

State-Making, Contested Spaces and Identifications

By

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Project Overview

The research project will explore two major issues of membership (inclusion/exclusion) and geographies of identifications among marginal ethnic peoples including those living within and between the state boundaries. It will examine the way in which Thai state identifies, classifies and maps out its boundaries and peoples in the context of state formation and modernization. The study will also investigate the discursive practice and response by the marginalized in their engagement with the powerful state project. Central inquiry of the research project is to compare and contrast state and local meanings and identifications within the shifting context of state-making. Contested political and cultural space of vernacular expression are investigated in the historical process of national identification. As vernacular forms of expression is never located/situated in a homogeneous terrain, the research focuses on the differentiated articulations of diversified unequal social and ethnic relations. The intersection between nation-making and marginal response is therefore played out in the complex arenas of gender relation, religious movement, local history, and citizenship.

Research Project in Abstract

1. Research Topic: State Making, Contested State Spaces, and Citizenship

Researcher: Chayan Vaddhanaphuti

State identification of its members was the major concern in the process of state-making not only when its boundaries were contested by colonial powers, but also when the Thai state attempted to extend its power over the peripheral hill areas. Such state project classified and identified whom would be included or excluded as members of the modern nation-state. Many highland people were registered and entitled to Thai citizenship, but in reality the shifting state policy and definition of membership had limited the right to citizenship and thus excluded them. This research project will investigate Thai state's legal techniques of power and discursive framework in including/excluding its members as well as the contestation for citizenship by different ethnic groups and their ambivalent identities and meanings.

2. Research Topic: Vernacular History of Resource Struggles in a Local Enclave

Researcher: Chusak Wittayapak

National history has always been instrumental for the rulers to legitimize and consolidate their authority. Official history explicitly contains state ideologies and projects. National history is mainly the narrative about the persistence of the unitary Thai nation-state. Therefore, history of local people's struggles has no place in Thai historiography. Exception is only the case that the particular local history is neatly connected to the appreciation of national history. The making of the modern Thai nation state, emphasis on the centralized power and territorial sovereignty, need territorial control that eventually lead to increasing control over local resource and people within the bounded territory. Resource enclosure in the name of development, conservation, and national integration has marginalized the ethnic minority politically, economically and culturally. Complex forms and strategies of resource struggle have been crafted out to accommodate and negotiate their positions in various spheres. Vernacular history becomes integral part of the identity making of the once subordinate group of people. Geographically and socially those communities are found as the enclaves in the hegemonic Thai cultural landscape.

3. Research Topic: Millenarian Movements at the Periphery of the Thai Nation State: Negotiating Sacred Space and Identity:

Researcher: Khwanchewan Buadaeng

This research project investigates Karen millenarian movements by asking why recent upsurges of millenarian activity mimic precedents from the 1930s, even though the Thai state and society are now very different. It will look at the relationship between religious movements and the state, noting that millenarian

movements, like the Thai nation-state, are concerned with sacred power, legitimacy, and imagined society. It will also examine how millenarian movement on the periphery if the Thai state evoke rituals to make places spiritual central.

4. Research Topic: Women, Nation, and the Ambivalence of Subversive Identification among the Shan along the Thai-Burmese Border

Researcher: Pinkaew Laungaramsri

This project is an ethnographic study of Shan women as they enter into the politics of displacement and ethnic nationalism since 1950s. By exploring the complex process of the nation making of the Shan nationalism in the struggle for independence, the research examines the construction of the collective Shan identification and its ambivalence. Not only has the constructed collectivity of the Shan nationalist ideology never been located in a homogeneous space, its construction has placed women in a symbolic/marginalized relation to nation. This research seeks to understand the gender politics of nationalist discourse and the place of women within and outside the nation. It also aims to understand the complex ways in which women reconstruct nationalism as a site of difference and contestation.

