

To race or not to race? – The (De)Racialisation of the Thai in History¹

The identity belonging to the people of a nation... it 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.

M.R. Kukrit Pramoj,
Prime Minister of Thailand, 1975-1976
(Thongchai 1994, 5)

Being Thai, as Kukrit notes, assumes a form of identity linked to particular characteristics. As a speaker of the Thai language myself, I have been mistaken to be Thai by many native Thais around the world, as long as I act in the proper Thai manner, i.e. posture, mannerisms, speech. In my personal interactions, it would appear that I have become Thai, even though I am a true blue Singaporean. Many a time, I was asked if I was Thai. After I had replied in the negative, the next common question asked, would be whether I had Thai blood, specifically if I had a Thai parent. Only after, would they ask if I was working in Thailand or had lived in Thailand for a long time. My personal experiences of being considered Thai, had thus led me to question why I had been treated as such. Why had I been considered as Thai, on the basis on my appearance, manners and speech? Why had I been considered to have Thai blood in my ancestry?

This paper will try to explain what constitutes Thai-ness. I will argue that race and ethnicity underpins the logics of many policies that the Thai nation has undertaken throughout its history. These policies have contributed to the *racing*, or rather, the erasure of 'race and ethnicity' from Thai identity. Specifically, I will examine various historical ruptures since the start of the Chakri Dynasty. In (re)-examining these ruptures, I hope to expose the powerful hegemonic discourses of race and identity in Thailand. I will trace how ideas of race and identity were formed during the initial colonial encounter. In particular, contact with the French was to influence King Chulalongkorn and to lay the foundations of

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race and identity in Thailand. His successor, King Vajirarudh, subsequently implemented nationalistic policies which further developed these logics of race and ethnicity. Decades later, these founding influences of race and ethnicity could still be observed. The communist insurgency through the 1970s, the Thai treatment of refugees and the 2010 Red Shirt protests were examples of the pervasiveness of race as a discourse, explicit or implicit.

Thinking about race in Thailand

Many scholars of Thailand have examined how national identity is related to an idea of a Thai race (see for instance, Reynolds 2002). The formative experience of Thai nationalism is a popular subject, as Thailand was never colonised in colonial Southeast Asia. On the other hand, race has been the less popular relative. The idea of "Thai-ness" seems to have taken a mystical, almost unshakable, rootedness. As Thongchai (1994, 3) notes, there is a widespread assumption of a common Thai nature or identity, which pervades among people and scholars. In David K. Wyatt's (2004, 1) seminal work on the history of Thailand, he begins by reaffirming this idea of Thainess:

The people of modern Thailand are as varied as those in any nation... *virtually all would call themselves "Thai" and would define "Thai" as primarily political, as "Thai" they are citizens of Thailand, subjects of the Thai monarch...* as "Thai" they are speakers of the Thai language and participants in Thai culture. However, the "Thai" identity along with its political, cultural and linguistic components has developed slowly through many centuries and what the modern citizen refers to as "Thai" existed only recently. [italics my emphasis]

Even while the modern idea of "Thai-ness" has existed only recently, it is widely prevalent. For instance, Kukrit Pramoj, quoted at the start, was speaking in 1976 at the launch of the Commission for National Identity (Thongchai 1994, 5) and he had reaffirmed an identity of Thai-ness, linked to birth and specific characteristics.

Thongchai's (1994) seminal work, *Siam Mapped*, provides a plausible explanation to the construction of Thai identity. The adoption of cartography delineates the modern boundaries of the nation, creating the *geo-body* of the Thai nation, which is not just the space and territory under a nation, but also the concepts, practices, and institutions related to it, that defined the territoriality of the nation (Thongchai 1994, 17). The delineation of national space creates an internal/external dichotomy, which serves effectively to delineate

the Thais from their other, for instance, their various foes, like the Vietnamese, Burmese and the West. The concept of the geo-body and this us/other dichotomy, is an important cornerstone in understanding Thai identity.

