

An Insight into Thailand's Construction of the Thai Race, Identity and Consequent 'Thainess'

Introduction

A person's identity is often moulded by the powerful influence of their society. For the citizens of Thailand, a desired identity is defined and encouraged by a handful of central Thai elites. This is based on citizenship within the physical boundaries of the country, as well as certain characteristics that directly reflect a distinct Thai identity. What it means to be Thai is constructed from a mixture of external influences including religion, culture and class alongside ethnic origin. At the forefront is a sense of nationalism which is imperative in the shaping of the self.

Exploring the racialisation of Thai society through the lens of political influence reveals the power the central government has over the production and maintaining of Thainess; a modern concept constructed due to a threat to the Thai race during colonisation. This essay will endeavour to expose the tools in which the government use, and have used, to ensure the assimilation of ethnic minority groups within Thailand's geographical boundaries into society. For instance, education in Thailand teaches and promotes the dominant culture, language and religion as enforced by the Thai state, without embracing any alternatives.

In addition, religion in Thailand plays a pivotal role in constructing identity. A refusal to assimilate into society is a possible cause for the insurgency occurring in the Southern provinces of Thailand between the Malay Muslims and the majority Buddhist country. These racial conflicts highlight the importance of religion in what it means to be Thai as the Malay Muslims are increasingly secluded from central society due to their distinct culture and religion.

Alongside this, other ethnic minority groups have been excluded due to a failure in possible assimilation attempts. The indigenous people of northern Thailand suffer greatly in preserving their unique lifestyles and protecting them from being lost to the Thai state. As a result these groups are restricted of citizenship, criminalised and continually ostracised by the government and laws which challenge their lifestyle and wellbeing. The perception of these communities by central society is clearly negative and derogatory and lead to the racial discrimination against these ethnic groups, rather than an expression of Thailand's ethnically diverse population.

Most importantly, the construction of identity is not created from within Thailand alone.

Acknowledging the effects of globalisation is essential in studying the racialisation in this country.

The obsession with lighter skin is an example of Westernised ideas that have been incorporated and celebrated in Thai culture, with clear undertones of racism towards those with darker skin. Notions of nationalism are evident in central Thai society, yet the desire for lighter skin is a contrast to what would be expected to be regarded as natively Thai. This phenomenon demonstrates again the influence of the elites who almost encourage racism against those who do not desire to accept this global influence sweeping across the majority of Asian countries.

The aim of this essay is to ultimately explore the construction of 'Thainess', a concept that encompasses what it truly means to be Thai, through looking at its historical origin, why it is still very much present in contemporary Thai society and whether it is a dangerous concept in regards to possibly perpetuating racism towards those who do not fit within its boundaries.

The Thai Race: From its Creation to its Representation in Contemporary Thailand

The construction of the current concept of 'Thainess' cannot be understood without recognising the effects of the colonisation of Asia during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Despite not being colonised itself, the threat of western countries prompted the birth of a singular Thai race. Formerly Siam, Thailand once boasted a large amount of ethnic groups from surrounding countries, including Lao, Chinese, Cambodian and Malay individuals. In particular, the French threat was greater than most and encouraged those who were natively Thai to regard themselves as

minorities in their own country due to the strong presence of other ethnic groups within its borders (Streckfuss, 1993). A lack of a singular, distinct race or the ability to rule left Siam a vulnerable country to colonisation. Adopting the concept of race politics, the French proposition of the Siamese as a minority meant they were unable to rule with a lack of a dominant race due to the probability of oppressive governance (Streckfuss, 1993).

In response to growing threats of European colonisation, steps taken by the government saw the seizure of their own territory, assimilating ethnic groups into a dominant Thai race. This was the beginning of the Thai identity, as reinforced with the renaming of Siam as 'Thai-land' in 1902 (Streckfuss, 1993). The Thai elite formed the basis of Thainess and racial consciousness on ethnic identity alongside the geographical boundaries of their country. The dichotomy of 'us' and the 'other' is present in the construction of Thai identity, with western countries and also Lao individuals being regarded as the 'other' (Zhuang, 2014). The 'othering' of the Lao resulted in their elimination from the Thai borders following the gaining of their own territory, especially due to the fact they were often compared as being an equal race and highly present within Thailand. This identification of 'us' is a clearly indicator of the Thai elite's aim to strengthen the national identity and distinguish themselves from others. Although direct colonisation of Thailand did not occur, the immense threat led to the suppression of individual ethnic and racial identities due to the composure of the Thai race.

