Creating the Other Requires Defining Thainess against Which the Other Can Exist: Early-Twentieth Century Definitions

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Abstract

This paper discusses "Thainess," prior to the 1900s. Before then, people in what is now Thailand and also nearby, distinguished socially between *tai* and *kha*. Whereas *tai* were literate members of lowland kingdoms that had law codes, professed (local forms of) Buddhism, and sometimes built large architectural structures, the *kha* were illiterate forest people, had oral codes, mostly were animists, and lived in wooden structures beyond the pale of what the *tai* considered civilization. Ayutthaya and similar centers were multi-ethnic in nature, with a literate "civilized" elite. These centers only became "Thai" (a kind of back-formation from *tai* intended to mean "free") when King Rama VI (r. 1910–24) and other rulers adopted and adapted Western ethnicity-based definitions of nationalism. Applied socially, Thainess negatively impacted the newly defined "Other," people not ethnically Thai, in forestry, citizenship, and other areas. Thai was not *tai* at all.

Keywords: Citizenship, ethnicity, *kha*, King Rama VI, nationalism, Thainess, *tai*, The Other

Introduction

Gruff and condescending on a clammy March 1995 Hanoi morning, this big man, Vice Minister of CEMMA (Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas Affairs), Phan Than Xuyen, told me, a very new manager of the UNDP Subregional Highland Peoples Programme, that he would not visit the highland development projects in Chiang Mai that I had recommended. Why not? Because, he said, "the Thais have confused ethnicity with nationality!"

This paper examines why, among the six Greater Mekong Region countries, Thailand alone has no clear policy defining minority groups as citizens. To do so, this paper explores what it means to be Thai. Much scholarly work has been devoted to examining "the other" in Thai life while implicitly accepting the official definition of Thainess that those very scholars know is a fabrication.

This is not the first attempt in recent years to compare and relate changes in Southeast Asian life with transformations in Europe. Victor Lieberman [2003], comprehensively surveyed and compared historical shifts in the two regions. Although discussing political, military, agricultural and other changes, he did not analyze ethnicity or social structure, which are examined in this paper.

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It is clear, that from at least the early-nineteenth century, changes in European society affected life in Thailand, sometimes, as shall be shown, negatively. Although this could be said for all the other countries in the region, Western impact in Thailand, despite it never having been overtly colonized, changed the social structure in ways so differently from its neighbors that the people from those countries now find Thailand's ethnic policies extraordinary.

These historical differences in Thailand led to citizenship being defined as part of being "Thai," and thus innately different from how it is defined in the other Mekong countries, where all ethnic groups are recognized as citizens. In each country, all the ethnic groups jointly comprise the nation's citizenry. In Laos, the many peoples,[1] were divided into three groups in 1975: Lao Soung, Lao Theung, and Lao Loum (highland, midland, and lowland Lao).[2] Ethnic Lao almost entirely comprise the Lao Loum while Mon-Khmer and other groups such as Hmong comprise Lao Theung and Lao Soung. In China, the majority ethnic Chinese are called Han, while in Vietnam the majority ethnic Vietnamese are referred to as Kinh. Together with the other ethnic groups, they all hold Chinese or Vietnamese citizenship, respectively. Cambodia is much the same. Burma, routinely maligned for its minority policy, officially calls itself the Union of Myanmar, comprising the major ethnic groups, Burman (Bamar), Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. All are Myanmar citizens.

Working in regional United Nations and related projects often dealing with these minorities found in several of the region's countries, I have often had to explain the policies of certain countries. I know now that to astonish Chinese officials, you only need to review the variously colored identity cards for persons of different residence status among Thailand's border groups, the process they must follow to gain Thai citizenship, and the fact that, as a result of this confused policy, many minority people living in Thailand cannot (at least without considerable trouble) enroll their children in Thai schools or gain access to government-supported health care. For many Chinese, Lao, and Vietnamese, whose governments were much influenced by the Bolshevik ethnic policy in the 1920s that created national territories, trained ethnic leaders, and established many national languages in what historian Terry Martin calls "the world's first mass affirmative action" programs, Thailand's policy seems bizarre.[3]

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1) According to ILO [2000: 7, appendix 1], based primarily on linguistic grounds there are 236. The Lao census enumerates 48 of them. This threefold distinction seems not to be official anymore but the concept that all the ethnic groups are Lao citizens remains strong.

2) However, the 1991 Lao Constitution did not use these three terms indicating this division may be out of favor. Article 8 does state: "The State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups." The 1992 Resolution of the Party Central Organization, the "cornerstone of current ethnic minority policy," makes it the policy to "realize equality between ethnic minorities" [ILO 2000: 21, 23].

3) Of course, there are many problems regarding minorities in each of these countries that would require in-depth review. What is examined here is why Thai nationalism plays such ↗

This response would confuse most Thais, to whom possessing the "Thai" traits taught in Thai schools seems natural and logical for members of the Thai state. Perhaps it is because Thailand was never formally colonized by a Western power, that nationalism plays so dominant a role in its cultural and political life. Perhaps too, because this Thai nationalism was created to avoid Western colonization in the late-1800s and early-1900s it became so vigorous a force. So much in Thailand have been done in the name of Thai nationalism, from the revolution in 1932 to the recent government actions against "Muslim separatists" in the south, that Thai nationalism has become sacrosanct and integral to Thai life.

All the country's diverse peoples are expected to practice cultural traits that the state has identified as "Thai" but sometimes the general population's views go beyond the letter of the law. The great majority of people in Thailand believe strongly that Thais must be Buddhist. In fact, however, all the Thai constitutions allow (under the assumption that Thais ought to be religious) Thai citizens to chose their own faith. There are many Thais who do not know this and if presented with the fact, would not accept it. Nevertheless, according to the most recent constitution, only the king must be Buddhist.

This paper assesses how and why Thai leaders in the early-twentieth century adopted nationalism so quickly and implemented it so enthusiastically. This is done to help explain Thailand's policies towards ethnic groups arose and, also, to indicate some related problems.

The Pervasiveness and Origins of Thainess

Children in the Thai primary and secondary school are immersed in Thainess. Besides Thai language, they are taught Thai history, Thai manners, Thai etiquette, and quite a bit more about being Thai. The creators of the modern system of Thai education, during the height of the threat of colonization a century ago, made inculcation in Thainess one of their foremost objectives.

So comprehensively did Thai leaders succeed that there is now a major effort by the Thai government to reform Thai education in order to make students more creative. Although the rote teaching used at the turn of the twentieth century was the international norm, and although many countries have liberalized their educational systems, Thai nationalistic conservativeness maintained the traditional top-down approach. Regardless of their cultural background, if students stay in a Thai school for several years they will acquire many Thai cultural attributes.

Although educational leaders are now conservative, the process of making this

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a big role in Thailand, especially in minority relations and what impedes other ethnic groups from being overtly identified as citizens of the state.

country a Thai state and creating a supportive educational system was very innovative. Education in the pre-modern era was top-down but decentralized and localized. A multitude of schools under individual teachers and masters taught all aspects of life, from music to handicrafts and even religion. However, with the introduction of modern mass education in Thailand beginning around the turn of the twentieth century and a system by which all the schools in the country use the same curriculum, students everywhere started to be trained in the same way, thus impeding creativity, local initiative, and diversity. One new aspect of this educational system was inculcation in the values of the modern Thai state.