In examining the persistence of race and ethnicity in Thailand, I argue that the multiplicity of race discourse reflects what Judith Butler (1990, 1993) terms performativity, where effects of discourse are replicated by subjects. In Judith Butler's seminal works on feminism, *Gender Trouble* and subsequently in *Bodies that Matters*, she introduces the concept of "performativity". The consistent replication, construction or materialisation of the norm, in this case sex/gender, through highly-regulated practices, is what Butler (1990, 1993) terms performativity. In other words, through gender performativity, discourse (re)-produces the effect that it names.

Racial discourse in Thailand could then be seen as a regulatory norm, which is imposed upon the ideas, policies, and actions of the government, elites, administrators and common Thais in their reactions to the issues they face. At the same time, through what Foucault (1977) terms *techniques of power*, i.e. law, administration, judiciary, healthcare, academic scholarship and even by the acts the Thai people themselves, these discourses are replicated and reiterated. A racial understanding of discourse would allow us to better understand why the Thais act in certain manners.

In this way the central state engineers a perverse form of Orientalism. Orientalism as espoused by Edward Said (1978) is the analysis of how the Occident/West, imagines the Orient, and the reiteration and replication of the image in the structures, institutions, knowledges, and academic scholarships of the 'West'. Occidentalism is then the reverse, where the Oriental imagines the West. Pattana (2010) has argued that the othering of the West is a key factor in the formation of Thai identity. However, instead of seeing the Thai history of racialisation within either paradigm of Orientalism or Occidentalism, perhaps we could consider seeing such history as a form of 'perverse Orientalism'. The Thai state, or rather the central Bangkok/Siamese elite, had commandeered principles of Orientalism as it sought to impose its gaze and vision onto the various people it ruled over. This imagery of

the Thai people and what they are to be, is constantly juxtaposed vis-a-vis the West, and yet also within itself by the central state.

Seen as such, the Thai state is a racial state. Goldberg (2002) argues that there is no single phenomenon that we can term the racial state; instead, there are different types of states that have its own racial regimes in different sociopolitical and historical contexts. In that manner, race is an essential component of the modern nation. I agree with Goldberg (2002, 9), that in racial (racist) states, we see the adoption of techniques of power to categorise, differently and hierarchically, populations in a racial manner and dominate them through a centrally-defined modernity. This is particularly useful as we turn our attention to the Thai central state and its attempts to create a Thai nation.

Origins of Race in the Thai nation

Historically, the Thai kingdoms, in particular the Ayyuthaya kingdom had interactions with the West through trade (Pattana, 2010; Gehan, 2002). However the racial discourses espoused then were mainly external facing and concerned with keeping Westerners separate from the native population. Indeed, a key cornerstone of Siamese identity had been to compare and differentiate themselves from the West, their neighbours and the people they ruled - the Lao, Khmer, Burmans (Sulak 2002). Yet at the turn of the 19th century, some groups of these people had begun to be assimilated and integrated within a singular Thai race.

The origins of racial discourses in Thailand could be traced to King Chulalongkorn's reign. While Thailand was never colonised, it was perilously perched between the British and the French. In particular, the turn of the 19th century marked the period where the French sought to increase their influence in Indochina (Wyatt 2004, 184-197). As a result of the French territorial threat, one of the responses of the Siamese² kingship was to lay the foundations of racial theory in Thailand.

² I have used the term Siam and Thai in various parts of the essay. In referring to the country, I have tried to refer to it by its proper name in the particular historical period.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the French had attempted to increase their influence by applying racial discourse on the Siamese elites. Through use of census, they portrayed the Siamese as a minority elite that colonised other ethnic groups and races in Siam (Streckfuss 1993, 129-132). In other words, the French sought to see the Thais as ruling the non-Thais. In fact, no other than Chulalongkorn reaffirmed this when he spoke to a newly appointed governor in 1883:

"you must remember that if you are speaking with a westerner on the one hand and a Lao on the other, you must maintain that the westerner is "them" and the Lao is Thai. If, however, you are speaking with a Lao on the one hand and a Thai on the other, you must maintain that the Lao is "them" and the Thai is "us"... [doing otherwise] would be returning to the old ways..."