Research Project 1

State Making, Contested State Spaces, and Citizenship

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti

The formation of modern nation-state in part as a response to the threat from the Colonial powers during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has made Siam (later Thailand) a bounded territory. Boundaries were drawn to demarcate the geo-body and identification was necessary to determine who belonged to the realm of the Kingdom (Keyes 1995). Many ethnic groups living within this bounded entity were then identified as “Thai” people. The Tai Yuan in the North and the Lao in the Northeast were included as members of the emerging Thai nationhood. The hill dwellers, relatively unknown to the majority lowland Thai, were also incorporated, but largely remained “the Others Within” (Thongchai 2000). The emergence of the modern nation-state also changed the hill/valley conjuncture fundamentally (Kammerer 1989) for it replaced the interdependence between hill and valley with the mode of domination from the centralized bureaucratic system. While the hills became spatialized and controlled under the state integration project, the gulf between the hill dwellers (mostly Karen and Lua) and the representatives of lowland authorities was widened. However, the state’s territorial control was limited and the borders were porous allowing flows of “perennial minorities” (Hmong, Akha, Lisu, Lahu, Mien, etc. see Alting Von Geusau 1983) to migrate to the hill areas of Northern Thailand.

National integration was carried out through the establishment of territorial-based local administration system with salaried officials from Bangkok replacing local lords. State power extended territorially not only to control over forest resources, but also man-power through household registration system (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). The State also tried to modernize the country by introducing modern education and Western scientific knowledge, universalizing Central Thai language, reforming administrative system, and improving communication networks. It encouraged non-Thai people, particularly ethnic Chinese, to work in many different emerging occupations where the Thai people lacked their skills. These Chinese migrants were later predominant in economic sphere. They married local Thai women, became Buddhist and were gradually assimilated into Thai culture. The hill migrants, on the other hand, were not incorporated into lowland society, and some of them even resisted to be incorporated. They saw “their southward journey at an end and consider Thailand to be their home. Their duplex of territoriality and polity (*hill/valley; village/state*, italics mine) permit them to respect their inherited traditions at the same time that they participate in the Thai nation-state” (Kammerer 1989).

During the early 1960s, the Thai state was much concerned with national development and national security. It perceived the mountainous areas along its porous northern border as vulnerable landscape. This prompted the state to

come up with a state project to deal with the mobile, “intrusive and alien”, non-Thai population. For the first time, six major mountain minorities were officially identified as “hill tribe” people or *Chao Khao*. Their cultural practices, such as, shifting cultivation, opium production, illiteracy, were defined and represented as “the hill tribes’ problems” detrimental to national interests. Living near the frontier, the hill tribe people could easily be persuaded to become communist insurgents. The image of the hill tribe people as insurgent was pervasive among Thai officials who had limited knowledge about them. The hill areas therefore were to be contacted, contested and controlled. At the same time, the hill tribe people had to be integrated through assimilationist policy into the mainstream Thai culture.

Four decades of highland development during 1960-2000 is, in effect, a process of the making of the Thai state and the making of hill people identity. The hill dwellers have been included in the territory, their ethnic identifications have been mapped onto Thai nation, but most of them have not been accorded with Thai citizenship and rights. State’s view toward the highlanders was contradictory. On the one hand, highland development policy during the 1970-80s largely focused on replacing opium cultivation with cash crop production, linking the hill farmers to lowland market, imposing new form of politico-administrative structure on the traditional village structure, and integrating them into Thai national culture through lowland-based education system.

On the other, state did not recognize the existence of the hill farmers in the forests, despite the fact that some of them had lived in the forest before the forest laws were enacted. Although state officials tended to be relaxed toward the hill farmers in their use of state forestland, the recent expansion of state forest resulted in the latter’s exclusion from access to forest resources. In order to identify who constituted the highland population, series of registration were carried out and identification cards were given recognizing their highland inhabitant status (illegal migrant, children of illegal migrant born in Thailand, displaced persons, etc.) eligible to apply for Thai citizenship. But the registration for citizenship has become too complex and slow due in part to the fear that any ease of registration regulations would “further encourage already substantial immigration” (McKinnon and Wanat 1983). Being non-citizen of the nation, the hill dwellers have been further excluded. In the making of modern nation-state, Thainess has been constructed and its definition has been used as exclusionary practice in the contestation for citizenship and for control over natural resources.