The introduction of an educational system to facilitate assimilation was adopted because of the exceptional ethnic diversity in the country at the time. The effectiveness of the approach is shown by this ethnic diversity in Thailand that existed into the early-twentieth century now being much reduced. From hundreds of distinct groups, most in the lowlands but many in the uplands, populating the country a century ago, there are far more cultural similarities between these regions at present. The top-down educational approach used by the Thai government overcame the uneven terrain and difficult travelling conditions, particularly during the rainy season, that had allowed small groups to survive in isolated niches with distinctive lifestyles, languages, and cultures. Lacking such a comprehensive and effective educational system (and also because of their different political and educational philosophies), the other Mekong countries today possess much the same cultural diversity that Thailand did a century ago.

At that time, Tai speakers predominated in the lowlands.[4] What are now called Central Thai dialects were spoken in the Chao Phraya Delta from Bangkok north to Nakhon Sawan, as well as along the Eastern Seaboard to Chanthaburi and south along the Malay Peninsula. On the Korat Plateau, on which the rivers drain into the Mekong, dialects of Lao were the most common. In the northern valleys, from Chiang Mai in the west to Nan in the east, northern Thai dialects were popular.

Between and beyond these Tai speakers, except in the south, were Mon-Khmer groups. When Tai groups began to enter the region, over a millennium ago they met, mingled with, and sometimes displaced the Mon-Khmer. Some stayed on in lowland areas, such as those known locally as Khmer as well as Kui and related groups in and around Si Saket, Surin, and Buriram, and also some isolated groups on the edges of the central plains. Certain groups retreated to the edges of the plains and lowlands and

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4) Speakers of related languages in the Tai branch of the Tai-Kadai "superstock" include Lao, Shan, Thai and other languages. The term, "Thai" refers to persons or citizens of Thailand. This is to be distinguished in this paper from the word *tai* which means free, as distinct from being slaves, as explained in the text below. As used here, *tai* refers to a class of people, not to the language. Thai refers to citizens (of all ethnic groups) of the modern state of Thailand.

survived as independent groups such as the Chao Bon ("Upper People" who also call themselves Nyah Ker) in Chaiyaphum and Lua groups in the northern valleys. Often too, Mon-Khmer blended with Tai speakers to produce groups speaking creoles and pidgins such as the so-called Korat talk. Besides these, there were Mon speakers, some descendants of pre-Thai contact dating back centuries but others prisoners-of-war from conflicts with kingdoms in the Irrawaddy Delta over the last few centuries. Many settled in areas of Ratchaburi and Phetchaburi, but other communities were in and around Bangkok such as in Phraphadaeng, across the river and Ko Kret on an island in Pathum Thani, just north of the city. There were also a few Mon settlements scattered northwards to Lamphun and Chiang Mai.

Other Mon-Khmer speakers included the Vietnamese who began reaching the area in the late-seventeenth century (many who do not believe they are Mon-Khmer speakers at all) in Trat and Chanthaburi. Wars with Vietnam and religious regulations by Vietnamese emperors, such as Minh Mang, led to a history of Vietnamese settling in Thailand's east but also in Bangkok as the approximately two dozen Vietnamese temples there attest. Later movement took others to areas in the east of the Korat Plateau, mostly on or near the Mekong such as in Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Nong Khai. There still are several Vietnamese neighborhoods in Bangkok.

In the far south were Malay speakers. Although culturally similar to the Malays further south, many in sultanates such as Pattani were politically linked with the kings of Bangkok. On the edges were smaller groups of seafaring people such as the Chao-Le, that is, sea people (also called Orang Laut in Malay). Quite a few Malay Muslim neighborhoods exist in Bangkok, including a ring to the west of the town in districts such as Prawet. In the heart of the city, close to the National Stadium, is an old Cham community, the strength of which was sufficient to keep an expressway from displacing the local mosque.

Also in the south but in other areas as well, such as between Nan and Phrae, were Negrito groups. Small in numbers and reclusive they did come to the attention of ruling groups. King Chulalongkorn adopted a boy from the Orang Asli about whom he wrote a play, *Ngo Pa* (Forest Negritos).

By the mid-nineteenth century, various small groups of Tibeto-Burman speakers, largely new to the area, were coming from the north and west. Although Burman-led kingdoms had controlled Chiang Mai and other northern cities (as well as having twice conquered Ayutthaya and leaving behind small Burmese-speaking communities that were mostly absorbed into local populations), the small groups such as Akha, Lahu, and Lisu who settled first in the hills around Chiang Rai were newcomers and maintained their identity. Moving out of politically troubled Yunnan and the Shan States and into the north, they began a migration stream that continues at present. Also entering Thailand in the last 150 years were Hmong and Mien (Yao), more often coming from Yunnan and through the Lao states.

These Tibeto-Burmans moved into areas in and around Chiang Mai where Karennic groups had already been living. Some were living here for centuries, with one reference to "Yang Biang" (almost certainly referring to Karennic speakers) in Lamphun dating to the fourteenth century. Karens in the nineteenth century (including many recent immigrants) were settled along the mountains west of the Chao Phraya Delta reaching into the western plains from Phetchaburi north through Kanchanaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Uthai Thani and into Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Isolated groups were also found in Saraburi and Nakhon Nayok. Included among these people were a range of groups sometimes speaking mutually unintelligible dialects. Their language family is not yet definitely established as being Tibeto-Burman, as many linguists contend.

Also arriving before Tibeto-Burman groups such as the Akha, Lahu, and Lisu, were Chinese, mainly from the southern areas such as Kwangtung, coming initially as merchants. Later migrants, usually also southern groups such as Hakka, Chaocho (Swatoese), and Hainanese, came after the mid-eighteenth century to work in tin mines in southern areas such as Phuket. By this time also Yunnanese mule caravans were trading with Chiang Mai and nearby areas. Although many first entertained the idea of making some money with which to return to China, thousands stayed. From Bangkok they moved to inland centers where they congregated and contributed to urban growth, expanding with it over time.

La Loubère, a French envoy to Ayutthaya in the late-1600s, remarked on this diversity, writing that "it is certain that the *Siamese* blood is very much mixed with foreign." Besides "Peguins" [Mon] and Laos, whom La Loubère seems to recognize as indigenous, he observes that "'tis not to be doubted that there formerly fled to *Siam* a great number of Strangers from different Countries, upon the account of a free Liberty of Trade and by reason of the Wars..." [1693 I: 10].

Conception of Thainess in the Ayutthayan and Early-Bangkok Periods

Prior to the Bangkok Era, local and regional rulers governed *muang*, an amorphous and multi-ethnic city-state that expanded and contracted according to its power. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did King Rama IV (r. 1851–68), because of contacts with Western powers, define the country as a state named Siam with its own tutelary deity: Phra Sayam Thewathirat [Sulak 2002: 35].

When the kingdom became a nation-state, after the European model, and in which Thai culture became the national norm, Buddhism came to be seen as a major characteristic of Thainess. As many observers, such as Thongchai Winichakul in *Siam Mapped*, have noted, in the process of remaking the country as a nation-state, Thai culture itself was redefined. At the same time, non-Thai ethnic minorities, were defined as "The Other."