(Streckfuss 1993, 134)

An attempt was thus made to distinguish between the West and the Thais. In confronting the West, a united front was presented. Yet at the same time, the Siamese elite also sought to distinguish themselves as different from the Laos and other races that they ruled. In pre-1900 Siam, controlling populations and keeping them distinct from others was based on a non-assimilatory logic.

With the French threat looming, the Siamese elite had to change their methods of governance. The Thai logics of governance, changed to assimilate the various races of Lao, Khmer, and Chinese living within the Thai border. The Siamese elite declared everyone "Thai", and absorbed all the other peoples under a singular Thai race (Streckfuss 1993, 138-143). The Lao, always seen as the "Other" to the Siamese elite, was also absorbed as Thai and not as a separate ethnic or racial group. The erasure of other groups of people, into a singular racial category of Thai thus completed the Thai response to the French threat.

Nation Building and the Thais

*Land of the Thais unites the Thai race,
A people's state, with each and every part of the land belonging to the Thais.
The land is kept intact
Through the Thai people's unity.
Thais are peace-loving people, who never fear to fight.
Their country can never be subjugated.*

Each drop of their blood is spilt for the nation's survival.
May the land of the Thais forever prosper, Chai-yo! (Italics my emphasis)
(PRD 2013)

The Thai National Anthem, produced in 1939, close to thirty years later, is thus reflective of the racist regimes set forth in Chulalongkorn's reign. By making reference to Thai unity, there was further reinforcement of the idea of the singular Thai race connected to the land of the Thai. This was despite the fact that just forty years ago, the various ethnic groups were yet to be assimilated within a singular Thai race. The Thai national anthem had also come after close to two decades of nation building by King Vajiravudh, widely regarded as the King of Thai nationalism.

In fact, Vajiravudh's reign saw numerous attempts made to assimilate the various peoples in Thailand. During his coronation in 1911, he invited state representatives from the West as well as people in the Thai provinces to partake in the festivity (Vella 1978: 21). While symbolic, the idea of a singular Thai people was prevalent in this gesture. In a speech, Vajiravudh reinforced the idea of a Thai race and nation:

Let no person of the Thai Race forget these high principles. Remember that we are born free and that our nation is known to the world as the Nation of the Free. Help, therefore, each other with your own heart to maintain and uphold our precious independence unto eternity (is there any punctuation here?)
(Chamun 1970: 28 cited in Vella 1978: 22)

The single Thai race was furthered through Vajiravudh's reinforcement of Thai Nationalism, centred in the 'Nation, Religion, King' trinity. In this trinity, a true Thai was to have certain characteristics: loyalty towards the Thai Nation, faith in the Buddhist Religion and loyalty to the King (Ratana 2004). This was reinforced by a sense of assimilation, specifically the peoples that the Thais once ruled. Vajiravudh's uncle, Prince Damrong described the Thai as "Loving national independence, tolerant and having the power of assimilation - Thais were fiercely independent and resisted foreign colonisation, tolerated other beliefs and customs, and able to assimilate different cultures" (Connors 2003: 37).

It was not only the elites who were engaged in the making of the single “Thai race”. The advent of print media and education by the turn of the century also saw the proliferation of a new class of urban intellectuals in Thailand. Contemporary scholars like Khun Wichitmatra and Luang Wichit Wathakan wrote books presenting the Thai as a race equal to the Western race (Baker and Pasuk 2005, 113). At the same time, the printing of newspapers also saw ideas on the Thai race circulated there. An essay in 1929 printed in the press was concerned about how the existence of the Thai race was dependent on the Thai language (Baker and Pasuk 2005, 113).