With the initial foundations of a Thai identity formed through geographical boundaries, the simplicity of social existence create common religion, language and customs which enable ethnic groups to evolve as well as entire nations (Thananithichot, 2011). A postcolonial construction of 'Thainess' highlights the importance of a common belief in nationalism and a promotion of a singular identity. Alongside these notions of nationalism, the monarchy and Theravada Buddhism form the trinity of the foundations for contemporary Thainess and a Thai race which is continually reinforced through assimilatory principles (Zhuang, 2014). The power obtained through the resistance of European colonisation strengthened the authority of a majority Thai race, allowing the minority groups remaining in Thai borders to be coerced and influenced into abandoning their own culture and customs and absorbing themselves into the majority group (Bun and Kiong, 1993). The evident social change occurring is resulting in the loss of diverse ethnicities within Thai borders, yet the obsession of having a 'nation-state' is more apparent than embracing these other groups.

As assimilation of alternate ethnic groups within Thailand is essential in the preservation and promotion of 'Thainess', it is evident that this occurs due to the authority the central government and Bangkok elites have over the control of the country and those within. Arguably the most effective way to comprehend the promotion of the Thai identity is to acknowledge its use as a political mechanism. Throughout the discussion of the evolution of 'Thainess', it can be assumed that a single Thai race emerged with no racial conflict, yet this is not the case. Many political conflicts occur due to assimilation principles and government control. The Red Shirt Protests that occurred in 2010 were the most recent examples of severe political conflict that clearly demonstrated the contrast between ethnic identity and the effects of assimilation. Following the military coup that removed Thaksin Shinawatra from presidency and created a new military government, the United Front for Democracy Dictatorship or 'red shirts' protested on a large scale in Bangkok against the government's actions, resulting in thousands of casualties (Buchanan, 2013). The 'red shirts' were from more rural areas of Thailand, differing greatly from those who supported the government, the 'yellow shirts'.

The presence of xenophobia within this political conflict highlighted how serious issues regarding the government and monarchy were regarded as something only Thais could comprehend. The 'yellow shirts' were witnessed using derogatory language towards the 'red shirts', often describing them as *prai*, a word associated with poverty and poor education. This was identified as an attempt to dehumanise those from 'rural' areas and dismiss them as not being truly Thai or having any importance (Buchanan, 2013). The marginalisation of the 'red shirts' clearly shows the racialisation involved in the political allegiances of these two opposing groups. In applying the concept of 'Thainess', nationalist portrayals of these protests outwardly labelled the red shirts as 'others' and 'un-Thai' due to their rebellion against the central government (Zhuang, 2014). By claiming these

individuals were not Thai, even though they lived within Thailand's borders, emphasises the importance of the Thai elites in shaping the national identity. Perhaps the most surprising conclusion made from analysing the Red Shirt protests is the obvious evidence of successful assimilation practices promoted by the government. Although shunned as not having Thai identity, the red shirts referred to themselves as being the true people of Thailand and so they deserved to have a voice in who runs the country. This shows how these individuals have become absorbed into the central Thai race as they believed they are what is defined as having a true Thai identity, a concept created and defined by the central government itself (Zhuang, 2014).

Adopting a political viewpoint in analysing the power of the central government can show the assimilatory principles in practice. As well as exposed through political conflict, a sense of nation is upheld through the education system. The government has strict control over the educational curriculum in order to perpetuate their political dominance. Particular religious practices are reinforced through education, promoting the majority religion of Theravada Buddhism, alongside using the concept of 'otherness' to teach a distorted view of history and culture (Von Feigenblatt et.al, 2010). For instance, the southern provinces of Thailand are populated by a majority of Muslim communities, therefore against the trinity of what constitutes 'Thainess'. Clear issues regarding the assimilation of ethnic groups into the dominant Thai race are demonstrated here and inevitably result in further racialisation of these groups. Modernity in Thailand is based on nationalism and in order to successfully promote this, the new generation are taught a one sided view of their history, with other ethnic groups only being recognised in historical contexts if they were successfully absorbed into Thai culture (Von Feigenblatt et.al, 2010). Taking the example of Malay Muslim communities in Southern Thailand, schools named 'pondoks' are present to teach local dialect and religion. The challenges these schools raised for an attempt at government control led to the instatement of compulsory Buddhist schools, teaching central Thai language and civic education involving royal and government propaganda (Von Feigenblatt, 2010). This is proof of an attempt to forcefully assimilate groups with opposing lifestyles into the preferable Thai standard of living. Chinese individuals living in Thailand have also been seen to lose their own language and customs due to their culture being extremely assimilated by the promotion of a nation-state (Von Feigenblatt et.al, 2010). Through this, it can be argued that the focus of identity in Thailand is centred on the oppression of any ethnicity or race that does not fit within the boundaries that are clearly defined by the central government.

