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CONTENTS

Articles

Pham Thi Yen — US-Vietnam Defense Diplomacy: Challenges from the Ukraine War ..... (201)

Zeng Damei, Duan Haosheng — Inter-Construction Goals: Navigating Thailand's Digital Economy from a Sustainable Development Perspective ..... (229)

Hjorleifur R. Jonsson — Thailand's Plural Identities: Contesting the National Imagination in Fiction and Ethnography ..... (255)

Christophera Ratnasari Lucius, Imam Santosa, Widjaja Martokusumo, Adhi Nugraha — A Study on Indonesian Sociopolitical Design Objects within the Framework of Gesamtkunstwerk ..... (287)

Chai Skulchokchai — Smirking against Power: Cynicism and Parody in Contemporary Thai Pro-Democracy Movement (2020–2023) ..... (311)

Silpsupa Jaengsawang — Transformations of *Anisong* Manuscripts in Luang Prabang: Application of Modern Printing Technologies ..... (343)

Book Reviews

Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim — C. Pierce Salguero. *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. ..... (385)

JPaul S. Manzanilla — Karen Strassler. *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020. ..... (388)

Laura Gibbs — Madoka Fukuoka, ed. *Ramayana Theater in Contemporary Southeast Asia.* Singapore: Jenny Stanford Publishing, 2023. ..... (392)

Tania Murray Li — Sophie Chao. *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human-Becomings in West Papua.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2022. ..... (395)

Muhammad Asad Latif — Anoma P. van der Veere, Florian Schneider, and Catherine Yuk-ping Lo, eds. *Public Health in Asia during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Health Governance, Migrant Labour, and International Health Crises.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022. ..... (398)

Matsuda Masahiko — Jamie S. Davidson, ed. *Just Another Crisis? The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Southeast Asia's Rice Sector*. Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023. ..... (402)

Wengki Ariando
Narumon Arunotai — Bérénice Bellina, Roger Blench, and Jean-Christophe Galipaud, eds. *Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia: From the Past to the Present.* Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. .... (406)

Sinae Hyun — Puangthong Pawakapan. *Infiltrating Society: The Thai Military's Internal Security Affairs*. Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021. .... (409)

Vincent Pacheco — Josen Masangkay Diaz. *Postcolonial Configurations: Dictatorship, the Racial Cold War, and Filipino America.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023. .... (413)

US-Vietnam Defense Diplomacy: Challenges from the Ukraine War

Pham Thi Yen*

This article analyzes activities of defense diplomacy between Vietnam and the US before the Ukraine war. Based on these, the author assesses the possible impacts of the war on US-Vietnam defense cooperation. By clarifying Vietnam's stance on the Ukraine war as well as the benefits that the US enjoys through its relationship with Vietnam, the author projects an optimistic view of the prospects of US-Vietnam relations in general and the two nations' defense diplomacy in particular. The article asserts that Russia's "special military campaign" in Ukraine had short-term impacts on US-Vietnam relations, but in the long term the United States' strategic interest in cooperating with Vietnam remains unchanged. The fact that the US has actively sanctioned Russia over the Ukraine war does not mean that it has forgotten China, which has been stepping up its unilateral actions in the Indo-Pacific region, where the US is also building up its influence. Moreover, the concern that China may imitate Russia to use force against Taiwan or in the South China Sea will likely further motivate the US to increase cooperation with Vietnam.

Keywords: US-Vietnam relations, defense diplomacy, Indo-Pacific, Ukraine war, Vietnam's perspective, challenges

Introduction

Defense diplomacy—which is sometimes labeled as military diplomacy—has emerged as one of the most important tools of military art in its attempt to minimize the use of force, although its precise definition has not yet been agreed upon. Historically, the term appeared in the last decade of the twentieth century. The 1998 "Strategic Defence Review," which defined the scope of operations of the UK armed forces, referred to these activities as "defense diplomacy" deployed to

> provide forces that are responsive to the diverse range of operations conducted by the Ministry of Defence to dispel dissolving hostilities, building and maintaining trust, and supporting the develop-

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> ment of democratically responsible armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution. (New Challenges to Defence Diplomacy 1999, 38)

Juan Emilio Cheyre in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (2013) defined defense diplomacy as "implementation, without coercion [or without urgent international or national obligations], in peaceful time of defence resources to achieve specific national targets, primarily through relationship with others [defense factors/elements based abroad]" (Cheyre 2013, 2).

Dhruva Jaishankar defined defense diplomacy at the widest and narrowest levels. Defense diplomacy, according to its broadest definition, covers almost all outward military operations. Under a narrower definition, the term refers to military activities carried out with the sole purpose of diplomacy (Jaishankar 2016, 18). Defense diplomacy activities can be seen as a variant of soft power, used for such purposes as eliminating hostility and building and maintaining trust, supporting the development of the armed forces, and contributing to preventing and resolving conflicts. Although there are many different understandings of the concept, in general the main goal of defense diplomacy is to implement the state's security policy, and its mission is to create stable, long-term international relations in the field of defense (Drab 2018, 59). Ian Storey (2021) perceives defense diplomacy as a political instrument that can be utilized to serve a multitude of objectives, including attempts to expand political, economic, and military influence in foreign countries as well as mitigate the influence of rival nations. Additionally, defense diplomacy can facilitate comprehension of the security perspectives and military capabilities of other countries, and enhance defense cooperation with friendly nations. Capacity-building support can also be offered to allies, partners, and friends as part of this process (Storey 2021). Accordingly, defense diplomacy activities include arms sales, combined military exercises, educational exchanges, naval port calls, strategic dialogues, and participation in peacekeeping and humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

Thus, in essence, the connotation of defense diplomacy is close to defense cooperation—which is understood as a general term for the scope of activities carried out by the Ministry of Defense with allies and other friendly countries to promote international security. Accordingly, the activities of defense cooperation include (but need not be confined to) security assistance, industrial cooperation, armaments cooperation, Foreign Military Sales, training, logistics cooperation, cooperative research and development, Foreign Comparative Testing, and Host Nation Support (DAU 2023)—which are also prominent activities of defense diplomacy. However, the difference between these two concepts lies in their political connotations. While defense diplomacy emphasizes peace, defense cooperation does not necessarily do so. For example, in war, certain

parties may cooperate with each other against one or more other parties.

The Vietnamese government considers defense diplomacy to be a critical task and an important component of its three pillars: Party diplomacy, state diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy. It strives to protect the country by preventing conflicts early on and resolving disputes peacefully in accordance with international law, contributing to building a peaceful environment, and strengthening strategic trust with partners to develop the country (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2021). It should be noted that Vietnam has not used the term "defense diplomacy" in official documents of the Party and the state. Instead, it uses the phrase "foreign defense affairs" (*đối ngoại quốc phòng*) or, more broadly, "defense cooperation" and "defense cooperation relations," all of which emphasize the peaceful spirit of national defense. Therefore, many Vietnamese scholars use these concepts interchangeably (Nguyễn Thị Huệ 2023).

The main purpose of this article is to clarify the deployment of defense diplomacy between Vietnam and the US since 1995, then assess the challenges of the Ukraine war with regard to US-Vietnam relations in general and defense cooperation between the two countries in particular. The analysis is conducted based on the perspective of balance of power theory and theory of great powers balance. The balance of power theory helps the author explain why the US has increased its presence in the Indo-Pacific region, thereby strengthening relations with Vietnam, in the face of China's strong rise. Meanwhile, the theory of great powers balance helps to clarify Vietnam's tendency to promote relations with the US as well as shed light on the country's caution in the face of "enthusiasm" from the US.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part goes into the details of defense diplomacy between Vietnam and the US from 1995 to the present. Part two assesses the challenges of Vietnam-US relations since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, after clarifying Vietnam's position on the war.

I Defense Diplomacy between Vietnam and the US since 1995

The US-Vietnam relationship is a special one in the international political arena. Both countries have made incredible efforts to promote cooperation in the spirit of putting aside the past and looking toward the future. In 2013 the two countries established a Comprehensive Partnership, and on September 10, 2023 the relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This event positioned the United States on an equal footing with China, as both became Comprehensive Strategic Partners of

Vietnam, bypassing the level of a Strategic Partnership. The trade turnover between Vietnam and the US has grown continuously, from US$450 million in 1994 to US$123 billion in 2022 (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2023). The US is Vietnam's second-largest trading partner after China, while Vietnam is among the top ten trading partners of the US. In terms of foreign direct investment, America is Vietnam's 11th biggest investor, with a total of 1,138 projects and accumulative registered capital of US$10.28 billion as of end-2021, up 32.8 percent and 4.1 percent from 2017, respectively (Hong-Kong Nguyen and Pham-Muoi Nguyen 2022). All of these facts demonstrate the unremitting efforts and increasing trust between the two countries. In that space, defense diplomacy, although it began more slowly than other areas of the relationship, has gradually been tightened and manifested in many practical activities. In the first ten years after the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries, defense interactions between them were limited to Vietnam sending officers to attend seminars of the US Pacific Command; exchanges of high-ranking officials; and cooperation in search and rescue, military medicine, and demining. From that initial foundation, however, defense diplomacy gradually took on a more prominent role, contributing to the development of US-Vietnam relations.

I-1 *Defense Leaders' Bilateral Interactions*

Bilateral defense communications between Vietnam and the US have been built through visits by defense leaders of the two sides and three dialogue mechanisms: (1) bilateral defense dialogue chaired by the US Pacific Command, starting in 2005; (2) security-politics-defense dialogue chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the two sides, starting in 2008; and (3) defense policy dialogue chaired by the two Defense Ministries, starting in 2010. In the early years after the normalization of relations, although there were not many significant activities, a series of reciprocal visits were made to build the foundation for US-Vietnam defense relations. The first contact was the visit to Vietnam by the US deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia-Pacific affairs, in March 1997. This was followed by a visit to the US by Vietnamese Deputy Defense Minister Tran Hanh in October 1998, shortly after Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Manh Cam visited the Pentagon that same month.

US Secretary of Defense William Cohen's visit to Vietnam in 2000 began to make a difference as it marked the first visit by a US defense secretary to Vietnam since the Vietnam War. This event became even more meaningful since it took place on the eve of President Bill Clinton's visit to Vietnam, which helped create positive coordination and bring the two countries' relations to a new height. Three years later, in 2003, General Pham Van Tra became the first Vietnamese defense minister to visit the US,

Table 1 Visits by Defense Leaders from the US and Vietnam

Year	American Leaders to Vietnam	Vietnamese Leaders to the US
1998		Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam and Deputy Minister of National Defense Tran Hanh
(March) 2000	Secretary of Defense William Cohen	
2003		Defense Minister General Pham Van Tra
2006	Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld	
2009		Defense Minister General Phung Quang Thanh
2010	US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates officially visited Vietnam and attended the first ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM+)	
2012	Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta	
2015	Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter	
2017		Defense Minister Ngô Xuân Lịch
(January) 2018	Secretary of Defense James Mattis	
(October) 2018	Secretary of Defense James Mattis	
2019	Secretary of Defense Mark Esper	
2021	Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin	

Source: Compiled by the author from official Vietnamese sources.

giving a new impetus to defense cooperation between the two countries. On this occasion, the leaders of the two Defense Ministries agreed to hold meetings and exchanges at the defense ministerial level every three years on a rotating basis between the two countries. This was considered a visit of historic significance, symbolizing a new phase of US-Vietnam relations, in which there were regular meetings and exchanges between defense leaders of the two sides (see Table 1).

Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's subsequent visit to the US in 2005 further opened up the defense relationship between Vietnam and the US. As the first high-ranking Vietnamese leader to pay an official visit to the US after the war, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai took an important step when he signed a memorandum for Vietnam to participate in Washington's international military education and training program. Although Vietnam later participated only in less sensitive programs (English training), this activity also helped to strengthen political trust and dialogue, which created an important foundation for the two sides to promote cooperation. Bilateral defense dialogues between the two countries were started in 2005, chaired by the US Pacific Command (Nguyễn Đức Toàn 2016, 66).

As agreed in 2003, the defense ministers of Vietnam and the United States alter-

nately made reciprocal visits in 2006 and 2009, strengthening the growth momentum of bilateral defense relations. After the 2006 visit to Vietnam by US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the George W. Bush administration announced a partial relaxation of the ban on the sale of non-lethal defense equipment to Vietnam on December 29, 2006, paving the way for US companies to export some defense goods and services to Vietnam (Nguyễn Mại 2008).

In June 2008, on the occasion of Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's visit to Washington, the two countries agreed to hold security-politics-defense dialogues at the deputy ministerial level. This form of dialogue—which was first held in October 2008 in Washington—became an important annual mechanism for Vietnam and the US to promote cooperation on security and defense issues. The US-Vietnam defense dialogue took on a more focused direction in 2010, when the two Defense Ministries agreed to hold a defense policy dialogue at the deputy ministerial level. The objective of the dialogue was to help the two Defense Ministries strengthen cooperation, enhance mutual trust and understanding, and contribute to peace and stability in the region. The defense policy dialogue together with the security-politics-defense dialogue have become two strategic dialogue mechanisms in US-Vietnam defense cooperation and are held almost every year.

In 2011, within the framework of the second US-Vietnam defense policy dialogue, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on promoting bilateral defense cooperation (Tuổi Trẻ 2011), which identified five key areas: (1) maritime security cooperation, (2) search-and-rescue cooperation, (3) peacekeeping operations, (4) humanitarian and disaster relief, and (5) cooperation between defense universities and research institutes. The memorandum of understanding was a big step: it marked the first time the two countries officially formed a clear framework for defense cooperation. Although the agreement was only in the form of a memorandum of understanding, with a low level of legal binding, it was a very important milestone. The mechanism for defense cooperation between Vietnam and the US was elevated to a Joint Vision Statement during US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter's visit to Vietnam in 2015. US-Vietnam defense cooperation then started to be implemented on the basis of the memorandum of understanding (in 2011) and the Declaration of Joint Vision on Defense Cooperation (in 2015).

Accordingly, there was a series of activities to tighten defense ties between Vietnam and the US. Especially from 2010, visits by defense ministers became more frequent, no longer based on the previous principle of rotating every three years. More significantly, these regular exchanges took place on Washington's initiative, with the US secretary of defense visiting Vietnam in 2010, 2012, 2015, 2018 (twice), 2019, and 2021. In

2012, during his visit to Vietnam, US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta called at Cam Ranh port[1]—where there was a US military base during the Vietnam War. This event symbolized the good prospects of US-Vietnam relations, especially in the context of the US adjusting its policy toward a pivot to Asia in order to contain China.

The two countries' subsequent actions in the following years demonstrated the breakthrough growth of US-Vietnam defense relations. In December 2013 US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Vietnam, where he announced that the US intended to provide new assistance to Vietnam with a value of up to US$18 million; this would start with personnel training and the provision of five high-speed patrol boats (US Department of State 2013). In October 2014 the US partially lifted the arms embargo on Vietnam, and in May 2016 this ban was officially done away with during President Barack Obama's emotional visit to Vietnam.

The progress of US-Vietnam defense cooperation continued to be displayed through subsequent visits to Vietnam by US defense leaders. In particular, in 2018 US Defense Secretary James Mattis visited Vietnam twice (in January and October). While the first trip set the stage for the historic visit of the aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* to Da Nang port two months later (March 2018), Mattis's return to Vietnam for the second time in less than a year showed America's attention to strengthening its partnership with Vietnam. After Mattis, the new US defense secretary, Mark T. Esper, visited Vietnam in November 2019, reaffirming the US commitment to relations with Vietnam. During the visit, Esper called for an end to bullying and illegal activities that were negatively affecting coastal ASEAN countries, including Vietnam; he asserted that "such behavior is in stark contrast to the US vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific in which all countries, large or small, can develop together in peace and stability" (VOV 2019). More important, Esper once again emphasized the United States' support for a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam that would contribute to international security and the rule of law. At the same time, he also stressed the importance of the bilateral partnership between Vietnam and the US as well as how this partnership had contributed to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The messages that Esper conveyed were very meaningful to Vietnam in the context of China bullying Vietnam in the South China Sea. In July 2019, the Chinese ship *Haiyang Dizhi 8* violated Vietnam's exclusive economic zone to supposedly carry out a petroleum survey and seismic research. China blatantly repeated its illegal action in the

1) This was the Cam Ranh International Port, which is a purely civilian-run enterprise—distinct from the military base at Cam Ranh Bay, which was used by the United States and Soviet Union/Russian Federation.

waters of Vanguard Bank,[2] which was completely within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone, as if it wanted to challenge the power of international law. Esper's statement in this context therefore showed the United States' support and sympathy for Vietnam. The fact that Esper visited Vietnam soon after replacing Mattis also proved America's commitment to strengthening relations with Vietnam despite the turnover of personnel during President Donald Trump's administration at the time.

I-2 *Ship Visits and Naval Exercises*

In addition to exchanges between defense leaders, visits by military ships made a great contribution to the process of strengthening US-Vietnam defense relations. After the first successful visit by a Vietnamese defense minister to the US—General Pham Van Tra in 2003—US Navy warships were allowed to visit Vietnam. A week after the historic visit by General Pham Van Tra, at noon on November 18, 2003, the US destroyer USS *Vandegrift FFG-48* docked at Saigon port. This was the first visit by an American naval ship to Vietnam after nearly thirty years, and it was viewed as a symbol of ice-breaking in US-Vietnam relations. Over the following years, many US warships made friendly visits to Vietnamese ports,[3] conducting meaningful civilian exchanges. For instance, the naval medical ship USNS *Mercy* visited and treated more than eleven thousand Nha Trang patients in June 2008, and it continued to do the same with thousands of Quy Nhon people two years later (June 2010). These were not only symbolic activities of defense diplomacy; with the practical significance of the visits by US ships, the understanding and trust between the peoples of the two countries were also enhanced.

The significance of American ships in Vietnam was most evident in Cam Ranh Bay. After Vietnam announced (in 2010) the opening of Cam Ranh to military and civilian ships of all countries in need, the US became the first partner to make use of this strategic gulf. In November 2011 the USNS *Richard E. Byrd*, a dry cargo/ammunition ship of the 7th Fleet of the US Navy, made a historic visit to Cam Ranh (MarineLink 2011), marking the first arrival of a US naval ship at Cam Ranh port in more than three decades (since 1975). The USNS *Richard E. Byrd* remained at Cam Ranh port for seven days to carry out regular repair and maintenance. The majority of staff on board were civilian forces, helping to reinforce the peaceful goodwill and cooperation that the two countries had built. The sight of American ships in Cam Ranh became more frequent after Cam Ranh international logistics service port came into operation in March 2016. After the

2) During the nearly four months from July 3, 2019 to October 24, 2019, the Chinese ship *Haiyang Dizhi 8* entered and left Vietnam's waters four times.

3) From 2003 to 2016, there were about twenty visits by US warships to Vietnam's seaports (see Hoàng 2017, 75).

USS *John S. McCain* and the submarine USS *Frank Cable* (AS 40) became the first US Navy ships to visit the strategic port in October 2016, a series of visits were made by other naval vessels. Famous American warships such as the USS *Mustin*, USNS *Fall River* (T-EPF-4), and USS *Coronado* (LCS 4) showed up in Cam Ranh within a short period of time. Among the major powers that were interested in and visited Cam Ranh international logistics service port, the US was the country with the highest number of visits (Pham Thi Yen 2021, 41).

There was no record of US warships docking at Cam Ranh port in 2018; however, the visit of the aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* to Da Nang port in March 2018 marked a new turning point in defense diplomacy between Vietnam and the US. An American aircraft carrier appearing for the first time in Vietnam was an important symbol, a testament to America's growing interest in the country. In March 2020, exactly two years after the visit of the USS *Carl Vinson*, a second US aircraft carrier, USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, called at Da Nang port, conducting technical, sports, and community exchanges in the central coastal city. This was the first event commemorating the 25th anniversary of US-Vietnam relations.

According to the report by Radio Free Asia on July 5, 2022, the aircraft carrier USS *Ronald Reagan* was scheduled to visit Vietnam in the latter half of July (Army Recognition 2022). However, this plan was scrapped following the crisis that erupted after the visit to Taiwan by Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives. In fact, it is reported that the US had been pushing for an annual aircraft carrier visit to Vietnam but Vietnam had consistently declined. Vietnam's reluctance to host frequent visits by US aircraft carriers stemmed from the potential security implications that may have had on the country's relations with China. The regular presence of US aircraft carriers may have sent unintended messages to China and even been perceived as a hostile act, thus complicating Vietnam's efforts to balance its relationships with major powers and peacefully resolve territorial disputes.

Apart from the visits by US ships, there were joint military exercises for peaceful purposes by Vietnam and the US. One notable feature of Vietnam's participation in joint military exercises with the United States and other countries has been its confinement to training activities. Vietnam engages only in *diễn tập* (practice/exercise; positive connotation) rather than *tập trận* (exercise; negative connotation), in order to avoid sending messages of taking sides to prevent/counter the other side, which is in line with its steadfast "Four Nos" policy. Accordingly, joint military exercises between the US and Vietnam have been conducted since 2010 with an initial focus on non-traditional security issues of concern to the two countries. On August 8, 2010, the US nuclear aircraft carrier USS *George Washington* arrived in international waters off Da Nang and

conducted exchange activities with Vietnamese military and government officials. The two navies then conducted a joint search-and-rescue exercise. In 2011 and 2012, the USS *George Washington* continued to welcome delegations of Vietnamese officials and military officers while operating in the South China Sea.

In 2012, Vietnam participated in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise for the first time as an observer. Started in the 1970s, RIMPAC is the world's largest multilateral naval exercise; it is organized by the United States every two years in areas of Hawaii and Southern California. Vietnam continued to be an observer at RIMPAC 2016, then in 2018 it sent a force (without warships) to attend for the first time.[4] Also, since 2018, Vietnam has participated in Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT)—an annual maritime exercise initiated by the US in 2002 with the original name "Southeast Asian Cooperation against Terrorism." SEACAT aims to promote commitments on partnership, maritime security, and stability in Southeast Asia. To date, Vietnam has participated in this exercise three times.[5] Besides SEACAT, Vietnam has also cooperated with the US in another form of multilateral exercise in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN-US maritime exercise. This exercise was held in September 2019 under the agreement signed between ASEAN defense ministers and the US in 2018. The participation of all ASEAN members (including Vietnam) marked the first time that the ten ASEAN countries had a simultaneous military presence in the South China Sea.[6] The ASEAN-US exercise—held under the theme of "Enhancing mutual understanding and combined maritime combat capability"—highlighted the interaction and coordination between ASEAN and the US in the face of maritime security challenges in the region. This activity demonstrated that ASEAN's trend toward multilateralism[7] was not merely symbolic but also brought value to each member country, especially Vietnam.

Although ship visits and maritime exercises are symbolic in nature, such continuous

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4) The US invited Vietnam to participate in RIMPAC 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic Vietnam and many other countries did not attend. Other ASEAN countries that have participated in this activity are Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. China participated twice in RIMPAC—in 2014 and 2016; since 2018, the US has not invited China to attend.

5) In 2018, 2019, and 2020.

6) Even though the training area is located in the Gulf of Thailand and offshore of Ca Mau (Vietnam), a location that is relatively far from the hotly disputed areas of the South China Sea, the exercise did not include any drills involving significant combat simulations.

7) Before the exercise with the US in September 2019, ASEAN held three exercises with China: (1) in July 2018, some ASEAN countries and China held a maritime exercise at Changi Naval Base (Singapore); (2) in October 2018, six ASEAN countries and China held joint maritime exercises in the waters of Zhanjiang City, Guangdong Province (China); (3) an exercise between ASEAN (ten member countries) and China took place in April 2019, in Qingdao (China) (see Pháp luật 2019).

interaction has fostered the substantial development of Vietnam-US defense relations, especially in the fields of military aid and post-war settlement.

I-3 *Defense Trade and Defense Aid*

Due to historical factors, Vietnam's largest partner in defense trade is Russia. Although the US was the world's largest arms supplier and Vietnam-US relations have existed since 1995, defense cooperation between Vietnam and the US in the early years was not normal. This was because the ban on the sale of weapons (both lethal and non-lethal) imposed on Vietnam since 1984 had not been lifted. After 2006, when the George W. Bush administration allowed the sale of non-lethal military equipment to Vietnam (Jordan *et al.* 2012, 6), the door to defense trade cooperation between the two countries was partly opened. Unfortunately, nearly ten years later (in 2014), the promotion of cooperation in defense trade between Vietnam and the US came to a halt because the latter's focus shifted to the Middle East in its fight against terrorism. Entering the 2010s, given the strong rise of China, the US made a "pivot" to Asia in which it reinforced alliance connections as well as promoted relations with potential partners in the region. The relationship between Vietnam and the US was strengthened again, creating a foundation for the prospect of defense trade between the two countries.

Nearly two years after announcing a partial lifting of the ban on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam (October 2014), in May 2016 US President Obama announced a complete lifting of the ban, which bore many marks of a hostile past. Vietnam-US relations from that moment were officially considered fully normal, which meant Vietnam had more choices in defense equipment procurement; it also had the opportunity to access military equipment with modern technology from the US, which helped to improve its defense capacity, especially in the field of maritime security.

Cooperation opportunities were created shortly later through defense aid activities. At the end of 2017, Vietnam received the 3,250-ton *Hamilton*-class cutter *Morgenthau* (WHEC 722)[8] from the US Coast Guard. This was the first major weapons transfer from the US to Vietnam, and it helped Vietnam strengthen its maritime law enforcement capabilities and search-and-rescue capabilities at sea. Next, it was announced during the visit to Vietnam by US Defense Secretary Esper that a second *Hamilton*-class Coast Guard ship would be transferred to Vietnam in 2019 (VOV 2019). The last *Hamilton*-class ship of the US Coast Guard, *Douglas Munro* (WHEC 724), was also declared decommissioned at the end of March 2021; and according to an unofficial source, this last ship would also be transferred to Vietnam (Trúc Huỳnh and Yến My 2021)—though

8) In the Vietnam Coast Guard, the *Morgenthau* is called *CSB-8020*.

that has not happened yet. The US Coast Guard has a total of 12 decommissioned *Hamilton*-class ships and it has so far transferred or pledged to transport to Bangladesh (two), Bahrain (one), Nigeria (two), the Philippines (three), Sri Lanka (one), and Vietnam (two). If Vietnam receives the *Douglas Munro* (WHEC 724), it will join the Philippines—a regional ally of the US—in receiving the maximum number of these large patrol boats.

According to the US State Department, from 2016 to 2019 Vietnam received more than US$150 million in security assistance from the US Foreign Military Financing program (US, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs 2020), of which more than US$58 million was for supporting the transfer of the two large *Hamilton*-class patrol ships from the US Coast Guard mentioned above. The program also supported the supply of 24 Metal Shark high-speed patrol boats to the Vietnam Coast Guard to improve its maritime capacity, of which the last six were handed over in May 2020 (Anh Sơn 2021).

Apart from the patrol boats, Vietnam was granted access to unmanned aircraft systems made in the United States. Per the US Department of Defense, Vietnam was scheduled to receive six ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles with an overall value of over US$9.7 million (US Department of Defense 2019). It is not known whether these have been delivered. Furthermore, the US is scheduled to transport 12 T-6 military training aircraft to Vietnam within the 2024–27 time frame (Tuoi Tre News 2022), which will aid in enhancing pilot training in the Southeast Asian nation. The T-6 aircraft program also creates possibilities for cooperation between the two countries in the areas of logistics, flight safety, and aviation medicine, and the US can potentially transfer other defense equipment to Vietnam. Additionally, Vietnam has registered its pilots to participate in the US Air Force training program in the United States. In 2019, Senior Lieutenant Dang Duc Toai became the first Vietnamese pilot to complete a training course utilizing T-6 trainer aircraft under the 52-week US Air Force Aviation Leadership Program. All of these undertakings demonstrate that defense cooperation between Vietnam and the US is not only symbolic but also practical.

I-4 *Cooperation to Resolve War "Legacy" Issues*

Another feature of the Vietnam-US defense relationship is resolving the consequences of the Vietnam War, including mainly the issues of Agent Orange/dioxin and the search for soldiers missing in action (MIA). These are legacies left over from the fierce armed confrontation between Vietnam and the US. Since the normalization of relations, such issues have been jointly worked on by the two countries, as a testament to the willingness of the two former enemies to ignore the past by facing the past. It is estimated that from 1961 to 1971, the US military sprayed about 11 million to 12 million liters of Agent Orange on the battlefields of Vietnam and about five million Vietnamese people

(from three generations) were infected with this poison (Martin 2012, 1). This is a deep wound from the past, and strengthening the bilateral relationship will not make much sense if the two countries do not focus on healing it.