This idea of a singular Thai race was equated to certain Thai characteristics and at the same time, juxtaposed against the West. As a group of Thai students departed to study in Europe, Vajivarudh extolled:

"Finally I beg to remind all of you students that we are Thai. Don't disparage your nation, for in doing so you are in effect disparaging yourselves... There is much that is good in the Thai nation. *We must nurture the merits and the good characteristics of our race and not let be said that we are inferior and not the equals of others...*" (Vella 1978: 179)

The assimilatory racialisation of the Thai people is made clearer in Vajivarudh's treatment of the Chinese in Thailand. In the first Thai nationality act of 1911, anyone could take on Thai nationality and be Thai by default, as long as one was born on Thai soil (Vella 1978: 190). Yet there was an attempt made to distinguish among the Thai race, the Chinese community and Chinese migrants. In July 1914, very much influenced by the wave of anti-Semitism then, Vajivarudh wrote an essay titled "The Jews of the Orient", portraying the Chinese as Jews albeit with a nation. (Wyatt 2003, 216). More importantly, in comparing the Thais to the Chinese, he was engaging in a racial discourse of sorts. While seemingly assimilatory, Thai race discourse also sought to present those Chinese as other. This was done to distinguish between Chinese who were in Thailand to settle for good and the migrant Chinese workers who wished to return to China and whose loyalties remained to China (Vella 1978: 195). As Baker and Pasuk (2005, 115) notes,

In [Jews of the Orient] he accused the Chinese of refusing to be assimilated into Siamese society, being politically disloyal, expecting undue privileges, worshipping wealth as a god and being parasites on the economy 'like so many vampires who steadily suck dry an unfortunate victim's life blood'.

The reasons to portraying the Chinese as other is clearer in another article that Vajivarudh wrote,

"I do not ask you to hate the Chinese; I ask only that you think more of yourselves. You who are Thai must do more for your own nationality than you do for the Chinese. Whenever you must choose between what is of benefit to the Chinese or to the Thai, there should be no question, you should choose the Thai. That is my only wish..." (Vella 1978: 195)

While Vajivarudh expressed anti-Chinese sentiments, the assimilation of the Chinese, particularly those seen as 'Thai', was still a key concern. In December 1910 he had written,

The Chinese people and our people have long been of one heart; *the Chinese have acted like people of the same race as our people from ancient times to the present day*. I am resolved, therefore, always to assist and protect all the Chinese who come to live in this country (Vella 1978, 119).

Thai racial discourse in Vajivarudh's reign thus followed that of Chulalongkorn. There were two sides to it; the first defined the Thai, through an external other, the second, was an internal discourse that assimilated selected peoples who professed specific "Thai" characteristics under a singular Thai race.

As such, policies were initiated to assimilate the Chinese. Two laws in particular stood out. One in 1914 on the registration of associations, was aimed at the formation of Chinese associations, and the second in 1918 on Chinese private schools, which must now teach students to write, read and understand the Thai language (Vella 1976, 189). In particular, the number of hours for Chinese language learning was reduced as well (Skinner 1957, 244). The policies to assimilate the Chinese were particularly successful. Many Chinese in fact, took on Thai surnames that reaffirmed their identity as Thai (Baker and Pasuk 2005, 116).

It is thus interesting to see how the discourses of race worked in the early and formative periods of the Thai Nation-State. With the advent of nationalism, Thai racial discourse, which originated at the turn of the 19th century, was subsumed and further defined. Its aim was to incorporate the disparate peoples in Thailand under a singular 'Thai' race. In Vajiravudh's reign, race was implicated with the discourses of Thai nationalism. There was a continuation of previous assimilatory practices. Yet at the same time, the Thai

was continually distinguished from the other, be it the West or the Chinese. Also, to be Thai was further to be defined with certain characteristics, for instance of loyalty with the trinity of "Nation, Religion, King".