This research project aims to examine how the ideas of citizenship in Thailand have been produced and how citizenship is defined and conferred in different historical contexts. More specifically, it will investigate the processes of nation-state making and the official identification of population included/excluded in the process. The project focuses on the marginal hill population in the historical conjecture between hill and valley—the duality of power relation and contestation. It will also look at the state project in the making of its citizen, identifying who is eligible for Thai citizenship, and the ways in which

citizenship is connected to the inclusion/exclusion of certain categories of people in the context of resource scarcity. In addition, it will attempt to understand and identify different practice in contesting for citizenship and for belonging to the political landscape of Thailand.

The research project will draw upon certain concepts relevant to politics of inclusion and exclusion in state formation. Scott's concept on "state spaces/nonstate spaces" will be used in understand the power relation between hill dwellers and lowland state. As Scott puts it "Contemporary development schemes.....require the creation of state spaces where the government can reconfigure the society and economy of those who are to be "developed." The transformation of the peripheral nonstate spaces is ubiquitous and, for the inhabitants of such spaces, frequently traumatic." (Scott 1998). The concept of construction, and contestation, of ethnic identity/identification in the process of the making of "imagined community" as used by Keyes (Keyes 1995) in the case of Tai speaking peoples is also relevant. The research project will also benefit from some theoretical discussion on ethno-nationalism and citizenship by Rajah (Rajah 2001) and Gianni (Gianni 1997).

The duration of this research project is two years whereas the first year will be spent in understanding the state policy toward ethnic minorities through archival materials, government records, reports and document as well as literature on highland development in Thailand. Laws on Alien Person, Immigration, Thai Citizenship will be studied and analyzed. Interviews will be conducted with state officials and NGO workers involved in registration for citizenship. During the second year, interviews will be conducted among different highland ethnic groups, both who have obtained citizenship and those who have not. The interview aims to understand politics of citizenship and the social experience of those who have contested for their citizenship.

Research Project 2

Vernacular History of Resource Struggles in the Local Enclaves

Chusak Wittayapak

Rationale

Thai historiography has been used predominantly as a mean to achieve the political economic ends. National history has been instrumental for the rulers to legitimize and consolidate their authority. Official history explicitly contains state ideologies and projects. Suffice to maintain that Thai historiography is always part of the nation-state making (Thongchai, 1994). National history is mainly the narrative about the persistence of the unitary Thai nation state and constitutional monarchy. Therefore, history of people's struggles has no place in Thai historiography. Exception is only in the case that the particular local history is neatly connected to the appreciation of national history.

The making of the modern Thai nation-state, emphasis on the centralized power and territorial sovereignty, needs territorial control that eventually lead to increasing control over natural resource and the people within the bounded territory. Thai nation-state, through the process of internal territorialization as Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) put it, has continuously excluded its citizens by ethnicity. This process has subsequently categorized those ethnic minorities into people without history in the national historical narratives.

State projects need regular revenues to strengthen centralized administration. Modern nation-state commonly nationalizes all natural resources. This process has taken away the rights to access local resources from the people in peripheral area. Customary access and traditional management of natural resources was destabilized. For this reason, we have witnessed that people history always contains the story of resource struggles in variety of forms and strategies. The expansion of state presence in the village community following with the market penetration has intensified the resource contests involving more actors and arenas.

Resource enclosure in the name of development, conservation, and national interest has increasingly marginalized the ethnic minority politically, economically and culturally. Like the case of *Khamu* ethnic group in Nan Province, they are caught up in the middle of resource competitions aggravated by the proposed reservoir project on the one hand and the expansion of National Park on the other hand. This research, however, views those local social actors as dynamic agency negotiating with the dominant structures. It has seen complex forms and strategies of resource struggle have been crafted by the oppressed. Construction of their own history is one form of mobilization of cultural capital for their struggle.