Starting with Defense Secretary Cohen's visit to Vietnam in March 2000, the US committed to closer cooperation with Vietnam on the Agent Orange issue. In November 2000, on the occasion of President Clinton's visit to Vietnam, the two sides agreed to establish a joint research center on the effects of Agent Orange/dioxin (Nguyễn Đức Toàn 2016, 68–69). In March 2002 the first Vietnam-US scientific conference on Agent Orange/dioxin was held in Hanoi, with the participation of hundreds of researchers from the two countries. A memorandum of understanding was later signed between Vietnam and the US, in which the two countries agreed to cooperate in research on human health and future environmental effects from Agent Orange/dioxin as well as establish an advisory council to monitor the progress of cooperation.

In the following years, the US became more concerned about dealing with the consequences of Agent Orange/dioxin. In fact, it made practical contributions with financial support packages through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the War Victims Fund. In May 2007, US Congress approved a budget of nearly US$3 million to deal with the consequences of dioxin poisoning—related health care and medical services—at the military base in Da Nang (which was used by the US as a distribution center for Agent Orange during the war) (Martin 2012). In addition, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies foundation funded a US$6 million laboratory in Vietnam to enable high-resolution dioxin analysis. From 2008 to 2012, three USAID partners—East Meets West, Save the Children, and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped—provided medical, rehabilitation, and employment support to more than eleven thousand people with disabilities in Da Nang (Nguyễn Đức Toàn 2016, 70), regardless of the cause of disability.

Along with supporting Agent Orange victims, the US is interested in environmental cleanup activities in the airport areas that used to be US air bases during the war. In June 2012, USAID spent US$8.34 million on executing a contract to manage and monitor pollution treatment projects in Da Nang (Manyin 2014). Later, in July 2013, the US pledged to continue spending US$84 million on environmental cleanup projects at airports (Nguyễn Đức Toàn 2016). After completing pollution treatment at Da Nang airport in 2017, the two countries promoted similar work at Bien Hoa airport. According to Vietnamese media, the US committed US$300 million for restoring the environment at Bien Hoa airport and surrounding areas (Tuổi Trẻ 2019). The project was expected to be completed in ten years and has entered phase 1 after the Air Defense–Air Force (Ministry of National Defense of Vietnam) handed over 37 hectares of airport land

(Pacer Ivy area) to USAID. According to the agreement signed between USAID and Vietnam's Ministry of National Defense, phase 1 will last five years, with US$183 million in funding from the US (USAID 2019). The US efforts to clean up the environment in airfields that used to be wartime air bases as well as to support Agent Orange victims have greatly contributed to healing war wounds. This has helped the two countries move toward a good relationship.

The search for missing soldiers, especially missing American soldiers, from the Vietnam War is also one of the outstanding activities of US-Vietnam defense diplomacy. If the United States' efforts with regard to Agent Orange/dioxin show its acknowledgment of responsibility for the painful wounds that it caused in the Vietnam battlefield, when it comes to searching for missing Americans Vietnam's cooperation highlights the friendly spirit of a peace-loving country. No matter what each country's perspective, the goodwill on both sides has contributed to bridging the gap and healing the relationship between the governments and peoples of the two countries.

According to the US State Department, as of November 12, 2010, there were still 1,711 Americans missing in Southeast Asia, of which 1,310 were in Vietnam (US Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam 2020). As of 2015, Vietnam had returned 945 sets of remains of US soldiers and identified seven hundred (Dương Thúy Hiền 2015). From the reverse direction, the US also supports the search for Vietnamese people missing in the war. In September 2010, USAID and Vietnam's Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs agreed on a two-year program under which the US contributed US$1 million to help Vietnam locate thousands of its soldiers missing from the war. Thanks to financial resources and information provided by the US, Vietnam has found nearly one thousand cases (there are still about three hundred thousand Vietnamese soldiers missing) (Dương Thúy Hiền 2015). Speaking in Vietnam in November 2019, US Defense Secretary Esper reaffirmed the US commitment to solving the MIA problem; he also presented a map of a burial site on a battlefield provided by a US Marine veteran who had fought in the war (VOV 2019).

In addition to searching for missing soldiers, the US is cooperating with Vietnam to implement mine clearance projects under the Investigation, Survey, Assessment of Toxic Effects of Bombs and Mines and Explosives Left Over from the War program. Using mine detectors and personal protective equipment supplied by the US, the program has identified three thousand mine-affected areas, cleared 1,354 hectares of land, and removed twenty-five thousand pieces of unexploded ordnance (UXO) (Nguyễn Thị Hằng 2011, 48). Since 1993, the US has contributed more than US$154 million toward efforts related to UXO in Vietnam, including surveys and demining activities, information management, risk education, victim support, and capacity building for the Vietnam

National Mine Action Center (US, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs 2020).

The US also pledged to support Vietnam with funding for landmine and coastal demining projects in 2016–20 and providing resources to carry out scientific and technological research and development programs in mine remedial work in 2016–25 (Lương Văn Mạnh 2017, 9). The long war of resistance against the French and the Americans from 1858 to 1975 has led to the land of Vietnam, even in peacetime, being threatened by explosives left over from the war—mainly UXO, including ball bombs. Demining is therefore an activity of practical significance, helping Vietnamese people stabilize their lives. The cooperation of the United States with Vietnam in detecting and removing UXO has contributed significantly to the development of substantive bilateral relations between the two countries.

II Challenges from Russia-Ukraine War

II-1 *Vietnam's Perspective on the War*

The war (which Russia calls a "special military operation") between Russia and Ukraine, which began in February 2022, has posed new challenges to international relations. Although Russia's main reason for attacking was its perception of being threatened by NATO's eastward expansion and Ukraine's determination to join the military bloc, which was marked by East-West confrontation during the Cold War, its aggression was strongly condemned by the international community, especially Western countries. A wide range of sanctions targeting Russian individuals, banks, businesses, currency exchanges, bank transfers, exports, and imports were imposed. The United Nations General Assembly so far has adopted seven resolutions related to the Ukraine war. The first resolution (March 2, 2022) condemned the "aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine" and called on Russia to immediately withdraw from Ukraine. The second resolution (March 24, 2022) called on Russia to end its special military operation in Ukraine and called on the international community to increase humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The third resolution (April 7, 2022) called for suspending Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council. The fourth resolution (October 12, 2022) urged countries not to recognize Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian territories. The fifth resolution (November 14, 2022) required Russia to pay reparations for Ukraine, the sixth resolution (February 23, 2023)—on the first anniversary of Russia's invasion—called for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine, while the seventh one (July 11, 2024) demanded Russia to "urgently withdraw troops and other unauthorized personnel" from Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Vietnam abstained from voting on six of the resolu-

tions (the first two and the last four) and voted against the third resolution.

Vietnam's voting behavior on the United Nations General Assembly resolutions reflects its consistent foreign policy mindset—that is, the spirit of independence, peace, and respect for international law rather than taking sides. In fact, Vietnam has always maintained independence and consistency in its foreign policy, and from the very beginning it has made its point of view clear through a series of statements by state leaders. Ambassador Dang Hoang Giang, head of the Permanent Delegation of Vietnam to the UN, emphasized:

> Vietnam calls on relevant parties to de-escalate tensions, resume dialogues and negotiations through all channels, in order to reach a lasting solution that takes into account the interests and concerns of all parties, on basis of international law, especially the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. (VOV 2022)

Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang also affirmed:

> Vietnam's current priority is to exercise maximum restraint, stop the use of force to avoid causing civilian casualties and loss, and resume negotiations on all channels to reach lasting solutions taking into account the legitimate interests of all parties, in accordance with the Charter of the UN and the fundamental principles of international law. (Vũ Văn Tự 2022)

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, during his visit to the US on May 11, 2022, once again emphasized that Vietnam firmly adhered to a foreign policy of independence and self-reliance, choosing justice instead of choosing sides (TTXVN 2022). Obviously, the message in these statements was that Vietnam opposed the war, stood for international law, and stood for justice—through which means Vietnam would support any party or point of view that had legitimacy. The fact that no specific country was named to support or condemn (as some countries expected) in Vietnam's view of the Ukraine war was just a clever strategy to avoid going against the policy of not siding with one party to oppose the other and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. In terms of security and defense, Vietnam has transparently persisted in implementing the "Four Nos" policy,[9] in which, except for the fourth "No"—no using force or threatening to use force in international relations—the remaining three "Nos" all represent Vietnam's avoidance of choosing sides. Having been a victim of wars of aggression, Vietnam understands the terrible and persistent long-lasting consequences of war;

9) The "Four Nos" include the following: (1) no joining any military alliance, (2) no siding with one country against another, (3) no giving any other country permission to set up military bases or use Vietnam's territory to carry out military activities against other countries, (4) no using force or threatening to use force in international relations (see Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense 2019, 23).

therefore, it never wants to suffer a war and never wants to engage in war with any other country. Vietnam has also paid a heavy price for choosing sides in the past, so it understands the pain of being interfered with and losing its independence and self-control. Hence, its foreign policy prioritizes independence and self-reliance, persistently fighting to resolve all disputes and disagreements by peaceful means, on the basis of international law. Thus, in the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Vietnam relies on international law—the ground of "rightness"—to consider, recognize, evaluate, speak, and act. Certainly in the case of the Ukraine war, some would argue that standing on the side of "rightness" means being on the side of Ukraine. However, siding with Ukraine contradicts Vietnam's stance of not siding with one side to fight the other; this is why Vietnam upholds the principle of standing for what is right, what is in accordance with international law.

Vietnam's six abstentions and one vote against the resolutions of the UN General Assembly fully express this point of view. Obviously, these resolutions all carry the implication of an alignment of nations against Russia—a form of choosing sides that Vietnam has persistently avoided. Vietnam's abstentions are thus consistent with its foreign policy as analyzed. As for the vote against the third resolution, which concerns the expulsion of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, Vietnam also acted in the spirit of international law and independence. The basis for this against-vote, as Ambassador Dang Hoang Giang emphasized, was that exchanges and decisions of international agencies and organizations need to comply with their operational processes and procedures. All discussions and decisions of the UN General Assembly should be based on verifiable, objective, and transparent information, with the cooperation of relevant stakeholders and in broad consultation with countries. Originally this resolution was issued on the basis of accusations that Russia had carried out a "civilian massacre" in the town of Bucha, though Russia denied the allegation and said that it was a staged incident (Marchant de Abreu 2022). It was therefore entirely reasonable for Vietnam to want an independent UN investigation before making a decision. Its against-vote was in that spirit, not in favor of Russia or in the spirit of being dominated by any country. This behavior also shows that in its foreign relations, Vietnam is independent rather than neutral in a way that does not distinguish between right and wrong or stand on the sidelines. That response is clearly consistent with international law as well as with Vietnam's long-standing foreign policy.

It must be admitted that Vietnam's behavior in relation to the Ukraine war was also influenced by other geopolitical factors. Vietnam's dependence on the Russian defense industry does not allow it to react too strongly. The dispute between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea also adds an incentive for Vietnam to think carefully in

this regard. Russia remains an important factor in Vietnam's multilateral policy. It is not in Vietnam's interest to see Russia weakened and/or made dependent on China, and it is definitely not in its interest to provoke Russian retribution. In other words, Vietnam had interests grounded in realpolitik that prevented it from supporting the seven UN General Assembly resolutions.

II-2 *Challenges from the Ukraine War*

Despite such a clear point of view, Vietnam's response to the Russia-Ukraine war still causes subjective inferences—based mainly on the history of the Vietnam-Soviet alliance—thereby creating challenges for Vietnam's relations with other countries, including the United States.

The first challenge is Vietnam's difficulty building strategic trust with the US. "Strategic trust" can be understood as sincere trust between parties, for the strategic benefit of the two (or more) parties. Strategic trust is of particular interest in Vietnam-US relations because both countries were once enemies in a large-scale armed war—the Vietnam War, which was also seen as a typical proxy war of the Soviet-American confrontation and beyond, an ideological confrontation between the socialist and capitalist blocs during the Cold War. Since then, the relationship between Vietnam and the US has grown tremendously in the spirit of respecting differences. However, with different political institutions, strategic trust is needed by both sides to overcome doubts from the past. With the positive gestures from both nations in recent years, the prospect of strategic trust being built between Vietnam and the US is very promising. However, the Russia-Ukraine war has created uncertainty for this outlook.

Russia-Ukraine relations were strained by Ukraine's desire to join NATO, which was created during the Cold War by the US with the main purpose of providing security against the Soviet Union. As a result, the Russia-Ukraine war represents not only the conflict between Russia and Ukraine but also the conflicts of Russia with Europe and the United States. Meanwhile, Vietnam used to be an ally of the Soviet Union and has had close relations with Russia since 1991. This makes it easy for many Western countries to believe that Vietnam supports Russia. The fact that Vietnam abstained six times and once voted against the resolutions of the UN General Assembly only strengthened this view. Due to the nature of Vietnam-Russia relations and the historical conflict between Russia and the West, such Vietnamese action is likely to be misinterpreted, causing "unnecessary noise," even creating doubts regarding Vietnam's perspective on the situation in Ukraine (Lao Động 2022) and thereby affecting the prospects of good Vietnam-US relations. This argument became even more convincing in May 2022, when the United States, Canada, Australia, and a number of European countries

signed an article calling on countries outside Europe, including Vietnam, to speak out against Russia's violations of human rights and international humanitarian law[10] (US Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam 2022).

The historical tensions between Vietnam and the United States remain a crucial element of the bilateral relationship. The contrast between their political systems offers a valuable perspective to examine their past conflicts whenever relevant opportunities appear. And the war in Ukraine has the potential to create that opportunity. The closeness of Vietnam-Russia relations and the tension between Russia and the United States are reminiscent of the triangular relationship between the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and the United States during the Vietnam War. Because the Soviet Union used to be Vietnam's main supporter against the US, during the Russia-Ukraine war it is difficult for conservatives in the US Congress to avoid the perception that Vietnam supports Russia. Vietnam's independent foreign policy has put it in a position of being innocent but having the evidence stacked against it, as illustrated by the controversial case of six abstentions and one negative vote in the United Nations General Assembly.

From another perspective, the United States' suspicion of Vietnam against the background of the Ukraine war may potentially affect Vietnam's faith in the US commitment to bilateral relations. In the final year of the Trump administration, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other high-ranking officials launched an anti-Chinese Communist Party crusade. This was aimed directly at China, and the criticisms did not cause concern for Vietnam as it perceived them as part of the US-China trade war. However, the West's suspicion of Vietnam choosing Russia after the outbreak of the Ukraine war could potentially raise anxiety for Vietnam; US criticism of the Chinese Communist Party could potentially be extended to the Communist Party of Vietnam, especially when China is building a close relationship with Russia. Thus, the Ukraine war may make it more difficult for Vietnam and the US to build strategic trust. Vietnam's apprehension surrounding "peaceful evolution," which was previously directed mainly toward the US, gradually shifted toward China. Now there is a concern that this fear may resurface and once again be directed toward the United States.[11] This will affect

10) Previously, on March 8, 2022 (after Vietnam abstained from voting on the first resolution of the UN General Assembly), EU ambassadors along with the ambassadors of Norway, Switzerland, and the UK in Hanoi signed a memorandum calling on Vietnam to support Ukraine (see Delegation of the European Union to Vietnam 2022).

11) This is evidenced from the political rhetoric in Vietnam regarding "peaceful evolution," which identifies new actors as "narrow-minded nationalist countries with expansionist and hegemonic ideologies" and "countries that disregard international law and blatantly infringe on sovereignty, deeply interfering in the internal affairs of other countries" (see Trần Đức Tiến and Lưu Mạnh Hùng 2022).

the prospects of improved Vietnam-US relations, especially when it comes to joint diplomatic and defense activities.

The second challenge is the possibility that the war between Russia and Ukraine will change the foreign policy trajectory of the US, reducing the latter's focus on the Indo-Pacific region and thereby impacting the growth momentum of US-Vietnam relations. Undeniably, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has to some extent diverted the world's attention away from the Indo-Pacific region. This war serves as a reminder of the Russian threat to the US and Europe, and it has become a catalyst for NATO to regroup and reaffirm its value after a period of disagreement caused by disparities among the contributions by its members as well as the existential goals of the alliance. The NATO summit in June 2022 introduced a new Strategic Concept in which, for the first time in more than ten years, NATO officially changed its stance toward Russia, moving from viewing it as a "strategic partner" (in the 2010 Strategic Concept) to seeing it as "the biggest, the most direct threat"—although it still insisted it did not seek confrontation with Russia (NATO 2022). Russia's special military operation in Ukraine has led member states toward greater consensus in defining the "Russian threat." Meanwhile, China has also become a formal subject for the first time in NATO's Strategic Concept and is seen as a lasting "systemic challenge" to the union. Obviously, NATO members are interested in the risks posed by both Russia and China. However, unlike the US, which wants stronger words and actions against China, its traditional allies (France and Germany) want NATO's words and actions to have "more moderation" (Shalal and Pamuk 2022). The prime minister of Belgium (where NATO is headquartered), Alexander De Croo, on June 27, 2022 warned: "we will not want to turn our backs on China as completely as we have turned our backs on Russia" (Zhang and Wan 2022). The US had to compromise with other NATO members and acknowledge Russia rather than China as the primary threat. As a result, as part of its NATO responsibilities, the US must allocate resources to counter the Russian threat rather than focusing solely on China. In addition, as the EU has to deal with security problems caused by the Ukraine war, the US is also experiencing difficulty mobilizing power from its allies for its Indo-Pacific strategy. This has affected the prospects for Vietnam-US cooperation, causing anxiety in Vietnam that the US will reduce its focus on the Indo-Pacific region.

The third challenge after the outbreak of the Ukraine war is that future Vietnam-Russia cooperation may become a hindrance to US-Vietnam cooperation. Vietnam is faced with a dilemma: it has to be careful about buying Russian weapons, because of sanctions from the West; but on the other hand, it is unable to find a suitable alternative source of supply. Russia is currently the second-largest arms supplier in the world and an important source of weapons for China, India, and Vietnam. According to the

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, between 2000 and 2019 Russia sold 10.7 billion euros' worth of defense equipment to Southeast Asian countries, 61 percent of which was exported to Vietnam (Wezeman 2019, 14–15). Since 2000, nearly 80 percent of Vietnam's military equipment has been supplied by Russia. Although Vietnam's expenditure on arms procurements from Russia decreased from US$1.054 billion in 2014 to US$72 million in 2021 (SIPRI 2023),[12] during 2017–21 Vietnam was the world's fifth-largest importer of Russian weapons (after India, China, Egypt, and Algeria) and the largest in Southeast Asia.[13]

Meanwhile, in 2017 US Congress passed the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which imposes sanctions against countries that buy Russian weapons. To date, the United States has applied CAATSA only to China and Turkey, both of which purchased the S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Russia. In the case of Vietnam, the United States continues to turn a blind eye, due to the former's important role in the Indo-Pacific region as well as the increasingly close strategic relationship between the two countries. Given Vietnam's geostrategic location and rising status, its military buildup also contributes to the United States' interest in preventing China's expansion in the region. From the US perspective, it would be better for Vietnam to buy Russian weapons than to buy Chinese weapons. Also, since the Ukraine war has raised concerns about the prospect of China imitating Russia to use force against Taiwan and in the South China Sea, the US needs to keep good relations with Vietnam more than ever.

However, the close relationship between Hanoi and Moscow continues to embarrass the US. Although the US wants to build a strategic partnership with Vietnam, it holds CAATSA as a key tool for punishing Russia (through sanctioning Russian defense companies and disrupting Russia's arms sales by threatening countries that buy Russian weapons). Vietnam-Russia cooperation is therefore likely to "affect US expectations to make Vietnam a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region" (Carl Thayer, quoted in Hutt 2022). According to Carl Thayer (2018), in 2018 defense officials from the Trump administration pressed Vietnam to reduce its dependence on Russian weapons

12) The reason for this reduction is twofold. First, Vietnam has actively diversified its sources of defense weaponry supply in order to reduce excessive dependence on Russia. This has been increasingly emphasized since 2014, when Russia established good relations with China, amidst China's illegal placement of the HD 981 oil rig within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone. Heavy reliance on Russia for defense procurement raised security concerns for Vietnam, driving it to accelerate its self-reliance in security. Second, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic forced Vietnam to cut its overall defense budget to focus on economic recovery, resulting in a reduction of the budget for purchasing weapons from Russia.

13) Previously, in 2013–17, Vietnam was the third-largest customer of the Russian arms industry (after India and China) (see Fleurant *et al.* 2018, 2; and SIPRI n.d.).

and military technology. Washington lobbied Hanoi to buy American weapons instead. The problem is that although the US lifted the arms embargo against Vietnam in May 2016, its weapons remain unaffordable for Vietnam. Vietnam's military modernization has slowed down since 2016, with tighter budgets making it even harder for the country to buy expensive Western weapons. Vietnam's spending on weapons purchases dropped from US$603 million in 2018 to US$95 million in 2022 (SIPRI 2023). Moreover, Vietnam is familiar with Russian/Soviet weapons systems as well as doing business with Russian partners, which would make it difficult for it to change suppliers if forced to.

It is clear that although the US has so far turned a blind eye to Vietnam's buying of Russian weapons, Vietnam's continuation of military relations with Russia in the current context is a sensitive subject. This might be the reason that Vietnam's participation in the 2022 Army Games[14)] was interpreted by some as a further indication of its "choosing Russia" (Thayer 2022). In this context, Vietnam's continuing cooperation with Russia needs to be carefully calculated and take into account the US reaction.

It should be noted that Vietnam is engaged in efforts to modernize its national defense, a plan that was already in progress prior to the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict, as indicated at both the 11th All-Army Party Congress in 2020 (Quân đội nhân dân 2020) and the 13th National Party Congress in 2021 (Vũ Cương Quyết 2021). However, given Vietnam's reliance on Russian weaponry, any change must be gradual, and Vietnam will require Russia's assistance to upgrade its current equipment. This situation also creates an opportunity for Vietnam to engage in defense trade with the United States. If the US can establish trust and handle the matter delicately (taking into account Vietnam's need to balance its relationship with China), it could accelerate the modernization of Vietnam's national defense. In fact, following the conclusion of the Vietnam International Defense Expo in 2022, several American defense contractors held discussions with officials from the Ministry of National Defense. This could potentially pave the way for a more substantial defense cooperation partnership between Vietnam and the US.

14) Russia's International Military Games, or Army Games, was inaugurated in August 2015 and is an annual event held between July and September. Army Games 2021 had 175 teams from 43 countries and territories competing in 34 events. Vietnam was an observer at Army Games 2015 and a regular participant from 2018. In 2021, it participated in 15 events and ended in seventh place. For the first time, it hosted two competitions (sniper and accident zone). It was one of the 12 co-organizers of Army Games 2022, which was held on August 13–27 and included 36 separate competitions. Vietnamese military representatives attended the first organizational meeting on September 2, 2021. At that time, 45 countries indicated their intention to participate. On April 22, 2022 Russia announced that 237 teams from 31 countries had confirmed their participation in Army Games 2022.

Conclusion

In conclusion, defense diplomacy between Vietnam and the US has taken place in nearly all areas of defense relations. In the beginning, the two countries focused on less sensitive issues such as English training and dealing with the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Following the growth of the bilateral relationship, in the context of increasing regional security challenges, Vietnam and the US have actively coordinated as well as jointly established and joined defense cooperation mechanisms at a higher and more diverse level. The current mechanisms are a solid foundation for the prospects of Vietnam-US relations in general and defense diplomacy in particular. However, the Ukraine war is likely to pose some challenges to that good outlook. Due to the historical Vietnam-Russia relationship and the traditional Russian-Western confrontation, Vietnam's Russia-related foreign activities—regardless of their consistency with Vietnam's long-standing foreign policy direction—are likely to be misinterpreted, thereby affecting the development of Vietnam-US relations. The building of strategic trust between the two countries is also challenged with the Ukraine war creating a situation that overlaps in many aspects with the Vietnam War period (the closeness of Vietnam-Soviet/Russia relations and the Russia-US confrontation).

Nevertheless, it can still be affirmed that the growth momentum of US-Vietnam relations in general and the defense diplomacy of the two countries remain unchanged. After all, the strategic interests of the US and Vietnam in the bilateral relationship are still important enough for the two countries to overcome temporary roadblocks. With the increasingly fierce US-China competition, Vietnam is a valuable partner for the US due to its geostrategic position, the history of Vietnam-China relations, and the current status of disputes between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea. On the Vietnamese side, the US plays a leading role in its balancing policy. Of all the major powers that are Vietnam's partners at the comprehensive level (comprehensive partnership) or higher, only the US has a fully comprehensive and positive relationship with Vietnam. The US is also the country with the greatest motivation and the highest ability to counterbalance China's power. This role of the US becomes more and more meaningful to Vietnam with China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Dealing with a scheming China—which also understands Vietnam well—requires Vietnam to be more flexible in its strategy of responding to China. Vietnam's upgrading and transition from a "Three Nos" to a "Four Nos"[15] policy in 2019 showed its flexibility.

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15) The 2004 White Paper on National Defense addressed the concept of the "Four Nos," but the content differs slightly from the version mentioned in the 2019 White Paper on National Defense. In 2004 Vietnam advocated: (1) no participating in any military alliances; (2) no allowing foreign ↗

Moreover, Vietnam also publicly explained in the 2019 National Defense White Paper:

> [D]epending on the development of the situation and specific conditions, Vietnam will consider developing necessary defense and military relations to an appropriate extent, based on mutual respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, as well as fundamental principles of international law. This cooperation will be mutually beneficial, serving the common interests of the region and the international community. (Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense 2019, 25)

This interpretation can be extended to mean that, depending on China's further actions, Vietnam may have appropriate defense solutions and, under necessary conditions, may further cooperate on security with the US. These factors are a solid premise to affirm the good prospects of Vietnam-US defense diplomacy.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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↘ countries to establish military bases in Vietnam; (3) no engaging in any military activities that involve the use of force or the threat of force against other countries, but being ready to defend against any action that infringes on Vietnam's territorial integrity on land, in the air, and at sea as well as its national interests; and (4) no engaging in an arms race but always strengthening its defense capabilities enough to defend itself. Subsequently, the 2009 White Paper on National Defense emphasized the "Three Nos": (1) no using force or threatening to use force in international relations, (2) no participating in military alliances, and (3) no allowing foreign countries to establish military bases or use Vietnam's territory to oppose other countries. Finally, the 2019 White Paper on National Defense outlined Vietnam's "Four Nos" policy: (1) no joining any military alliances, (2) no taking sides with one country against another, (3) no granting permission for other countries to establish military bases or use Vietnam's territory to carry out military activities against other countries, and (4) no using force or threatening to use force in international relations. Vietnam's publication of the 2009 and 2019 White Papers on National Defense led many people to perceive a shift in Vietnam's overall perspective, from the "Three Nos" to the "Four Nos" (see Bộ Quốc phòng 2004; Tạp chí Quốc phòng toàn dân 2011; and Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense 2019, 23).

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Inter-Construction Goals: Navigating Thailand's Digital Economy from a Sustainable Development Perspective

Zeng Damei* and Duan Haosheng**

The digital economy has become a powerful engine for global economic resurgence in the post-pandemic era. As an ASEAN developing country, Thailand greatly values the digital economy, which facilitates its "Thailand 4.0" Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By focusing on digitalization trends in Thailand, this article examines whether new technological trends will have beneficial or detrimental impacts on the socioeconomic flowering of the Global South in the digital age. The "Constructive-Sustainable Development Theoretical Framework" is formulated by combining constructivism and the SDGs for conducting analysis. According to empirical research, bridging the digital divide and reducing poverty need to be Thailand's top priorities. Therefore, Thai policy instruments should promote equal distribution of socioeconomic resources and close the digital divide, accelerate digital talent cultivation to fill the talent gap, build partnership networks that support transnational governance in cyberspace, promote third-party market cooperation, and share the reciprocal profits of development.

Keywords: digital economy, digital divide, SDGs, constructivism, Thailand

Introduction

The digital economy is fueling global economic recovery and prosperity. States have started working on their digital economies to take advantage of the fourth industrial revolution, and economists are paying attention to the expansion of digital technology on the global and regional scales. Southeast Asia is a newly emerging digital market with incredible consumption potential and increasing importance.