However, the scholarly community, Thongchai included, has not analyzed what Thai

culture and the "Other" were before this process started, leaving many misunderstandings about the change process, the nature of society in Ayutthaya, the characteristics of the inner or elite groups of society, as well as the Other. The basis for the present-day definition of minority groups in Thailand cannot be understood unless the conception of the Other in Ayutthaya is also apprehended.

Understanding the Other can only begin with a study of the "Ins" of Ayutthayan social order, this elite group that has sometimes imperfectly been called the majority. Identifying the key features of Ayutthayan social structure has been impeded by a lack of primary source material as well as misconceptions by contemporary observers from other countries.

One place to begin this study is in the instructions King Narai gave his envoys going to Portugal in 1684. In these instructions, the king posed and then answered all the questions he thought Europeans might ask. In so doing, he provided a comprehensive overview of his kingdom.

The instructions strongly suggest that the king of Ayutthaya did not consider ethnicity an important factor. King Narai makes no reference in these instructions to any ethnic group in the population of Siam; he only notes that it was populous and that many foreigners from numerous kingdoms had settled there [Smithies and Dhiravat 2002: 128]. This is confirmed in many seventeenth century foreign accounts, such as by one French observer who wrote that over half the residents of the capital were Mon [Halliday 1954: 75].

Although the king did distinguish between members of the kingdom and foreigners, this distinction was not simply between those who spoke Thai as their native language and others. European writers at the time generally assumed that ethnicity in Ayutthaya was defined in the same way that it was in Europe, and that, for example, Mon and Khmer were foreigners. However, the situation was not so simple and misconceptions regarding Thainess and ethnicity, the Majority and the Other, have continued until the present.

Unravelling the misconceptions should begin by understanding that the kingdom was not called Tailand or Thailand or by the name of any other particular group. Nor was the kingdom called Siam, at least by its residents—this was a term used by people from elsewhere.[5] Being a subject of a kingdom like Ayutthaya did not imply that the subjects shared the same ethnicity, the same culture, and the same language.

Ethnicity, thus, was not the primary distinction between the Ayutthayan "Ins" and the Other. Such a distinction now has a different basis than it did then.

The people of the kingdom traced their roots to a multi-ethnic ancestry, including Mon, Khmer and Thai (*tai*) roots. King Narai instructed his envoys that "If you are asked of what royal race is the reigning king... reply that... [he] descends from the great king Sommedethia Ppra Pattarma Souria Naaranissavoora Boppitra Seangae" in the Khmer

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5) Not until the nineteenth century would King Mongkut make Siam the kingdom's name.

kingdom of Angkor [Smithies and Dhiravat 2002: 127].

Although the editors doubted that King Narai was a biological descendant of this Angkorean king, King Narai must have thought it advantageous to link Ayutthaya with Angkor and that he and his kingdom were the political heirs of Angkor. This may have at least partly resulted from a nine-year sojourn spent in Cambodia by the founder of Ayutthaya, U Thong, in the mid-1300s. The king was not alone in seeing this connection between Angkor and Ayutthaya. The Dutch merchant, Jeremias van Vliet's history of Siam, that was compiled in 1640 stated that "many Siamese also say that" U Thong himself built Angkor[6] [Wyatt 1975b: 60]. Writing in the twentieth century, Erik Seidenfaden referred to these people as *Thai Khôm* (that is, Thai-Khmer), "because of the heavy mixture of Môn-Khmer blood in their veins" [Seidenfaden 1967: 97].

In such a polyglot and multi-ethnic situation, and although Thai was the language the rulers wrote in (aside from religious texts in Pali), the "Thai" language of Ayutthaya was far from the standardized national Thai language of the present day. The predecessor of modern Thai borrowed words from several lexicons, most frequently Pali, Khmer, and Mon. However, the observation by Ayumongol Sonakul that there were Thai scholars among whom it appears to be the "compulsory belief that no words in the Thai language—except swear words—could possibly be native Thai" should be an exaggeration [Ayumongol 1972: 11]. Approximately 30 per cent of standardized modern Thai has Mon-Khmer antecedents, a trend that started at least as early as during the kingdom of Ayutthaya. Quite likely too, many people in the city spoke several languages.

Most of the elite called themselves *tai* or *phrai*. Besides *tai* referring to the language they spoke (Thai), *tai* (and *phrai*) also referred to a social class of people. This is recognized in a substantial body of historical literature, such as the classical account written in 1962 by Kachon Sukhaphanit, *Thanandon Phrai* (The Condition of the *Phrai*).

Although the word, *tai* (ไท), spelled differently than Thai (ไทย) refers to people in the Tai linguistic family, including Shan and Lao, and Thai refers to people (citizens) of Thailand, they may be cognates. There is another meaning for *tai* that is also quite old which means a person of a *muang*. This is still preserved in regional languages, such as northern Thai [Udom 1990 I: 551] and Tai Lu in Sipsong Panna. These words might also be cognate with another word pronounced *thai* (ไถ่) and which has as one of its meanings, "redeem," as to redeem from slavery. In one of the earliest Thai dictionaries, by the American missionary, Bradley, *tai* (ไท) is defined as "Siamese," as "redeemed from slavery, name of the people of Siam, and as "of the Bangkokian race" (ที่เป็นชาติ์เชื้อชาวกรุงเทพนั้น) [Bradley 1873: 287]

Those who were *tai* were Buddhist (sometimes with Brahmanic, Saivite, or animist overtones), were literate, and practiced other cultural traits, such as following law codes, astrological practices, and adopting architectural styles inherited from India. The *tai* had

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6) A belief still held by some in Thailand.

access to a literature in several Indic-based scripts that included a wide range of religious writings and other texts. In a world with a diversity of languages and dialects, many mutually unintelligible, as well a plethora of differing if not divergent cultural practices, being civilized and *tai* offered one the chance to rise above worldly matters to a more spiritual and sanctified sphere. Buddhism as practiced in Ayutthaya was, as Seni Pramoj described it, a "most individualistic faith." Quoting from Buddhist scripture, Seni cited the phrase *pacattam veditabbo viññu hi*, "Each person according to his/her realization," appropriate for *tai* society.[7]

The *tai* also included persons who came to Ayutthaya as prisoners-of-war from neighboring kingdoms. Although these people might have entered the kingdom as members of a captive or lower class of people, many among them were not considered foreigners because they practiced some kind of Buddhism and followed "civilized" lifestyles similar to many *tai*.

For those who were foreigners in the kingdom at the time, many were in what David Wyatt and Nidhi Aeusrivongse have called "professional" or "skilled classes," as opposed to those holding administrative posts [Wyatt 1994: 102, citing Nidhi 1980]. These included the powerful Bunnag family, which is descended from a Persian nobleman who came to Ayutthaya as a Muslim in the seventeenth century and with which the family still identifies. At that time also, Constance Phaulkon, a runaway Greek who came to Ayutthaya as a cabin boy, later taking a Japanese wife, managed to usurp, while still professing the Catholic faith, the role of the Persians at court to become one of the most powerful persons in the kingdom. Such people could and often did enter *tai* society, as the Bunnags (and Phaulkon's descendants), who, in the assimilative process mentioned above, later became Buddhist. One of the other descendants of perhaps the same medieval Persian, Seni Pramoj, notes that he was part Thai and also part Chinese, while adding that "my maternal great-great umpteenth grandfather 300 years back in Ayutthaya being a Persian, I am a kind of mongrel Thai." Besides this being an example of the commonness of ethnic diversity in Ayutthaya, it also shows how fully the European conception of ethnicity has been accepted in modern Thai society [Seni 1972: 22].