The Post War era and Communism

Thai Nationalism was to be further developed during Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram's regime as Prime Minister (1938-1944). Through a series of twelve edicts, or Cultural Mandates, Phibum effected the name change of the nation from Siam to Thailand in 1939, discouraged the use of terms like "Northern Thais, Northern Thais, Islamic Thais" in favour of the term "the Thais", and promoted specific dress and proper behaviours (Reynolds, 2002). More importantly, as Reynolds (2002, 5) notes, the second Cultural Mandate, laid out what constituted treason against the Thai state. The ninth Mandate in particular saw the promotion of Central Thai over regional based dialects, as the official national language (Royal Gazette, 1940). As Diller (2002) notes, this was a key factor in the erasure of racial and ethnic identities. The net effect of the Mandates had the effect of cementing certain behaviours as Thai and un-Thai respectively. In other words, to be Thai was to be Buddhist and be loyal to the King. A Thai could not then be loyal to the King and be a communist. This was to cement the links between Thai characteristics, Thai identity and the idea of a single homogenous Thai race.

The Communist 'threat' from the 1950s saw the further reinforcement of Vajivarudh's trinity of nationalism. Sarit, then Prime Minister, again proclaimed the inseparableness of the King, Religion and Nation (Phimmasone 2012, 45). In fact, Sarit's coup to seize power was launched in the name of the king and also to protect the Thai nation from communist influence; communism was deemed to be at odds with the trinity of the Thai Nation (Rattansengchanh 2012, 46). The Thai government also implemented policies that cemented the position of a singular Thai race within Thai nationalism. One was to distribute maps of Thailand and pictures of the Thai King nationwide to curb communism. In particular, these maps stated explicitly that people in the boundaries of the nation, were Thai subjects – there were no ethnic and cultural differences and everyone was Thai, a single race (Phimmasone 2012, 51). When the communists surrendered, they were also made to go through symbolic ceremonies. They would give up their rifles and red flags in

exchange for a picture of the King, a Thai flag, and sing the national anthem (Thongchai 1994, 171-172). The singing of the nation anthem in particular, symbolically renewed their loyalties *as a united Thai race within the Land of the Thais*.

Immigration Policies

Perhaps the clearest indication of racist policies was that of land ownership. Under Thai Laws, foreign nationals could not own residential land. While they could purchase houses, they could not own the land and could only lease it for up to 30 years (Joanna, 2012). The restrictive measures taken and implemented suggest that the Thai nation-state takes extreme care in preserving its land for who it deems to be Thai nationals only - doing so implied an implicit connection between the Thai race, and the land of the Thai, and is also indicative of the defining characteristic of 'being free', which was inscribed onto Thai national identity by Vajiravudh.

As Lehane and Ditton remark in their study on illegal Burmese migrants to Thailand (2012), non-citizenship prevented such migrants from owning land and access to free health services. Such migrants thus took extreme measures, like bribery or buying ID cards of dead Thais to gain access to Thai citizenship (Lehane and Ditton 2012). However, children of such migrants could apply for Thai citizenship when they turn 15, as long as they could prove they were born in Thailand and had a Thai parent (Lehane and Ditton 2012).

The logics of exclusion were manifested in the management of space too. While Burmese refugees were on Thai land, official government policy was to keep asylum seekers distinctly separate from the Thai population. There were, for instance nine officially recognised camps for such refugees located along the border with Burma [HRW 2012, 18]. The location of the camp is telling, for its place along the border reflects a particular intent to keep these refugees as far away as possible from the main Thai body. This is backed up by the Thai immigration act of 1979, which subjects anyone who entered the country illegally to immediate deportation [Immigration Bureau 1979].