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To take advantage of the new wave of digitalization, Thailand, ASEAN's second-largest economy, is proactively seeking new drivers for stagnant development. For the last ten years it has been committed to rescuing itself from the "inequality trap" and the "middle-income trap." Thailand's economy saw three development stages over the past few decades: agricultural "Thailand 1.0," light-industrial "Thailand 2.0," and heavy-industrial "Thailand 3.0." To break out of the past few years' economic stagnation, the Thai government has launched the "Thailand 4.0" economic growth strategy, which encourages industrial transformation and a restructuring of the development model. The main goal of Thailand 4.0 is to develop a high-value-added economy driven by innovation, technology, and creativity in order to achieve prosperity, security, and sustainable development (Usa 2018). One of the top ten S-curve industries of Thailand 4.0 is the digital sector.[1] Digital technology undoubtedly creates attractive opportunities, which makes it one of the integral instruments for achieving Thailand 4.0 and promoting sustainable economic growth. However, whether Thailand's ambitious goals will ultimately have the desired effect needs to be further researched.

The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic became a catalyst for the enhancement of the digital economy in Thailand and accelerated the country's society-wide digital transformation. Against this backdrop, digital finance, e-commerce, remote learning, and food distribution quickly grew or developed on Internet-based platforms in order to lower the danger of viral transmission. The diffusion of digital technology has significantly affected Thailand's industrial structure transformation and socioeconomic recovery. AI has even proliferated into the religious sphere, illustrating how digital technology has penetrated beyond the financial realm and is now starting to progressively converge with the requirements of local cultural public goods in Thai society: for instance, the Thai virtual monk named Phra Mana went live in January 2022 (Petch 2022). However, under the intertwined influence of Covid-19 and the sustainable development dilemma, the digital economy has brought unprecedented opportunities and challenges at the social, national, and international levels. Public, academic, and policy-making agencies have all expressed interest in and engaged in discussions about the ongoing digitalization process.

In general, it is reasonable to acknowledge the admirable accomplishments of

1) An S-curve in project management refers to reaching critical mass by investing in innovative technology products to reach optimality. Thailand 4.0 borrows this concept to refer to its focus on industries that will become optimal as innovative technology is invested in. The strategy focuses on ten industries: biofuels and biochemistry, digital economy, healthcare, automated robotics, aviation and logistics, agriculture and biotechnology, smart electronics, health tourism, next-generation self-driving cars, and food processing.

global digitalization. However, any new technology has its pros and cons, and if the public sector ignores the potential drawbacks of digitalization, it may thwart Thailand's efforts to achieve the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Accordingly, there should be a long-term critical observation of how the expansion of digital technology can serve as a stimulus for the Thai economy and accelerate industrial transformation. From the standpoint of International Development Studies, this discussion concentrates on the following closely related issues: What opportunities and challenges will the digital economy present for Thailand in achieving the SDGs at the social, national, and international levels? How can Thailand effectively take advantage of favorable trends for progress toward the SDGs?

The analysis examines the advantages and disadvantages of the societal, national, and international dimensions before elaborating on how the three relate and interact with one another. The study's main contribution is connecting the inevitable digitalization trends in Thailand to the SDGs by investigating the potentially beneficial or detrimental impacts of new technological trends on the universal Sustainable Development Goals of the Global South. This article contends that the inter-constructed or mutually influential effects at the social, national, and international levels must be taken into account to ensure the sustainable growth of the digital economy.

This paper is structured as follows. Following the introduction, the section titled "The Thai Digital Economy through Multiple Lenses" briefly profiles the current research landscape. The methodology and theoretical framework are introduced in "Normative SDGs in the Multilevel Digital Economy of Thailand." "Assessing the Thai Digital Economy from a Sustainability Perspective" forms the main body of the article. The final two sections present strategic recommendations and the conclusion.

The Thai Digital Economy through Multiple Lenses

In terms of research, views on the Thai digital economy may be categorized into two levels and two schools: the domestic and international levels, and the schools of realism and neoliberalism.

First, some realists have paid attention to digital industries such as e-commerce, digital payments, online education, and digital tourism in Thailand and believe that the digital economy has become a key force in Thailand's resistance to Covid-19 shocks (Ma'rifat and Sesar 2020; Mi 2020; Song 2020; Li *et al.* 2022). In the case of Uber's suspension, Suebwong Kalawong and Nuntnidhi Bongsebodhidhamma (2017) argued that Thailand's patronage and rent-seeking activities might negatively impact the digital

economy's development. However, realists prefer to consider the nexus between the digital economy and social impacts as a sort of simple unidirectional relationship. Furthermore, though it is still a domestic-level discussion, a growing body of literature has shed light on the social impacts of the Thai digital economy's development. These impacts include the ways in which small and medium-sized enterprises have adapted to digital transformation trends, the development of a cashless society, information leakage, and whether the digital skills of Thai youth match the labor market (Bukht and Heeks 2018; Calderwood and Popova 2019; Suepphong *et al.* 2021). The realists' studies concluded that traditional socioeconomic relations could sometimes impede the improvement of the digital economy, because the latest trending technology inevitably exposes marginalized groups that cannot adapt to tech trends to wage cuts or unemployment. When digital technology disrupts the traditional business model, some social groups inevitably suffer economically. However, Thailand's digitalization is not only a domestic problem but is also relevant to sustainable development in the context of complex international relations. Various bilateral and multilateral mechanisms also influence its development positively or negatively.

Second, some neoliberalists investigated the state of the digital economy in the Lancang-Mekong region and ASEAN through the lens of institutionalism. They emphasized the roles of Thai digital legislation, 5G application, and official digital policy (Liu 2021; Rhee *et al.* 2022). Some of them examined the expansion of the digital economy in the region from a macro perspective, focusing on the promotion of economic progress through regional organizations such as ASEAN and policy coordination among member countries. Meanwhile, potential challenges such as the digital divide, insufficient cross-border logistics and payment systems, and technical competition among major powers are viewed as the primary impediments to Southeast Asia's digital cooperation (Xu and Wu 2020; Niu *et al.* 2022). Comparing the digital-economic policies of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, Joey Erh (2021) argues that the policies of the six major ASEAN digital economies lack regional coordination and suggests that ASEAN could take a leadership role by entering into cooperative agreements with specific countries. Kim Heejin (2019) examined the e-signature laws in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam and concluded that ASEAN had been essential in regionalizing international standards. Overall, neoliberal studies recognize the role of institutionalization as key to promoting state actors' digital economies in Southeast Asia. However, in the sense of people-oriented sustainable development, the positive effects of international institutions on state actors depend to a large extent on a benign environment of international cooperation. In other words, a lot depends on the degree to which state actors and local society can internalize the

norms and values of international mechanisms. Meanwhile, the degree of internalization depends on the normative socialization at the local, state, and international levels as well as the impacts of great-power rivalries.

In a nutshell, research on the subject needs a more dynamic and comprehensive analytical perspective. In order to elucidate the research questions beyond the material-centric and institutional-centric philosophies, this article will adopt a constructivist approach incorporating the concept of sustainable development to carry out an in-depth analysis.

Normative SDGs in the Multilevel Digital Economy of Thailand

This research employs a qualitative methodology supplemented by documentary analysis and interviews to develop a theoretical framework for analysis.

First, per constructivist consensus, the internalization of norms by state actors is jointly influenced by the process of mutual socialization between the state actors themselves and others (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Wendt 1998; 1999). Second, Amitav Acharya (2004) criticizes the "old" constructivist theories as being based primarily on Western empirical thinking in order to reinterpret the theories or emphasize existing influencing factors rather than rethinking or constructing theoretical development frameworks based on non-Western cases. The old theories ignore the mutual socialization processes of localization among domestic societies, state actors, and the regional and international aspects of development issues. Acharya suggests that "localization" or "domestic society" is another element that affects state actors based on the "national-international" or "self-other" binary structure.

Therefore, from the interdisciplinary lens of international relations and International Development Studies, this paper adopts Acharya's constructivist theory of normative localization to investigate the dynamic of development issues in a non-Western developing country. More specifically, this paper examines the developing sustainability of Thailand's digital economy at three levels—social (domestic/local), national (state), and international—and explores their dynamic and inter-constructive nexus. However, unlike Acharya's purely normative approach to international relations, this study introduces a consensus, idea, and developing norm broadly accepted worldwide—the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—as an evaluative and normative criterion to conduct the analysis. SDGs are comprised of 17 goals. They respectively are Goal 1 No Poverty, Goal 2 Zero Hunger, Goal 3 Good Health and Well-Being, Goal 4 Quality Education, Goal 5 Gender

Fig. 1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Source: United Nations (n.d.)

Equality, Goal 6 Clean Water and Sanitation, Goal 7 Affordable and Clean Energy, Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities, Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, Goal 13 Climate Action, Goal 14 Life Below Water, Goal 15 Life On Land, Goal 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals (Please see in the Fig. 1). International Development Studies believe that these goals are inter-constructed in achieving sustainable development. Constructivism emphasizes norm diffusion and internalization, and because SDGs are a universal agenda and norm for global sustainable development, internalizing them will ultimately lead to the implementation of socioeconomic development processes. This study therefore examines digitalization in Thailand using this globally recognized development norm as an evaluative criterion.

In terms of methodology, qualitative documentary analysis is the primary method used throughout this paper. The primary documentary data were obtained from policy documents and reports from Thai official agencies, such as the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society; Ministry of Industry; and Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation. Pertinent evaluation reports from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the World Bank also provided crucial supporting data and information. Furthermore, to better understand the internalization of SDGs in the development of Thailand's digital economy along with the attitudes of participants in Thai digitalization, other important data from the media news and interviews were collected. The authors also held in-depth discussions with students from three Thai universities (Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, and Khon Kaen University) to better understand how the young generation perceive Thai digi-

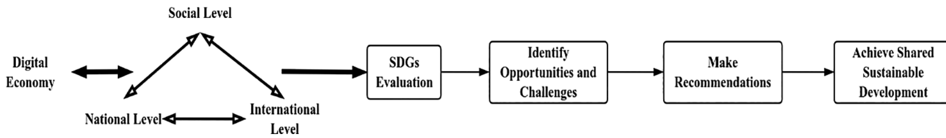

Fig. 2 Constructive-Sustainable Development Theoretical Framework
Source: By the authors

talization. Based on the methodology, a "Constructive-Sustainable Development Theoretical Framework" (Fig. 2) was devised to answer the research questions and formulate practical recommendations for a sustainable digital economy.

This multidimensional study anchors the relevant SDGs on three levels—social, national, and international—as the normative criteria that need to be achieved or internalized for the sustainable development of the Thai digital economy. Given the complexities of digital technology expansion for state actors, the study identifies the impacts on the three levels based on the SDG criteria. From the aforementioned systematic analysis, the study ultimately provides targeted recommendations for the sustainable growth of the Thai digital economy.

Assessing the Thai Digital Economy from a Sustainability Perspective

Thai Digital Economy Development Status

Compared to other ASEAN developing countries, Thailand has an advanced digital infrastructure, which is essential for satisfying consumer demand and accelerating industrial digitalization. Krung Thep Maha Nakhon (Bangkok) has been more eager than ever to use digital technology to foster economic resilience since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following are the features of Thailand's digital infrastructure.

First, the 5G digital infrastructure is the overarching focus for driving the economy and society toward the Thailand 4.0 era. The government is actively supporting the 5G network infrastructure and related technologies in order to revive socioeconomic development, which was negatively impacted by the pandemic. Thailand's three largest mobile operators (AIS, True, and dtac) and two state-owned telecom companies successfully bid for 5G spectrum at an auction held by the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission in February 2020 for a total of 100 billion baht (Komsan *et al.* 2020). Then the three major mobile network operators accelerated the deployment of 5G infrastructure and services. Thailand has deployed 20,000 5G base stations, with 4.3 million 5G users (2.5 times the total number of 5G users in other

ASEAN countries) (Komsan 2021). The Global System for Mobile Communications Association reports that in the third quarter of 2021, Bangkok was among the top 20 capitals in the world for 5G download speed (McKetta 2021). Thailand's fixed broadband download speed in June 2023 was 206.60 Mbps, ranking sixth in the Speedtest Global Index (Speedtest 2023).

Second, thanks to official policies, the adaptation of market profiles, and consumer demand, ubiquitous digital technology widely reshaped Thai consumption patterns during the Covid-19 lockdowns. For instance, there was a boost in e-commerce activity, with a 7 percent increase in new online consumer users in 2021 (Bain & Company 2021, 16). Zero-contact, high-efficiency, and low-cost digital payments, particularly e-wallets, are rapidly emerging as a reliable form of payment. Furthermore, following the pandemic-driven lockdowns, social media and restaurant takeout/delivery have been incorporated into daily lives. Besides its traditional uses for networking and entertainment, social media serves as a significant online shopping channel. And due to the potential risk of viral transmission when dining in during the pandemic, restaurants adapted to provide delivery services via digital platforms. During the pandemic lockdowns, food delivery orders surged on Grab Food, Line Man, Foodpanda, and Uber Eats. Unsurprisingly, food delivery has become the digital service with the highest penetration rate, with 71 percent of Internet users having ordered food online at least once in their lives (Bain & Company 2021, 52). Gradually, products that were available via delivery services expanded beyond the food and beverage industry to include cosmetics, daily necessities, and pharmaceuticals.

Third, Thailand's adoption of digital technology is closely related to the surging demand for pandemic prevention and healthcare. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the healthcare sector's digital transformation. Thai medical institutions' innovative 5G medical solutions are committed to improving patient care effectiveness and lowering the risk of infection. High-tech medical devices enable doctors to communicate and keep track of patient health through contactless interactions. AIS, Thailand's leading 5G network provider, invested 100 million baht to create 5G care robots and provide them to 22 hospitals (Kanokchan 2022). Digital robots can disinfect, deliver medications, serve meals, take patient temperatures, and check vital signs. It is worth mentioning that Thai laws and regulations governing digital healthcare are constantly being improved. The Thai Medical Council, Pharmacy Council, and Ministry of Public Health have released "Telemedicine Guidelines," "Telepharmacy Guidelines," and "Standards of Telemedicine Service Provided by Medical Facilities" respectively (Peerapan *et al.* 2022). Thus, digital technology has helped Thailand to achieve SDG 3: ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for people of all ages.

Digitalization may provide support in overcoming uncertainties and promoting a strong and durable economic recovery in the post-pandemic era. However, opportunities and challenges coexist, inextricably linked, and interact on the social, national, and international levels. Hence, this study will unpack in more detail the compound effect brought about by the digitalization process and how it relates to Thailand's accomplishment of the SDGs.

Analysis at the Social Level

Regarding opportunities at the social level, active digital consumers, a supportive business ecosystem, attractive market size, and high Internet penetration rates form a solid foundation for the sustainable growth of the Thai digital economy.

Thailand is ranked 30th globally and third in Southeast Asia in the World Digital Competitiveness Ranking 2023, released by the International Management Institute in Lausanne, Switzerland (The 2023 IMD World Competitiveness Ranking). Thailand's Internet economy jumped to $30 billion in 2021 (Bain & Company 2021, 8). The country's total population is about 69.88 million, of which active digital consumers aged 15–64 account for about 70.2 percent (United Nations Population Fund 2022). A stable digital consumer population means the country can maintain an attractive digital market size. Thailand is also one of the ASEAN nations with a relatively high Internet penetration rate and the most active Internet users. There are about 48.59 million users, and each spends more than eight hours online daily (Kemp 2021).

Thailand's telecom industry database indicates a 184.97 percent mobile penetration rate in 2022 (Thailand Telecom Industry 2023b). The country's digital payments industry has also snowballed, driven primarily by e-commerce and mobile broadband penetration. As a case study of the inclusive development of the Thai digital economy, in addition to PromptPay from the Central Bank of Thailand, commercial banking giants such as Kasikornbank, Siam Commercial Bank, Bank of Ayudhya, and Bangkok Bank have launched digital banking services. Digital payment platforms such as TrueMoney, Rabbit Line Pay, and Alipay are also active in the Thai consumer market. Data from relevant authorities show that digital payments doubled from 2019 to 2021 (Satawasin *et al.* 2021). The growth has led to a bright outlook for Thailand's digital economy, with the 5G technology ecosystem expected to create 130,000 jobs by 2030 (Phakdeetham 2021a). Digital technology "will boost the GDP of Thailand by 10% or approximately 2.3 trillion baht by 2035" (Phakdeetham 2021b). These figures show the future opportunities for prosperity and economic recovery from the shock of Covid-19. A vibrant and inclusive market and business ecosystem can act as the driving force behind Thailand's digital economy.

Applying SDGs as normative assessment standards, fully utilizing the opportunities presented by the digital wave will contribute to Thailand's social-economic development, thereby benefiting SDG 8: promoting a sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

However, unemployment or income disparities that may result from digital penetration have also inevitably hampered Thailand's accomplishment of the SDGs. The digital economy relies more on technology and information resources than traditional industries, which depend primarily on labor and material resources. The use of digital technology can increase the effectiveness, intelligence, and automation of production processes, resulting in significant improvement in production effectiveness and quality while lowering costs. Meanwhile, some traditional industry employees will inevitably face wage cuts or structural unemployment as a result of disruptive digital penetration. In addition, the gap between the rich and the poor has relentlessly widened because low-income groups are not resilient enough to handle technological evolution. In other words, digital penetration is not conducive to achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Acting as a catalyst, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated Thai digital transformation across industries, a technology trend that may continue in the long term to stimulate economic efficiency. However, the disruption effects of new technology and the digital divide have also exacerbated income inequality and social tensions. There may be an amplified sense of deprivation among low-income groups as a result of platform expansion and the widening income gap between online and offline practitioners in some established industries. Traditional motorcycle drivers, for instance, wear numbered orange undershirts to identify themselves and have attracted customers in the business area under sheltered social relations for a long time. However, with the proliferation and popularity of online taxi platforms in Thailand, the number of traditional motorcycle drivers has decreased by 20 percent—due mainly to competition from Grab—and they complain that their livelihoods are threatened by "illegal entrants" on online platforms (Thodsapol 2019). Moreover, tensions and conflicts of interest between registered riders on online platforms and traditional motorcycle drivers have emerged. Thai motorcycle drivers complained in interviews that online taxi platforms were stealing jobs that used to be theirs, and this had reduced their income. They decided to use demonstrations and protests to voice their concerns because they felt strongly deprived. Their actions did have some results—for example, the Thai Ministry of Transport announced an extension of sixty days for Grab/GrabBike rider registration (the previously stated deadline was July 15, 2022); after the publication of the notice, groups of motorcycle and taxi drivers under the Thai Motorcycle Association gathered in front of the

Thai Ministry of Transport, burning orange safety vests and blue taxi driver uniforms in protest. They claimed that the latest notice from the Thai Ministry of Transport seriously harmed their interests and requested that the policy be withdrawn.

Overall, the winner-takes-all effect of the digital economy model, combined with the unemployment crisis during the pandemic, exacerbated income differentiation and inequality among social groups. Against the backdrop of the multiple opportunities and disruptive challenges presented by digital technology, it is particularly important for the Thai government to respond to the interests of different social groups and to bridge social concerns. These challenges also imply that certain social groups might be wary of digitalization trends because their interests are somewhat jeopardized. The proliferation of digital technology has harmed the interests of social groups who cannot adapt to new trends, and the digital divide and uneven resource distribution could thus lead to or intensify Thailand's income gap at the social level. The authors argue that intensified new technologies may marginalize certain groups of people, thereby slowing down the implementation of the SDGs.

Analysis at the National Level

State actors play an active role in the process of norm internalization. Acharya (2004) argues that local actors' active reconstruction of foreign norms ultimately aligns foreign norms with local norms and practices. Regarding opportunities at the national level, the Thai government has set in place solid policy support to build "Digital Thailand" and has continued to strengthen its institutionalization framework. The official rhetoric prioritizes digital technology in order to capitalize on opportunities created by the fourth industrial revolution and transform the export-dependent economic model in order to overcome the inequality and middle-income traps. Therefore, it is accelerating the pace of policy adjustment to make Thailand one of ASEAN's digital hubs by reorganizing administrative agencies, enacting laws and regulations, and promoting Thailand 4.0, which aims to create "Digital Thailand" and ultimately achieve national economic and social stability, prosperity, and sustainable development.

The most notable example of policy adjustment is the reorganization and renaming of Thailand's former Ministry of Information and Communication Technology into the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society in September 2016. In addition, new agencies were established, such as the Digital Economy Promotion Agency and the National 5G Committee. The policy alliances formed on digital economy development issues indicate the determination of Thai government departments. Thailand has also introduced laws and regulations regarding digital matters (Wendy 2016). It has enacted the Economic and Social Digital Development Act (B.E.2560), Personal Data Protection Act (B.E.2562),

Electronic Transactions Act, Thailand Computer Crime Act, Payment System Act, Thailand Network Security Law, and other regulations related to digital technology and the digital economy. In short, by issuing policy initiatives, restructuring institutions, and improving laws and regulations, government agencies are further signaling that the digital economy is beneficial to the country.

Using the SDGs as normative evaluation criteria, the digital economy assists the Thai government in adjusting its institutional settings to be more effective in creating an efficient, accountable, and inclusive public service sector. The government also strengthens the laws and rules regarding digital governance and creates a more regulated digital ecosystem, both of which will contribute to Thailand's achievement of SDG 16: this SDG calls for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; providing access to justice for all; and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Alongside the above opportunities, the author noted the following roadblocks affecting Thailand's SDGs at the national level.

First, Thailand's digital divide will be difficult to bridge in a short period. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines the digital divide as the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographical areas at different socioeconomic levels regarding access to information and communications technology (ICT) and the use of the Internet in various activities. The unbalanced economy and infrastructure among various regions and groups is the primary cause of the digital divide. In the context of inequality in economic and communication technology infrastructure development in Thailand's rural-urban dichotomy, the development divide in the digital domain is most visibly manifested in the disparity in digital infrastructure availability between different regions of the country. There is a divide in the use of digital technologies between Bangkok and the less developed countryside. Households in underdeveloped rural regions lack adequate and affordable high-speed Internet. According to the Thailand Telecom Industry database, Thailand's broadband penetration rate per capita was 19.36 percent in 2022. Bangkok has a higher percentage of computer-owning households (42 percent) than other provinces (21 percent in Central Thailand, 19 percent in the North, 17 percent in the South, and only 14 percent in the Isan Northeast) (Saowaruj 2020; Thailand Telecom Industry 2023a).

The raging Covid-19 pandemic further amplified the impact of digital divide barriers. Because of a lack of smartphones or bank accounts, socially marginalized and vulnerable groups severely impacted by the pandemic were unable to get government assistance. Some people were even deceived when asking for help because they lacked the necessary digital knowledge (Paritta 2020). For instance, a UNESCO (Thailand) staff member stated that "the digital divide was also reflected in the unequal opportunities for Thai

students to participate in online courses. Schools in the northern and northeastern mountain areas have lower Internet connectivity than the national average.” In addition, technical obstacles such as power outages, lack of electronic devices, and unstable Internet signal seriously hinder students’ efficiency in online learning in rural areas. According to a study by Thailand’s Education Equity Fund, 271,888 of the country’s 1.9 million students who are from low-income or impoverished families do not have access to computers or the Internet (Porpor 2021). The above analysis shows that the digital divide in Thailand poses a severe challenge to achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Second, from the standpoint of digital talent cultivation, Thailand suffers from a shortage of digital human capital and a mismatch between labor force skills and market demand. There is projected to be a shortage of 47 million technology professionals in Asia-Pacific by 2030, due to the digital transformation of the business and technology landscape brought on by the fourth industrial revolution (Huawei 2022). In Thailand, booming e-commerce, digital finance, and start-ups have increased demand for workers with skills in artificial intelligence and machine learning, data analysis, and strategic planning. The mismatch between the supply and demand of digital talent may become a stumbling block to the country’s industrial transformation and digitalization. International data on digital technology and skills use show that Thai youths and adults have less advanced digital skills than the average of OECD countries (Vandeweyer *et al.* 2020, 9). Only 54.9 percent of Thai workers, according to the World Economic Forum, possess the necessary digital skills (World Economic Forum 2020). Education is a structural factor in the nurturing of digital talent. The challenge for the Thai labor market is that graduates from higher education institutions often lack the skills that employers are looking for. There is a mismatch between the competencies required by employers and graduates, according to an empirical study of the competency gap among Thai IT students (Veeraporn *et al.* 2017). The minister of science and technology urged Thai universities to keep up with technological trends and advance students’ technical and digital skills, because 70 percent of university students in Thailand major in social sciences (Chanita 2016, 9). The country needs to urgently address the issue of how to match the talents produced by the education system with the labor market demands.

Finally, Thailand faces thorny cybersecurity challenges. There are numerous cybersecurity risks in the digital age, along with massive data generation, storage, and sharing in the cloud. Phishing, malware, extortion, identity theft, data leakage, and other cybercrimes have unpredictable negative impacts on the information and property security of individuals, companies, and sovereign countries. Most student interviewees said they had antivirus software installed on their computers. It appears clear that the

proliferation of network security risks is an unavoidable obstacle for the Thai digital economy. For example, over 120,000 bank customers' personal or business information was compromised in July 2018 when the Kasikornbank and Krungthai Bank computer systems were attacked. Despite no monetary losses, the potential damage was severe (Orathai *et al.* 2018). Furthermore, in August 2021 a British cybersecurity researcher discovered that the personal information of 106 million Thai tourists had been freely accessible since 2011, with a 200GB database containing the full name, gender, passport number, and other personal information of each tourist (Coble 2021). Within 24 hours, the Thai government took protective action against the database breach.

Thailand's cybersecurity sector needs to improve the relevant hardware configuration. According to the World Bank, the number of secure Internet servers (servers that use encryption technology in Internet matters) per million people in Thailand in 2020 was 1,863, while Singapore's secure Internet servers were about 68 times that number (World Bank 2020). The aforementioned cases demonstrate that cybersecurity threats pose a serious obstacle to SDG 11, which aims to make cities and communities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Since cyber threats are typically nontraditional security concerns with transnational and covert characteristics, Thailand needs to establish international cybersecurity governance partnerships in order to build harmonious digital ecosystems.

Analysis at the International Level

In terms of opportunities at the international level, localization of international norms can enhance the status and prestige of actors (Wolters 2018). Thailand thus actively creates networks for digital-economic cooperation through bilateral and multilateral channels. The analysis begins with bilateral collaboration and then goes on to multilateral collaboration and collaboration with global organizations.

PromptPay, an essential pillar of Thailand's national electronic payments plan, is actively developing its cross-border payments business. The first cross-border real-time payment link was established between Thailand's PromptPay and Singapore's PayNow electronic payment platform in April 2021. This partnership increased the effectiveness of cross-border payments between Thailand and Singapore (Monetary Authority of Singapore 2021).

With regard to multilateral cooperation, Thailand actively participates in the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) and ASEAN digital economy cooperation. The LMC countries have deepened their collaboration through forums and seminars. For example, the 2020 Lancang-Mekong Combating Cybercrime Forum was held in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, China. The meeting reached a consensus on gradually establishing a

cooperative mechanism for multilateral crackdown and comprehensive governance along the Lancang-Mekong basin, enhancing cyberspace governance and regulatory capacity, strengthening information sharing among countries by taking advantage of multilateral platforms, and providing training opportunities for cyber technology enforcement capabilities (Ren Min Zi Xun 2021). In addition, ASEAN regards the digital economy as providing an impetus for high-quality development. The Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, AEC Blueprint 2025, and e-ASEAN Framework Agreement aim to build ASEAN communities into leading, safe, and transformative digital service-, technology-, and ecosystem-driven digital communities (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2021). The Thai government recognizes the positive impact of ASEAN-wide digital cooperation on sustainable economic growth. At the third ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting, Chaiwut Thanakhanamusorn, Thailand's former minister of digital economy and society, suggested that an ASEAN committee be formed to concentrate on combating telecom fraud (*Bangkok Post* February 9, 2023).