Royal edicts of the eighteenth century denote the importance of religion as a marker of being *tai*. In about 1730, for example, King Thai Sra told the leading Catholic clerics in Ayutthaya that he would prohibit Catholics from preaching to Siamese, Mon and Lao, from writing books with Siamese or Pali letters, and from attacking Buddhism [Tabraca 1762: 525–526; Pallegoix 1854 II: 199–204]. All these languages seem, from the context of the edict, to have been integral to being a member of the elite of Ayutthaya.

Being *tai* was a flexible condition, allowing people to enter or depart. When people

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7) When census takers in British Burma asked Buddhist Karen their ethnicity, they often answered, "Buddha ba-tha," that is, Buddhist [Morrison 1946: 14].

reached sufficient status, such as through wealth, connections with and services for *tai* royalty, non-*tai* could become *tai*. Others who left for various reasons, such as to live with forest groups or to escape slavery, could stop being *tai*. La Loubère mentions "fugitives" who tried to, "seek a Sanctuary in the Weeds against the Government" [1693 I: 11].

These were the *kha* who lived on the fringes of society, sometimes in alliance with lowland rulers. As typical for members of the "Other" very little is mentioned about them in the written accounts of the time, either in local language accounts or in foreign books.

Not once for example is the word *kariang*—Karen people and a *kha group*—mentioned in the royal chronicles of Ayutthaya even though Karens were living west of the capital at the time. *Tai* writings were devoted to the high end of the social hierarchy of the time and the activities of the elite. Despite the *kha* having sustainable agricultural practices, rich oral literatures, and other advanced lore, the *tai* saw many of them, especially those living in the forests, as uncultured, irreligious, and uncivilized. The two main types of *phrai* were: *phrai luang*, subject to the king and *phrai som*, subject to members of nobility [Akin 1969]. *Tai* chronicles told the stories of kings, their acts of religious piety, triumphs in war, and the royal succession. The chronicles overlooked all measure of common life from agriculture to household work to the doings of the *kha* and, for that matter, most of the *phrai* as well. Despite the fact that *kha* regarded their settlements as centers of culture as opposed to the truly wild forest beyond, to the *tai* the *kha* were simple and ungenteel.

There was a third group of *phrai*, generally settled in more remote areas. They provided tribute (*suai*) to their ruler, most often in the form of forest produce or other local goods [*ibid.*: 30–37]. They included many ethnic Thai but also members of Mon-Khmer groups. The Kui in the lower northeastern areas around Surin and Si Saket, for example, were such prominent providers of tribute, that the Thai called members of that group *suai*.[8]

Many *kha* groups are now identified as different ethnic groups and language families. According to Doré [1998] the word *kha* is etymologically derived from the same root as "Khmer," an indication that the term originally may well have referred to Mon-Khmer speakers who constituted the most commonly encountered ethnic groups around the early Tai states.

The above shows that Ayutthaya and other such centers were hierarchical *muang* in which ones social status (i. e. being *tai* or *phrai*) was of major importance. Members of different ethnic groups, certainly those indigenous to the region but also sometimes including people from the Middle East or Europe, could and did enter local society, and aspire to higher rank, which they sometimes did reach. At the center of power in the

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8) Similarly, in Laos, Kui in the south insist they are to be called *suai* by outsiders and not Kui, which is how they often refer to themselves when speaking to each other.

court was much ritual and official language carried there by members of Angkor's elite, following two sackings by armies from Ayutthaya.

This *tai-kha* and multi-ethnic system endured into the fourth reign of the Bangkok Era when for the first time, and only after ample exposure to the growing conception of nationalism in Europe, the kingdom was officially called Siam. According to King Rama IV (r. 1851–67), the Kingdom of Siam comprised Siam Nua, Siam Tai, and the areas where such groups as the Lao Chiang, Lao Kao, Cambodians, Malays, and Karens lived.[9] This area covers all the territory of the northern Malay Peninsula (Siam Tai—southern Siam), the Chao Phraya Plains (Northern Siam), Lao Chiang (Chiang Mai and nearby areas well into the Shan States), the Korat Plateau and areas well into present-day Laos and perhaps Tai areas of northern Vietnam around Dien Bien Phu (Lao Kao), the provinces east of Bangkok through to Angkor and Phnom Penh, and the sultanates of the northern portion of Malaysia. He probably was the first Bangkok king to call himself "King of the Karens," in recognition of royally-titled Karens on the Burmese border who paid tribute to him. Although King Rama IV sought to operate as a *dhammarājā*, a righteous king of the Buddhist law, he allowed for members of all ethnic groups to be subjects as had been the practice of the kingdom of Ayutthaya.

Much the same conditions existed in surrounding areas. People from Ayutthaya captured by Burmese invaders were taken back to Burma where they assimilated completely into Burmese life. Professor Than Tun observed that they "could not be adjudged unpatriotic for completely severing their links with Ayut'ia (or Thailand) because they could not understand patriotism as we know it today" [Than 1984: 400–408]. The British historian H. G. Quaritch Wales in writing that these captives "lacked of any pride of nationality" [1934: 64], confirmed this ethnic malleability in a condescending European way.

Some years later, towards the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, one of his half-brothers, Minister of Interior, Prince Damrong provided a definition of being Thai that reflected the non-ethnic traditions described above. He identified the following three characteristics:

1. the love of freedom or independence, nationally, socially and individually,
2. the dislike of violence, i. e. if they have a choice the Siamese would prefer peaceful means or a nonviolent way of settling disputes, and
3. the Siamese skill at assimilation, or compromise (which he referred to as *prasan prayot*). [Sulak 2002: 36]

This definition reflects both traditions inherited from Ayutthaya and the political changes beginning to occur in the nineteenth century. The love of independence

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9) King Mongkut [1978: 601–603].

nationally, for example, shows his concern over colonial expansion in Burma and Vietnam that threatened Thailand while the love of social or personal independence reflects *tai* traditions from time of Ayutthaya. As a part of the epochal transformations Thailand underwent during this time, a new historical consciousness emerged that replaced the traditional conception, rooted in Indian Buddhist cosmology whereby time was expressed through the four Buddhas, each with an era lasting 5,000 years. Since, during each era, society would deteriorate until society collapses, most people saw history in stasis, fluctuating between good and evil while slowly declining. In this condition, most people tried to avoid suffering [Attachak 2000: 76–78]. When Western teleological influences began to be accepted the conception that history was progressing towards a goal which then implied that the lot of humankind could improve, there developed the belief that each ethnic group should have its own nation.

King Chulalongkorn seems also to have expanded a tradition of Bangkok kings serving as the upholder of Buddhism to other faiths. Following royal traditions embracing Buddhist tolerance and kings of righteousness, the Bangkok monarchs were supposed to encourage any moral code that would benefit his subjects. In this regard, King Chulalongkorn observed that "You must be conscious... that we regard Mohammadinism as a religion for those people in that part of the country" [cited in Surin 1985: 12].

