates the social institutions and practices which perpetuate the operation and reproduction of the imagined community in actual human relations. The primacy given to consciousness over the operation in human practices is always prone to idealism. Hence the new imagined community seems to be created out of the frictionless propagation of new ideas—like inscribing a new language on a blank sheet of paper. If a nation is not the first or the only kind of imagined community, and if a new mediator does not operate in a vacuum, then a meeting, contention, combination, or conjuncture between the old and new mediators must have occurred.

Third, the identification of Anderson's imagined community is a positive one. His linguistic mediation creates a sphere of identity, configuring and defining the spatiotemporal axes of a field of commonness. Yet to figure out a sphere of commonness is to identify the difference between that sphere and the one beyond. An imagined identity always implies the absence of such an

identity at the point beyond its boundary. In fact, ethnographers are familiar with how problematic an ethnic identification is. Basically, an ethnic identification is a dynamic mechanism defining or demarcating the sphere of "us" against "them." In many cases, the idea of who we are is possible only by identifying those characteristics which do not belong to us, rather than by considering positively any natural qualification of "us." Moreover, the differentiation is cultural, not based on any natural quality, and can be changed.⁴³ This is a truth for the identification of nationhood as well.

This book is not another study of nation building, state formation, or the origin of a nation. It is not a political or economic history of the transition from a premodern empire to a modern nation-state. It is a history of *identification* of nationhood: what constitutes the presence of Thai nationhood and how has an identity of it been created?

Subject and Method

Nationhood comprises many elements. Anderson's work emphasizes that the new temporal consciousness helps to formulate the sense of a new community in historical lineage (as distinct from previous imagined communities) and the sense of homogeneous time of the new community. This study will focus on another element of nationhood: the geo-body. It describes the operations of the technology of territoriality which created nationhood spatially. It emphasizes the displacement of spatial knowledge which has in effect produced social institutions and practices that created nationhood.

The choice was not made for any theoretical or historical reason. Rather, to challenge the metaphysical notion of Thainess or We-self, we should deal with the most concrete, seemingly natural, and stable feature of a nation in order to illustrate how even the most "natural" element constituting the presence of a nation has been culturally constructed by a certain kind of knowledge and technology. Yet this is done with full recognition that around the same time, the "revolution in time" was under way and not unrelated.⁴⁴

A nation's territory is not simply a sizable piece of the earth's surface. It is a territoriality. According to a geography theorist, "Territoriality [is] the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over geographic area. . . . [It] is not an instinct or drive, but a rather complex strategy. . . . [and] the device through which people construct and maintain spatial organizations."⁴⁵ Territoriality involves three basic human behaviors: a form of classification by area, a form of communication by boundary, and an attempt at enforcing. Above all, as the basic geographic expression of

influence and power, "territoriality is always socially or humanly constructed. . . . [B]ecause it is a product of social context, whatever is said about it . . . can have normative implications affixed to it and can lead back to a social context."⁴⁶ Likewise, the geo-body of a nation is a man-made territorial definition which creates effects—by classifying, communicating, and enforcement—on people, things, and relationships.

Geographically speaking, the geo-body of a nation occupies a certain portion of the earth's surface which is objectively identifiable. It appears to be concrete to the eyes as if its existence does not depend on any act of imagining. That, of course, is not the case. The geo-body of a nation is merely an effect of modern geographical discourse whose prime technology is a map. To a considerable extent, the knowledge about the Siamese nationhood has been created by our conception of Siam-on-the-map, emerging from maps and existing nowhere apart from the map.

The term "geo-body" is mine. But the definition of the term is neither strict nor conclusive. Readers will find that it is flexible enough to convey meanings concerning the territoriality of a nation. We all know how important the territoriality of a nation is. Unarguably it is the most concrete feature, the most solid foundation, literally and connotatively, of nationhood as a whole. There are innumerable concepts, practices, and institutions related to it or working within the provision and limitation of a nation's geo-body: the concept of integrity and sovereignty; border control, armed conflict, invasions, and wars; the territorial definition of national economy, products, industries, trade, tax, custom duties, education, administration, culture, and so on. But the term geo-body is used to signify that the object of this study is not merely space or territory. It is a component of the life of a nation. It is a source of pride, loyalty, love, passion, bias, hatred, reason, unreason. It also generates many other conceptions and practices about nationhood as it combines with other elements of nationhood.