Thailand has significant collaborations with global organizations. When it comes to working with international organizations—such as the United Nations and OECD—they attach importance to developing the digital economy and encourage coalition members to strengthen multilateral cooperation in ICT, cybersecurity governance, and other areas. Thailand actively participates in international dialogues on digital economic policy. For instance, its "Decade of Action, Decade of Innovation" campaign was launched on June 8, 2021 by the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (depa) in collaboration with the United Nations Office in Thailand to encourage the use of technology and creative solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals essential to future development (Bovornpong 2021). Using the SDGs as a reference, digital economic cooperation through multiple international channels will facilitate Thailand's attainment of SDG 17: strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

However, the obvious externalities that characterize the digital economy make it susceptible to the multiple power dynamics of world politics. International competition is focused primarily on digital technology, and Thailand's long-term digital economic development is susceptible to the international commercial environment. First, the largest digital businesses are run by high-tech firms that control the most cutting-edge digital technologies. Over-reliance on large tech firms' technology and data resources may exacerbate Thailand's digital vulnerability, threatening data sovereignty and security. Second, digital technology advantages and digital trade rule-setting are the main focus of competition among great digital powers. Some nations make an effort to prevent international cooperation in advanced digital technology.

As tension and competition intensified, Thailand ran the risk of “picking sides” when it imported specific digital technologies and products. For example, according to Reuters, the US launched a 5G technology test bed even as it placed Huawei on a controlled list and urged its allies to bar Huawei’s 5G technology. Thailand was faced with an international relations challenge when it chose to enter into a digital technology partnership with Huawei (Patpicha 2019). As an influential regional economy, Thailand will find it worthwhile to coordinate its policies with other ASEAN countries. In a nutshell, trends in digital economy at the international level present both opportunities and challenges for Thailand, which could undermine the implementation of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Summary and Discussion

Following is a summary of the above section, before coming to the strategic recommendations. The above analysis largely confirms that the digital economy presents interrelated opportunities and challenges for Thailand to achieve the normative SDGs at the social, national, and international levels. In this sense, the opportunities and challenges are intertwined with one another rather than existing independently. First, the opportunities presented by the digitalization wave are mutually reinforcing. A supportive business ecosystem, an attractive market size, and supportive official policies, for example, are all positive factors that will assist Thailand in relieving the unemployment crisis and recovering the economy (SDG 8) in the post-pandemic era. The groundwork will also be laid for a global network of digital partnerships through bilateral and multilateral cooperation channels (SDG 17).

The challenges to the SDGs are also mutually interconnected and have overlapping effects. For instance, the digital divide interacts with the widening wealth gap in society (SDG 1, SDG 10), implying that unequal distribution of socioeconomic resources, such as income, is also reflected in digital technology accessibility. Moreover, inequalities caused by the wealth gap not only undermine the effectiveness of official policy implementation (SDG 16) but also contribute to problems such as human resource deficiency (SDG 8), educational inequality (SDG 4), and the ongoing deterioration of cybersecurity (SDG 11).

Finally, Table 1 demonstrates that SDG 1 and SDG 10 have the highest frequency of occurrence (both twice) among the challenges posed by the digital economy wave for achieving the SDGs. It is worth noting that the main missions for Thailand in the future will be poverty reduction and bridging the development gap. All of the foreseeable spillover effects of challenges generated from digitalization will affect the economic dynamics. Based on the above analysis, Thailand needs to be aware of the dynamic,

Table 1 Assessing Thailand's Digital Economy by SDGs

Level	Opportunities	SDGs	Challenges	SDGs
Social	Digital consumers and market size, good business environment, high Internet penetration rate	SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Slowing economic recovery, poor performance of the service sector, widening gap between rich and poor	SDG 1: No Poverty SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
National	Restructuring of administrative agencies, enacting laws and regulations	SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Digital divide, talent scarcity, cybersecurity	SDG 1: No Poverty SDG 4: Quality Education SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
International	Bilateral and multilateral cooperation channels	SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Digital technology monopoly, digital competition among major powers, ASEAN countries	SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Note: This table is based on the analysis in Section 4: Assessing the Thai Digital Economy from a Sustainability Perspective.

mutually influential nexus among the opportunities and challenges at different levels and that the realization of SDGs at each level will not be independent but interconnected. This means that the process of promoting or internalizing normative SDGs at one level should also take into account the facilitation and improvement effects at other levels. Ultimately, a comprehensive practice will lead to a sustainable Thai digital economy model and meet the four objectives of Thailand 4.0: economic prosperity, social well-being, raising human values, and environmental protection.

Strategic Recommendations for Thai Digital Economy's Sustainable Growth

The technological revolution is gaining momentum, and global socioeconomic prosperity is irresistibly shifting toward digitalization. As previously discussed, the Thai digital economy has the potential for remarkable accomplishments but is also confronted with tricky challenges. Taking advantage of emerging technological trends will be beneficial for Thailand, where the digital industry is in its early stages, with regard to putting into practice the UN-promoted norms for sustainable development. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed based on the above analysis.

First of all, promoting equal distribution of socioeconomic resources and digital

inclusion needs to be Thailand's primary policy priority. The interregional and intergenerational digital divides in Thailand have negatively impacted household income and children's education among marginalized social groups. For example, students in underdeveloped areas could not participate in online classes during the pandemic because they lacked electronic devices and Internet access. The implementation of SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) means urgently bridging the digital divide. Therefore, the research suggests that actions and cooperation for bridging the digital divide should be centered on poverty eradication or reduction. Greater investment in digital infrastructure is necessary to close the digital divide, with the first step being to increase telecommunications infrastructure investment in rural areas, particularly in the country's mountainous north and Isan. Digital infrastructure can be built by national initiatives, private enterprises, or international cooperation, such as through the LMC "3 + 5 + X" framework, to strengthen poverty reduction cooperation in the subregion.

Second, the public service sector of Thailand should provide more technical support and humanistic care for the elderly, disabled, and residents in rural areas who are vulnerable due to the "digital literacy deficit." Technical assistance can be provided to these groups through volunteer services and regular training, to help them more easily adapt to changes in the digital world and enjoy modern conveniences. Developing specialized software programs/apps to improve the digital service usage of the country's digitally underprivileged citizens is also possible.

Third, digital talent cultivation via SDG 4 (Quality Education) is an essential strategy for tackling Thailand's tricky issues of poverty, inequality, and employment dilemmas. Thai authorities need to accelerate digital talent training to fill the talent gap. Talent cultivation is vital for alleviating employment pressure and promoting economic recovery in order to achieve SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). It is also an essential booster for "Digital Thailand." To begin with, there is strong demand for highly qualified personnel with digital skills in the labor market as a result of the digital transformation of Thai industries. However, unless the government and educational institutions adapt training and education programs to suit market conditions, graduates may find it difficult to gain employment. Therefore, it will be good if Thai universities, research institutions, and digital enterprises carry out various forms of digital talent cultivation cooperation projects based on the strengths of each stakeholder and promote effective interaction between talent, industry, and the public service sector. Market demand-oriented talent cultivation can ensure that labor market needs are continuously met. Moreover, cooperation can be enhanced through bilateral or multilateral diplomatic frameworks such as the ASEAN

Regional Cooperation Program on Technical and Vocational Education and Training or Lancang-Mekong Vocational Education Cooperation. In short, it would be beneficial to implement multiple channels of cooperation to address workforce issues that are impeding the sustainable growth of the digital economy.

Fourth, Thailand's cybersecurity sector should be more active in building partnership networks and promoting transnational governance in cyberspace. Fighting cybercrime is becoming increasingly difficult in the globalized world due to radical technological advancements and the ongoing updating of cybercriminals' attack tactics. Building partnership networks with regional and global stakeholders is essential to establish cybersecurity, because cybercrimes are transnational and covert. With regard to bilateral cooperation, Thailand can promote trust and consensus with ASEAN members, China, Japan, and other countries on the basis of respecting "digital sovereignty" in the areas of privacy protection, data security, digital taxation, information sharing, and extradition of criminals, so as to establish a robust transnational cybersecurity ecosystem. In addition, the existing multilateral cooperation framework should be fully utilized. For example, multilateral collaboration can be implemented to combat online gambling, online fraud, and other crimes under the ASEAN Network Security Cooperation Strategy (2021–25) and the Lancang-Mekong Law Enforcement Security Cooperation Mechanism. Building bilateral and multilateral partnerships, as mentioned above, can result in a healthy cyberspace community, which will contribute to achieving the blueprint outlined in SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Lastly, Thailand can promote third-party market cooperation and share the fruits of reciprocal prosperity with its economic partners. The digital economy represents the emerging direction of global economic flowering, and digital technology competition has increased among major powers. Thailand is vulnerable to potential geopolitical risks when choosing digital technology providers and engaging in cooperation, due to the politicization of technology and competition among major powers. Third-party market cooperation is a viable strategy for achieving sustainable development in order to reduce the risk of technology politicization. For instance, in recent years there has been a trend of cooperation between China and Japan in the Greater Mekong Subregion, and Thailand has taken the initiative to coordinate and participate in collaborative projects with China and Japan (Zhao 2020). Through trilateral cooperation, Thailand, Japan, and China can combine their comparative advantages and dispel unwarranted skepticism while avoiding interest rivalry. The three have jointly outlined their initial vision of economic cooperation. In April 2019, the Japan External Trade Organization and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade held a seminar on business

cooperation in third-party markets between China and Japan under the sponsorship of the Eastern Economic Corridor Office in Thailand. Representatives of enterprises from the three nations held a symposium focusing on critical cooperation areas, including transportation and logistics, energy and environment, and smart cities (JETRO 2019). Third-party market cooperation can effectively mitigate the negative impact of geopolitics and great-power games on SDG 17 and is therefore a rational choice for establishing high-quality economic partnerships.

Conclusion

Based on constructivist theory, this research employs the UN's SDGs as standards for evaluation and offers an integrated picture of Thai digitalization. More specifically, it analyzes the symbiosis of opportunities and challenges encountered by the Thai digital economy at the social, national, and international levels. Our findings contribute to the existing scholarship by examining how enhancement of the digital economy is entwined with the achievement of SDGs in ASEAN developing countries, reflecting the potentially beneficial or detrimental impact of newly generated ICT on the Sustainable Development Goals of the Global South. On the social level, active digital consumers, a supportive business ecosystem, an attractive market size, and a high Internet penetration rate form the basis for the digital economy, but the "winner-takes-all" effect combined with an unemployment wave has exacerbated the inequality among social groups. At the national level, Thai governmental policy support and its ongoing institutionalization are opportunities for "Digital Thailand." Still, the digital divide, digital human capital shortages, and cybersecurity challenges are obstacles that need attention. At the international level, Thailand can create bilateral and multilateral channels for international cooperation to advance its digital competitiveness. In brief, the Thai government has played an active role in the country's digital transformation process. However, in order to support the SDGs, a set of global development norms set by the UN, it is still necessary to address the disruptive effects of digitalization. Last but not least, Thailand's opportunities and challenges in achieving a resilient digital economy are interrelated and overlapping at the three levels. The analysis further suggests that the main missions of Thai policy instruments in the future will be poverty reduction and bridging the digital divide. The authors hope the findings of this study will contribute to understanding the complex interplay of global digital reforms and SDGs.

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Thailand's Plural Identities: Contesting the National Imagination in Fiction and Ethnography

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This article examines notions of national identity and diversity in Thailand during the twentieth century. It draws on ethnographies, historical fiction, jungle adventure, romance, and official documents to question common notions of Thai identity and of what constitutes socially relevant Thai-language writing. The focus is in part on so-called hill peoples, whom scholarship has generally regarded as irrelevant to an understanding of Thai society. The study suggests a recurring debate among rival Thai perspectives on society, identity, and inequality. I divide the range of social imaginaries into three groups. Some manifest unambiguous pluralism and interethnic equivalence. Others express a class-based critique of the harm that derives from hierarchy and social inequalities. The third view insists on Thai distinction from and superiority over other peoples. The implications of this chauvinism are often elitist, sometimes racist, and also at times authoritarian. Of the three views that I identify, the emphasis on pluralism and interethnic equivalence has never received any notice from scholars of Thai society and culture.

Keywords: Thailand, literature, ethnography, pluralism, racism, national imagination

Thai-language fiction and ethnography manifest local understandings of society and diversity at particular moments. These works are not policy statements in any direct sense, but many of them have political implications. For the most part, they are interesting pieces of creative writing that are each very unique. Taken together and situated historically, however, these individual works can be read as clear evidence of considerable traffic in diverse and contested social visions between Thai intellectuals and the Thai (reading) public during the twentieth century.

The research behind this study focused on representations of ethnic and other diversity in Thai writings during the twentieth century. My examination found a range of perspectives on identity and difference, which for analytical purposes I have divided

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into three groups. These different perspectives manifest divergence and debate about Thai social principles and priorities. One perspective prioritizes hierarchy and inequality, another critiques hierarchy and inequality as the source of social ills, and a third emphasizes plural belonging and denies any categorical convictions regarding hierarchy, ethnicity, class, gender, language, or any other lines of identity and difference. The three angles, I suggest, occur not only in fiction or ethnography. Instead, they express pervasive diversity in Thai notions of society and identity. I assert no Thai uniqueness; any society may be based on conflicting principles.

Sons of the Forest, a young adult novel by Mala Khamjan (2008 [1982]), gives some sense of the interethnic realities in Thai writing that have been persistently overlooked or ignored.[1] The story follows two boys in Thailand's North, a lowland Northern Thai boy named Muangkham and a highland Karen boy named Yachi. The two are about 12–14 years old when they get to know each other and become friends. At a boarding school in town, they later come up against certain problems. In one episode of bullying at school, someone calls Yachi a "smelly Yang." "Yang" is a Northern Thai reference to people who call themselves Pga k'nyau. They are known as Karen in English and Kariang in Central Thai; "smelly Yang" is certainly an offensive slur.[2]

In reaction, each boy evokes what he has been taught: the lowland Northern Thai Muangkham says that according to his father, "You must fight," while the upland Karen boy Yachi counters that according to his father, "You must endure things." Yachi follows up on this with what seems a complete reversal of Thai stereotypes:

> "You lowlanders refer to yourselves as more advanced than us. Instead of talking through your problems like we [Pga k'nyau or highlanders] do, you fight each other. My father says that settling differences through the use of force is the way of animals." (Mala 2008, 89–90)[3]

Thai society and worldview are conventionally understood in terms of a universal hierarchy where Buddhist Thais are inherently superior to animist ("tribal") hill peoples, city people are above rural populations, and humans are far above animals (Hanks 1962, 1257). From the regular academic angle, Thais are the dominant national majority and Karen the marginalized minority. In this novel, however, highland peoples such as the

1) Mala Khamjan was born Jaroen Malarote in the northern province of Chiang Mai in 1952. He is best known for young adult fiction. As of 2007, *Sons of the Forest* was in its 13th printing. The author had by then published 36 books and received 13 awards, mostly national but also one IBBY—an award from the International Board on Books for Young People. He received the SEA Write Award in 1991 and was made National Artist in 2014.

2) Yang, Kariang, Karen, and Pga k'nyau imply the same people but from different angles and in different languages. There is no neutral or context-free reference to identity.

3) All translations from Thai in this article are my own.

Karen qualify (from their own perspective but in Thai writing) as human and civilized. Compared to them, lowland Thais are subhuman brutes, because they use force to resolve their differences. Calling someone an animal (*ai-sat* or *i-sat*) is a vulgar insult that combines disdain and anger. The Karen boy never manifests such an attitude, but the assessment that he attributes to his father and to his ethnic group is squarely transgressive and also refreshingly funny.

The late 1970s was a violent time in Thai society. In 1976 a brutal and deadly attack on the Thammasat University campus in downtown Bangkok brought a sudden end to (a few years of) democratic government. A right-wing military government took over, and all discussion, debate, and even news reporting on the violence was banned except from the military's perspective that the perpetrators were Communist vandals who had threatened national security. There were—and had been—frequent attacks across the country on those advocating for labor rights and democracy. These included assassinations, and it seemed that right-wing vigilante groups had been given a free hand (Anderson 1977; Morell and Chai-anan 1981). Ethnically non-Thai highland settlements also came under military attack for suspected political subversion. Nobody could publicly criticize the authoritarian and right-wing violence. The novel *Sons of the Forest* came out of this historical moment. It is a relatable and entertaining work of fiction that upends some standard expectations but does not point an accusatory finger in any alarmist way. The book does not hammer out any political convictions. Readers can take it any which way they like.

The story's ethnic or cultural pluralism and its ability to shift perspectives and see Thainess from the angle of another identity are somewhat common in Thai writing, though I have not found any recognition of this in studies of fiction or of society. One reviewer for this journal found my reading overdrawn: This particular novel "by a lowland Thai writer [could] surely not [express] the Karen's own perspective." This is an important and debatable point. I do not agree that a Thai writer cannot draw a convincing or credible Karen character, any more than a female writer cannot create credible male characters or a middle-class writer create credible characters across class lines. This issue of representation across difference (in writing or otherwise) has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. It is equally unfounded to assume that no Thai writer can represent a Karen perspective as it would be to assume that all Thai writing about Karen perspectives or characters is equally realistic or successful. All fiction is teeming with characters who do not match their writer's identity. In the episode that triggered the reviewer's alarm, the Thai writer used a Karen perspective in order to convey a sense of lowland Thai peoples as subhuman brutes. This was not an attempt at an ethnographic characterization. It aired, I suggest, a critique of (a) a violent society and (b) the common

and racist sense of Thai superiority over hill peoples.

In a book on literature and politics in Thailand during 1950–80, the political scientist Benedict Anderson (1985) called attention, in passing, to the issue of Thai knowledge of hinterland ethnic minorities. His book contains 13 Thai short stories in translation. Two of the stories focus on hinterland peoples, one each on Chao Le "sea gypsies" in the South and Hmong hill farmers in the North. The two stories manifest historical change:

> [T]he entry of state and capitalism into the lives of these minorities has simultaneously brought them into the field of vision of the Thai intelligentsia, and for the first time into a serious Thai literature which they themselves are unlikely soon to read. (Anderson 1985, 74)

Anthropology came to Thailand in two ways, both of which manifest American influence on Thai society. Anthropologists were brought in to study "politically labile" populations in Thailand's Northeast, North, and South as part of anti-Communist counterinsurgency measures. Also, anthropology became a subject

> in universities and research institutes . . . One unplanned side-effect [of field studies among the "non-Thai Thai"] was a new sympathy for such minorities among Thai students, and a concomitant awareness of the need for a less narrowly ethnic, and more generously political, conception of the Thai nation and national identity. The marks of this changing consciousness are visible all over [the two short stories]. (Anderson 1985, 75)

Anderson deserves credit for calling attention to the issue, though his understanding of Thai knowledge about hinterland peoples was not based on familiarity with the subject matter. During the almost forty years since the book was published, other scholars have not called attention to or corrected Anderson's ignorance of the topic. The book has since been published in Thai translation with additional essays (Anderson 2010). It shows no indication that Thai scholars have attempted any correction regarding assertions about Thai knowledge of ethnic diversity. This suggests that we have all been equally ignorant.

Anderson's book engages with interesting issues that cross academic disciplinary lines between politics, history, anthropology, and literature. Anthropologists have generally confined their research to fieldwork and have not paid much—or any—attention to literature or other Thai-language writing. Scholars of Thai politics, history, and literature have in general not shown any particular interest or familiarity with regard to hill peoples or ethnography. A more grounded understanding of the relevance of diversity in Thai society, history, literature, and political life requires interdisciplinary investigations. My case is intended to encourage and contribute to such efforts.

This study makes no claim to being exhaustive. It insists, however, on the impor-

tance of a recurring diversity among societal perspectives in Thailand that has, to my knowledge, had little or no recognition in studies of Thai society or history. I looked for images of diversity in fiction and ethnographic writing in order to comprehend Thai notions of identity regarding hill peoples. I used to think that there was a particular Thai perspective on hill tribes. Most studies of Thai society associate Thainess with ethnic chauvinism, authoritarianism, and state control (Reynolds 1993). When I failed to affirm my expectations, I searched for a different understanding. I was already familiar with some Thai ethnographic writing, but the juxtaposition with novels and short stories put these Thai ideas in a new perspective.

The assumption that Thai people have certain ideas about hill peoples or ethnic minorities implies that these positions are to some extent unproblematic or even fixed. In the course of my research, my view shifted to the question of how Thai people imagine their own identity and society in relation to matters of diversity. How does one study notions of national identity and ethnic frontiers? Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) offers one angle in his structural analysis of myths, with the suggestion that one must include all versions of any particular narrative.[4] This is an impossible goal, considering the tens of thousands of writings that are potentially relevant regarding Thai views on Thai identity and diversity. However, the ambitious aim can still counter the tendency to select only examples that best fit one's analytical expectations and ignore the rest.

This analysis considers Thai ethnographic reporting in relation to fiction from three periods: the 1930s, 1950s, and 1970s. I also briefly discuss examples from before the twentieth century, since premodern cases also differ from what is commonly expected. My study takes each piece of writing, fictional or ethnographic, as an individual entity that needs to be studied in its particulars (what are the components, how do they differ and relate, what is the outcome of their interactions?) before it can be compared with other such entities that together make up what I have assembled under the rubric of "Thai writing related to identity and diversity."

One inspiration for my research focus is the historian O. W. Wolters's (1982) study of border poems from fourteenth-century northern Vietnam. He suggested that each poem had to be treated as a coherent and unique entity, and that its meaning had to be read from the relations among the components and the social and historical context. The poets, state officials in an ethnically diverse region near the border with China, were "witnesses" who expressed their individual understandings of society and history at a specific moment. They did so for a particular audience and in the spirit of political

4) Lévi-Strauss suggested that myths could be analyzed without any particular knowledge of the society, the historical moment, or even the original language in which the story was rendered. My approach to Thai narratives emphasizes all these elements, so my use of his perspective is selective.

intervention. My sources are twentieth-century Thai intellectuals of various backgrounds. Their Thai-language ethnographies, historical fiction, jungle adventure, romance, and official documents offer a range of socially relevant writing about identity and difference. My research question makes them "witnesses" to what could be imagined and expressed in Thailand during the twentieth century.

Pluralism Before 1910

Across island and mainland Southeast Asia and adjacent southern China, trade in forest products (horns, hides, spices, orchids, beeswax, fragrant wood, etc.; in certain hinterland areas peoples also mined gold and worked other metals) was an important component of trans-local and then interregional and international trade for millennia (Cushman 1970; Dunn 1975; Manguin 2002; Tran 2010). Ayutthaya and Malacca were among the many Southeast Asian courts that derived significant wealth from such trade. This trade relied on alliances and exchanges linking different environments and peoples, and it involved marriage relations and the granting of semi-royal titles to hinterland and ocean-people leaders (Andaya and Andaya 2015). Nothing about Southeast Asian prehistories suggests that hinterland peoples had ever been isolated or remote from the region's social and political dynamics. Anderson's notion that capitalism and modernity brought Chao Le and Hmong peoples out of their previous isolation—and that they were unknown to various lowland and coastal peoples until Western anthropology and capitalism entered the scene—draws on (Western and Thai) social theory, particularly the notion that historical change comes from urban dynamics that transform the otherwise-inert countryside (see Braudel 1972; and Chatthip 1999).

There is considerable indication that pluralism was a customary perspective on the social landscape across Southeast Asia and adjacent southern China; multiethnic networks were common (O'Connor 2009; White 2011; Le *et al.* 2016; Cushman and Jonsson 2020). However, each place had its particular networks and dynamics. The court of Ayutthaya may have been ignorant of the forest people who produced many of the trade goods that sustained its economy. Ayutthaya was cosmopolitan and multilingual in relation to trade partners from Java, Japan, Korea, China, India, Persia, and the Malay Peninsula but ignorant about the people in its hinterland. Other courts, such as Chiang Mai, Khorat, and Kamphaeng Phet, maintained relations with Lawa, Karen, and other forest peoples and may have been correspondingly ignorant of Java, Japan, and the other trade partners of Ayutthaya. In the Ayutthaya-era epic *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, one episode relates how a Siamese couple initiate relations with Lawa people with an exchange

of jewelry. Another one shows Lawa and Siamese attending each other's festivals and young people joking and flirting across these ethnic lines (Baker and Pasuk 2010, 386, 485).

The literature scholar Suvanna Kriengkraipetch (1995) studied images of otherness in Thai poetry around 1800 and found no sign of a stable notion of Thainess or selfhood. One striking example of pluralism is in a segment of the epic poem "*Phra Aphai Mani*" by Sunthon Phu:

> [All the enemies in a battle] listened to the teachings of the great [hermit] in order to call a halt to protracted fighting. After the teaching, which concerned Buddhist ideas, those who listened . . . explained their understanding in their own way, based on their religious beliefs and the cultural practices of each group. Sunthon Phu, as a Buddhist himself, did not clarify the meaning of this teaching, as if wishing to suggest that differences between "us" and "the others" . . . had no need for set criteria to distinguish each group, permitting one to enjoy the differences and become acquainted with each other. (Suvanna 1995, 145)

Thai Field Marshall Jaophraya Surasakmontri wrote about his military missions in the 1880s, when he was involved in fighting against "insurgent" groups in the borderlands of northern Laos and Vietnam. His account of "various groups of forest people" emphasized identifiable traits such as language, dress, and hairstyle. It showed no sign of ranking people by ethnicity or of insisting on any Thai superiority; there was only a plurality of peoples (Lathi 2015).

King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910) wrote a travel poem about the Karen peoples in Kanchanaburi that did not suggest any ethnic prejudice but rather interest and familiarity. He noted that the Siamese recognized the Karen for their midwifery skills and herbal medicine (Renard 1980, 104). He also wrote a verse-drama set among the Koi hunter-gatherers in the far south toward Malaysia (Chulalongkorn 1968 [1906]). In this, he gave an ethnographic background and noted that both Thai and Malay peoples valued herbal medicine from the Koi peoples. He also provided a glossary of dozens of terms from the Koi language and sprinkled the Thai text with these terms. The mention of the midwifery skills and herbal medicine that were valued and traded across ethnic lines is indicative of a pluralist tradition, where ethnic difference is maintained in part to cross it with mutually beneficial exchanges. Multilingualism was a regular component of such dynamics.

King Chulalongkorn's verse-play is not about ethnic difference. Instead, it is a drama about young lovers who are not allowed to marry because the woman's parents have decided on a wealthier suitor for her. At the end of the play, the male rivals have both been killed and the young woman has committed suicide. In my reading, the tragedy offers (directly or indirectly) a critique of parental overreach, such as was manifest in the

Thai law that a woman's parents decided on which man she married (Loos 2006, 138). King Chulalongkorn could write a drama with Koi characters about contemporary Thai concerns (e.g., could a woman marry for love?) because he assumed that peoples were to some degree equivalent. Nothing in the play asserts Siamese superiority over the Koi or suggests the latter's deficiency.

The historian Thongchai Winichakul (2000) argues that during 1885–1910, members of the Siamese elite engaged in nation building in part through an ethnographic project. He asserts that this project established distinctions through an elite-Siam-ization of ethnography. Allegedly, the elite established its superiority through an ethno-spatial hierarchy of the civilized city, the civilizable but rustic countryside, and the strange and uncivilizable ethnic others in the forest and mountains. Thongchai further asserts that King Chulalongkorn's verse-play, *Ngo pa* (Frizzy junglee), was one expression of this project. Prior to 1885, supposedly, the Siamese elite and Siamese society were ignorant of the hinterland peoples.

It is possible that some writings by certain members of the Siamese elite express the views that Thongchai found. But this is far from uniform or obvious in the sources. There was considerable diversity and debate among the elite on a range of matters. Prince Damrong, Chulalongkorn's brother, often expressed ethnic chauvinism in his writing, but his writings are not representative of the views of the elite in general. My reading of the report by Jaophraya Surasakmontri, for instance, differs from Thongchai's understanding. Some of his entries draw on considerable first-hand familiarity, others on rather reliable and unprejudiced informants, and yet other entries suggest unreliable and prejudiced gossip about peoples which the Siamese official had no knowledge of.

Thongchai's study views the Siamese elite as a singular entity with a unified and racist project of nation building and hierarchy. It suggests a critique of the monarchy and affirms a clear social divide between the elite and the public, both of which are significant items in contemporary Thai debates about society and politics. However, I question the claims regarding Siamese ignorance of ethnically diverse peoples prior to 1885, and about the shape of ethnographic knowledge production to boost the elite's claims to social superiority during 1885–1910. Thongchai's article raises important issues. His case, however, makes it impossible to recognize an indigenous Southeast Asian tradition of pluralism, including a practical interest in ethnic diversity, that is evident in premodern times and could still be found during 1885–1910, even in writings by members of the Siamese elite.