Thai Buddhists VS Malay Muslims: Conflict, Violence and Resistance

The Buddhist religion is one pillar of the Thai identity. In the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, eighty percent of the population is composed of Malay Muslims, a minority in the context of Thailand as a whole. These border regions celebrate diverse ethnicities yet the imposing Buddhist practices promoted by the government continually threaten their lifestyles. The presence of Buddhism in these provinces is reflected in the economic divisions and class structure. The standard of living Thai Buddhists and government officials enjoy is significantly higher than that of the Malay Muslims communities, demonstrating an economic divide based on religious beliefs (Engvall and Andersson, 2014). The divide between these two religious communities is evident and can be identified through not only the assimilatory principles used within education, but also the extreme racial conflict that has been developing for many years between the Malay Muslims and the central Thai state.

Movements of insurgency have been seen previously in southern Thailand, aimed directly at the central Thai government and state due to marginalisation and oppression of local identities. Insurgent movements had ceased to exist by the 1990s, in particular the Malay Muslim separatists were regarded as having the least direct effect on the central government and posed no threat to their power over these areas (Forbes, 1982). Yet, insurgent groups began to gain momentum again in 2004 with a heightened use of increasingly violent methods of conflict; Malay Muslims being at the core of these violent attacks on civilians (Von Feigenblatt, 2010). Since 2004, approximately five thousand civilians have been killed in attacks against the Thai state that can only be described as ideological, especially due to the majority of targets being locals that they are attempting to defend (Horn, 2011). Reasons as to why there has been heightened risk of criminal activity in these areas vary greatly from

brewing racial and religious tensions between the two conflicting groups, to the negative involvement of central control in such a hostile atmosphere.

Racialisation comes hand in hand with colonial and nationalist policies enforced upon the Thai nation. Through their resistance to join the majority state, Malay Muslims suffer from alienation and discrimination at the hands of the Thai government (Jerryson, 2011). Political and cultural marginalisation is apparent in how the government address this insurgency. They have shown little interest or acknowledgement in the occurrences in the south, instead the aim of the Thai state is to resolve the issue without any political involvement (Dominguez, 2015). It can be argued that a desire for autonomy and independence is at the heart of the separatist's conflict in a last attempt to preserve their distinct language and identity before it is forcefully oppressed through assimilation. In this case, political and cultural marginalisation should not be an issue for those fighting for freedom, however the government response in declaring martial law in these three provinces have caused even more violent conflict (Jerryson, 2011). This demonstrates counter insurgency operations conducted by the military as a method of diffusion, rather than the acknowledgement of the Malay Muslim's desire for autonomy. A basis for these grievances can be pinned to the dissolution of a political voice and outlet for local voices to be heard. The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre was disbanded in 2001, and as a result removed the stability and protection of the Malay Muslim communities living in the southern provinces (Jerryson, 2011). A repressed sense of fury against the government, alongside aggressive military intervention, can be identified as a reason for the continuing conflict. The majority of other ethnic minority groups have accepted assimilation into mainstream society for the sake of securing Thai citizenship and identity. Yet the overpowering resistance evident through Malay Muslims practice can suggest that the state is struggling to exert its power over this particular group (Dominguez, 2015).

The question still remains as to whether the violence is occurring between two conflicting religious groups or aimed directly at the Thai state as a whole. The dominant presence of a Buddhist religion is apparent in the political elite, as well as within the state nationals and the military. With contemporary Islamic threat dictating who is the enemy, it is no surprise that these global views have led to the Southern insurgency being labelled as an Islamic conflict (Jerryson, 2011). This demonstrates the influence on racial discourse on a global scale, highlighting the Malay Muslims as people not part of the Thai race, or as 'others'. Since the resurgence of conflict in 2004, more than a third of Buddhists that reside in these provinces have migrated to alternate areas of Thailand due to constant threat being directed at them (Sakolnakorn and Chandeng, 2014). Although the Malay Muslims are suffering at the hands of the Thai state, their desire for freedom does not justify the targeting of innocent civilians and specific religions as they are committing acts of terrorism to protect their own personal identity. Ultimately, in the process of creating a sense of 'Thainess', an enemy must be created alongside. In this case, the Malay Muslims are negatively contrasted with Thai Buddhists due to their minority in Thailand as a whole. A resistance to assimilate has led to Thai Buddhists regarding Malay Muslims as not true Thai people and people that do not deserve to identify with having a sense of 'Thainess'. Yet, it can be said that they do not regard themselves as part of the Thai identity either, as clearly shown through their desire for autonomy.