Vernacular history also becomes part of the identity making of the once subordinate group of people. In particular, the *Lao Puan* (Lao people displaced from *Puan* city in Laos during war times in 18th century), also in Nan Province, have just recently revealed their cultural identity after a long period of subordination. Geographically and socially those communities are found as the enclaves in the hegemonic Thai cultural landscape. In the changing Thai State making this Lao-origin people have dialectically re-invented their cultural identity as the *Thai Puan* to accommodate and negotiate their position in various spheres.

Research setting

Nan is one of the oldest cities of the so-called Eastern Lanna of Northern Thailand. Like Chiang Mai, Nan in the past was under the influence of the rise and fall of Siam and Burma. It remained relatively independent until being incorporated into Siamese State in 1896, during the rein of King Rama the 5th. Under the regime of modern Thai nation-state, local resources were nationalized to the centralized control of the respective agencies. At the present, with the emerging process of localization in Thailand, Nan has been intentionally represented as the strong base of the coherent community-based resource management. Initial data from field reconnaissance, however, showed that the vernacular history of resource struggles in this peripheral province is far less coherent. Rather it poises to diverse mosaic of ethnic communities thriving for their cultural identification. *Khamu* community and *Lao Puan* community are selected as the case studies because both are relevant to theoretical argument of the research project.

Theoretical relevance

This research tries to understand the history of the insignificant others from the approach of cultural history and subaltern historiography (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Sivaramakrishnan, 1995). In resource struggle, people may invest in their cultural meaning as much as in gaining access to material resources (Moore, 1996). To understand how resource struggles play out in a locality this research uses ethnographic approach to investigate how cultural identity and social memory articulate material resources. In cultural politics of resource contest, the interplay of culture and power shape the historical landscape. Claims over resources need to be remembered in some ways. Telling the story and collective memory can be used as discursive strategies to make claim over resources (Fortman, 1995). Stories are an important oral manifestation of local discourse to legitimize the claims. The state, elites, and local people are all found to construct, reconstruct and selectively use history and memory in struggle over resources and cultural meaning. State forest officials tell the stories about the damage done by shifting cultivation to justify National Park demarcation. Villagers tell the stories about their sustainable rotational cultivation system. Thus telling stories and constructing vernacular history is a form of negotiation on resource claims.

Research objectives, questions, and significance

This research project aims to investigate the vernacular history of peasant struggle to access over resources and expression of cultural identity throughout political economic changes in modern Thai society. It seeks to understand how and why local history has been constructed and reproduced in the face of domination of the meta-narrative of Thai national history. How the peasants use a narrative of collective story to support their claim over the resources under state control? How the local cultural enclaves negotiate to secure the space in mass cultural landscape? How the subaltern ethnic group construct the history and cultural practice to resist resource enclosure.

Research on local history is important for strengthening the autonomy of local people facing with surmounting pressure from outside forces. Collective consciousness on their history enhances the ability of local people to persist in the shadow of national integration discourse. Local knowledge, history, and cultural identity are embedded in the processes of empowerment and participation underlying the transformation to the civil society.

Research Project 3

Millenarian Movements at the Periphery of the Thai Nation-State: Negotiating Sacred Space and Identity

Kwanchewan Buadaeng

The term millenarian movement is widely used to mean the political-religious movement which aims to create utopia society, probably on earth, under the legitimated charismatic leader. Movements of this kind occur everywhere in the world but are varied in its forms and meanings. In Thailand, there have been three types of movement: first *'phi bun'* (holy man) movements which emerged in the North and the Northeast of Thailand at the turn of the 20th century to organize arm resistance to the central state. Second, In Western Thailand, the Ywa and Telakhon sects, the Karen millenarian movement, have waited for the return of their golden book and thus the prosperous society. It had fought with the Burmese government but now became one sect of which practices are different from the official ones. The last type of the movement has less militant nature but more religious. The Khuba movement in the North of Thailand started by Khuba Siwichai in early twentieth century had continued by many other Khuba until present day. Charismatic monks called *'ton bun'* are ascetic – have only one meal a day, are vegetarian, emphasize meditation. They are also believed as having supernatural power. They have led thousands of followers, mostly from ethnic background such as the Karen and Lua, constructed sacred monasteries in various parts of Northern Thailand.