Assertions of Essential Difference

In 1932 a democratic revolution changed Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a democracy with a constitutional monarchy. A book from 1933 introduced the northern province of Nan to a national readership. The book has a long chapter on history, written by a "Mr. Good-Luck Lotus" (Nai Bua Chok-di). He opens by stating that in the past the land of Nan was a small kingdom and thus it was at various times under the administration of stronger powers that surrounded it: to the west lay Chiang Mai and then Burma; to the north and east were Sipsongpanna (in Yunnan, China) and Luang Prabang (Laos); to the south were Sukhothai and Ayutthaya:

> Whenever Nan was under the administration of either the Ayutthaya or Chiang Mai kingdom then there was tranquility and happiness among the citizens, because these kingdoms were governed by justice and kindness. This is very different from the waste and destruction that came with being under the Burmese administration, when there was much despair among the people. The Burmese never built anything up, they only destroyed things . . . At times, Nan was also attacked by its neighbors, such as Phrae, Luang Prabang, and Sipsongpanna. (Nai 1933, 212–213)

Prior to the 1780s, Ayutthaya was the Siamese capital, and Chiang Mai was the predominant kingdom in the North and then the administrative center of the Northern Division (Monthon Phayap) of the Siamese nation-state. The expression of preferred subordination to Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya comes across as a declaration of allegiance to the new nation-state.

The chapter on the ethnic groups of Nan is more of a surprise. Siri Phetyaprasert (1933), who represented Nan in the national parliament, writes on the various ethnic groups in the province.[5] There are sections on the lowland Northern Thai population as well as on the Meo (Hmong), Yao (Mien), Khmu, Thin, (Tai) Lue, and Phi Tong Leuang (Mlabri). The entries on the ethnically non-Thai peoples stress their unfamiliarity: "Seven hundred years ago the Lawa people fled from the Thai into the forests and mountains, and they have had no way to progress" (Siri 1933, 283). Peoples are situated in terms of "blood," their supposed racial linkages.

Significantly, the chapter on the peoples of Nan opens with a plea to correct a misunderstanding about "Lao," which was a common Bangkok reference to the population in the North: "In truth there are no Lao people in Nan [The Lao people live in French Indochina] . . . In general, the lowland population is Thai, of true-Thai flesh and

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5) I have not yet learned any biographical details of this politician. He credits district governors in Nan with his knowledge of various ethnic groups, which suggests that he may have been unfamiliar with the province.

blood and ancestry." It continues with a mention of "the period when the Thai fled southward from the oppression of the Chinese [and split into two groups: northerners who initially were centered on Chiang Saen, and southerners (the Siamese in the Central Plains)] at Sawankhalok and beyond . . . The leaders of both groups were true Thai" (Siri 1933, 273, 274).

The Meo and Yao are said to be very similar, and both their origins are in China. There are White Meo and Black Meo, who differ mainly by dress. "Their important occupation is opium cultivation, and this activity creates considerable burden for the administration. [The Meo also grow rice and corn and raise animals.] Their dogs have a silky fur, and the lowland peoples buy lots of dogs from the Meo" (Siri 1933, 278). The entry on the Yao is much shorter. It mentions some vocabulary, typical dress, weddings, and that "the position of women is similar to that of slaves" (Siri 1933, 279). The racial emphasis is persistent in the entries: "The Lue are of Thai ancestry, but since ancient times there has been much mixing of blood with the Lua" (Siri 1933, 281–282).

Siri was conjuring untruths for a national audience with his exaggeration of the alienness of the various ethnically non-Thai peoples in Nan. The exoticization of hill peoples went hand in hand with the declaration that the lowland population was racially "true-Thai." In the 1880s the leader of a group of Mien (Yao) and Hmong (Meo) people (most likely a few thousand) negotiated with the king of Nan to settle in the mountains of his domain (they had earlier had similar relations with valley lords in Laos, Vietnam, and southern China). They agreed on annual tribute or tax payment, the leader was given a semi-royal *phaya* title, and the farmers in five settlements were allowed to grow and sell opium to the Royal Opium Monopoly. The Mien leader was well known to the authorities, and he often visited the city and the palace. He delivered tax every year, and he became quite wealthy from the proceeds of taxation and opium cultivation. When France took over neighboring Laos as part of Indochina in 1893, the Bangkok authorities placed Thai soldiers in garrisons along the border in Nan. The Mien population in Nan sold rice to the military camps (Jonsson 2005, 74–94).

It appears largely unknown nowadays that in the 1920s and 1930s, so-called forest and hill peoples were considered regular members of Thai society. One indication of this is an announcement in the *State Gazette* from January 1927 that extends the period for collecting taxes in order to accommodate the hill peoples. They had difficulty traveling in the rainy season and the hot season, and thus the tax collection would be extended (Suphayok-Kasem 1927, 603–604). Importantly, the people are referred to as *ratsadon jamphuak Meo, Yao, Musoe, Liso*.[6] The term *ratsadon* defines them as "citizens" or the

6) I owe my knowledge of this document to Suchon Mallikamarl, who is currently conducting research on interethnic political history in the National Archives of Thailand.

"general public"; there is no indication that members of these ethnic groups were considered alien or somehow outside of society. Nor were they labeled "hill" or "forest" peoples. During the 1920s, the Thai press favored the term *ratsadon* in reference to "people as the opposite of rulers" (Baker and Pasuk 2022, 128). The People's Party, the group behind the rebellion that established democracy and ended the absolute monarchy, referred to itself by this term, as *Khana ratsadon*.

In early 1927, King Prajadiphok (Rama VII, r. 1925–35) made an official journey by train from Bangkok to the north of the country. The governor of Chiang Mai orchestrated a grand reception that gave Mien, Hmong, Lisu, Karen, and other "hill peoples" important place. There were parades with floats celebrating each ethnic group, and there were music and dance performances by Mien, Hmong, and Lisu peoples. The governor had hosted a large number of hill peoples for a month prior to the event.

In the National Archives of Thailand, photos from this event show interethnic mingling among cheerful and interested Hmong, Mien, and Northern Thai audience members. The photo captions refer to the people as *ratsadon* (the general public). There is every indication that the ethnic diversity of Thai society was seen as a normal thing. The *ratsadon* suggests that there was no firm ranking of peoples that would mark Hmong, Mien, or Karen as in any way less central or less important than the other local populations. Nothing indicates that hill peoples were being viewed or treated as strange or as inferior to ethnically Thai peoples. The documentary film from this event suggests a sense of a plurality of peoples who were not being ranked by ethnic identity (Sadet Neua 1927).

A fiction film, *Kariang Sai-Yoke* (The Karen people of Sai Yoke), filmed in Kanchanaburi Province in 1936, offers further support for Thai pluralism and interethnic parity during this era. The film is set in a Karen village during New Year, and it combines daily activities with a staged drama of tension between the two suitors of a Karen maiden. Most of the actors are Karen villagers playing themselves, but the role of the Karen woman is played by a Siamese beauty queen, Miss Ayutthaya 1936 (Anake 2003, 146). This film shows no sign of exoticism or of a ranking of peoples where Thai are superior to others.

The pluralism that is apparent in various Thai writings from the early twentieth century suggests the continuation of a sense of the Thai as just one of many equivalent ethnic labels in a diverse region. However, there are some clear signs of an alternative insistence on an ethnic divide between Thai and others. These views represent simultaneous and rival perspectives on Thai identity and society. Prior to this research, I had not encountered expressions of Thai national identity as inclusive and diverse. This Thai material suggests parallels to the inclusive, multiethnic sense of modern

national identity in Vietnam, Laos, and Indonesia. Correspondingly, the apparent emergence of Thai racism and mono-ethnic chauvinism in the 1930s has some parallel with the situation that developed in Burma around the same time.

Some scholars have suggested that the Thai government used the nationalist label "Thai Islam" (Muslim Thai) to deny Malay identity in the South from the 1940s onward (Jory 2007; Dalrymple *et al.* 2023, 205–206). Photos in the National Archives from the 1927 visit of King Rama VII to Chiang Mai indicate, however, that people were identifying deliberately as Muslims before that time. Some photos show delegations marching in a parade, with signs declaring their ethnicity. One group holds a printed sign that says *khaek* and a hand-painted banner saying *Khana-chat-islam* (delegation of Muslim people). My guess is that the organizers printed the *khaek* label and that the people responded by writing their own preferred alternative. As discussed below, *khaek* is a common Thai gloss for South Asians, Indians, and Malay peoples that suggests a contrast to the Thai. "Delegation of Muslim people" asserts belonging and equivalence and clearly counters the otherness implied by *khaek*.

The above material on identity discourses in Thailand during the 1920s and 1930s shows clearly that notions of Thai identity as singular, exclusive, and superior to that of hill peoples coexisted with notions of identity as inclusive and diverse. The notion of various groups of highland peoples as *ratsadon* that is expressed in a state gazette suggests that at least some agents of the state and national integration were invested in a plural and diverse Thai society rather than being somehow uniformly focused on ethnic chauvinism or on the ranking of peoples through an ethno-spatial hierarchy.

Thai Perspectives during the 1950s

In 1950 Bunchuai Srisawat (2004a [1950]) published the book *30 Peoples of Chiang Rai*, which was in many ways an introduction to the northern province of Chiang Rai for a national readership. The author was a member of the national parliament, representing Chiang Rai.[7] It appears that the ethnographic impulse was triggered in reaction to Bangkok notions of northerners as "Lao" and a discourse on national credentials in terms of pure Thai blood. The people in the province are of three kinds. The bulk are northerners as well as Thai Yai, Lue, Tai Ya, Indochinese Lao, Karen, and Lawa. There

7) Bunchuai Srisawat (1917–73) was a businessman, politician, and writer, born in Chiang Rai Province. His travels in that province and in neighboring Burma, China, and Vietnam informed many books on ethnology that are still popular.

are also foreigners (*chao tang chat*, "people from other countries") and mountain peoples (*chao khao*) such as Khmu, Khamet, Meo, Yao, Lahu, Akha, Lisu, and Kui (Bunchuai 2004a, 2). The account stresses that the Yao, Meo, Lahu, and others are from other countries (China, Laos, Burma). The lowland Northern Thai population is "true Thai. There has been no mixing of blood from other groups . . . The Thai in the Central region [however] have blood mixed with that of other groups" (Bunchuai 2004a, 12). In the ancient past, Thai people migrated southward from China and came into conflict with the Lawa, who were the previous owners of the land. The Thai were victorious in this encounter (Bunchuai 2004a, 7).

Bunchuai declared that the Mountain Karen (*Yang doi*) "are filthy, and they do not like to bathe. They are fond of their family and relatives. They cling to their customary ways and live in little shacks" (Bunchuai 2004a, 186). The impression he leaves is that the more any Karen group (*Yang daeng, Yang khao, Yang kaloe*) resemble their lowland Northern Thai neighbors, the cleaner and more civilized they are. This account of the peoples of Chiang Rai conjured untruths for a national audience as it exoticized the ethnically non-Thai population, like the earlier account of Nan Province. The untruths were most blatant when it came to hill peoples' sexuality:

> The young [Ko, Akha] people meet up in the evenings at the *kalalasoe*, "the maiden-hugging grounds," where there is a bench where they can hug . . . [and if they like each other] they will continue and have sexual relations. [The villagers elect a man to serve as deflowerer, *khajirada*, who must initiate all the young women in the ways of sexuality. There is also a woman, *mida*, who initiates young men in the same way.] If the young people are reluctant to engage in sexual activity, then the elders must pull them by the hand to the hugging grounds and get them to embrace. (Bunchuai 2004a, 384–392)

The book *30 Peoples of Chiang Rai* went through several reprints, with various changes in the text.[8] Bunchuai (2002 [1963]) then produced a different book on "hill tribes of Thailand" that had no content on Thai peoples. However, the exoticization and sexualization of Thailand's hill peoples continued in much the same form in this book. In Bunchuai's (2004b [1954]) book on the Tai Lue in Yunnan, China, there was no sexualization in the accounts of Yao and Akha. However, "The Ko like to eat dog meat. They trade goods for [dogs] that they then kill and eat all the time. The women dress beautifully. They wear a short skirt, Hawaiian style" (Bunchuai 2004b, 377). The sexualized racism regarding Thailand's hill peoples manifested a particular intersection of author, topic, audience, and historical moment. When the topic was the same (Ko and Yao, or

8) Suchon Mallikamarl (personal communication, April 2022) has found four different editions, which are, however, never identified as such in the title. The 2004 reprint is made from the second edition.

Akha and Mien peoples, in the context of Thai) but was situated outside of modern Thailand, the sexualized racism was absent. That is, the sexualization was contingent on claiming true-Thai credentials for Chiang Rai lowlanders in relation to Bangkok through the deliberate othering of hill peoples.

The exoticization of the hill peoples in Chiang Rai was not the only ethnic-frontier imagery available to a national audience in the 1950s. In his historical novel on Kamphaeng Phet, *Thung Maharat* (The great ruler's plains), Malai Chuphinit (under the pen name Riam Eng) focused on the river-trader Reun, who later became a local leader.[9] Early on, Reun is at a Buddhist temple with his love interest (and future wife), Sutjai. He mentions to her that the buildings were long dilapidated but then two brothers, Phaya Taka and Phapo, financed the restoration. "Don't forget that they are Kariang, not Thai," says Reun (Riam 1975 [1951], 48). The topic later recurs, about the two brothers restoring the temple to its former glory: "They are not Thai persons, but they love Thailand and love the Thai people, because it is here that they established themselves, it is among these people that they found happiness" (Riam 1975, 294).[10] Further on in the novel there is an outbreak of smallpox. An elderly woman mentions that when she was young, there was another such outbreak. She recalls that the people in a "Kariang and Meo village had burned their houses to ashes" (Riam 1975, 455). This is the strategy that Reun then has the people follow. This shows the interethnic familiarity through which the Siamese in Kamphaeng Phet can learn from the neighboring Karen and Hmong peoples about responding to a debilitating and deadly epidemic.

In a short story that is also set in Kamphaeng Phet, Malai writes about an elderly upper-class woman attending the opening of a health station that her late husband worked on establishing in his lifetime. Her mind drifts to their decades together; she recalls the brothers Phaya Taka and Phapo and the idea that by establishing a lowland trading center the "Kariang and Meo hill villagers" would have easier access to trade goods (Riam 1961, 412). This suggests how certain lowland traders actively contributed to plural belonging by placing a priority on enabling relations that were of value to their highland neighbors.

Karen and Hmong people appear repeatedly around the Thai in this fiction, and this representation of diversity seems quite deliberate. Malai grew up in Kamphaeng Phet,

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9) The story was translated as *The Field of the Great* (Malai 1996). Malai Chuphinit (1906–63) was a journalist and writer recognized for his skill with short stories and novels.

10) Phaya Taka was a titled chief, and Phapo was a wealthy trader married to the daughter of the Siamese subdistrict official. They were important local characters around 1900. Their one-time importance is celebrated in the National Museum of Kamphaeng Phet. Their posthumous recognition has everything to do with the novel *Thung Maharat*, which is recognized as among the greatest of Thai novels. It places Kamphaeng Phet Province on the national stage.

where there is a long history of relations between Thai and Karen peoples. By situating the Kariang and Meo together in these narratives, in the vicinity of the Thai, the author insists on ethnic diversity as ordinary and important. People were familiar with one another across ethnic lines, they could learn from each other, and they cultivated good relations in ways that sustained plural belonging and precluded interethnic conflict and discrimination. This fiction directly countered Thai chauvinism such as in Bunchuai's assertion that hill peoples were aliens on Thai soil.

Under the pen name of Noi Inthanon, Malai wrote a jungle adventure series in 1955: *Jungle Trails*.[11] The stories center on three men: the Thai Mr. Sak Suriyan, his Karen mate Ta-Koen ("Old Koen"), and the Thai army captain Reuang Yuthana. Sak is the central character and narrator. The series does not romanticize jungle life, but it is notable for never suggesting the superiority of Thai over Karen or other forest people; for not depicting forest people as filthy, ignorant, or somehow inferior to the Thai; and never suggesting that education, urban ways, and Thai Buddhism are superior to the knowledge, behavior, or religion common in forest communities. Each of these elements is common in the standard chauvinist binary formulation of Thai people as superior to the hill tribes.

The association of forests with illegality, disorder, filth, backwardness, and wildness has often been conveyed in scholarship as "the Thai perspective" on forests and forest people (Davis 1984; Stott 1991; Thongchai 2000, 38; Turton 2000), a claim that I used to accept. This makes *Jungle Trails* quite significant in relation to the politics of Thai culture and society. Sak, the main character, declares near the beginning of one story:

> As for myself, I can say this: the forest is the kingdom of my life and the field of my life. Every year I must leave and seek it out. If I stay for too long in the city then I am like a tree that is in the wrong place. City life weighs me down and drains my mind. The city and I cannot mix for too long at a time. It is not peaceful and refreshing like the enlightenment that I derive from the forest and the forest people. (Noi 1990 [1955], Vol. 1, 103)

This work links "civilization" or "enlightenment" (*arayatham*) with forests and forest people, which is unusual in Thai writing. Noi's Sak makes this statement very plainly, and the attitude rings true for the character in the stories. In one story, Sak has been hunting when he meets up with Ta-Koen. Before they leave for a trip together, Sak wants to hold a feast for the Meo people who have been assisting him. He notes, "it is

11) The series started as a radio play in 1955 that became very popular. Then the stories were published in book form and in 1961 also made into a television drama. The books were published as five volumes in 1974; I do not know whether that was the original format. I cite from the 14-volume reissue (of about two hundred pages each) in 2012, which was first published in 1990 and remains in print.

in the character of the Meo people to never tell you anything that isn't true" (Noi 1990, Vol. 3, 161). This is as far from exoticization as can be. The hill peoples are reliable and honest, they are an ordinary part of society, and there is collaboration and trust across ethnic lines. Sak's feast indicates that he treats the Meo like partners or equals.

In this particular story, a young Karen man gets drunk and begins wielding a torch near some dry vegetation. A forestry official calls out to him to be careful, otherwise the forest and the villages are at risk. The Karen man says that he does not care: "This is not my forest. The big people are the owners; what do I have to fear?" The forestry official, an agent of the state and capitalist expansion, replies:

> "That is wrong, Maowa. All the people are the owners of this forest, not just the company that has the license, not just the likes of me who have come here for work. This also belongs to everyone, Karen and Thai—they are the owners of this forest and of this land. The forest gives shade and livelihood. Please don't let it be destroyed." (Noi 1990, Vol. 3, 183)

Things turn out badly, and the next morning the village headman despairs over the future: "It's all gone, the orchards, the hill fields, what will we eat?" Sak replies that there is taro and tapioca in the ground, there are fish in the rivers and birds in the sky, and lots of game in the forest, so why fear starvation? The two talk this back and forth, and then the Karen leader declares: "I will not forget this; the forest official understands that all the people are the owners of the forest and of this Thai land" (Noi 1990, Vol. 3, 186). This states very clearly that Thailand is not the exclusive domain of ethnically Thai people. Nothing in this fiction ever associates strangeness with forest or highland people, or presents them as inferior to Thai.

A different societal and interethnic configuration appears in Lao Khamhom's (2020 [1958]) short story "*Phrai Fa*" (The lord's serfs).[12] The story is set in a logging camp in Lamphun Province, near the Ping River. The narrator is Chert, a Thai man. Intha, an ethnically Khmu elephant keeper (mahout), is central to the story. Intha is in love with Bua Kham, a young woman from a nearby Northern Thai farming village. Intha has never been to school, and he cannot understand the hierarchical system of Thai society—how someone can be considered a lord and be treated differently from other humans. Chert has no success explaining the logic of this, which would be obvious to any Thai person

12) "*Phrai fa*" was included (as "Dust Underfoot") in Damnern Garden's translation of the short story collection *Fa bo kan* (The sky is no hindrance) (Khamsing 1973). Lao Khamhom (1930–) is the pen name of Khamsing Srinok, who is from Thailand's Northeast. He has written several collections of short stories and one novel. He worked for some time as a journalist and then as an assistant to anthropologists from Cornell University's Bang Chan research project (near Bangkok) in the 1950s. The short story collection *Fa bo kan* was for some time on the secondary school curriculum. Thai assessments of it range from a masterpiece to Communist propaganda (see Platt 2013, 54).

(Lao 2020, 33–36). The logging camp receives a visitor, an elite man of royal descent who is the company owner's nephew. While the loggers are away in some forest, the elite visitor takes Bua Kham for his pleasure, with the intention of leaving her behind when he returns to Bangkok.

Chert learns of the affair and tells the visitor to back off. The elite man takes offense that a mere commoner is trying to tell him, a Mom Rachawong (his royal rank), how to behave (Lao 2020, 42–43). Chert insists that it is all about love and human decency (*manusyatham*, commonly glossed as humanitarianism). The royal person blows off that notion as nonsense and then adds, "Intha! Since when has that Earholes been as human as the rest of us? He is a Khmu through and through!" (Lao 2020, 44). During a storm that night, when the river has swollen with the rain, Intha has his elephant push the hut where the royal and Bua Kham are sleeping into the river. By the next morning Intha is gone, and the villagers find the two dead bodies and wreckage of the hut washed up on the river's banks.[13)]

"*Phrai Fa*" is a unique and individual story, but it shares a plot structure with some critical writing from this era that portrays the old order (royalty, the upper class, officialdom) as an obstacle to progress. This old guard kept reform, justice, and humanitarianism at bay. Short stories and novels by writers such as Siburapha and Seni Saowaphong pitted enthusiastic young people against the agents of privilege and inequality who stood in the way of a just Thai society (Thak 2018, 57–59). This conflict was never resolved. It drew on rival views about the implications of hierarchy. The fiction rests on sharp moral contrasts, and it is in this comparative light that I see the innocent goodness of Intha, who cannot comprehend the status inequalities of Thai society. Readers will recognize the elite man as an agent of appropriation and harm.[14)] As with the fictional Karen character Yachi from 1982, the fictional Khmu man Intha from 1958 enables a displaced Thai reflection on Thai society and its problems.

In his scholarly work on relations between Lawa (Lua') hill peoples and the lowland Tai population of Chiang Mai, Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda (1965; 1967) called attention to centuries of political, economic, and religious exchanges and cultural mixing across these ethnic lines. His work struck some of the same notes as the pluralist fiction that I discuss,

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13) The names of the people in the story are somewhat intriguing. Chert is a common name. However, Bua-kham (Golden Lotus) is a somewhat common female name in folktales. Intha refers to the god Indra. Meanwhile, the royal person is named Paipiin Rachaphreuk (Climber-Royal-Plant), which a Thai friend suggested means "Royal Monkey" and thus constitutes a thinly veiled mockery.

14) For overviews of social criticism in Thai fiction and the leftist "literature-for-life" tradition, see Manas (1982), Harrison (1994), Ruenruthai (2000), and Thanapol (2011). The class-orientation of this discourse tends to leave out the gender-based social critique that was common in works by female authors such as Ko Surangkhanang (1994 [1937]).

and—somewhat similarly—it has generally been ignored.[15)]

Social Imaginaries in the 1970s

Khajadphai Burutsaphat (1975), a career bureaucrat concerned with national security, published a book called *Hill Tribes* in 1975. A second edition followed in 1985, and a third in 1990. The book claims to represent a neutral, learned view on hill peoples. It notes that opium cultivation and forest destruction are important problems. Hill tribes are recent immigrants to Thailand and are the source of these problems; their crossing of national borders is a significant security concern. There are chapters on individual tribes that summarize available knowledge and also draw significantly on Bunchuai's generalizations about the promiscuity of highland maidens, the maiden-hugging bench among the Akha, and the sexual freedom of Yao maidens. The book's first and second editions contain a photo of the author on the hugging bench in an Akha village, with his arm around a teenage Akha girl at night; this was a realm of masculine bravado.[16)] Khajadphai's book suggests that hill people are racially distinct from the Thai, that their cultures stress young people's sexual liberty, that they are recent immigrants to Thailand, that their traditional ways cause many problems for Thai society, and that things can only improve to the degree that hill peoples take on Thai ways.

At one point I read this book as presenting the official Thai view on hill tribes. Now I see it instead as one of several rival perspectives on Thai society. Khajadphai presents an authoritarian view that is intolerant of Thailand's diversity. While he borrows from Bunchuai, his concern is different. His subtext is that Thai society is under threat, and that it is important to obey the directives of the government. The anthropologist Pinkaew Laungaramsri (1998) has analyzed such "hill tribe discourse"—how highland people and their ways (shifting cultivation, opium growing, settlement migration, etc.) were portrayed as constituting "problems" for Thai society that concerned ethnic difference.

15) Kraisri (1912–92) was born in Chiang Mai, in Thailand's North, to ethnically Chinese parents. They ran a successful business and sent him abroad for education. He received a BA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1932 and an MBA from Harvard University in 1938. Upon returning to Thailand, he was first a professor at Chulalongkorn University and then worked in government and banking in Bangkok. However, he later settled in Chiang Mai and established himself as a banker, businessman, and scholar. He sought to bolster northern-ness to counter Bangkok hegemony and Central Thai chauvinism.

16) The "maiden-hugging grounds" was an idea made up by Bunchuai. However, it was so compelling to some of his male Thai audience that it was staged for a documentary film in 1964, and then the once-fictional bench became a Thai "fact" that took on a life of its own (see Jonsson 2020).

If descriptions of hill peoples are a Thai way of engaging with identity, diversity, and society, then the subtext of Khajadphai's book can be read as an authoritarian manifesto: People are a problem, and they need to be brought under disciplinary control through state measures for national security. The common labeling of any agitation for justice, democracy, and equality as Communist propaganda and a threat, and the license to use violence against anyone so labeled, reached a horrifying high point in the deadly attack in Bangkok in 1976. However, the pattern of political abuse has been much more general (see Subrahmanyan 2021).

Sophak Suwan's (2016 [1974]) novel *Pulakong* presents an interesting counter to such authoritarian chauvinism.[17] The story is set in Patani Province in the Muslim South. The main character is Suphara (nicknamed Tun), a young Bangkok woman who goes south as a development volunteer after graduating from Thammasat University. She settles in the village of Pulakong and negotiates to stay with the family of the school headmaster. Tun becomes a substitute teacher at the school and learns sufficient Malay to communicate with others. She insists to the students that they are a Thai people and that they must love the country as a Thai people: "They simply differ in religion and language. These are just matters of local culture and language; they don't suggest that the people aren't Thai" (Sophak 2016, 138). "She also told the students to call themselves Muslim Thai (Thai Islam) instead of using the binary-contrast terms Thai and *khaek* [a common term for Malay and Indian peoples]" (Sophak 2016, 185) that would mark them as outsiders and as not Thai.

Given the common use of authoritarianism in relations between government officials and ordinary villagers, Tun's inclusive sense of Thai identity and belonging and her anti-authoritarianism stand as a clear alternative:

> If we don't bully the villagers but are instead on friendly terms with them and offer them assistance the best we can, then they will understand us better and will not believe the propaganda of that other group [Muslim separatists]. She had previously seen villagers' fear and intimidation toward the officials who insist on placing themselves above ordinary people . . . The power of that group causes real hardship for any assistance to the countryside . . . She wanted to warn [the officials] that their actions would play into the hands of their opponents. (Sophak 2016, 268–269)

Before Tun leaves for Bangkok, local people commend her on her work and the way she

17) Sophak was born Ramphaiphan Suwannasan in 1944. She studied music therapy in Vienna and was a Thai pioneer in that field. She has written dozens of novels, many of which have been made into television dramas. She was made National Artist in 2013. *Pulakong* was serialized in a magazine before it was published as a book, and in 1977 the Ministry of Education selected the book for independent (out-of-classroom) reading for students in secondary school (*mathayomsuksa*). By all accounts the story was well known.

has influenced villagers' understanding of their belonging:

> You have done a good job, teacher, not just with respect to development in the village and sub-district. You have also made this land belong to the villagers more than before. If they know that the place where they stand belongs to them, then they will help protect it. No more will anyone be able to deceive them that they are being oppressed . . . Where they live is Thai land that belongs to them, the villagers, as a Thai people. (Sophak 2016, 368)

This suggests an echo of the sentiment expressed in the *Jungle Trails* adventure story: this land and this forest belong to the Thai and the Karen together. In *Pulakong*, southern Muslims are not alien *khaek* but are as Thai as any other people; they belong in the country, and the land belongs to them too.