Failed Assimilation? The Seclusion of Thailand's Indigenous People from Central Thai Society

The construction of a singular Thai race has overshadowed the presence of ethnic minorities within Thailand's borders. In contrast to Malay Muslims who have demonstrated a clear rejection of inclusion of Thai identity, other groups have less of a voice. The border regions of Northern Thailand are home to many communities, including migrants from Burma, Laos, Tibet and China and communities of indigenous people. These groups are all clustered together under the fact they are all outsiders of central Thai society. The concept of identity politics suggests that those who are marginalised construct their own identities based on their diverse culture and lifestyle; that being said, all have their own customs, beliefs, language and dress (Yoko, 2006). These diverse lifestyles are not incorporated or expressed by the central Thai society and it is likely that the majority of their way of life is unknown. In the north-western highlands, the 'Hilltribes' are the largest group of indigenous people with a population of approximately one million (Cultural Survival, 2015). The rich, unique culture enjoyed by the Hilltribes is no different to other minority cultures within Thailand in the sense that they are stifled by the central government. The Hilltribes were regarded as a problem due to their

dramatic contrast to the ideal construction of Thai identity and race. Due to this, either assimilation or expulsion from Thai territorial lands were the only options (Yoko, 2006). Their natural way of life in the highlands highlights them as an easy target for assimilatory principles, through the popular tools of education and political involvement.

Similar to processes used in the past, the Hilltribes were initially engulfed by the introduction of compulsory education. They were taught the national curriculum consisting of central Thai language, not their regional dialect, Buddhist practices and a distorted view of history that did not acknowledge their presence. The common myth that they are not what constitutes 'Thai' is evident throughout the historical textbooks and within the media (Gill, 2001). The aim of assimilation through education may have been an attempt to teach younger generations about the importance of modernity based on nationalism, not their local way of living (Von Feigenblatt et.al, 2010). This differs from the elders in the communities who are not involved in the growing influence of global norms and pressures from central Thai society; ultimately leading to the diffusion of the Hilltribes through assimilation of younger generations. However, the language and geographical boundaries of the Hilltribes makes education difficult in these areas, meaning assimilation is not entirely possible. In this case, the other path used to enforce central control is through marginalisation.

Different to Malay Muslim communities who did not see themselves as Thai, the majority of indigenous people regard themselves as being natively Thai. The negative perception of the Hilltribes by central society is their biggest obstacle in their attempt to adopt this identity. They are not embraced as a unique section of Thai culture, instead they are associated with criminal acts such as illicit drug productions and trafficking and deforestation of their surrounding areas (Johanson, 2011). The central government promote these negative connotations through criminalising them further, as seen in the war on drugs that led to raids and arrests in local Hilltribe villages by state officials and police (Cultural Survival, 2015). In constructing the image that they are dangerous and threatening to central society, the marginalisation of the Hilltribes is ever increasing and their association with 'Thainess' is as limited as possible. It can be suggested that labelling them as foreign and uncivilised is a backlash following failed attempts at assimilation into the Thai race.

Threats of marginalisation and exclusion from the Thai race is dangerous for the preservation of the Hilltribe culture. Many obstacles of modern life stifle their ability to live comfortably. They are constantly denied citizenship despite approximately fifty percent having a legitimate claim (Cultural Survival, 2015). Thai citizenship enables rights to education, land and allows freedom of movement; without this, individuals face engaging in illegal behaviour possibly without intent. As well as denied citizenship, policies such as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) demand a protection and conservation of forests in Northern areas of Thailand. As this is where the Hilltribes reside, many are forced from their homes yet their lack of citizenship means they are likely to be arrested for moving without free will (Cultural Survival, 2015). This demonstrates a tactful control over these communities by the government without having to assimilate them into central society. A lack of status and education also enables victimisation of criminal behaviour to be more common, such as human trafficking. The danger these communities are put in by the hand of the government is not recognised due to the overpowering desire for a singular Thai race. It is apparent that the importance of constructing a nation state run by a handful of traditional elites is more overpowering than the wellbeing and functioning of indigenous communities. It is bizarre how the focus can shift so dramatically from assimilation to exclusion in regards to minority groups such as the Hilltribes. However, the reeling effects of colonialism still shape the construction of a strong, unified race and highlight the importance of an inferiority complex whereby the racialisation of these groups is engrained in global capitalism (Dikotter, 2008). The presence of distinct other races such as the Hilltribes may be regarded as a weakness, mirroring the presence of other minorities in Thai borders during the colonisation of Asia. European ideologies still have powerful authority over the shaping of societies due to globalisation, therefore it can be suggested that the only option, as decided by the Thai state, is to exclude these minorities from society to enforce a powerful Thai race based on a singular identity of 'Thainess'.