Besides accepting all indigenous ethnic groups in Thailand as subjects, King Chula-longkorn accepted other groups that seemed to have been considered foreigners in the time of Ayutthaya, such as the Chinese, perhaps as a way to integrate this rapidly growing population into the mainstream of the country. In 1907, King Chulalongkorn observed, "I regard the Chinese not as if they were foreigners but as a part of our country and equally entitled to share in the fruits of the country's prosperity" [quoted in Vella 1978: 191].

Certainly up to the early years of the Fifth Reign, but then for years later, the traditional non-racial, non-ethnic form of social organization was maintained at the higher and the lower levels of society both in the Bangkok era. For example, there were many Chinese local rulers in Thailand, such as the Na Ranong family, descended from Khaw Soo Cheang who King Chulalongkorn gave the title Phraya Damrongsucharit Mahinsornphakdi [Cushman 1991: xxv]. Other examples were Karens along the Western border of the country who were given the royal title *phra* and Akha, Yao, and other hill people headmen who were given royal titles in the north.

Thongchai Winichakul's important book, *Siam Mapped*, describes how the process of mapping the boundaries of the country led to a reconstruction of the country's history (while nevertheless not discussing what national identity was before that). He refers to a talk given by King Chulalongkorn in 1907 at the inauguration of the Antiquarian Society of Siam, which "clearly represented the new discourse of Siam's past" [Thongchai 1994: 162], such as by using the new word for nation, *prathetchat* and talked about the need

for a history of "every city, every race, every dynasty" of Siam[10] Chulalongkorn, [tr. by Baker 2001: 97]. Forward looking it might have been, King Chulalongkorn still recognized that Siam was a multi-ethnic kingdom of considerable diversity.

Changes in this system were to occur increasingly in the late-nineteenth century and after that, following the adoption of Western ways of thinking. Starting with new definitions of race, these changes grew more comprehensive.

Similarities with European Conceptions of Race

There appear to be quite a few similarities between the system of *tai-kha* social organization and that of Europe a millennium previous. One of the first to recognize the similarity of the word *tai* with the word, *frank* was the La Loubère. He wrote, "The *Siamese* give to themselves the Name of *Tai*, or *Free*... bearing the Name of *Francs*, which our Ancestors affirm'd when they resolved to deliver the *Gauls* from the *Roman* Power [1693 I: 6–7]. Just as a Frank is free in the sense of not being a Slav or a slave, *tai* is free and not a *kha* or *phrai*. Although the scope of this paper does not allow for a deep analysis of these similarities, there is sufficient evidence to show that over a millennium ago in Europe, race or ethnicity was not nearly as important in defining social groups as it became later.

This was so around the Mediterranean centuries earlier than La Loubère. This is seen, for example, in the writings of St. Augustine, who grew up in North Africa where Arabs mingled with persons from south of the Sahara, as well as Europeans, and descendants of Phoenicians from Carthage. At that time, race was not an issue, as seen in his *City of God*, written from 413–426 while he was Bishop of Hippo. When he wrote, "Mankind is divided into two sorts: such as live according to man and such as live according to God... [who] we mystically call the 'two cities' or societies..." [Saint Augustine 1958 XV 1 : 323–325], he showed that the conception of racial distinctions (assuming they existed at the time) were not the most important way to distinguish between people. St. Augustine stated that Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, who killed his brother, Abel, was of the city of man because the physical came first for him. Abel, by contrast was of the city of God because for him the spiritual came first. Augustine's assessment of humanity in such terms resembles the distinction between *tai* and *kha*.

The concept of race, which was to allow for the identification of the other developed in Europe only in the seventeenth century. Among the first to discuss race was a French author, François Bernier, in his work, *Nouvelle division de la terre par les different espèces ou races qui l'habitent*" [Hannaford 1992: 191]. Gradually, in studies paralleling zoological and botanical research at the time to establish the taxonomy of the animal world, social scientists examined the relationship of humans to climate and other factors. Some

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10） Including perhaps Khmer dynasties from the time of Angkor.

scientists pursued these studies distinguish superior and inferior races.

Out of these pursuits emerged the study of anthropology, a pioneer of which was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840). Examining skulls to identify features by which humans could be divided, Blumenbach identified five varieties of humankind that he contended were "consonant to nature" [*ibid*.: 202–207]. These included 1) Europeans, including Eskimos, 2) other Asians, 3) Africans, 4) those from the rest of the Americas, and 5) the southern world including Polynesians and some Micronesians. He mentioned characteristics of these groups, such as for "other Asians," that is those from China, Korea, Tonkin, Siam, and Pegu, including "monosyllabic languages, depravity, and perfidiousness of spirit and manners."

A German scholar, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) introduced the idea of *kultur* as a basic means for organizing civilization and race [*ibid*.: 231]. He identified a relationship between the individual and the *volk*, that is a people or folk linked by shared language, religion, and traditions. He claimed that the state as traditionally viewed in Europe and as expressed by writers such at St. Augustine, oppressed indigenous culture. From such reasoning came conceptions of nationalism and race. Each culture was seen as having its own genius that flourished best when it could express itself in its own nation state populated by one race. The basis for the French and Germans culture (and to some extent the English through their Teutonic connection) were the ancient forest-dwelling Germanic tribes of Europe who had been oppressed by the Roman Empire. This fit it easily with the teleological conceptions of history being adopted at this time, because it looked to future progress.

New trends in scholarship began to rank cultures as advanced or backwards. When some authors came to believe that the "advanced" groups were destined to dominate those who were "backwards," racism developed. So too did ethnologists who began studying the Other against which dominant societies defined their own identity. Structuralist interpretations of Freudian theory were prominent in France during the 1960s. One leading writer, Anwar Abdel-Malek, studied how an individual's conception of self develops as it recognizes that it is different from others. Abdel-Malek applied this to society as a whole, writing that, "One sees how much, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the hegemonism of possessing minorities, unveiled by Marx and Engels, and the anthropocentrism dismantled by Freud are accompanied by europocentrism in the area of human and social sciences, and more particularly in those in direct relationship with non-European peoples" [Abdel-Malek 1963: 107–108].

Changes of Thai Conception of Thainess and the Confusion of Ethnicity with Nationality

Thai attitudes began to change markedly when Chulalongkorn's son, Vajiravudh, took

the throne. He had spent about a decade studying in Europe where he had come to accept the new conception of race and ethnic groups.[11] Going to England at the early age of 14, this impressionable, bright, and elitist youth was so profoundly affected by European life that his value system changed to accept much that was not traditionally Thai. He studied at major educational institutions in the country such as Sandhurst and Oxford where he met the best English society had to offer, making these new attitudes easier for his notable self to accept. Thus even when he expressed concern over what it meant to be Thai, he did so with English undertones, evincing such themes as progress and modernity. He later distinguished between accepting useful technological advances and slavishly mimicking the European way of life [Loos 2002: 151].[12]

He also came to appreciate bully nationalism. Noted Vajiravudh, in the first year of his reign:

> The most important thing is that Thais must not forget that all the Thai people must do their duty to our forbearers and our progenitors.... At present we are content to brag that we are better than the Thais of the past, isn't that right?... But if the new class of Thais do not voluntarily perform their duties, how can they say they are better? One problem with the modern Thai is that they disregard completely anything that is old.... Even if they only hear what a foreigner says imperfectly, they take it to heart.... Our race is collapsing so that we cannot love it anymore. Please believe me. I studied in European countries for almost ten years.... Thai people who do not love their race should not mistakenly start to think highly of Europeans. They will only look down on you. [Vajiravudh [1911] 1950: 29–30]

He came to believe that England was strong because English nationalism was vibrant. In doing so, he seems to have overlooked the fact that England was a part of the United Kingdom and that other groups, such as the Welsh, Scots, and Irish belonged to it. He also seems to have overlooked the growth of Irish nationalism that would lead to Irish independence with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922 (which was in fact during his reign). Perhaps because he was at the center of the English world and because the English were the most politically powerful people in the United Kingdom he disregarded the role of other groups there. Whatever the reason, this led him to confuse

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11) Further study is required to know whether changes that may well have been occurring inside Thailand also contributed to the changes in King Vajiravudh's thinking. Nevertheless, King Vajiravudh contributed significantly to a new conception of Thainess which was based on European conceptions of race.