The novel *Under the Deep-Blue Sky* by Sifa (1977) concerns the Hmong man Li-Jeng and the Bangkok Thai woman Matsi, who fall in love while at Teacher's College in Thailand's South.[18] Li-Jeng is from a Hmong village in the mountains of Chiang Rai in the North, and he wants to establish a school there so that the Hmong people will not be inferior to the Thai. He is adamant about being of Hmong ethnicity and Thai nationality. When he graduates and wants to move north, Matsi decides that they will get married. Her father gives his consent, but her mother is in tears and never accepts that her daughter has married a non-status hill person. She wants her daughter to divorce him and to instead carry a family name that brings status. Correspondingly, Li-Jeng's mother never takes to Matsi, but his father is very approving and thinks that Matsi has sacrificed greatly by leaving the city and the lowlands to live with Li-Jeng in a mountain village.[19]

The novel was published at a time when hill peoples were portrayed as alien immigrants and the Hmong people in particular were vilified as a Communist threat, as "Red Meo." Matsi's parents ask Li-Jeng whether he is a Red or a White Meo. "I am Black Meo," he says, adding that there is no such thing as Red Meo. Then he tells them that the diversity of Tai/Thai groups is comparable, and it turns out that educated and affluent urbanites are completely ignorant of ethnic diversity in Thailand and beyond. The text is sprinkled with Hmong phrases that are translated into Thai in footnotes. It seems a

18) The story was serialized in a magazine prior to being printed in book form, and it was later made into a film. Sifa (1930–2013) was born Mom Luang Si Fa Ladawan. She was of royal descent: her great-grandfather was a son of King Rama III. She became recognized as a writer during her college days and went on to write dozens of novels. Sifa received many awards for her books and was made National Artist in 1996.

19) The female name Matsi is best known from Jatakas (Buddha life-stories) as that of the wife of Prince Vesandorn, Phra Wet, the then-future Buddha who gave away his wife and children as a manifestation of his extreme generosity. Matsi as the Bangkok-Thai wife of Li-Jeng, a young and modern Hmong man, may be a gentle joke by a determined Thai pluralist.

deliberate choice to have Thai readers voice the Hmong language in order to blur the lines between languages. The marriage of Matsi and Li-Jeng expresses a more obvious blurring of ethnic difference.

Before they get married, Li-Jeng visits the village on his own. He thinks of courtship in the highlands, that it is a natural thing between women and men, that it is pure and there is nothing shameful about it. Li-Jeng thinks about Matsi, who was very disapproving of highland ways. He told her:

> My group has had these customs for a long time. Your group may think of this as savage practice, as the shameful ways of stupid hill tribes. But I have heard that in Sweden there is the same kind of free sex. In the minds of your [Thai] group they are progressive and have freedom. And how is this really different? Or is it just that one group is *farang* (Westerners) while the other is hill tribe? (Sifa 1977, Vol. 1, 84–85)

This reversal undermines any expectations of Thai superiority over hill peoples. Sifa's framing counters the common notion from Bunchuai that hill people are promiscuous and thus inferior to the Thai. In Sifa's novel, in contrast, this feature is something that can also be found in Sweden, whose people the Thai see as liberated and progressive. It becomes possible to see the Thai as clueless and equally behind both hill tribes and the progressive Europeans.

Li-Jeng is not interested in hook-ups with young village women, unlike his brother. Sifa does not assume any ethnic stereotypes in her cast of characters. Matsi and Janjong, her Bangkok Thai female friend and classmate, are different people because of different class backgrounds and also simply as individuals. Li-Jeng is blind to some of the gender inequalities in Hmong culture that outrage Matsi. She, meanwhile, is not yet conversant in the Hmong language despite spending more than a year in the village. Matsi becomes pregnant and decides to give birth in Bangkok and recover at her old home. Li-Jeng refuses to accompany her there, knowing that he would be in regular conflict and argument with her upper-class parents.

Surachai Janthimathon's (1997 [1981]) novel, *Before the Light of Day*, is set among the Lua' people of Nan Province and traces their history from about 1940 to 1965.[20] They initially moved in from Laos, fleeing the war. They enjoyed a good reception

20) Surachai (1948–) is from Surin Province in Thailand's Northeast. In the early 1970s he was playing folk and protest music with friends, and his band, Caravan, became well known. After the violent suppression of democracy and activism in October of 1976, Surachai (whose musician name is Nga Caravan) and his bandmates fled to the jungle and joined the Communist Party for several years. He has written essays and short stories. *Before the Light of Day* is his only novel, but his music has been far more popular and influential than any of his other writing. He was made National Artist in 2010.

from the authorities in Nan and received some official assistance. Later, relations went sour as authoritarianism took over:

> When those fighting against French imperialism had lit the fires of a brutal war all across Indochina, the peace-and-quiet-loving inhabitants of forest villages streamed into Thailand like a flock of crows escaping a forest fire, and they settled near the farthest north of the country. Once safe from the fires of war, they arrived from all directions to be quickly registered. The District Office was crowded with people of many ethnic groups. (Surachai 1997, 23)

Once the people were settled, the *kamnan* (subdistrict official) came to visit them. He said:

> Now listen all, for the improvement of the locality. You are living on royal land. For the making of fields there is a tax of 7 baht per year. For wood, 20 baht for big trees, mid-size 15 baht, small ones 5 baht. Tax on making alcohol is 25 baht, cold season tax is 2 baht, constitution tax 2 baht, tax on selling buffalo 15 baht, selling pigs 20 baht, on teak trees an extra tax—20 baht for small trees, 50 baht for large trees. The announcements went on and on. It looked like nobody there could remember it all, but everybody stood stiffly listening to *kamnan* Thi. He was like the main actor of some play on stage. (Surachai 1997, 40–41)

Things went from bad to worse for the Lua' because of abuses and oppression by the Thai authorities. All the men were sent away to prison in Thai towns and cities, and the only remaining hope was that people bringing red cloth would bring justice to the Lua' (Surachai 1997, 136). There had been a Lua' holy man on the Laos side who carried a red cloth. The Lua' people's access to him was thwarted by the Thai authorities' border control. There was, however, hope for a new group of people carrying the red cloth. Surachai wrote his novel while with the Arts Division of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) guerrillas in the jungles of Nan Province, and while taking shelter with Lua' highlanders who had been alienated from any contact with lowland society. In the novel, the history of the Lua' predicts how the CPT will carry the hope for the future, through the implied match between the Lua' holy man's red cloth and the CPT's red flag. The innocent goodness of the Lua' villagers is repeatedly highlighted through the contrast with the oppressive Thai authorities.[21)]

A very different witness to ethnic-frontier conditions in Thailand in the mid-1970s

21) The moral-binary setup is common in Thai fiction from this time (see Khammaan 1992 [1978]). It is also common beyond fiction writing, in the focus on Karen people's alleged eco-wisdom (Hayami 2006) and in the more general emphasis on "community culture" that imagines traditional Thai villagers as endangered by the erosive force of modernity and globalization (Yukti 2005). The most scathing internal critique of the Thai romanticization of village life may be Chart Korbjitti's (2001 [1981]) novel *Kham phiphaksa* (The judgment) (see Chusak 2014).

appears in Thommayanti's (2019 [1976]) novel *Jewel of the Deep Forest*.[22] The story is about a Thai man named Songphao and a Karen woman named Miyawaddi. Songphao is hunting in the forest with his friends, and Old-Jan, a Karen man, is guiding him. Old-Jan is fatally injured by a tiger as he saves Songphao's life. Before he dies, he asked Songphao to take care of his daughter, Miyawaddi. Songphao wants to kill the tiger, and though Miyawaddi doubts his skills, they set off into the jungle. There, however, they come upon a group of terrorists. Songphao becomes sick, Miyawaddi nurses him, and meanwhile she kills three of the terrorists. Later the authorities defeat the terrorist group, and Songphao is declared a hero. He takes Miyawaddi to live with his parents in Bangkok; he tells her that the urban jungle will overtake the other jungle, so she would be better off living with him. An upper-class woman, Wan, is interested in him, but in the end Songphao and Miyawaddi become a couple.

Miyawaddi returns to her forest-village but then does not want to marry any man in the village. Songphao goes after her. "Do you love me, Miyawaddi?" he asks when he finds her. "My father entrusted me to you," she replies. "You know that if a woman is entrusted to someone then she must live with that man" (Thommayanti 2019, 470). The novel says nothing about politics. There is no indication of who or what the terrorists are; all the reader knows is that they are evil. Nor does the novel try to convey anything about social life among the Karen villagers when the story begins.

Miyawaddi is a clearly Burmese name that also had currency among Karen peoples. However, I see no sign in the story that the novelist has paid attention to Karen culture, society, language, or history. Given this lack of familiarity, I think that Thommayanti simply borrowed from Noi's *Long Phrai* series (the radio play or the book version), where a significant female Karen character has this name (Noi 1990, Vol. 1). In contrast to Thommayanti's token nod to interethnic relations, the novels by Sophak, Sifa, and Surachai describe communities and social life among Thailand's Malay Muslims, Hmong, and Lua' peoples with familiarity and interest.

Thommayanti's novel contains an extended slapstick segment about the difficulty of getting Miyawaddi to wash her hair (Thommayanti 2019, 264–280). The maid ultimately showers her by force. To me, this echoes the racist Thai notion that hill people do not like to bathe, that they are filthy savages who need Thai intervention. The ending, in which Songphao and Miyawaddi became a couple because they both honor her

22) Thommayanti was the pen name of Wimon Siriphaibun (1936–2021). She was a prolific writer, the author of over 60 novels and some short story collections. Wimon had strongly right-wing nationalist views and was a minister in the Thanin government (1976–77). She was made National Artist in 2012. Many of her novels were turned into television dramas, and *Jewel of the Deep Forest* was also made into a film.

father's decision rather than being in love with each other, fits a certain Thai perspective on romance and family dynamics. The anthropologist and folklorist Siraporn Nathalang (2000) shows how various folktales and television dramas have been understood differently by members of the Thai audience, depending on how individual people relate to family tension and conflict (e.g., between a father-in-law and son-in-law, a wife and her husband, a woman and her father, and a major wife and minor wife). One implication, she suggests, is that the "process of listening to and interpreting the folktale [or television drama] stabilizes real-life conflict situations in the family" (Siraporn 2000, 22). Most likely, Thommayanti's book has particular resonance for readers who value a young woman for following her father's wishes rather than following her own heart and making her own life decisions. Of the fiction that I have examined here, this is the only novel that concludes with the manifestation of a dutiful daughter.[23]

Discussion

The Thai writing discussed above shows very clearly a range of simultaneous and alternative indigenous Thai perspectives on society and diversity. In the novels and ethnography that I consulted, one perspective assumes Thai identity as plural, inclusive, and diverse. Another perspective assumes that Thai identity is exclusive and singular, and that ethnic others are inferiors who do not have any claim to belonging in the country. The third perspective assumes plural identities in Thai society, focuses primarily on class divisions, and depicts the insistence on hierarchy and inequality as socially harmful. These three perspectives recur enough times in Thai writing that I view them as credible and meaningful expressions of what Thai people have imagined about their modern identity and society.

The sense of multiethnic Thai belonging is perhaps strongest in the books by Malai (as Riam Eng and Noi Inthanon), Sifa, and Sophak—but this sentiment is clear also in the official announcement by Suphayok-Kasem in 1927. Calling attention to this perspective

23) Herbert Phillips (1987) remarks that Thommayanti's fiction gets framed as politically inconsequential *nam-nao* ("stagnant water") literature by her leftist critics. He suggests that her writing "focuses on the rich inner life of women, not on the outer world of political practice and ideology" (Phillips 1987, 76). In my reading, though, the work is as political as any other. I find the supposed distinction between inner and outer worlds unconvincing. Because women's writing in Thailand often gets bracketed as romance novels of no social or political significance, I insist that there is no commonality between Thommayanti's novel and the two other "women's" novels from Sifa and Sophak. Nothing about the three novels' content would justify classifying them as the same kind of work.

on Thailand's diversity is important, given the apparent academic neglect of the pluralist understanding of society and identity in Thailand and across Southeast Asia more generally (Jonsson 2014; 2022a; 2022b).

The main emphasis of this study has been to substantiate the sense of pervasive and persistent diversity in Thai notions of society and identity. That point, however, relates to a more general issue regarding understandings of culture and society. Western anthropology's ethnographic mode, associated with Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Clifford Geertz, has since the 1930s played up understandings of culture as uniform within an ethnic label (as in "the Balinese," "the Samoans," and the like).[24] Prior to that, the ethnological perspective of Robert Lowie and many others insisted on diversity and individual variation in any society (Bargheer 2017). Lowie (1927; 1948) also showed that any social formation was likely to be based on alternative and contradictory principles. Even the smallest community, he maintained, might rest on the separate principles of territory, kinship, and voluntary associations, which might arrange people in different ways and could also lead to clashes. The ethnological focus was relentlessly comparative, regional, and historical and never took ethnic lines for granted.

The political scientist Kasian Tejapira (2009; 2015) has called attention to a range of modern Thai views on society and government among Thai intellectuals. His analysis of debates concerning government among a rather small group of intellectuals and politicians in relation to economic and political crises during 1997–2014 shows repeated diversity that he sorts into three perspectives: authoritarian, liberal, and communitarian. This diversity of views is similar to the range of perspectives on society that I have found in Thai-language ethnographies and fiction, though it is not the same. These varied perspectives are all equally Thai. Their divergent notions of Thainess are simultaneous, alternative, and at odds.

Thongchai's (1995) study of trends in Thai writings on Thai history suggests an arc that goes from Prince Damrong's royalist nationalism, which celebrated the monarchy and Buddhism as quintessentially Thai, to a Marxist critique of the premodern *sakdina* hierarchy of rank and class, and on to a localist orientation that quietly ignores any focus on Thainess, hierarchy, or the supposed superiority of Bangkok over other parts of the country. My study suggests that a similar range of rival perspectives has long coexisted in Thai discourses and social dynamics rather than being a sequence of steps that is specific to the writing of Thai history. The celebration of hierarchy, the critique of hierarchy, and the emphasis on pluralist belonging that denies categorical distinctions are all equally Thai views that have been simultaneous and at odds.

24) These examples draw on American anthropology; the foundational British anthropology on "the Trobriands," "the Andamans," and "the Nuer" points in precisely the same direction.

The airing of different narratives of history and politics or regarding interethnic relations does not produce an agreement on these matters. As Siraporn found with conflict narratives in Thai folktales and television dramas, people relate to such narratives from different and potentially antagonistic perspectives. Engagement with the stories often reinforces rival notions of identity and diversity and sustains differences that can produce conflict. The studies by these three Thai scholars resonate with Lowie's ethnological perspective: There has never been a single Thai culture or a singular social ideology. Instead, Thai society is built on alternative principles that can be glossed as elitism, anti-elitism, and pluralism, which trigger a range of rival representations and agendas that sometimes coexist without problems and occasionally generate violent conflict.[25)]

Thongchai (2000, 46) argued that the Siamese elite's ethno-spatial project was anchored to the idea of hill people's strangeness (*plaek*, *pralat*). I did not find this idea characteristic of the ethnographic writing for the period that he focused on. However, this idea helped me make initial sense of Noi's *Jungle Trails* and Sifa's *Under the Deep-Blue Sky*. There is no reference at all to strangeness in these works. Without Thongchai's analysis, I might never have made the connection or recognized this as an issue. That, in turn, gave me a perspective on the ethnographic writing by Siri, Bunchuai, and Khajadphai. Each of them emphasized the strangeness of hill peoples. Their works clearly affirm the connection of certain ethnographic writing and racial hierarchy in the Thai project of nation building. This connection appears in certain writings from the democratic period after 1932 but is not so obvious in works from before that time.

The 1932 revolution that ended absolute monarchy in Thailand triggered contestations and suppression related to tensions between democracy and hierarchy/monarchy (Ockey 2002; Thak 2007; Sopranzetti 2018). One result was creative ethnographic reporting that insisted on Thai racial divides, ethnic inequality, and an authoritarian intolerance of diversity. Most of the fiction and some of the nonfiction that I examined, however, counters this racialized view of ethnic inequalities and emphasizes instead plural belonging and the ordinariness of ethnic and other diversity in Thai society. The novels that I discuss in this article manifest a lively, diverse, and sometimes contentious discourse on Thai identity and diversity.

My study of national imagination in Thailand during the twentieth century grew out of the recognition that certain novels about interethnic relations from the 1950s and 1970s contradicted everything I thought I knew about Thai identity. This pushed me

25) Several studies by Richard A. O'Connor (1983; 1995) show the contradictory social principles behind urbanism in Thailand and in Southeast Asia more generally past and present.

toward an interdisciplinary territory where I had no particular expertise. During my research I came to appreciate the ethnological focus of scholars such as Lowie, who was relentlessly comparative, historical, and regional and never assumed that ethnic lines implied coherent societies or predictable politics. Lévi-Strauss's structural approach also offered some guidance, in the suggestion that one must consider all variants of any one narrative or topic in order to understand it. This obviously impossible goal encourages an indiscriminate search for source material.

The research project required an interdisciplinary perspective that combined anthropology, history, literature, politics, and some grounding in social life and the Thai language. The research questions defined the project and contributed to my selection of sources. The combination of romance novels, jungle adventure, leftist social realism, ethnographic reporting, and official documents came about in the process of the research; it was not something I could know beforehand. The study has an Area Studies bias, in terms of both an interdisciplinary focus and an "openness to a variety of nondisciplinary, nonacademic arguments" (Guyer 2004, 501). My disagreement with the findings of Anderson (1985) and Thongchai (2000) regarding fiction, ethnography, politics, and interethnic relations in Thai history is in the spirit of collaboration. Research is an ongoing social enterprise where we learn from one another, including through debate rooted in separate and diverse knowledge of events, sources, and histories (Guyer 2004, 501–502).

Jane Guyer suggests that an Area Studies focus can help reshape disciplinary academic practices and ideas through research encounters when "we are challenged, criticized, shamed, or inspired by 'another' to whom we are absolutely committed to listening" (Guyer 2004, 518). Reading the fiction, ethnography, and other Thai writing has changed my knowledge of interethnic realities and social imaginations in Thailand. Taking the writers and their imagery seriously by examining each individual entity in its particulars and then juxtaposing it to a range of others offered suggestions about how to revise the current academic understanding of Thailand's national imagination in the twentieth century.

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A Study on Indonesian Sociopolitical Design Objects within the Framework of Gesamtkunstwerk

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This article proves how the practical implementation of the Gesamtkunstwerk idea in design objects in Indonesia can provide sociopolitical value. The framework of Gesamtkunstwerk in this study is contained in two design projects: the architecture of the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex by Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo and the design of museum objects in the Electricity and New Energy Museum by Widagdo. The literature review leads to two perspectives of Gesamtkunstwerk—the ideas of Wilhelm Richard Wagner and those of the Bauhaus School—with both implemented together in a design object. Data were collected in April and July 2022 through field observations, supported by interviews. The data were analyzed through both perspectives based on the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk. The results showed that the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk was successfully implemented in the two design projects. The first project aimed to represent the noble values of Indonesia and demonstrate the nation's proficiency in modern technology, while the second aimed to incorporate interdisciplinary knowledge in the presentation of museum objects, creating a shared experience for visitors. In conclusion, the simultaneous implementation of both Gesamtkunstwerk perspectives—Wagner's and the Bauhaus—allowed for a surprising amount of meaning in design objects.

Keywords: Bauhaus idea, Gesamtkunstwerk, Wilhelm Richard Wagner, Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo, Indonesian Legislative Building Complex, Widagdo, Electricity and New Energy Museum

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Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to prove the role of the Gesamtkunstwerk idea (TGKWI) in the design of two projects in Indonesia. The development of the two projects was initiated by the government of the Republic of Indonesia in order to present the face of Indonesia on the international stage. The first project is the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex, which was designed by the architect Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo and built in 1965, during the administration of Soekarno, the first president of the Republic of Indonesia. The second is the interior and objects of the Electricity and New Energy Museum, designed by Widagdo and built in 1995, during the rule of Soeharto, the second president of Indonesia.

According to the principles of Gesamtkunstwerk,[1] attempts are made to combine art forms or designs along with other features. Fátima Pombo (2014) described the creation of an atmosphere of well-being and fruitful space, literally and metaphorically, as a total work of art in the productions of the Belgian interior designer Jules Wabbes. Anatoli Tsampa (2017) demonstrated a transmedial, global, total work of art through a synthesis of media, mythical/archetypal subject matter, social relevance, and philosophical concerns. Steven Brown and Ellen Dissanayake (2018) highlighted speech sounds, singing voices, instrumental music, and dance as the main features of Gesamtkunstwerk, which can be found in the aesthetic practice of artwork as a whole as well as in religious ceremonies. Studies proving the implementation of TGKWI focus on the perspective of unifying various types of art, designs, or features. This is the definition of Gesamtkunstwerk: the amalgamation of various art forms, without any one form dominating (Neumann 1951, 4) but rather all forms making use of one another (Koepnick 2017, 277).

Éric Michaud (2019) described an understanding of the origins of TGKWI from Wilhelm Richard Wagner with two variations. Wagner's essay on the Gesamtkunstwerk aesthetic aimed to achieve *gemeinsame Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, which translates as "future collective artwork" as well as "future communal artwork." The first is a perspective that emphasizes the collective realization of work by the community, while the second emphasizes work realized for the people (Michaud 2019, 2).

Previously, two different ways of understanding total design were explained by Mark Wigley (1998). Wigley's explanation of architectural control is relevant to the two perspectives in understanding the meaning of total design: the first is the implosion of

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1) For the purposes of this research, the term "Gesamtkunstwerk" is not translated into other languages.

design, in which design is focused inward on a single intense point; while the second is the explosion of design, in which the design expands outward to touch every possible point in the world (Wigley 1998, 1).

This study agrees with the two perspectives for understanding TGKWI as proposed by Michaud and Wigley. A review of the theoretical framework explains these two perspectives in more detail. According to Wigley and Michaud, TGKWI must be implemented in design objects through "two perspectives from opposite directions"[2] at the same time. The first is the implosion of design (Wigley 1998, 1) or future collective artworks (Michaud 2019, 3), which is relevant to Wagner's TGKWI. The second is the explosion of design (Wigley 1998, 1) or future communal artworks (Michaud 2019, 2), which is relevant to the Bauhaus TGKWI.

The results achieved by the practical implementation of TGKWI through these "two perspectives from opposite directions" will be demonstrated in two design case studies in Jakarta, Indonesia. The first is the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex, and the second is the Electricity and New Energy Museum. An analysis of design objects that encompass sociopolitical values reveals the role of TGKWI in realizing the vision of two Indonesian presidents to present the character of the Indonesian nation. It is important to note that the mention of "two perspectives from opposite directions" is not intended to provide a new definition of TGKWI but merely to reveal the role of TGKWI ideas in the architectural and design objects in the case studies.

Method

This study on the implementation of the TGKWI idea in two designs in Indonesia uses qualitative methods through historical research, case studies, and narrative inquiry.

Since the focus of this study is TGKWI, that is discussed at the outset. Based on the description by Wigley (1998) and Michaud (2019), historical research through a review of the literature provides "two perspectives from opposite directions" to understand the implementation of TGKWI. On the one hand is the idea of the origin of Gesamtkunstwerk based on Wagner's perspective; on the other is the idea of modern Gesamtkunstwerk based on the perspective of the Bauhaus School. "Two perspectives

2) Wigley uses "two concepts of total design" (Wigley 1998, 2), whereas Michaud notes "two elements of variation for their striking opposition to each other" (Michaud 2019, 2). This study uses the term "two perspectives from opposite directions" to explain the implementation of the Gesamtkunstwerk idea. It does not aim to provide a new definition of Gesamtkunstwerk but to underline the differences between the two perspectives.

from opposite directions" for understanding TGKWI becomes the analytical tool for the case studies of the two design artifacts in Indonesia.

The first step in this analysis is an overview of Soejoedi's and Widagdo's German educational background, to highlight the influence of Bauhaus ideas on their designs.[3] This is followed by a brief description of the role of the Indonesian government in the development planning of the two case studies and Soejoedi's and Widagdo's involvement in their respective designs.

In design discipline research, design objects function as reported evidence and are used to interpret arguments (Biggs 2002, 20). Objects that are instructional works are called artifacts, because they display the structure of actions within cognitive frames (O. F. Smith 2007, 5). Soejoedi's architectural work being analyzed here is the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex (TILBC), which was built in 1965. This was the first major project in Indonesia that demonstrated the technological capabilities of Indonesian experts at the time (Budi *et al.* 1995, 22). Widagdo's interior work being analyzed is the Electricity and New Energy Museum (TEANEM), which was inaugurated in 1995. The first modern science museum in Indonesia, this is located in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park; BIMP), which houses projects that provide educational value (Suradi *et al.* 1989, 11).

Robert Yin has stated that the case study approach requires direct observation of the object along with interviews with associated sources and the designer (Yin 2018, 43). Therefore, observations were made at TEANEM in April 2022; these focused on the design and arrangement of displays of museum objects. Data collection and documentation were done through photography, video shooting, archive collections from the museum, and 1995 photos owned by Widagdo. Observations at TILBC were made in July 2022; these focused on observing architectural forms, spatial interior arrangements, and works of art found throughout the TILBC area. Data collection and documentation were done through photography, video shooting, and archive collections from the Indonesian Legislative Museum.

The limited literature on Soejoedi's architectural design concept and Widagdo's interior design concept requires a narrative case study approach. This inquiry focuses on the meaning obtained from exploring the experiences and perspectives of the informants (Kim 2016, 215). Data and information on Soejoedi were obtained by interviewing

3) This study is part of a research project to identify traces of the Bauhaus in Indonesia. Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo and Widagdo were selected as representatives for studying the influence of the Bauhaus on design practice in Indonesia. Their education in Germany was influenced by figures who were members of the Bauhaus and Deutscher Werkbund: Kurt Dübbers, Egon Eiermann, Herbert Hirche, Wilhelm Kreuer, Hannes Neuener, and Hans Scharoun.

his assistant, the architect Yuswadi Saliya.[4] Data and information on Widagdo's designer were obtained through direct interviews with him. The interviews with the two informants were open and guided by questions on the implementation of TGKWI in the two case studies.

Theoretical Framework: The Idea of Gesamtkunstwerk

According to Wigley (1998) and Michaud (2019), the definition of Gesamtkunstwerk denotes two different perspectives of the Gesamtkunstwerk idea (TGKWI), which in this study are referred to as "two perspectives from opposite directions." The first is Wagner's perspective, which is generally taken to be the origin of Gesamtkunstwerk. The second is Gesamtkunstwerk according to the Bauhaus, which is generally viewed as the modern version of Gesamtkunstwerk.

The German composer Wagner (1813–83) became a major figure in TGKWI both musically and spiritually during the Romantic era (Tsampa 2017, 20). According to Alfred Neumann (1951, 2), the word "Gesamtkunstwerk" is defined only in Wagner's (1850) aesthetic essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (The artwork of the future).[5] TGKWI according to Wagner means resynthesizing forms of art that are historically separate, such as dance, music, and poetry. Wagner's TGKWI means a work unit in which all parts are integrated evenly (Neumann 1951, 224), mutually utilize one another (Koepnick 2017, 277), and create a completely new meaning (Kultennann 1995, 165). Wagner's TGKWI became a model for experiments involving various genres and composite media in Modernism (Koepnick 2017, 274).

A very modern form of TGKWI appears in the Bauhaus School[6] (M. W. Smith

4) Yuswadi (b. June 15, 1938) obtained his doctorate in engineering science, majoring in architecture, from the Bandung Institute of Technology. He has played an important role in the education and professional development of architects in Indonesia, including being a member of the Council of Indonesian Architects since 2020. Yuswadi was an assistant to Soejoedi, who was involved in the construction of the Conefo Project, specifically the construction of the Nusantara V Building or auditorium.

5) *Das große Gesammtkunstwerk, das alle Gattungen der Kunst zu umfassen hat, um jede einzelne dieser Gattungen als Mittel gewissermaßen zu verbrauchen, zu vernichten zu Gunsten der Erreichung des Gesamtzwecks aller, nämlich der unbedingten, unmittelbaren Darstellung der vollendeten menschlichen Natur - dieses große Gesammtkunstwerk erkennt (der Geist) nicht als die willkürlich mögliche Tat des Einzelnen, sondern als das notwendig denkbare gemeinsame Werk der Menschen der Zukunft* (Wagner 1850, 32).