The Influence of Globalisation on the Construction of Identity

Appearance is arguably one of the strongest factors in the formation of identity. No doubt this creates an opportunity for possibly racialised beauty trends to develop and be highly influential. The media

has the power to shape and mould society and identity through normalising certain behaviours and body images. In recent years, a large proportion of countries across the globe, in particular Asian countries, have succumbed to the globalisation of popular beauty trends stemming from westernised countries. Thailand is rapidly becoming one of the fastest growing countries in advertising in the world, with Bangkok being one of the most popular cities for tourists to visit (Franklin, 2013). The mass media provides a platform for Americanised norms to form a basis in the beauty industry, shaping how standards and trends evolve and globally spread to have an impact on other countries and their society. The media has the ability to stereotype what is 'beautiful' and what is 'ugly' and so certain characteristics are categorised as such.

Tourists sporting fairer skin alongside the celebration of lighter skin in global beauty campaigns have led to the possible revival of racial hierarchies, with modernity based on skin colour and affluence. An association between skin colour and prosperity is evident as the white skin obsession sweeping across Asian countries indicates a re-emergence of white supremacy to some extent, with those who have darker skin not meeting the standard of beauty that is accepted and desired in their current society. White supremacy indicates a notion of power and excellence over those with darker skin which is equally reflected in beauty standards across Thailand. Those who are regarded as the elite members of Thai society, such as celebrities or wealthy individuals, tend to have much fairer skin. This portrays the notion that lighter skin represents wealth, power and a higher class in contrast to people with darker skin tones who are at the bottom of the racial hierarchy (Persaud, 2014). Women in particular go to great lengths to ensure their skin is as light as possible, such as rarely revealing any parts of their body in order to prevent the sun from darkening their skin. With fair skin at the top of the racial hierarchy, darker skin is at the bottom, associated with outdoor, manual labour and poverty (Chaipraditkul, 2013). This is not a far cry from past racial stereotypes that created a clear divide between those with darker skin, marginalising them from central society and constructing a personal identity based on this.

It can be argued that the impact of globalisation in the beauty industry has revived and perpetuated past colonial racial hierarchies which stereotype lighter skin as being powerful (Persaud, 2014). Post-colonial racialisation in reference to a desire for fairer skin may occur due to a possible perceived threat of other individuals that could be regarded as superior. Personal enhancement through cosmetic surgery and skin bleaching may express a desire for confidence and an improvement of current social status that is decided upon through the stereotypes of skin colour (Chaipraditkul, 2013). Despite the influence of western media and advertisements on perceptions in Thailand, they do not necessarily promote lighter skin as being most desirable. The exposure to advertisements and large scale cosmetic campaigns in Thailand promote these beauty standards subconsciously as they feature no ethnically Thai models (Franklin, 2013). However, what is described as beautiful and desirable by the representation of no ethnically Thai models across global campaigns indicates that they should desire to be more like them. Any beauty and fashion trends are highly influential over shaping the perception of self and identity, therefore it is the responsibility of cosmetic companies to create and provide products that are in high demand. In the case of skin bleaching, the media promote racial stereotypes alongside the products as a result in order to fully capitalise from current beauty trends.

Skin care companies have seen a dramatic increase in the use of skin whitening products in recent years which create the largest sector in skin care in Thailand (Persaud, 2005). Despite possible health complications, women, and increasingly men, continue to lighten their skin as it has become normalised in society to do so. In a study of university students in Thailand, 83.8% used skin bleaching methods, the highest percentage across all Asian countries (Peltzer et.al, 2015). Recent advertisements from large scale cosmetic companies promote discrimination against darker skin tones through using slogans such as 'if I was white, I would win' (BBC, 2016). The advert for 'Snowz', a skin bleaching product was removed due to a backlash of complaints about its racial attack on darker skin, explicitly demonstrating the racism ingrained in this industry. A famous Thai actress, Cris Horwang, featured in the advert and responded by claiming that her success is due to her sporting fairer skin to most Thai citizens (BBC, 2016). Horwang is most likely a role model to a majority of individuals across Thailand due to her high status of an actress, alongside her racialised identity as a woman with fair skin who has succeeded. Companies use television adverts, the internet and other methods to embed the notion of white supremacy, leaving young, impressionable women exposed to the highly influential beauty standards that symbolise white skin as being attractive and essential for

superiority (Peltzer et.al. 2015). As a result, desire appears to shape the economy more so than racial discourse.