The millenarian movements usually occur in the peripheral or marginal areas far from the center where administrative and control power may be concentrated. These areas are the land occupied by many ethnic groups who also join the movements. Many movements also operate on the local concept of sacred space. It was also found that some movements create new communities which could be the 'millennium' on earth or to prepare for the coming of the 'millennium.' Thus it is clear that the movements concerned with the construction of sacred space based on their specific rituals, reworked myth and everyday practices of ethnic marginal people. Through the practice of the construction of sacred space, identities of ethnic groups, woman and locality have expressed. Charismatic leaders are also legitimated by vernacular religious texts and religious practices which have been continued in a local way. These reconstructed sacred space, legitimated leadership and expressed identities exist in contestation with the national identity, official/centralized space, and symbolic power.

This project would fit into research Theme 2: Geographies of Identification within the overall project of "Hill and Valley in Southeast Asia: Official and Vernacular Identifications in the Making of the Modern World." However, this project would not only explore the physical and social space but

also the religious space. It is to investigate how state's identification of religious space, identity and symbolic power are contested, negotiated and modified by millenarian movements.

This study focuses on two contemporary millenarian movements: the Telakhon movements among the Karen at the border of Thailand and Burma on the west and the Khuba La movement among the Karen and Khon Muang at the hill area of Omkoi district, south of Chiang Mai. For these two movements, both secondary data, historical and present, and field data will be collected mainly by interview and observation. However, to reach the full understanding on the millenarian movements according to the above objectives, I will also collect secondary data and conduct a short survey on other contemporary movements namely the Khuba Bunchum movement which is popular among Tai Lue people in the border areas connected between Thailand, Laos, Burma and Southern China; the Khuba Thueng movement in Mae Rim district, north of Chiang Mai; and millenarian ideas and small movements among the Mien, Lahu and the Hmong people who also live in the border areas.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How has the particular space where millenarian movements emerge and extend their activities been made significance or meaningful?
- 2) How has the movement's identities been projected?
- 3) How has the 'millennium' era been projected onto the space and identity/identities that the movement have constructed and expressed?
- 4) How has symbolic power of the charismatic leaders been created and exercised?
- 5) How have official (state, Buddhism, Christianity) spatial and identity/identification and official symbolic power been challenged, competed, resisted, negotiated or cooperated by those of the millenarian movements?
- 6) Comparing the Khuba movements in the past and those in the present, have the movement's form and content and their meanings remain the same? how? and why?

The research will be conducted within 18 months (October 2001-March 2003). The schedule is as follows:

Date	Activity	Location
Oct. 2001-Jan. 2002 (4 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secondary data collection - Field work preparation 	Chiang Mai
Feb. –Sept. 2002 (8 months)	- Field data collection for the two focus movements	Omkoï and Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai, Omphang district, Tak
Oct.-Dec. 2002 (3 months)	- Survey and secondary data collection for other movements	Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan
Jan-March 2003 (3 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Data processing and analysis - Report writing up 	Chiang Mai

Research Project 4

Women, Nation, and the Ambivalence of Subversive Identification among the Shan along the Thai-Burmese Borders

Pinkaew Laungaramsri

The Tai kin-line is the race of King.
Three seams form the national flag.
The moon in the universe brings peacefulness,
And lights up in the darkness.
Our nation is courageous.
We are united.
We are truthful and honest.

(The Shan National Anthem)

A hen crows, the sky goes dusky.
A woman rules, the cloud dims the sky, dims the country.