6) The Bauhaus was a design school that existed in Germany from 1919 to 1933. It was grounded in the idea of creating the Gesamtkunstwerk and became known for its approach to combining craft, art, and technology. The founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius (1883–1969), was the first director of the school. In April 1928 he was replaced by Hannes Meyer (1889–1954), and in August 1930 Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) became the third and last Bauhaus director.

2007, 48; Roberts 2011, 159; Trimingham 2016, 95; Munch 2021, 9). The manifesto for the founding of the Bauhaus School in 1919[7] was an invitation from the architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969) to the members of the Bauhaus to create a Gesamtkunstwerk cathedral that could restore a divided society (Michaud 2019, 7). Gropius repeatedly tried to find forms of shared ideas through activities such as collaboration, coordination, collectives, and integration. In the Bauhaus School, Gesamtkunstwerk was developed by the painter Lázló Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) into the idea of Gesamtwerk, namely, the synthesis of moments in life to form total life (Moholy-Nagy 1927). Through the idea of Gesamtwerk, humans explore their senses to find alternative forms of future space and become the media that adapt to the nature of modern society (Koepnick 2017, 283).

The term "Gesamtkunstwerk" is generally accepted in German as well as in English through several translations,[8] one of which is "synthesis of the arts." Since this translation underlines the word "synthesis," which describes the unifying connection of different elements, this translation of Gesamtkunstwerk is relevant to the present study. "Synthesis" comes from the Greek word *sýnthesis*, which means various forms of knowledge put together to form complete knowledge (Machauer 2009, 14). Based on this philosophical view, on the one hand synthesis is understood as a unifying activity and on the other as the whole gained through it (Machauer 2009, 14).

This basic understanding of the word "synthesis" is relevant to Wigley and Michaud's explanation of the two perspectives for understanding TGKWI. According to Wigley (1998, 1), the perspective of the architect who organizes various forms points to Wagner Gesamtkunstwerk while the perspective of the architect who designs all objects points to Bauhaus Gesamtkunstwerk. According to Michaud (2019, 1), the second perspective—Bauhaus Gesamtkunstwerk—is a reworking of the first in the Bauhaus School program. The two TGKWI perspectives are connected, and they must be implemented together for a design object to be regarded as a Gesamtkunstwerk object.

According to Wagner's perspective, namely, the collation of different art forms to produce a single meaning, a Gesamtkunstwerk design object does not show the dominance of one design form. Wagner's TGKWI, as manifested in architecture, is the focusing of design inward on a single intense point (Wigley 1998, 1). Wigley calls this the implosion of design, which takes over a space, subjecting every detail, every surface, to an over-

7) *Das Bauhaus erstrebt die Sammlung alles künstlerischen Schaffens zur Einheit, die Wiedervereinigung aller werkkünstlerischen Disziplinen – Bildhauerei, Malerei, Kunstgewerbe und Handwerk – zu einer neuen Baukunst als deren unablösliche Bestandteile* (Gropius 1919, 3).

8) There are several English translations of the term "Gesamtkunstwerk": synthesis of the arts (Machauer 2009, 15; Gabriel 2020, 189); unified work of art (Lægring 2020, 96); total work of art (Vidalis 2002, 50; M. W. Smith 2007, 3; Menninger 2016, 1; Koepnick 2017, 273; Michaud 2019, 3); integrated work of art (Neumann 1951, 222); and others.

arching vision. Meanwhile, Michaud has defined Wagner's TGKWI as the collective work of art of the future (Michaud 2019, 3). Michaud's definition makes a Gesamtkunstwerk object the embodiment of a collective work of art or communal work. Based on this description, a design object resulting from a synthesis of various scientific disciplines implements Wagner's TGKWI if the object can provide a new design meaning for the benefit of human life.

The second perspective on Gesamtkunstwerk design refers to the Bauhaus idea of being able to meet universal human needs. Bauhaus TGKWI is defined by Wigley as the expansion of design to touch every possible point in the world (Wigley 1998, 1). Wigley called this the explosion of design, the ability of an architect to design everything from teaspoon-sized objects to urban planning. Meanwhile, Michaud defines Bauhaus TGKWI as the communal work of art of the future (Michaud 2019, 3). Michaud's definition provides an understanding of a Gesamtkunstwerk object as fulfilling the needs of the public in a homogeneous manner. Based on this description, a design object is considered to implement Bauhaus TGKWI if the new meaning given by the object can satisfy the broadest possible needs of human life.

A design object implements TGKWI practically, because the object is a synthesis of various scientific disciplines that satisfy universal human needs. This is in line with the perspective of the Bauhaus School, which is oriented toward the synthesis of all aspects of life (Michaud 2019, 10). Referring also to Bauhaus, the practical implementation of TGKWI includes more modern forms of media, namely, architecture, interior design, product design, media design, and others. TGKWI provides an aesthetic laboratory for the reintegration of the auditory, visual, and tactile senses, in which modern subjects can explore different artistic settings (Koepnick 2017, 278).

Indonesian Legislative Building Complex: Implementation of the Idea of Gesamtkunstwerk by Architect Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo

Soejoedi (1928–81), the architect of TILBC,[9] was a pioneer of modern architecture in Indonesia and set up architecture schools in the nation's big cities. He was an outstanding representative of a German education, with his work being formalistic, measurable, and well defined (Yuswadi 2003, 111). In Soejoedi's artistic approach, form, function, and material came together in geometric compositions (Bagoes 2013, 181). Soejoedi used two types of aesthetic inspiration to immerse himself in design matters, namely,

9) The selection of the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex for this study was approved by sources who knew Soejoedi during a site survey in July 2022.

the harmonization of small and large universe targets (Budi 2011, 44). His aesthetic inspiration came from his interest in Indonesian vernacular architecture along with his experience in Europe.

Soejoedi graduated from Technische Universität (TU) Berlin in 1960. He returned to Indonesia in 1961 and became the head of the Department of Architecture at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). He laid the foundation for an architectural education that emphasized the exploration of modern technology in construction and building materials (Bagoes 2013, 181). Soejoedi's final project at TU Berlin, which was exhibited in the Department of Architecture at ITB, reflected a mix of Indonesian and Prussian traditions (Yuswadi 2012, 110). The Western ideas in Soejoedi's architectural design were the result of his educational and apprenticeship experiences in Europe in 1954–61.[10)]

Soejoedi won an architectural design competition for his TILBC project. TILBC was originally set up as a political venue to complement the sports complex that was built in 1962 for the the Fourth Asian Games in Jakarta (Budi *et al.* 1995, 17). Through a Presidential Decree dated March 8, 1965, President Soekarno (1901–70), the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, assigned Minister of Public Works and Energy Soeprajogi to carry out the construction of a project for political activities, namely, the Conference of the New Emerging Forces (Conefo).[11)] The Conefo project had to be completed before the commemoration of the Proclamation of Independence of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1966. The groundbreaking of the first pillar of the Conefo project was carried out on April 19, 1965, coinciding with the Celebration of the Decade of the Asian-African Conference in Jakarta (Budi 2011, 65).

10) In 1951 Soejoedi began his architecture studies at the Bandung Faculty of Engineering, University of Indonesia. In 1954–56 he continued his studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris with a scholarship from the French government. His architecture education in Indonesia was not recognized by the École des Beaux-Arts, so in 1956 he transferred to the Technische Hogeschool Delft in the Netherlands and remained there until 1958. Due to tensions between the Dutch and Indonesian governments, in 1958 Soejoedi transferred yet again—this time to Technische Universität Berlin, where he remained until 1960. In Berlin he studied under Wilhelm Kreuer (1910–84) and Kurt Dübbers (1905–87). According to the Dipl.-Ing. Arsitek Exhibition in Jakarta (December 12, 2022–January 13, 2023), Soejoedi did internships in architectural offices during his studies in Europe: in 1957 he apprenticed at Kraaijvanger Architects in Rotterdam, in 1958 at Kasper in Freiburg, and in 1960 at Hentrich Petscnigg und Partner in Düsseldorf.

11) At the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961, President Soekarno introduced the political ideas of Nefos and Oldefos: Nefos (New Emerging Forces) as a force of imperialism consisting of countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America along with socialist countries; Oldefos (Old Established Forces) as a colonial force consisting of Western capitalist countries. Indonesia also tried to persuade the Non-Aligned countries to create a counter-UN called the Conference of New Countries (Conefo), which resulted in a rift between Indonesia and the other countries (Agus 2014, 155).

The Conefo project is one of the monumental projects built by President Soekarno after the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945. "Monumental project" was the term used by President Soekarno to celebrate the independence of the Indonesian nation through architectural works (Yuke 2023). This term encapsulates the ideas of glory and immortality embodied in the unity of architecture, art, and science. Through the 1961–69 Pola Pembangunan Nasional Semesta Berencana (Planned universal national development pattern) policy, President Soekarno prioritized the construction of monumental projects for developing the personality of the Indonesian nation (Bambang 2023).

The Conefo project consisted of several buildings complete with interior and landscaped design areas, all approved by President Soekarno, who had given certain design specifications: the buildings had to reflect Indonesian personality traits, and they had to display the excellence of Indonesian design through their grandeur and ability to respond to modern challenges (Budi *et al.* 1995, 20). The time constraints for implementing the Conefo project development were overcome by mobilizing resources from various government departments and agencies, private companies, as well as young workers and students from various universities in Indonesia. The Conefo project, which was developed by Wahono, chairman of the Indonesian Legislature, was touted as implementing a spirit of togetherness (Budi *et al.* 1995, xvi). The collaborative work between technical and non-technical personnel transformed the project into a field laboratory that produced technical and management cadres for the future implementation of modern development in Indonesia. The Conefo project was the first large-scale building project in the country (Budi *et al.* 1995, 22). However, a change in the political situation disrupted the allocation of the facilities. Since May 1968, Conefo has been the official place of work and trials of Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat dan Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia (People's Consultative Assembly and People's Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia) (Budi *et al.* 1995, 61).

Soejoedi was appointed by the Indonesian government to be the head of the Engineering Planning and Supervision Team. He designed four separate facilities[12] for the Conefo political venue: the Nusantara Building as the main conference building, the Nusantara III Building as the secretariat building, the Nusantara IV Building as the banquet hall, and the Nusantara V Building as the auditorium (Fig. 1). The separation of venues was based also on time considerations, so that construction could be carried

12) The names of the existing buildings in the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex reflect the following changes: the main conference building was renamed from Grahatama to Nusantara Building, the secretariat building was renamed from Lokawirasabha to Nusantara III Building, the banquet hall was renamed from Pustakaloka to Nusantara IV Building, and the auditorium was renamed from Grahakarana to Nusantara V Building.

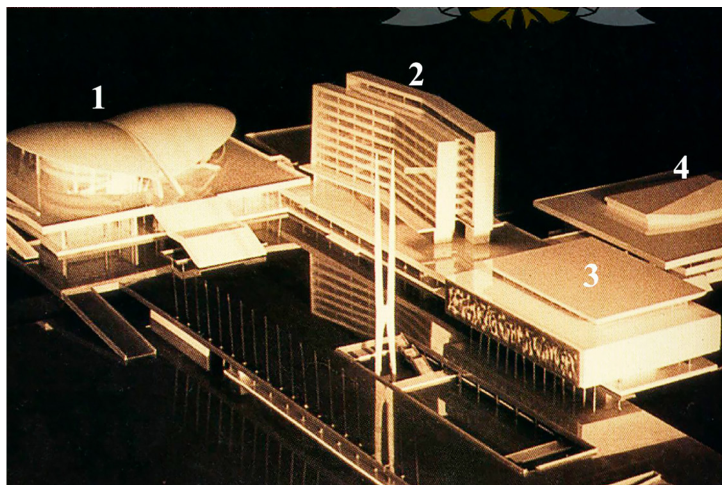

Fig. 1 Model of the Indonesian Legislative Building Complex: (1) Nusantara Building, (2) Nusantara III Building, (3) Nusantara IV Building, (4) Nusantara V Building

Source: Budi *et al.* (1995), reprography

out simultaneously by different contractors (Budi *et al.* 1995, 23).

The description below shows how Soejoedi implemented the TGKWI idea to realize President Soekarno's mandate. Referring to the "two perspectives from opposite directions" of Wagner and Bauhaus, where design objects are a synthesis of various scientific disciplines that give new meaning and fulfill universal human needs, TGKWI was implemented in the fields of architecture, interiors, and landscape design. The change in the designation of facilities from the Conefo project to TILBC in 1968 had no effect on the function of each building. Therefore, the analysis of this case study is carried out along two tracks: as the Conefo project as well as TILBC.

Soejoedi designed the main conference building or Nusantara Building as the main building in the Conefo project. This was based on the major activities carried out at the building, namely, meetings for making important decisions. On the first floor are five meeting rooms—called *wacanasabha* rooms—with different seating capacities. On the second floor is the main conference room, with a capacity of around 1,700 seats, which is called Grahasabha Paripurna. In keeping with President Soekarno's stipulations, Soejoedi designed the Nusantara Building to display the personality of the Indonesian nation. Its embodiment in TILBC is the values that must be fulfilled in the sessions of the Indonesian Legislative Body as a representative of the Indonesian people.

The Nusantara Building is the venue for sessions of the People's Consultative Assembly and the People's Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia. It has

Fig. 2a The Two-Part Shape of the Domed Roof of the Nusantara Building
Fig. 2b The *Kesaksian* (Testimony) Mural in the Commission II Meeting Room, Nusantara Building, Second Floor
Fig. 2c The *Gotong Royong* (Mutual cooperation) Relief in the Commission V Meeting Room, Nusantara Building, Second Floor
Sources: 2a: photo by authors, 2022; 2b and 2c: DPR RI (1990)

a domed roof with two parts, with the edges raised and truncated at a point (Fig. 2a). The two-part shape of the roof was the result of experiments by Soejoedi and his assistant Nurpontjo, and the construction was approved by Sutami (Budi *et al.* 1995, 43). Saliya (author interview, 2022) stated that there are several interpretations of this form, but the most appropriate is the "yes or no" opinion symbol. The symbolism of the two opinions shows that there are two attitudes that must be chosen by the representatives of the Indonesian people for making decisions in the Indonesian Legislative Body sessions.

In the Commission II Meeting Room is a mural titled *Kesaksian* (Testimony), by the painter Ahmad Sadeli (1924–87). This mural is made of wall paint and mixed medium (Fig. 2b). The composition is not intended to express any particular illustration or symbol. In the middle of the mural is a dominant black spot that is similar to the shape of an eye. Black spots are a manifestation of eyes that look attentively even though the person does not show himself (DPR RI 1990, 15). The mural is seen as symbolizing the presence of an invisible supervisor, so that the people's representatives can be held accountable to the Indonesian nation for their decisions.

In the Commission V Meeting Room there is a relief titled *Gotong Royong* (Mutual

cooperation), which is the work of the sculptor and painter But Muchtar (1930–93). This relief is made of copperplate material using a welding technique (Fig. 2c). *Gotong Royong* shows a group of people holding hands (DPR RI 1990, 19). The human reliefs are of different heights and sizes, while the sun shape reflects the brightness of life. The work is seen as a symbol of the need for cooperation to achieve the ideals of the Indonesian state. This collaboration must be carried out by all levels of Indonesian society regardless of differences based on ethnicity, religion, and race and relations between groups.

President Soekarno's stipulations also covered the exterior layout of the Conefo project (Budi *et al.* 1995, 18). The person responsible for designing the outer area was Slamet Wirasondjaja (1935–2016), assisted by Soelarto, Soemardjan, Wahyudi, and Zaini, who supported the monumentality of Soejoedi's architectural works. The placement of the four buildings in this wide open space gives the impression of monumental architecture. The dominant horizontal planes and lines of the four structures can reduce the monumental impression of the Conefo project requested by President Soekarno. Slamet Wirasondjaja presented monumental axes in his landscape design to strengthen the monumental impression (Budi *et al.* 1995, 47). He realized the monumental axes through hard and soft landscape designs (Fig. 3a): the former by a row of fountains at

Fig. 3a Designing the Conefo Project Landscape
Fig. 3b The *Batu-Batu Pembangunan* Relief on the East Facade of the Nusantara IV Building
Fig. 3c The Statue with Aesthetic Elements in Front of the Nusantara Building
Sources: 3a: DPR RI (1990), reprography; 3b and 3c: photos by authors, 2022

the front of the Nusantara Building, and the latter in the form of green elements at the back of the building. The design of other exterior elements was guided by the monumental axes.

On the monumental axis in the front of the Nusantara Building is a statue of an aesthetic element that is also the work of the sculptor and painter But Muchtar. This statue is made of an iron frame construction covered with copper sheets and embedded in a concrete foundation (Fig. 3c). The statue is a spatial amplifier to achieve the architectural unity of the four masses in TILBC (DPR RI 1990, 14). The sculptural aesthetic elements are the supporting elements, reinforcing elements, and limiting elements of the entire TILBC design. The aesthetic elements of the statue represent the hopes of the Indonesian people in the past, present, and future. The value of spatial penetration is derived from the shape of the statue, which has volume and space that is not dense.

The relief on the east facade of the Nusantara IV Building is titled *Batu-batu Pembangunan* (Development stone). The relief, made of lightweight concrete, is 63 meters long and 5 meters wide (Fig. 3b). *Batu-batu Pembangunan* is in the original form of a traditional *jaja* pattern arrangement from Bali, which was made as an offering to God (DPR RI 1990, 15). This pattern, which consists of shapes in a geometric arrangement, describes various aspects of Indonesian people's lives that together build the future of the nation.

President Soekarno required the greatness of Indonesian engineering design to be displayed in the Conefo project (Budi *et al.* 1995, 20). This demanded an architectural form that displayed technological advances, new constructions, and new building materials that were able to meet the challenges of the times.

The domed roof of the Nusantara Building consists of two parts whose ends are raised, with the truncated parts meeting at a point. The roof arc structure, with one meeting point, plunges below the ground surface to ensure its load is distributed evenly (Fig. 4a). The shape of the roof is the result of an experiment to make a pure dome-shaped roof mock-up. Experiments through unplanned manual work led to the decision to produce an architectural work, along with its technological completion. The roof shape of the Nusantara Building meets the requirement to respond to the challenges of the times through the use of new construction and new building materials.

The design of the Nusantara III Building or secretariat building, with a total of nine floors, has an outer area as a receiving room for the sports venue complex, which lies to the east of the TILBC area. The sun visor material installed on the western facade of the building reinforces the impression of a positive outdoor space design presented by the Nusantara III Building (Fig. 4b), as does the use of new building materials for the

Fig. 4a The Roof Arc Structure of the Nusantara Building
Fig. 4b The Nusantara III Building or Secretariat Building
Fig. 4c The Nusantara IV Building or Banquet Hall
Source: Photos by authors, 2022

Nusantara IV Building or banquet hall. The Nusantara IV Building is in the International Style, namely, a simple and modern volume-over-mass architectural form (Fig. 4c).

The architectural design analysis and design objects explain how Soejoedi implemented TGKWI in the Conefo or TILBC project design. The synthesis between architecture and various design objects in the design of the Nusantara Building produces a new meaning for the activities carried out by the Legislature, which represents the expectations of the Indonesian people. The new meaning is that decisions on Indonesia's future are based on the character of the Indonesian nation. The Nusantara Building may be viewed by the national and international public as a symbol of the Indonesian nation's character. In this context, the design of the outer spaces strengthens the symbolism of the Nusantara Building. Thus, TILBC is viewed by the Indonesian people as representing them and by the international community as representing the character of the Indonesian nation.

The above analysis explains how Soejoedi implemented TGKWI to achieve excellence in design works by Indonesian technicians. Experiments with materials produced new architectural forms that adapted to technological developments. Soejoedi's demand for modern technology in the selection of materials for the Conefo project resulted in an International Style development that may be compared with modern buildings in the Western world.

Electricity and New Energy Museum: Implementation of the Idea of Gesamtkunstwerk by Designer Widagdo

Widagdo (b. May 1, 1934) was the interior designer as well as exhibition designer at the Electricity and New Energy Museum (TEANEM). His works emphasize honest, geometric, functional forms and detailed processing (Agus and Yan 2002, 77). Widagdo's works have triggered the growth of interior design services in Indonesia. His interior design of the Indonesian Pavilion at the 1970 Osaka Expo was the starting point for the recognition of Indonesian interior designers (HDII 2004, 12). Widagdo was one of the founders of the Indonesian interior designers association[13] in 1983 and the Indonesian Design Center in 1995 (Widagdo 2011, 224).

He graduated from the Staatliche Akademie der Bildende Künste Stuttgart in 1964. After his return to Indonesia, Widagdo taught at the Bandung Institute of Technology's Department of Fine Arts from 1966 until he retired in 2004. He said (author interview, 2022) that two of his lecturers at Stuttgart were students from the Bauhaus School: Hannes Neuner (1906–78)[14] was a Bauhaus student in 1929 who taught the Basic Course and selected Widagdo to join his class; Herbert Hirche (1910–2002)[15] was a Bauhaus student in 1930 who taught interior architecture. Widagdo explained that Hirche's teaching method was not instructional in nature but left design decisions to

13) Indonesian Society of Interior Designers (Himpunan Desainer Interior Indonesia, or HDII) is the agreed-upon name to cover the broad group of interior design fields. The inauguration and first congress of HDII was held on January 17, 1983, in the Multipurpose Building of the Erasmus Huis in the Netherlands embassy, Jakarta. At the event, Achmad Sadali and Widagdo were appointed to the HDII Honorary Council.

14) Neuner taught at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildende Künste Stuttgart in 1953–67. He taught classes in abstract or non-representational direction, interior design and furniture making, and painting and drawing (Büttner *et al.* 2011, 207, 211, 254).

15) Hirche was the rector of the Staatliche Akademie der Bildende Künste Stuttgart in 1969–71 and also taught interior design and furniture making (Wobus 2011). He visited Indonesia, though the visit was not documented. While writing his memoir from his time as a student at the Bauhaus School, Hirche was a guest of the Widagdo family in Indonesia (Solichin 2020, 2).

the subjectivity of his students.

As mentioned earlier, TEANEM is located in the BIMP[16] area, Kramat Jati, DKI Jakarta 13560. BIMP was built under President Soeharto (1921–2008), the second president of the Republic of Indonesia, and was inaugurated on April 20, 1975. It is a modern ethnographic garden constructed by the Indonesian government in an effort to advance the Indonesian state (Yulia 2016, 121). BIMP is designed to reflect the diversity of Indonesia's population and represent Pancasila, the five principles laid down by the state for political and social order, the philosophy of the Indonesian state (Hitchcock 2005, 45). BIMP is a permanent and modern tool for introducing Indonesia to other nations, so that the outside world ostensibly has a correct understanding of the country (Suradi *et al.* 1989, 9).

BIMP showcases the culture of each region of Indonesia. A glimpse of Indonesian culture is displayed in the provincial administrative area, which is equipped with arts, educational, and recreational facilities. BIMP's target market is the domestic community, and its purpose in attracting visitors is to increase their sense of national pride while adding scientific treasures. BIMP is a counterbalance to Indonesia's economic development and is directed at the development of projects in the mental-spiritual field (Suradi *et al.* 1989, 11).

Parmanto, the coordinating officer for development at the Electricity and New Energy Museum when the observation was carried out in April 2022, stated that TEANEM was the first modern science museum in Indonesia (author interview, 2022). TEANEM is one of 18 museums in the BIMP region. As an educational tool complementing BIMP, TEANEM has the duty of being a science ambassador with the goal of building an energy-efficient Indonesian society. For more than 25 years, TEANEM has been active in developing scientific understanding of electrical energy among the Indonesian people. The TEANEM development concept was designed in 1990 by Minister of Mines and Energy Ginanjar Kartasasmita, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the hundredth anniversary of Indonesia's Electricity Day. Exhibition objects as tangible objects are used by museums to represent certain intangible concepts (Wood and Latham 2014, 42). Based on this idea, TEANEM presents a collection of objects that show the development of science and technology with regard

16) The Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park, or BIMP) project was initiated by Siti Hartinah, the wife of President Soeharto, as a recreation area that could depict the greatness and beauty of Indonesia in miniature. The park has an area of approximately 150 hectares. In the center is a lake with some islands representing the territory of the Republic of Indonesia and depicting its tribes, customs, religions, cultures, flora, and fauna. The purpose behind BIMP was to showcase the what, who, and how of Indonesia; improve the education and knowledge of Indonesians; as well as foster a sense of national pride.

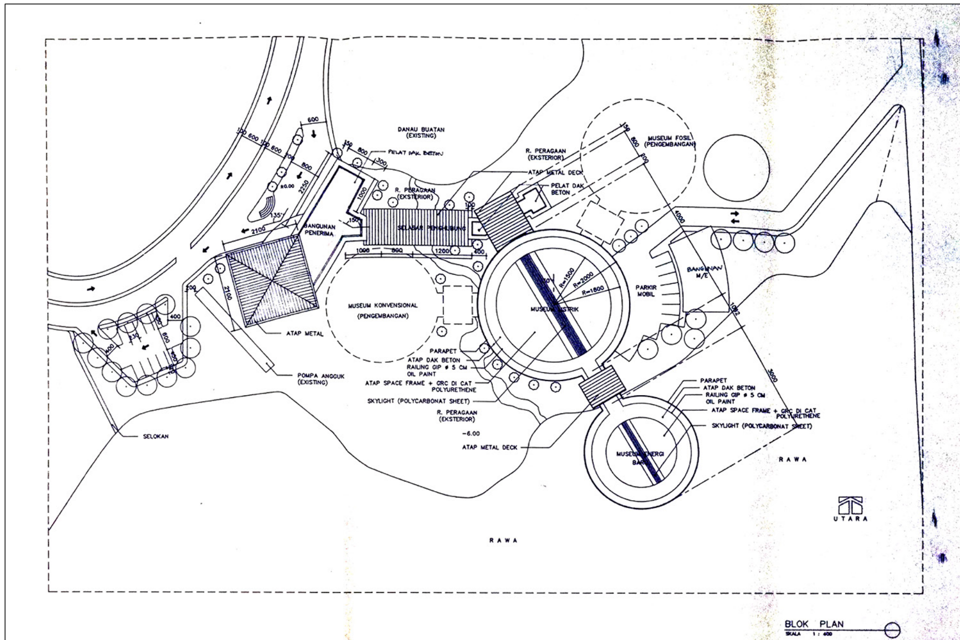

Fig. 5 The Plan of the Block of the Electricity and New Energy Museum
Source: Directorate General of Electricity and Energy Development (1992), reprography

to electrical and renewable energy, as well as information on its various applications in everyday life.

TEANEM occupies two hectares, with a total building area of 6,500 square meters. The architecture consists of four building masses depicting the shape of an atom with one proton surrounded by three electrons. The Electricity Pavilion, designed to illustrate the atomic arrangement of protons, is the central building and is surrounded by three other buildings: the New Energy Pavilion, the Fossil Energy Pavilion, and the Conventional Energy Pavilion (Fig. 5). Parmanto stated that the construction of the TEANEM development was directed toward the future, so the Electricity Pavilion and the New Energy Pavilion were built first (author interview, 2022). Based on the April 2022 observations of the research team, the TEANEM development includes the two buildings.

The basic concept behind the TEANEM design is to provide a comprehensive demonstration of electrical energy (LAPI-ITB 1993, 1) that can provide a correct understanding of the theory and basic principles of electricity, convey an overview of the production and distribution of electrical energy, and show the use of electricity for industrial purposes and daily household needs. A comprehensive demonstration of science and technology with regard to electrical energy requires the simultaneous involvement

of several disciplines. The best strategy is to have interdisciplinary teams, thus increasing the possibility of multidimensional decision making (Pekarik *et al.* 2014, 18). For this reason, TEANEM formed a team of experts from the fields of electricity, physics, education, visual communication design, display product design, and museum interior design (LAPI-ITB 1993, 3). The team designed objects that could be displayed in the museum to explain the principles of electrical energy. The objects embody a synthesis of concepts from various scientific disciplines and provide a new experience when visiting TEANEM.

The description below shows how Widagdo implemented the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk to realize President Soeharto's mandate. Referring to the "two perspectives from opposite directions" of TGKWI from Wagner and Bauhaus, where design objects embody a synthesis of various scientific disciplines in order to satisfy universal human needs, the implementation of TGKWI in designing the interior and museum objects of TEANEM are described below.

The main purpose of a visit to TEANEM is to learn about scientific and technological developments in the rapidly progressing field of electrical and renewable energy. This information is shared by each museum object through educational methods that are informative but not analytical, popular but not scientifically deep, and recreational but do not demand reasoning (LAPI-ITB 1993, 2).