Despite its concreteness, or perhaps because of it, there have been few studies on the history of a national territory. Most of them concern disputes over territories and boundary demarcations. Such studies always presuppose the existence of the territoriality of a nation in modern form. Accordingly, they merely legitimate or refute a claim and therefore merely entail a political history in a politico-technical sense. Only in the works by Edmund Leach on Burma have the effects of the arbitrariness and recent origin of boundaries been seriously considered.⁴⁷ Leach, however, merely exposes the limitations or inapplicability of a modern boundary to ethnic entities. He does not consider its positive role as a creator of a nationhood.

The lack of interest in the history of a nation's geo-body has led to many

misleading historical interpretations which assume a modern concept of space in explaining the incidents in which the premodern discourse still prevailed. No study has been done on the relationships—either the transformation or shift or confrontation—between the premodern geographical discourse and the modern one. The absence of definite boundaries of the premodern realm of Siam is not taken seriously, as if it were due to some practical or technical reason.⁴⁸ Many historians have demarcated the boundary of a premodern nation retrospectively. Innumerable texts include anachronistic maps of historical space. In this respect, this study is not simply a record of how mapping has been implemented and boundaries settled by treaty. Rather, it emphasizes how the new geographical discourse displaced the indigenous one, generating conflict, confrontation, and misunderstanding. Central to the whole study is the question of how a map created the geo-body of a modern nation.

Geography is regarded here as a kind of mediator. It is not a given object “out there.” It is a kind of knowledge, a conceptual abstraction of a supposedly objective reality, a systematic set of signs, a discourse. The strategy of this study is to analyze the premodern and modern discourses and then to detect the moments when the new and the old discourses collided. Those moments were in fact the politico-semiological operations in which the new discourse threatened and displaced the existing one. They occurred whenever the notions of geography, boundary, territorial sovereignty, and margin were in conflict. Those moments could appear in every sort of social activity: diplomatic relations, scientific observations, correspondences, travels, textbooks, warfare, and, of course, surveys and mapmaking. They could take place anywhere from the palace’s study room to the jungle on a remote border. Those moments of collision can be determined by locating the events in which ambiguous meanings about space were signified, since the confronting discourses were playing upon the same field of terminology and practices. The relations between mapping and military force are emphasized here as the mutual operation of knowledge and power in executing the truth of geographical knowledge.

My use of the terms Siam, Siamese, Thailand, and Thai throughout the book follows a simple criterion: Siam and Siamese are used for the country and its people before the change of the country’s name in 1941; Thailand and Thai are used for the post-1941 context. This is done with full acknowledgment of the controversy surrounding the name: changing the name of the country and its people was the political act of a chauvinist regime to promote the domination of the ethnic Thai and their culture over others. But even though the racial prejudice expressed in the name’s etymology and in reality

is far from dissolved, it is no longer the dominant signification of the term. Application of the term Thai is now wider than its limited racial denotation. For example, *khwampenhai* (Thainess) as discussed in this introductory chapter is not meant to denote characteristics of the ethnic Thai exclusively but of the country’s nationals as a whole. On the other hand, the usage of the term Siam is more limited. Again, no one uses the term *khwampenyam* (Siameseness) to signify the supposed common characteristics of all citizens of the nation. The new nomenclature has not been changed since its inception. But its application and its reference, the country and people, have changed. So the complications surrounding the issue will be left aside in this study.

Another term which is very misleading is “modern”—a vague and relative term which hardly signifies any specific historical character. Indeed, except as a proper noun, such as Modernism in the arts, it can mean too many things, depending on the noun after it and on the context. The modern period of Southeast Asia, for example, is not the same as that of Europe or that of the arts. In the context of the history of Siam, this adjective generally means westernized as opposed to traditional. But I wonder if the westernized Siam of the late nineteenth century is still considered modern. Its vagueness renders other terms in relation to it—such as “traditional,” “premodern,” and so on—ambiguous. In most situations, each of these terms is intelligible only in reference to the others.

Moreover, the term “modern” usually implies a state of advancement, betterment, progress, even goodness or virtue. That is to say, it claims superiority over its counterpart, the premodern and traditional. This claim, of course, is not necessarily true. Unfortunately, because of its relativity and vagueness, the term is flexible and encompassing and therefore applicable to any occasion. As a result, it is very useful in this respect.