12) Very little is known or has been written about the formative years Prince Vajiravudh spent in the United Kingdom. Scholars who have examined his life and work, such as Vella and Loos, have mainly used his prolific output of writings while on the throne. However, his education and the process by which he adopted the modernist attitudes expressed in his writings and expressed through his policies, have been overlooked by scholars.

English ethnicity with citizenship in the United Kingdom.

King Vajiravudh used the word, *chat* which formerly meant "clan" or "class of people." For example, the *chat* of Brahmins has been the clan [caste] of priests for many generations. The *chat* of Kashatriyas has been the clan [caste] of warriors. Derived from the Indic word for birth, people in the Brahmin *chat* are born as Brahmins and the Kashatriya *chat* are born as Kashatriyas. "Later, after we Thais started calling the group of people living together as *chat* it would be true and not false thus that the '*chat* Thai' are those born as Thai, born in the group of people who call themselves 'Thai'" [*ibid*.: 46].

And in marked difference from his uncle, Prince Damrong, King Vajiravudh defined Thainess as "Thai history, Thai art, Thai language, Thai literature, Thai Buddhism, Thai love of the royal leader, and an essential Thai spirit, a fierce devotion to *thai* in the sense of 'free,' warrior spirit[13]..." [quoted in Vella 1978: 178]. By using the word, *thai*, and not *tai*, Vajiravudh shows that he has adopted nationalism, an ethnic-based consciousness, and abandoned the *tai-kha* basis of ordering society.

In a discussion on dangers to the *chat*, Vajiravudh exhibits attitudes on foreigners, almost surely picked up from the local bias against the Jews while he was in England, that were quite different than those his father had. Whereas King Chulalongkorn wanted to incorporate the Chinese fully into the country's polity, Vajiravudh saw them more as a threat, such as in the following passage.

> Unrest will occur within the country when the citizens are oppressed by injustice. This can occur because foreigners who have come to live in the country cause trouble in order to take advantage of the people.... Those who cause strife or troubles in a country should be considered enemies of the *chat*... must be suppressed.... If they persist, it is like a passenger on a boat. If it is in danger of leaking...[and] everyone must help to bail the water out. If they end up arguing and the sailors are the only ones bailing, these hired-hands who are only on the boat as workers may... not be able to keep pace... With regards to the country... if there is strife... and [suppression is left to]... the soldiers... a disaster might occur. [Vajiravudh [1911] 1950: 47–48]

King Vajiravudh wrote an essay entitled "The Jews of the Orient" in 1914. Writing in English, apparently for a foreign audience, he compared Chinese to Jews, noting that the Jews followed a religion different than the majority of Europeans, remained outside the general social life of each country where they settled, and were convinced of their racial superiority. Similarly, he noted that Chinese were much the same. Since they sent most of their earnings back to China, the Chinese "were like so many vampires who steadily suck dry an unfortunate victim's life-blood" [quoted in Vella 1978: 194]. Such sentiments agreed with those of Westerners, such as Warrington Smyth, a British surveyor who had worked in the country, who wrote that "The Chinese... are the Jews of Siam" [1898 Vol.

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13) Thus not completely abandoning the identity of *tai* as not being *kha*.

1 : 285–286] and Campbell who compared Jews to Chinese who were employed as a "necessary evil" [Campbell 1902: 270–274].

As in Europe where the antecedents of the conception of race were rooted in anti-Semitism, in Thailand King Vajiravudh began to define what it was to be Thai with the Chinese in mind. Even before the first Nationality Act the government had enacted laws regarding Chinese. The first, in 1914, regulated Chinese associations while the second, in 1918, dealt with Chinese schools. In this regard (and almost as Loos [2002: 151] points out), Vajiravudh eliminated the use of ethnic terms used in names, such as *chin* and *khaek* so that they could be all considered as Thai [Vella 1978: 199].[14)]

This new definition of Thainess was promoted through the modern educational system, the roots of which can be traced to 1885 when King Chulalongkorn placed modern education under the control of Prince Damrong. Out of this emerged the Education Department (Krom Suksathikan) and then the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1889–90, covering primary education, the Royal Pages Bodyguard Corps, and the Royal Survey Department [Wyatt 1969: 114–115, 125–126].

The king and his associates wanted to promote a modern education which they believed would take advantage of the new learning entering Thailand and make the country more secure. Prince Damrong observed that "real security can be achieved only when most of the population is educated and believes in the value of buttressing loyally the independence of their own land" [quoted in *ibid*.: 329–330]. Building on King Chulalongkorn's belief that a "general improvement in the educational standards worked to the benefit of society as a whole" [Wyatt 1975a: 134], this conception grew so that by the end of the reign, modern education had become a force for social change. When in 1906 Prince Wachirayan stated that education was an "instrument of social mobility," it showed that even this future Supreme Patriarch seems to have accepted the conception of progress [quoted in Wyatt 1969: 326].

Thai leaders pondered for years how to design an appropriate curriculum. They worried how to establish a modern education that would not damage the country's culture and character. Although some feared it would be impossible to balance modern science and Thai traditions, at the end of the fifth reign, Thai leaders agreed that public instruction would provide the means for instilling correct behavior and a knowledge of the arts and sciences in the students while the parents would be responsible for moral and physical welfare [*ibid*.: 366].

Attention was given to defining the Thai as an ethnic group. Policymakers agreed that Thai-speakers in the Chao Phraya Delta, the Eastern Seaboard, and southwards on the Malay Peninsula were Thai. This was extended gradually to others. Although Prince Vajiravudh had in 1906 pessimistically observed that the northern Thais had to be *chuang*

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14) *Chin* refers to Chinese while *khaek* refers to a range of people from Insular Southeast Asia to the Middle East.

(broken, as an animal is trained) before they could join the Thai citizenry [Vachara 1988: 96–97], when he became king they were called Thai. Prince Chakrabongs, a full brother of Vajiravudh, wrote in reports in 1915 and 1916 that all the "Lao" in the north and the northeast of the country should be considered as Thai [Vella 1978: 199–200]. Regarding the Tai-speakers of the far south, King Chulalongkorn had already said in his address at the Antiquarian Society, "As for Nakhon Si Thammarat which exists to this day and is of true Thai race, its people are misrepresented as outsiders. . . . [tr. by Baker 2001: 96].[15]

Cultural Adaptations

Together with adopting the new conception of ethnic identity, and with it a new way to define the "Ins" and the Other in society, the king and his country began acquiring new practices in a wide range of fields that were believed to be a part of the modern progressive way of life. In the process, the country received a comprehensive makeover, from language and education to forestry, agriculture, as well as the police, railroads, and local administration. Often these practices and techniques were adopted without the administrators examining thoroughly how appropriate they were for the country. The political authority, economic advances, and military strength of the European imperial powers often convinced rulers in Bangkok that they ought to adopt given practices.