As this epidemic continues to spread globally, whether its popularity affects a construction of Thai identity is disputed. On the one hand, it instils the idea that in order to be accepted and successfully integrate into society, one must alter their appearance to fit social norms that are globally developed. Yet, as the majority of Thai citizens have naturally darker skin, this trend introduces a level of shame or embarrassment in being natively Thai (Chaipraditkul, 2013). In reference to this particular trend, a notion of collectivism in the construction of identity appears to dominate over a desire for individualism. Thus, to some extent, altering skin colour in Thailand to fit with the racialised identities accepted by most is demonstrating what is admired in Thai society (Chaipraditkul, 2013). What it means to be Thai is therefore more centred on what is collectively regarded as such, regardless if this dramatically alters over the years. Alternatively, the global influence of beauty standards that revives a racial hierarchy in a post-colonial setting can be viewed as an attack on Thai culture and identity (Persaud, 2005). The desire to adopt an identity based on global norms rather than specifically Thai standards does not represent a celebration of 'Thainess'; instead it creates a conflict between a desire to be Thai and a desire to be accepted. Skin bleaching perfectly demonstrates the impact of modernity on the Thai culture to the point where it has become a racial state (Goldberg, 2002). This shows how global racial discourse has become so engrained in everyday life in regards to employment, marriage, perceptions of others and personal identity, that it has become normalised.

Conclusion

'Thainess' is a concept that has been present throughout the history and development of Thailand as a country. Its origin perfectly demonstrates a racial discourse that was promoted during colonisation. Ideas of inferiority and weakness were associated with having a country of mixed races and ethnicities due to a lack of dominant authority. This was once the case in Thailand, but it is clear that the importance of power, identity and distinct culture has not faded since the initial concept of 'Thainess' took hold. The negative effects of colonisation to a singular country stifle any sense of culture or identity. Yet, it can be suggested that a similar outcome to colonisation has occurred in Thailand without this actually happening.

Thailand has been dominated by a wave of modernity based on global constructions of desirability and identity. Despite Thailand's enormous effort to enhance the Thai culture, there is no denying that the effects of global norms in the construction of Thai identity shape and control central society. Modern crazes such as skin bleaching fit with the primary theme of the 'othering' of outsiders in many dimensions in Thailand, confining the boundaries of desired 'Thainess' even more. Whether within religion, politics, education, historical textbooks or contemporary media, a target is always defined as being the 'other', with the Thai race being the 'us'.

Thainess is a complex concept due to its ever changing meaning; yet it is clear this has always been centred on the monarchy, the nation-state and Buddhism. With all the efforts of the central government to keep the identity of Thainess under their control, it can be suggested that this has failed. The evident assimilatory techniques may have been effective previously, but the resistance by some and the presence of other ethnic identities suggest the central control is not as powerful as it desires to be. A reluctance to acknowledge racial and religious violence in the Southern provinces and the ignorance of indigenous communities boasting alternate rich, Thai cultures does not in any way demonstrate a strong, unified Thai race.

The interactions between Thailand and other countries constantly threaten their desire for a distinct identity to the point where westernised concepts and norms are becoming embedded within the Thai identity. The presence of skin whitening has become so normalised that it is not regarded as being 'foreign' despite its dramatic contrast with the characteristics of Thainess. In conclusion, the Thai identity and Thainess evolved through a dramatic construction attempts of a singular Thai race in response to European threat. This idea has been perpetuated by a handful of elites that have central control over political insights, educational curriculums and everyday living. There is no doubt that Thainess possibly encourages the revival of racial degradation and exclusion of an inferior identity. However, the biggest threat to Thai identity is arguably the expanding power of globalisation. Maintaining control within a small number of traditional Thai elites is possibly going to become increasingly less likely, especially due to the increasing tourist industry in Thailand, allowing many

other cultures, ethnicities and identities within its borders. The concept of Thainess is dangerous for those who do not fit within its boundaries; yet, global influence could possibly result in the dissolution of such a concept to be used to define Thai identity.

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