In Thailand's treatment of migrants, it is clear how exclusionary principles of race are made clear. By virtue of not being "Thai", one was excluded from privileges commonly associated with being "Thai". As then Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (2009) notes in his speech at the launch of the UNDP report on migration in 2009:

"Migration... is an expression of the freedom and desire of each individual to seek better opportunities in life... As "Thailand" means "the Land of the Free", it is our government policy to ensure that migrants can ensure their freedom and social welfare while their human rights are duly respected..."

While the question of whether migrants' freedom, welfare and humans rights are protected is doubtful, what is glaring is that there is a distinction between the human rights, freedom and social welfare of 'ours/Thai' and 'theirs/migrants' (Derks 2013). This was a logic based on exclusionary principles. The elephant in the room, is then why certain people are included and certain people are not. For instance, the Chinese and other people living in Thailand, as noted above, were assimilated into the Thai populace as Thai people. The answer will be made clearer when we turn to examine the Rohingya issue.

The Rohingya first became an international issue when the Thai authorities were found to have pushed Rohingya refugees back out to sea in 2008/2009 when they tried to enter Thai territories (HRW 2009). The Thai rationale was that the Rohingya were Muslims and feared that they would aid the southern Thai Muslim separatist movement. (HRW 2009, Saikia 2011). The need to exclude and separate such unwanted elements for fear of contaminating the Thai race, was also seen in the treatment of those Rohingya who managed to enter Thailand. These were detained in immigration centres, while awaiting plans to deal with them. One such plan was to transfer the Rohingya to refugee camps on the Thai-Burmese border (Hodal 2013).

The intent in doing so is clear. Besides keeping the Rohingya separate physically, geographically/spatially and mentally from the Thai race/nation, Thai immigration policy also illustrated the earlier discourse of race. Following the earlier veneration of what was termed 'desired Thai characteristics' [i.e. Nation, Religion, King], we see how the Rohingya, by virtue of being of a different religion, was viewed as a suspicious and potentially

disruptive element in Thai society. Such people should then be kept apart, not assimilated into the Thai geo-body, and either deported or segregated.

Red Shirt Protests 2010

“I want to tell all sides they must not clash with each other... we are all Thais and can live together despite our differences”

General Prayuth Chan-ocha,
Thai Army Chief on the current political situation
(Ghosh, 2014)

The racial logics of a singular Thai race, imbued with certain Thai characteristics can be seen clearly in the current Thai political crisis. Here, I will focus specifically on the May 2010 crackdown of the protests and the burning of Bangkok, which received worldwide coverage (For more reading on the protests and the timeline, see Hewison 2010; Montesaro, Pavin and Aekapol 2012). The Red Shirt protests have been extensively studied and its various rhetoric and discourses have been analysed by scholars (Pavin 2011, Thongchai 2010, Buchanan 2013, Taylor 2011, Forsyth 2010). I shall reproduce them here below in the hope of analysing them in the larger historical context of racial discourses in Thailand.

The Thai political crisis can be seen as a struggle between People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or Yellow Shirts and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship or Red Shirts. A number of broad interest groups, academics, Thaksin supporters constituted the Red Shirts, who desire to see full representative democracy in Thailand; they were also numerically dominated by the subaltern and marginal classes - small farmers and urban-dwelling informal sector workers (Taylor 2011). Against the middle classes of the Yellow Shirts, the UDD/ Red Shirts were comparatively 'inferior'. This stereotype, despite the presence of academics and professionals in the Red Shirts movement, led to discourses and rhetoric that sought to marginalise the Reds. For instance, as Taylor (2011) notes, the Red Shirts were referred to animals; water buffaloes that were seen as stupid or humans smelling like fermented fish (a northeast delicacy). The Reds were also seen as prai which meant an uneducated peasant (Buchanan 2013). As Thongchai (2010) aptly puts it, the Reds

were called dirty, ugly, vulgar, low, inferior rural people, in other words, they were othered as un-Thai.