The enthusiasm for adopting many of these new practices was infectious. The young king and his courtiers and advisors, many who were as young as him, took to the ways of the West, its technology, medical advances, and intellectual traits, with exuberance. Among the leaders, Western practices were seen to be a new set of elitist tendencies that could be made into Thai ways. The young ruling group pursued new ways in technology, administration, the arts, and political philosophy.

However, such drastic changes were sure to make a profound impact on the way of life of the people, especially on the poor and those living in remote areas who were rarely consulted as the innovations were introduced. The impact could be severe on the non-Thai groups who were suddenly alienated in the adoption of new citizenship laws and procedures.

These Other groups, from having a sustainable way of life and access to valuable produce or information (as spies from their border vantage points) in the nineteenth century when these groups were recognized as valued Thai subjects, these political and other innovations served to dismantle their social support structure in the early 1900s. So strongly did King Vajiravudh and his successors prod "Thainess," and thus confuse ethnicity and nationality and so severely did they make the consequences felt for not

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15) Notes Baker [2001: 98 n], "The 'twelve languages' is a conventional phrase meaning, roughly, all foreign languages."

becoming Thai, that almost all the people in the country rapidly complied. Those who did not were branded as non-Thai, a term that became an epithet and a basis for expelling them from Thailand. There were, to be sure, benefits in the new ways being promoted. However, the speed with which the innovations were introduced caused that negative consequences to be felt emphatically by groups relegated to Other status.

Disorienting the Promotion of a National Language

While wishing to introduce nationalism as practiced by the English to Thailand, Vajira-vudh also found practices in France to adopt for his country. Unlike Britain, where at the beginning of the twentieth century, the people spoke a multiplicity of dialects that were sometimes mutually unintelligible, the French government had for over a century been actively encouraging its people to speak a common national language. Efforts at standardizing in all aspects of life beginning with the French Revolution brought both the metric system and the promotion of a single French language. In the 1800s, only about half of the French population spoke or understood French, using instead minority languages such as Occitan dialects in the south, Franco-Provencal in Savoie, as well as Flemish, Basque, and Corsican in outlying areas. In 1794, in an address to the powerful Committee of Public Safety, the influential official, Barère, called for all French citizens to be educated in French, the language of Paris and the areas close to it, in order to reduce what he saw as threats to the state. Among the threats he saw were fanaticism by Basque speakers and superstition by Bretons [De Certeau *et al.* 1975]. Attention was concentrated on areas with distinctive regional languages so that they would be more readily in-tegrated into the French state. The policy succeeded so thoroughly that by 1910, approximately 90 per cent of the population understood French although regional dialects were still sometimes used.

The leaders of the revolution believed that threats to the state could emerge most easily were in areas with distinct local languages, such as Alsace-Lorraine, Brittany, Corsica, and Basses-Pyrénées. After decades of delays due to political and military upheavals, Jules Ferry introduced free and compulsory education in French in which the national language would be the medium of instruction. Universal military service also contributed to the spread of the national language.

In Thailand, the government promoted a national language based on the Thai spoken by the upper classes of central Thailand. This nonetheless required considerable innova-tive work. Although grammars of Thai were being prepared in the late-nineteenth century, these were Thai versions of grammars prepared by foreigners such as the missionaries who wanted their brethren to be able to learn the language rapidly. And although King Rama IV had issued language edicts, these did not aim primarily to standardize the language.

The actual standardization of Thai was thought through and promulgated most properly during the reign of King Chulalongkorn through the work of Phaya Upakit Silapasan, particularly in his *Lak Phasa Thai* (Principles of the Thai Language), which was reprinted many times and followed a Western approach. As described by Anthony Diller, "every page reflects the style of contemporary Western school grammars. . . [but] using Indic terminology" [Diller 2002: 86].

Based on this approach came the preparation of Thai dictionaries that built on the earlier dictionaries written by non-Thai missionaries, such as Dan Beach Bradley and Bishop Pallegoix in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Diller, Phraya Upakit codified the "language associated with traditional literacy and with the older elites" and what Prince Wan called "*sayam-phak*" [*ibid*.: 92].

Unlike in France, however, the strategy called for introducing the language in Bangkok as well as other urban centers from where they worked outwards. Although many minorities lived in and around Bangkok, only in the rarest of circumstances did government officials make an effort to reach remote or minority groups living in out-of-the-way places. Since those living closest to the urban centers often knew the Thai way-of-life well, they were relatively easy to assimilate into the new standardized Thai culture. Those on the fringes of these centers, who were already more likely to diverge culturally from the Thai, grew even further apart as the process proceeded.

This was to have negative consequences on the groups living in remote areas by creating divisions between them and those who were coming to be seen as the citizens of the Thai nation. Using language as an important ethnic indicator, the latter often chose not to recognize border area groups as Thai at all, thus alienating them from the Thai state.

Household Registration

The Thai practice of *thabian ban* (household registration) by which the names of all members of a household are listed on a document issued by the local district office seems to have been influenced by French and British colonial practices. The French *livret de famille* (family book) is a civil document issued by local administrative officials to a couple upon marriage as well as to all single women who declare that they have given birth. Listed on this document are the parents and all their children.

The French family book was created by the 1884 municipal law, although such a document had been used in 1872 when, after the burning of the Hôtel de Ville de Paris, many Parisians had lost all means of proving their civil status. This was expanded to national use in the following decade.

Not long afterwards, British officials in Burma introduced the same approach in the British India Village Act of 1909. This arose as the British were extending their hold over

the Shan State and Upper Burma, taken over in 1886.

In both the French and the British Indian format, all members of a household are listed on the document, which is in the name of the household head who normally owns the land where the family lives. As adopted in Thailand in 1913, early in the reign of King Vajiravudh, this document is proof that one is a citizen of the country. It is required to be presented in order that household members obtain such government services as education, health care, and various documents such as identification cards and passports.

However, there are problems when household members grow estranged or distant from the household heads. In these cases, such as occurs in slums or in various highland or otherwise remote areas, persons entitled to Thai citizenship may be denied their rights. Not only were people on the fringes the least likely to become members of the Thai state but the new "modern" regulations being formulated served to alienate them further, putting them at a double disadvantage.