(A Shan proverb)

If a nation is like a narrative that tells a story of an origin, a solidarity in soul and spirit, such story is never complete. The deficiency of the narrative derives from the fact that the presumed collective origin is not only a historical construct, but also a fragmented imagination. Emphasizing a dialectic framework rather than a universal/uniformed view about nation-making, scholars of poststructuralist historiography call for an attention the difference within the modular forms of nationalism (Chatterjee 1993), the agency of ambivalent narration of the nation (Bhabha 199x), and the contestation of the narrative of self over the notion of national identity (Liu 1994). Nationalism is therefore not a product of homogeneous totality but a process of the making of differentiated margins, “the margins of the nation-space” (Liu 1994). It is within/at these margins that marginal subjects and their voices interact and engage with the nationalist discourse.

This research focuses on the making of the Shan nationalism as a subversive identification against the Burmese oppression/hegemonic regime and its gender ambivalence. By employing the feminist critique of nationalism, the research explores the relationship between women and nation within the movement for political independence among the Shan people. Central to the research is the women’s inquiry, their presence and absence within the Shan nationalist project and its implication. What is (are) a “nation (s)”? How has it been shaped by gender-specific constructs? As a nationalist subject, what does it mean to be a Shan woman? How has gender relation been expressed and suppressed within the process of building the ethno-nationalist project? In the

course of displacement, how do women (re)construct their own imagination about the nation and national identity? What historical/social ramification arises as a result of the engagement between the master and marginal narrative of the nation?

These research questions place the gender critique as the central analysis of the subaltern Shan nationalist identity. In so doing, the research project aims to understand the intersection between female marginality and nationalism and its implication. As women's voices are far from homogeneous and coherent, the research focuses on multiple and diverging perspectives of three groups of Shan women: "modern" women, "traditional" women, and youth groups. Representative of the first group is women from SWAN, an NGO working to support Shan immigrant women. "Tradition" (in the sense of distinctive juxtaposition to "modern") will be Shan women living in Ban Piang Luang, a Shan village located at the border between Thailand and Burma. And woman youths are immigrant workers who grew up in the north of Thailand and never have a direct connection to their "homeland".

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Bio-bibliography

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Chusak Wittayapak Ph.D.

Chusak Wittayapak, a lecturer in the Department of Geography and the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. He teaches political ecology and development geography. His research works include common property resource management, community forest, political ecology of protected areas in Thailand. His current research focuses on local history of resource contestation in Northern Thailand. He is also interested in land allocation and land reform policies in Laos and Vietnam. He is involved with politics of the environment and environmental movement in Thailand.

Kwanchewan Buadaeng Ph.D.

Kwanchewan Buadaeng is a researcher of the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development, Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University. She got her M.A. in anthropology, with the thesis entitled "The Karen and the Khruba Khao Pi Movement: A Historical Study of the Response to the Transformation in Northern Thailand," from Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines in 1988. She got her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Sydney, Australia, in 2001, with the thesis entitled "Negotiating Religious Practices in a Changing Sgaw Karen Community in North Thailand". Her interest is in the issues of social space and identity, the negotiation of religious practices and meanings, millenarian movements including "Khuba" movements in Northern Thailand and ethnic groups in Mainland Southeast Asia, the Karen in particular. One of her current research projects focuses on the comparison on ethnic and religious identity of the Karen ethnic group in Burma and in Thailand. Her research

project under the ACLS-CRN Identifications project is on millenarian movements in the North and Northwest of Thailand. This project will look at the construction of sacred space participated by multi-ethnic local people, in negotiation with the official identification of the space.

Pinkaew Laungaramsri Ph.D.

Pinkaew Laungaramsri is an anthropologist and teaches sustainable development at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, northern Thailand. She is an author of a book entitled: *Redefining Nature: Karen Ecological Knowledge and the Challenge to Modern Conservation Paradigm*. Currently, she is undertaking two research projects relating to marginal people in northern Thailand. The first project is "Shifting Cultivation: Putting Debates in the Local Context," which is a collaborative research with NGOs and local communities. The second project is a study about Shan woman exiles in Thailand and their views about national identities.