This othering can be seen as a result of persistent racial discourses that have permeated since the earlier periods. The deliberate un-Thai-ing of the Reds, can be seen as an attempt by the elites, to maintain power in the light of a growing rural force, who were gaining power through democracy and the right to vote in their government of choice. Turning back time to Chulalongkorn's reign, we see how the Siamese elite, who were initially accused of 'colonising' other races and peoples, incorporate them into the singular 'Thai race' to legitimise their rule (Streckfuss 1993). Seen as such, the Yellow Shirts were then keen to protect the power of the elite, who had so many years ago fashioned a singular race to maintain their grip on power.

The Yellow Shirts' demands for an unelected "people's council" to pick the country's leaders (BBC 2013) in recent protests can thus be seen in the context of subverting the 'rural' Reds' claim for proper elective democracy. However, this also exposed the weakness of a singular Thai race, which had incorporated these other ethnic groups so many years ago. The demand is not new and has been reiterated several times over the duration of the protests to date; the rationale was that the rural Reds were too stupid to vote and cannot be entrusted to choose a government (Buchanan 2013, Taylor 2011). Together with the portrayal of the Reds as un-Thai, the argument is implicit. Power must be retained in the hands of the true Thai race, in other words, the elites. Any other claim to power, for instance, by the rural Reds who were ethnically different in Chulalongkorn's reign and had been deemed a separate group was illegitimate and an attempt to subvert the control of Thailand by Thais.

It is also important to see the actions of the Reds as constituting what they themselves saw as Thai-ness. For instance, the Reds reclaimed the rhetoric of rural-ness, and took pride in the identity of being 'rural'. This, as Buchanan (2013) argues, re-constituted the Reds as the *real Thai people*, who were also peace-loving, loved their nation and the King. This reconstitution and reclaiming of being Thai, showed the success of Thai assimilation; the rural/marginal and other ethnic groups were so successfully assimilated that they now

perceive themselves as essentially Thai. Arguably, we can see both sets of rhetoric (Red and Yellow) as competing discourses of Thai-ness, of what constituted the quintessential Thai race and racial characteristics. This claim to "Thai-ness" is then useful in terms of looking at the longer term historical structures and discourses of race in Thailand.

An afternote could be seen in the aftermath of the 2010 crackdown which saw over ninety dead and two thousand injured (BBC 2010), where there was an attempt by the state to reconcile the actions of Thais against fellow Thais. There was massive outpouring of love for the King. Posters and advertisements heralded the togetherness of the Thais to overcome difficulty about the streets of Bangkok and other parts of Thailand. This rhetoric of togetherness was also used again in the massive Thai floods of 2011 as a rallying call for Thais to come together to help fellow Thais and their nation. Although the protests and the ruptures in Thai history have continued, we have once again an assimilatory logic imposed onto the Thai people, seeking to draw the Thai together in a show of unity.

(De)-Racing Thailand

In September 2010, the Government of Thailand conducted its 11th population census. According to the National Statistical Office (2010), the census aimed to present an accurate picture of the population. The list was comprehensive. It captured age, sex, nationality, religion, education, speaking language, occupation, place of birth, marital status, number of children ever born, number of living & dead children, handicap status, migration, type and characteristics of household, registered in the living household or not, sanitation and water supplies and even ownership of basic living appliances (NSO 2010). However, there was no mention of 'ethnicity' or 'race' in the census. One was either Thai or non-Thai in the census. The difference is stark, for in the 1904 census of twelve regions of Thailand, ethnic categories like Chinese, Malay and Khmer still existed, as well as in the nationwide census of 1918 (Grabowsky 1996). However, by 2010, their erasure is complete. The non-existence of race and ethnicity as a census category reflects the effectiveness of the racial discourse propagated more than one hundred years ago. It created a singular homogenous Thai racial identity, based on assimilatory principles that has since receded in the background and is now taken for granted in everyday life.