Adoption of Forestry from a Country that Had Fenced Off the Commons

For centuries, farmers in what is now Thailand made their living out of the area's generally poor soils. Two methods proved sustainable for centuries when certain conditions, such as having ample available land, were met. One popular approach has been to grow rice in either lowland or terraced paddy fields in which the plants thrived on nutrients that are replenished efficiently. Basic cations and silica are brought by irrigation works while biological fixation provides nitrogen and the amount of phosphorus is enhanced under anaerobic conditions. The result, together with high resistance to soil erosion, provides high productivity and sustainability [Kyuma 2005.] Another common approach was shifting cultivation or swiddening which was practiced not only by hill people in the past but many in the lowlands (among whom the system has gradually been replaced by paddy cultivation). Recent studies of swiddening among groups such as Lua or Karen in Northern Thailand show that for reasons including, minimum tillage and allowing big trees to remain uncut in the fields, as well as protecting watersheds and natural vegetation around the fields, forest regrowth is rapid [Nakano 1978: 424–427]. Researchers such as Zinke and Kunstadter, who studied shifting cultivation in depth, concluded that the practices have endured in some swidden areas for 150 years [various articles in Kunstadter et al. 1978]. Besides this, there are Lua villages nearby, such as Bo Luang, which are documented as existing about 400 years ago and where shifting cultivation was quite likely practiced continually. Both paddy and swidden cultivation have been conducted for centuries.

During the late-1800s, radically new ways to use the forest were introduced to Thailand by foreign teak logging concerns. Coming to Thailand mainly from British Burma where the great stands of *tectona grandis* attracted the attention of those supply-

ing shipbuilders in the increasingly deforested British Isles, these companies wanted the wood, which because of its high resinous oil and rubber content, is almost impervious to termites.[16]　As prices for the wood soared, northern Thai princes used various and sometimes dishonest tactics to increase their income.　There were cases, for example, of northern rulers leasing the same forest to more than one logging company, collecting two lease fees, and then letting the loggers settle the issue on their own.　Alarmed by the prospect of conflicts with the British imperialists, Thailand signed treaties with the British in 1874 and 1883 to reduce tensions between British concerns such as the Bombay-Burmah and the Borneo Companies and the northern rulers.

In 1896, three years after the French seized what is now Laos over a political disagreement, and with disputes over teak still occurring, King Chulalongkorn decided to establish a forest department to control the northern Thai rulers in another way.　The first Conservator of the Forests of Thailand was the British forester, H. A. Slade, formerly of the forestry service in British India.　Soon after arriving in Thailand in January of 1896, he traveled by river to Uttaradit and then by elephant to Phrae and Chiang Mai.　After his return he helped organize the Royal Forest Department which was established on the 18th of September.　Besides Slade there were other Europeans: 16 in all, who together with 9 Thai comprised the original staff of 25 [Thailand Royal Forest Department 1996: 45–46]. From the beginning, the department was based completely on Western conceptions of forest management.

Besides implementing controls on how the northern rulers issued leaseholds and enforced them, the RFD promoted a new kind of forest use.　Slade and his compatriots promoted a "scientific" methodology that sought to optimize the extraction of teak and to maximize the income derived therefrom.　At the same time, "scientific" forestry encouraged (at least some) replanting so as to ensure the future of the trade.　Growing tree crops was promoted, starting in 1906, by the use of what was called the *taungya*[17] system in Phrae.

Although understandable because of the threat posed to forests under King Chulalongkorn's control by British logging concerns, it is ironic that the foresters, professing sustainable use of the woods, came from "one of the least wooded places in all of Europe" [Daniels 1988].　Although there was a tradition in the United Kingdom, dating to the time of William the Conqueror a thousand years ago, that allowed ordinary people to use the woodlands, while preserving forests and parks for royalty, this had changed by the early-1800s. Starting in the fifteenth century, a series of acts gradually fenced off the commons, including woodlands, made them subject to private ownership or otherwise

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16）Teak was also popular because it saved lives.　Unlike the hardwoods of the British Isles used to make warships at the time, teak did not splinter when hit by cannon fire, which was a common cause of death for sailors.

17）Ironically the Burmese word for swidden.

restricted them from public use. Partly because this process concentrated economic power, industrial development sanctioned by government authorities was encouraged and considerable forest clearing resulted.

Although there was an old system of agriculture used in the British Isles that resembled shifting cultivation (and from which the word, "swidden," is derived), this had been abandoned by the middle ages and was all but unknown in the nineteenth century. Foresters at that time who supported exploitation of the woodlands for commercial purposes saw all forms of shifting cultivation as wasteful and something that should be replaced. Despite the fact that the shifting cultivation traditionally was practiced in Northern Thailand was sustainable, foresters from the British Isles did not recognize it as such, were uninterested in studying it, and condemned it without review. Little actually was done initially, however, because when the RFD was founded, it did not have any legal basis for suppressing swiddening. Later, after acquiring the means to do so by mid-century, the RFD began to restrict it.

Therefore, the introduction of "scientific" forestry, including the banning of swiddening, which was meant to strengthen the country's economy (and control the northern rulers), also alienated highlanders and criminalized their livelihood. As with the adoption of a national language and the introduction of household registration, the way these European methods introduced in Thailand were adopted so comprehensively that little evaluation was given to their impact on small groups in remote areas.

The impact on the hill people who for centuries depended on swiddening has been severe. As their traditional means for making a livelihood was outlawed, the peoples of the hills became even more alienated from lowland life. Together with the fact that they did not often speak the national language and were not educated in the formal Thai school system, the outlawing of swiddening made the various hill people all the more the Other, all the more alienated, in a way similar to household registration despite shifting cultivation having long been conventional in the area.

From *Tai* to Thai

Thus it is that many hill people of Thailand have been institutionally excluded from membership in the nation-state. Many hill people born in the country as well as those who migrated here do not have Thai citizenship. Nor do many others on the edges of the Thai nation-state as well as within its interior.

At the same time, a sizeable number of people living in the hills became full members of Thai society. However, they lost much of their culture in the process.

The same procedures also affected how lowland Tai speakers entered society in the new state of Siam/Thailand. Indicators of what it meant to be Thai were identified, developed, and inculcated through nationwide universal education (although not fully

implemented until decades later). The process was so effective that the disparate small groups populating the country took on more and more this artificially-defined Thai appearance.

The acquiring of this new Thainess by over-enthusiastic national leaders in Thailand was accompanied by the adoption of European practices and ways of thinking by Thai governments. Even though many of these ways, such as household registration and the bans on swiddening disrupted many people's lives, so powerful was the European aura that the nation's leaders readily adopted them. In the case of swiddening, although local rulers were surely aware that it was appropriate technology, political considerations and modern proclivities outweighed everything else.

Although European methods of forestry, household registration, and other introductions may well have contributed to the way of life in Europe, their rapid introduction into Thailand often resulted in negative impacts. This process has made the traditional, non-ethnic and diverse *tai* way of life irrelevant in Thailand. The majority culture of Thai society that has emerged in its place is more rigid, less varied, and less creative than the older way of life it replaced. So comprehensive has this remaking been that few people in the country now know that *tai/phrai* ever referred to a class of society in Ayutthaya and other kingdoms of that time. This *tai* way of life in the Ayutthayan and Early-Bangkok kingdoms differed so profoundly from national Thai life at present that most Thai citizens today would regard these early *tai* as aliens.

Given the educational reforms now underway in Thailand aimed at enhancing the creativity and self-reliance of school students, it can be hoped that this will result a populace more analytical and more aware of the *tai* and *kha* in Thai history. Understanding the role played by all the small groups in the area in centuries past can only improve the lot of today's minorities, welcome them into the Thai polity, and bring national policy on minorities in line with that of its neighbors. Only when it is realized that Thai policy is unique in the region for the problems it causes these groups and that the diversity of these groups strengthens the country, will there be a way for their cultures to be openly integrated into the greater Thai way of life and contribute what it should to national growth.

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