This racial discourse of Thainess is related to Thongchai's (1994) geo-body of the Thai nation. Racial discourse and geographical discourse went hand in hand in understanding and determining the Thai nation state and the Thai population. The treatment of undesired elements where they are kept away from the main geo-body, spatially and physically is telling. The expulsion of the Rohingya, the separation of illegal migrants in refugee camps, and the exclusion of migrants from land ownership were concrete examples. At the same time, the detention of Red Shirt leaders after the 2010 protests and the exile of Thaksin Shinawatra, can be seen as symbolic actions of segregation, of cutting away the undesired. Recent protests have also seen Suthep, the protest leader, call for the entire Shinawatra family to leave the country (ST 2013). The net effect is that Thailand should only be for the 'Thai'.

As Goldberg (2002, 257) notes, all states are 'racial states', where race is internalised and over time, becomes so casual that it becomes part of everyday life. The Thai nation from its racial beginnings has assimilated race such that it has been taken for granted. These have, in particular forms, permeated throughout events in Thai history. The relative stability and continued perpetuation of the Thai Monarchy, could explain why such discourses continued in society in various forms throughout Thai history. This has led to the propagation of a singular homogenous Thai race together with nationalism; a deliberate attempt to fashion, reiterate and exemplify a particular image of Thai-ness or Thai identity.

Racial assimilation also served to silence other racial discourses prevalent in Thai society. Foucault (1979) argues that the appearance of a dominant hegemonic discourse also lends itself to the multiplication of various discourses that served to constantly regulate the subject. In Thai history then, the various expressions of nationalism, migration and others, further perpetuate the idea of the Thai race. This constant reiteration of race, or "non-race", in the censuses, protests and treatment of migrants and communists serves as a classic case of what Butler terms performativity.

At the same time, the continued reiteration of Thai racial discourse through history, serves as a means to perpetuate the power of the Siamese elite. They started off as a minority elite and formulated a racial discourse to integrate the disparate people they ruled. In the face of the colonial threat, nationalism, communism, immigration and in today's political crisis, the elite sought to impose a perverse sort of Orientalism among the different people in Thailand. A highly-regulated climate imposed itself on race, in history, national writings and education to create a single Thai race and identity. Vajiravudh's nationalism and Phibun Songkran's Cultural Mandates are thus apt examples of how the Thai elites regulated ways of behaviours and doing upon the populace.

Following the debate in approaching race studies, the study of a racial Thai identity, is at once both interactive and relational (Dikotter 2008, Goldberg 2009). The Thais have adopted a common language of racial science in their initial endeavours to mark out their geo-body and integrate their populace, within a singular Thai race. Yet it is relational, for we see how the Thai response through history has been influenced by their local adoptions of nationalism and also by the earlier *modes of racial discourse* for control and domination (Goldberg 2009, 1275).

In recent times, two seemingly disconnected phenomena are of note. One is a recent news article which highlights the rural boom in Thailand and how the Chairman of the *Central Group*, Thailand's biggest conglomerate, had expressed his plans to expand and build even more shopping malls in the outskirts and rural provinces of Thailand (*Bloomberg 2013*). The other is the rise of racially-mixed children who have been exalted as cosmopolitan, self-confident and modern (Pattana 2010). Mario Maurer of *Love of Siam* fame, and Nickkhun who is now a Korean pop star with the group *2PM*, are thus two examples of racially-mixed children who have gained popularity amongst Thais and the international community. These two phenomena, one of rapid urbanisation and economic growth in the rural provinces, the other of the gradual acceptance of racially-mixed children, may be a result of globalisation. These have potential to cause disruption to the racial discourses in Thailand today. For one, the growing wealth of the rural points to the growth of a new middle class. This new middle class must then be assimilated into the elite, or they

would potentially be a point of concern. The Shinawatra family, which originated from Chiang Mai, is thus a case in point. Similarly, the acceptance of racially-mixed children could signal the coming of an age where the foreign is no longer the 'other'. It remains to be seen how the singular Thai race, imbued with certain characteristics of Thainess, would meet these challenges in the future.

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