TEANEM shares information on the science and technology of potential sources of geothermal energy and their use in everyday life (Fig. 6). Decisions on display objects

Fig. 6 Museum Objects That Explain the Potential Sources of Geothermal Energy and Their Use in Everyday Life (photo by Widagdo, 1995)

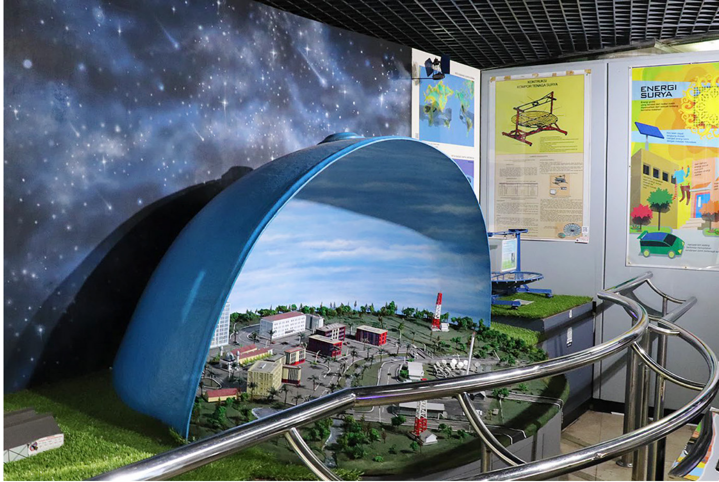

Fig. 7 A Museum Display That Explains the Potential Sources of Solar Energy and Its Use in Everyday Life (photo by authors, 2022)

and visitor experiences are made by a team of experts in electricity, education, product design, visual communication design, and interior design.

TEANEM also uses a team of experts to share knowledge about the potential sources of solar energy and its use in everyday life: electricity experts weigh in on the potential conversion of solar energy into electrical energy; education experts formulate informative, recreational, and popular ways to educate visitors about the use of solar energy sources; product designers design models of solar energy sources; and visual communication designers put information into a two-dimensional display so that visitors' attention is focused on information about potential solar energy sources. The interior designer combines the inputs from the various experts to devise a display object for TEANEM (Fig. 7).

Knowledge about the electric power system is conveyed to visitors through displays showing the generation, high-voltage transmission, and medium-voltage distribution of electrical energy (LAPI-ITB 1993, 6). The expert team's input was realized by the interior designer as follows: The knowledge object is a compilation of data on a map of the electric power system in Indonesia which displays power plants in two-dimensional media, high-voltage transmission information, and information on the consumption of electricity in Indonesia (Fig. 8). The object provides information on where electrical energy is produced, where it comes from, and where it is used. Visitors gain knowledge through direct interaction with objects, such as lights that can be turned on in the animated map of the electric power system. This TEANEM object is equipped with several other

Fig. 8 Display on Electric Power Systems Showing the Generation of Electrical Energy, High-Voltage Transmission, and Medium-Voltage Distribution (photo by authors, 2022)

elements to support knowledge about the production and distribution of electrical energy in Indonesia.

Technology for the production and distribution of electrical energy is also demonstrated in the form of artificial objects. Such TEANEM objects provide information about the location of power plants, which must be far from the load center, where problems are caused by differences in geographical conditions. From such museum objects, visitors learn that hydroelectric power plants are always located far from consumers, while electric steam power plants are located far from cities in order to avoid dust pollution. The model object displays are focused primarily on details of the substation, based on the application of the theory of converting electrical energy into electricity through a transformer.

The analysis of some of the teaching aids above explains the way in which Widagdo implemented TGKWI in designing objects for TEANEM. With reference to the "two perspectives from opposite directions," on the one hand the definition of TGKWI is a synthesis of knowledge from experts in the fields of electricity, education, product design, visual communication design, and interior design who gave birth to new meanings of objects containing knowledge about electrical and renewable energy. On the other hand, the understanding of TGKWI through informative, recreational, and popular methods in the form of objects at TEANEM gives Indonesians knowledge of electrical and renewable energy, which can help them use such energy wisely.

Conclusion

It is very possible that when Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo designed the architecture of TILBC and Widagdo designed objects for TEANEM, they did not announce that they had implemented TGKWI. However, since the design projects incorporate cross-disciplines, it is certain that the two case studies can be referred to as TGKWI. This is because the synthesis of various disciplines has been identified as the implementation of TGKWI. This practice is, of course, an outcome of Soejoedi's and Widagdo's German educational background, where the idea of modern Gesamtkunstwerk is synonymous with Bauhaus.

TILBC is a Gesamtkunstwerk design object. Its synthesis is presented through its architectural form, its various types of artwork that complement the inside and outside of the building, as well as its landscape arrangement. The synthesis gives architecture a new meaning to express the noble values of the Indonesian nation, which are represented by the various activities of Indonesians around the world.

All the museum objects in TEANEM are Gesamtkunstwerk design objects. Each museum object is a synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge, a realization of concepts from electricity, physics, education, visual communication, display design, and interior museum design. This synthesis is aimed at ensuring that knowledge about the use of electrical energy resonates with all types of visitors, that it raises awareness and concern such that Indonesia becomes known for its energy efficiency.

The above analysis of the architectural design of TILBC and the interior design and museum objects of TEANEM has shown the role of TGKWI in presenting the face of the nation that two presidents of the Republic of Indonesia wanted to convey on the world stage. TILBC displays the political policies that affect the lives of Indonesian people and the ability of Indonesian experts to master modern technology, while TEANEM displays the mastery and utilization of electrical energy science and technology by Indonesians.

Within this framework, it has been underlined that TGKWI must be implemented with "two perspectives from opposite directions." TGKWI according to Wagner's definition aims at giving new meaning to design objects through the synthesis of various scientific disciplines. However, as a design object that is owned by the public, its new meaning must also be provided to the public; this aspect refers to TGKWI according to the Bauhaus definition. Implementing two TGKWIs simultaneously allows for a surprising number of meanings in design objects. This study offers ideas for various experiments with TGKWI through the many design forms or features available.

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Correction

This article was published on August 22, 2024 and amended on August 28, 2024 because the earlier version misidentified Pavin Chachavalpongpun as "an exiled anti-monarchy academic" and Somsak Jeamteerasakul as "another exiled antimonarchy activist-scholar" (page 323). Both Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Somsak Jeamteerasakul are exiled pro-monarchical-reform critic scholars. A corrigendum note is published for the printed version.

Smirking against Power: Cynicism and Parody in Contemporary Thai Pro-Democracy Movement (2020–2023)

Chai Skulchokchai*

The 2020–23 wave of protests in Thailand forever changed the country's political landscape. While stemming from and inspired by the 2011 protests, its ability to undermine the hegemony of form and the eternal state of Thailand remains unmatched. People no longer act as if everything is normal but have started to acknowledge the underlying problems. Through parodies and cynicism, they expose the fragility of the eternal state. The Internet has made it easier for subversive acts to spread. To evade censorship, subversive acts use metaphorical and paradoxical parody as a tool to disguise messages as innocuous. Thailand has experienced turbulence in the past decades with the interregnum crisis. People who believed in the regime have become *ta sawang* (disillusioned)—but with the draconian lèse-majesté law, they have no way to voice their dissent except through cynicism and parody.

Keywords: cynicism, hegemony of form, online activism, parody, Thailand

Introduction

On August 25, 2020, the Royalist Marketplace Facebook group—a parody of the royalist movement in Thailand, with more than one million members—was ordered to be disbanded by the Thai government under the Computer Act, which deals with the dissemination of false information. The group's founder quickly announced plans to create another Royalist Marketplace, to demonstrate that no matter how many groups were closed, another would always be set up.

It is said that dictators have no sense of humor. Academically speaking, authoritarian regimes and their variants do not tolerate humor well. The study of humor and cynicism

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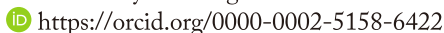
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is well developed in studies of the former Soviet bloc and came to attention again during the Arab Spring uprising, which began in 2010 (Popovic and Joksic 2013; Damir-Geilsdorf and Milich 2020). Humor is used as a tool used to degrade the opposition. However, it has not been as widely studied as the use of technology and various aspects of social cleavage in the context of Thailand's 18-year-long political turmoil. The continued protests in Thailand since 2020 are part of a greater resistance to the authoritarian regime. Thais are not only famous for their smiles and hospitality but have also become famous for their disapproval of repression through cynical humor and satire.

Thailand was under a decades-long political crisis that many attribute to the interregnum (possibly since 2006, 2014–23) between the reigns of King Rama IX (1927–2016, r. 1946–2016) and King Rama X (b. 1952, r. 2016–present), when the royal institutions lost considerable political and cultural hegemony (Hewison 2019). To preserve the status quo, there were two coups and a civilian massacre during the 2010 Thai military crackdown (Ferrara 2019). Like Antonio Gramsci's quote "the old is dying and the new cannot be born in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear," the Thai *ancien régime* is deteriorating rapidly but trying to prevent the new with government suppression of public expression. During the interregnum the "morbid symptoms" showed up; and under government suppression, several people became *ta sawang*, or "disillusioned." Many blamed the king or his close confidants for Thailand's ongoing political crisis (Sopranzetti 2018). Nevertheless, people are still constrained by the state's ironclad censorship and suppression. To circumvent the abusive litigation, they express their subversion through cynical jokes, satire, and parody. The initial widespread circulation of such acts of subversion occurred in May 2011, the first anniversary of the 2010 Thai military crackdown. Subversion became popular again in 2020, when the public reached their breaking point after eight years of dictatorship, with the help of social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Despite the popular youth movement's early success, it took a hiatus in late 2021 after a series of failed attempts to force the government to dissolve the parliament. The movement almost died out while this paper was being written, for reasons that will be discussed later. Therefore, it is important to understand why the movement began and what it has achieved through various theoretical lenses.

Methods and Positionality

The scale of the 2020 protest and its contribution to Thailand's democratization is debatable. However, this work focuses on the method of resistance rather than the

movement's outcome. Most of the physical protests discussed below were chosen because I was directly involved in them as an observer and could capture the zeitgeist. As for the online cases, they were selected for the scale of reaction from the royalists. Although some of the protests discussed below were small and had minimal effect, they were selected because of their creativity. Obviously, the jokes discussed in this paper are viewed from the perspective of this author—a middle-class observer of urban demonstrations. The jokes are open to interpretation, and therefore my interpretations are not absolute. There were several social classes that participated in the demonstrations. From Kanokrat Lertchoosakul's (2021a) research, the most popular subaltern group was Thalugaz (Breakthrough Gas). They were rather violent, using Ping-Pong bombs and firecrackers against police. Their anti-establishment tactics were not hidden behind a humorous front, which most protests were—especially during the Din Daeng Triangle clash.

Brief History of Recent Political Developments in Thailand

King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great, or King Rama IX, was the longest-reigning monarch in Thai history. He began his reign as a symbolic leader with no real authority in the military government (Asa 2019). He then became a junior partner in successive regimes: the infamous Sarit's despotic paternalism era and the Thanom-Praphas era (Asa 2019). Although it is debatable whether he sided with the people in the 1973 uprising against Thanom-Praphas and the 1992 Black May uprising against Suchinda Kraprayoon, he strategically positioned himself away from the military. All of this helped him consolidate power through the "Bhumibol Consensus" after the 1992 Black May uprising (Asa 2019). There was an implicit consensus in the top echelons of Thai society to consider him as the leader and adjudicator of any issues (McCargo 2005). From then on, he became the most powerful person in Thailand, being able to intervene in all affairs through his proxies, a system dubbed the "network monarchy" (McCargo 2005). By the time of the diamond jubilee (sixty years) of his reign in 2006, he owned the hegemony of form. People paid respects to His Majesty without a second thought despite the superficial value of such acts: praying at the temple on his birthday, wearing a yellow shirt on Monday (his birth day), and celebrating Father (of the Nation) Day in schools and government bureaus. On the sixtieth anniversary of his enthronement, more than 500,000 people gathered at the Royal Plaza for a royal audience (Faulder 2016). The eternal state was perfect: people believed and wished that King Rama IX's reign would last forever, even though his health had been declining. Later in 2006, a

political crisis began with the coup d'état against Thaksin Shinawatra, an elected prime minister, on the pretext of Thaksin's corruption and a political deadlock. Before the coup, the pro-monarchy "Yellow Shirts" demanded that the king appoint a new prime minister, which was legally impossible (Pasuk and Baker 2009). The coup was ineffective because it failed to eradicate Thaksin's influence in Thai politics, and his supporters united under the banner of the "Red Shirts" in 2007. The Thaksin-affiliated party won the next election in 2008, only to be ousted by a judicial coup through a constitutional court. Before the case came before the constitutional court, the Yellow Shirts stormed Government House and Bangkok's two airports. In one of the clashes with police, Angkhana Radappanyawut or Nong Bo, a Yellow Shirt protester, was killed (Khorapin 2018). The queen attended her funeral, which implicitly showed that the monarchy was aligned with the pro-royal, anti-government masses (Khorapin 2018). That day, October 13, was marked as the "day of disillusionment" for many people when the event was discussed on the Fah Deaw Kan Same Sky web board (Khorapin 2018). After the judicial coup, the leader of the opposition, Abhisit Vejjajiva, took office with support from the military and some of the semi-loyal government coalition who had turned against Thaksin's government. The Red Shirts came from the North, Northeast, and provinces around Bangkok to demand that the parliament be dissolved. Instead, Abhisit allegedly ordered a crackdown that resulted in at least 98 deaths in Bangkok (Phasuk 2020). This led many to become disillusioned with the monarch, who was apparently aware of the crackdown but chose not to intervene.

The first anniversary of the crackdown in 2011 was the first time that royal hegemony was challenged through parodies and cynicism. While no one talked about the royal family, the graffiti on a burnt building showed the people's disillusionment. From then, Article 112 (the lèse-majesté law) became more frequently used to suppress anti-monarchy acts. This led to the development of more sophisticated methods of subversion.

Abhisit soon dissolved the parliament and called for an election. The Thaksin-affiliated party again won the election, only to be ousted by another coup in 2014 by General Prayut Chan-o-cha when the government was blamed for dividing the nation. The coup is believed to have been staged by the royalists to consolidate the succession of King Rama X or King Vajiralongkorn (Pavin 2020). Once King Rama IX passed away in 2016, the new king, Vajiralongkorn, expanded his privileges by assigning two regiments of the Royal Thai Army as his personal armed force and changing the law to allow him to reside abroad without appointing a regent (Deutsche Welle 2017; Reuters 2019). The king is known to prefer living in Germany and to have a passion for the military. Those two privileges gave him greater influence, with taxpayer money, which generated

much discontent among young people (BBC 2020). After the coup leader, Prayut, called and won the 2016 general election, progressive movements continued to be repressed. The anti-military, pro-democracy Future Forward Party, which was the younger generation's favorite during the 2016 election, was dissolved in early 2020 after being accused of violating election regulations on its source of income (BBC Thai 2020). The court ruling instigated mass protests, which were soon brought to an end by the outbreak of Covid-19. The government took advantage of the emergency to order social-distancing protocols that halted any political movements (Kurlantzick 2020). Later that year Wanchalerm Satsaksit, a pro-democracy activist-in-exile, was allegedly abducted and disappeared. The news sparked public outrage and waves of protest despite the pandemic's emergency decree (Wright and Praithongyaem 2020). The main differences between the youth movements in 2020 and the Red Shirt movement against Abhisit in 2010 were the former's widespread use of social networks and young age of protesters (middle school to university students). The young urban middle-class protesters in 2020 were a contrast from the "urbanised villagers" of the Red Shirts of the Thaksin era (Naruemon and McCargo 2011). The youths used creative protest tactics that may have been learned from abroad, such as pop culture, jokes, and transnational pleas, rather than physical confrontation and disruption like the Red Shirt protest—although the youths did see the Red Shirt movement as an act of heroism.

Even though King Vajiralongkorn was made crown prince in 1972, he was overshadowed by his father's accomplishments. King Bhumibol had had ample time to create his support base before gaining real power, unlike King Vajiralongkorn, who was crowned when he was 64 years old without any prior loyal support base. King Vajiralongkorn dismissed most of his father's advisers, replacing them with his own (Bangkok Post 2016), and although the network monarchy he inherited still functions, he has lost some support. Scandals about his mistresses have also tainted his reputation as an unflawed royal (Handley 2014). For example, his ex-consort Yuvadhida was involved in a drug trade (Handley 2014). Such incidents have dealt a blow to the king's charisma and legitimacy. Monogamy and respect for elders are important Thai social norms. Many people who were loyal to Rama IX changed their minds about the monarchy after King Vajiralongkorn came to power. King Vajiralongkorn is trying to replace his charisma with fear based on rumors that he ordered the forced disappearance of many dissenters and his "installation of discipline" program among his semi-loyal servants (Pavin 2022).

The State of Anti-Royalism and the 2019 Wave of Protests in Thailand

Thongchai Winichakul (2014) believed that Thai society was in a state of denial about the "two elephants in the room": the intervention of the monarchy in Thai politics and the silencing of anti-monarchy sentiment by the superstructure. Although Thai society has modernized superficially, mentally many still reside in a state of denial, refusing to see the obvious suppression of free speech. An important argument from Thongchai (2014) is the Thai belief in Dhammaracha occult (worship of the king who has the mystical power to satisfy with his good deeds). This belief elevates the king as the representation of virtue, and thus he wields absolute power over the country. The belief is still popular among older generations of Thais but is in decline among younger generations. However, this belief is one of the keys to understanding how groundbreaking the 2019 protests were, as youths refused to believe in Dhammaracha occult. Thongchai discussed the extent of hyper-royalism in Thailand: "First, it is the permeation of royalism in everyday life and the increased demand for the expression of loyalty to the monarchy. Extravagant public displays of royal symbols and platitudes are encouraged and found everywhere" (Thongchai 2019, 289). He added another crucial characteristic of hyper-royalism: exaggeration and exaltation of the king's work and achievement, together with tight control of public discourse through a repressive state apparatus and civil society. As a result, people feel compelled to participate in insincere acts to escape the state's wrath (Thongchai 2019).

Khorapin Phuaphansawat (2018) tracked down the ideological shifts among Thais from 2006, as early as the aftermath of the 2006 coup when the Red Shirts were formed. The Red Shirts identified themselves as *phrai* or commoners/serfs pitched against the *ammat* or aristocrats. The early target of the Red Shirts was Prem Tinsulanonda, whom they identified as the leader of the *ammat*. Khorapin (2017) employed Alexei Yurchak's concepts of *stiob* and hegemony of form, which this paper uses too—though in a different context and time frame.

To understand the force of anti-royalism, one has to first understand the dynamics of royalism. Duncan McCargo (2005) proposed the concept of a "network monarchy" headed by the king. The network works because everyone accepts the king as the adjudicator, and the king uses his privy council members as his proxies. Eugénie Mérieau (2016) has suggested that the Thai constitutional court operates according to the monarch's will. The court also acts as a surrogate to preserve the king's hegemony and interests. Thus, the state does not operate on its own. It is controlled by a higher political entity—the monarchy. This phenomenon may also be referred to as the deep state.

McCargo (2021) also wrote about youth protests in Thailand. The break from previous generations is stark from their radically different understanding of how power works in Thai society. Generation Z protesters call into question taboo topics in Thai society. But McCargo concluded that Generation Z protesters do not constitute a disruptor dilemma since their impact is too insignificant to change the system. However, the people's attitude toward the monarchy has changed. Kanokrat (2021a) interviewed 150 school students and 150 university students about their motivations for protesting. She concluded that youth protests against the education system—a part of the authoritarian institutions and influenced by the monarchy—can result in change as the goal is more reachable for youths. This conclusion might contradict the definition of Mérieau's deep state, as Kanokrat's (2021b) research showed that even though everyone knows about the existence of the network monarchy, the concept of the state within a state can still be applied. Even Nidhi Eawsriwong (2017) suggested that the Thai state is a "shallow state" since there is no hidden controller behind the scenes.

Theoretical Background: Cynicism and Parody

Simulation and pretense, which describes the act of make-believe, has a long history in the study of anthropology. From Karl Marx to Yurchak, the study of simulation and pretense has grown tremendously. The phenomenon is closely connected to cynicism, which refers to rationalizing beliefs to conform to one's viewpoint—usually in the context of skepticism toward the state, in the Steinmüller sense (2014). But for Hans Steinmüller, a cynical stance intended to undermine the state is ineffective as the state can operate normally in a cynical society. Explaining such a phenomenon facilitates our understanding of how the state tolerates cynicism in private spaces and how it creates an eternal state that allows minimal change. The best description of the eternal state is Yurchak's book title *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*: everything appears perfect and unchangeable until people start to doubt the status quo. Sometimes an eternal state is understood in colloquial Thai as "Frozen Thailand," which originated from a proposal in 2012 to stop all political activities for five years, maintaining the status quo while fixing problems (Apichart 2012). However, the truth is that simulation and pretense, which are not uncommon in an authoritarian state, make the state vulnerable to small and sudden changes. In the past few decades, change began with the downfall of the Soviet Union, followed by the dot-com boom and smartphones, which increased the ability of cynicism to undermine the legitimacy of the state. Although authoritarian regimes are weakened by technological progress, some authoritarian

societies like North Korea are still able to maintain the eternal state by limiting freedom. Though such eternal states are believed to be forever, they are actually fragile and prone to collapse at any time, as was seen in the Arab Spring and several disruptions in Hong Kong and Thailand.

Simulation and pretense were not understood as political practices in the past, because it was believed that people could not conceal their thoughts and acts. This was the idea of rule as "total control," as observed from Marx's false consciousness and Gramsci's hegemony. Marx's false consciousness is based on the idea that the superstructure uses infrastructure to create a systematic misrepresentation of dominant social relations, to obscure the realities of subordination and exploitation (Marx and Engels 2017). Gramsci's hegemony is about total control politically, economically, and culturally through the normalization of the dominant worldview (Wacharapon 2018). The goal is to manufacture consent among people as well as urging them to actively show their consent. Simulation and pretense were introduced as forms of political practice in James C. Scott's (1987) *Weapons of the Weak*, a study on peasants in Southeast Asia. It explains the impossibility of openly and successfully opposing the dominant power given the overwhelming power advantage of the state. As a result, peasants choose to resist in quieter ways such as false compliance and foot-dragging (Scott 1987). However, this line of thinking assumes that people are resisting the system, as opposed to Marx and Gramsci's belief in total state control. Yurchak (2003) developed an alternative to this dichotomy: His idea is that there are people who know about the problems with the system but still serve the system, actively reproducing consent while not believing in it. This contradictory performance may be observed through many examples, such as a student who preaches about the decadence of the West in public but enjoys rock music in private without seeing the contradiction. Thus, Yurchak's idea goes beyond simulation and pretense, which actors are conscious of doing, to the realm of the subconscious. The realm of the subconscious is why simulation and pretense is related to hegemony—it is about ingrained habits. Yet the paradox is that the actors, despite knowing the problem, still follow ingrained habits (Sloterdijk 1987, cited in Steinmüller 2014). Hence, simulation and pretense is also about hegemony of form (of practice). Actions are performed not only for their face value but also for practical reasons (Steinmüller 2010). Thus, we see different states of simulation and pretense—from their absence to their being used as weapons of the weak and part of the hegemony of form.

Over time simulation and pretense developed into cynicism—a distrust of the system, making fun of it, and looking down on it. Nevertheless, passive aggression is feeble in the eyes of the state, and the fear of social sanction still outweighs people's

intention to go against the system. The base arguments for cynicism and *Weapons of the Weak* are different. *Weapons of the Weak* views every action as resistance, while cynicism views action as a well-calculated habit focusing on the trade-off if people do not comply with the state, which they are very dependent on (Steinmüller 2010).

Simulation and pretense, hegemony of form, and cynicism show that there can be discrepancies between thoughts and actions. These are coping mechanisms often found in authoritarian regimes (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Yurchak 2003; Steinmüller 2015). People do what they have to, from attending meetings and passing meaningless resolutions to attending their leader's funeral pretending to cry (Mbembe 1992; Yurchak 2003; 2013). Such actions become routine, as the government constantly directs people to join state ceremonies such as national days and parades (Mbembe 1992; Yurchak 2013). Nationalism may even become banal when people unconsciously perform patriotic gestures in daily life (Billig 1999). Such acts are pushed by the state to condition the people according to its own agenda.

The hyper-royalism in Thailand parallels what happened in late socialism in the Soviet bloc in the 1960s–1980s (Yurchak 2013). Constant public expressions of loyalty became meaningless acts performed in order to avoid public sanction. Exaggeration and exaltation were used to portray the leader as perfect. Such obligations do not come from state sanctions alone. Although Thailand has laws on royal defamation (Article 112) and sedition (Article 116) that foster a climate of fear, the conservative civil society also contributes by suppressing critics of the monarchy. Thus, the country fits in with Yurchak's (2013) condition of the hegemony of form. On the other hand, gossip about royalty is widespread in Thailand. The conclusion is that hegemony of form is about culture as well as totalitarianism.

As mentioned above, simulation and pretense are especially important in modern life. Cynics use pretense and simulation to evade censure (Sloterdijk 1987, cited in Steinmüller 2014)—not due to fear but due to common sense, since not participating in performative acts could take a toll on their social status. Achille Mbembe (1992) suggests that participating in public events such as oath-taking and medal ceremonies is necessary for individuals to have a respectable social status regardless of their beliefs. Lisa Wedeen (1998) suggests it is important for people to act "as if" they believe in something even if they are skeptical. She gives the example of a soldier in Syria who defied his superior officer by talking about his dream, which was different from the other soldiers' dreams. By giving an alternative interpretation, he also stopped demonstrating active consent to the state's absolute control. His not having the same dream as the others was a crime worthy of punishment despite its triviality. This case study shows there can be serious consequences for defiance, which makes most people choose to do

nothing despite questioning the system. Acts of defiance like the soldier's matter, because language can be used to create social change. Hollow actions may be founded on cynicism, but scripted words burrowed within conversations hold power in real life. People act with cynicism but speak as if they believe the official narrative. Repetitive dialogue can generate even more state control. Hence, performativity is a state tool to fabricate a reality in people's minds, while cynicism creates a small safe space for people to express their doubts.

Parodying and joking is a tool for expressing cynicism. Since it can be taken lightly, it is what the state fears most—it can spread quickly and undermine the state's legitimacy in a short time. Since language can affect our worldview, the use of parody can alter perceptions. As a result, when the hegemon becomes an object of absurdity, it is easier to undermine its legitimacy.

Hegemony of Form at Its Finest

Thailand's hegemony was consolidated after May 1992 by the "Bhumibol Consensus" with the support of the ruling elites (McCargo 2005). The hegemony of form has been developed ever since. From 2006 it became normalized for everyone to wear a yellow shirt on Mondays to celebrate the king's birth day. The "sufficiency economy" philosophy credited to the late King Bhumibol became both state policy and practice by the people. Irrespective of social class, this economic principle was supposed to be a part of every individual's spending practices—though in reality it was not that common. During the mourning period for King Rama IX in 2016, those not wearing black faced public shame and risked physical abuse (Masina 2016). Discussions about the appropriateness of the lèse-majesté law have always been taboo as they show disrespect for the king, an indication of how ingrained the hegemony of form is in Thailand.

King Rama X ascended to the throne in December 2016. He is alleged to be a playboy with many mistresses whom he mistreats (Economist 2019). This rumor has fostered cynicism, as the king having mistresses goes against Thai as well as modern ethics. However, disapproval is expressed mostly in private, with inside jokes like "I have only one father" (which means only my biological father is my true father, not the king—the national father) or "When is Mother's Day again?" (Since Thailand's Mother's Day is on "the queen's" birthday, this joke implies that the current king has more than one queen). The traditional role of the king is to be a respected, paternal figure. However, since King Rama X's promiscuous lifestyle does not foster such an image, increasing doubts are cast on his royal status and legitimacy. Nevertheless, the public continued

to praise the new king until the youth protests of 2020 (McCargo 2021). At the beginning of King Rama X's reign everyone performed the traditional rituals, such as standing up when the royal anthem was played in cinemas and calling him a father figure. Change came with the student movement in 2020, which called for a reform of the monarchy. The Internet played a major role in the protests. A video titled "A Clip at the Pool," widely circulated on YouTube and Twitter, allegedly depicted the former royal consort, Srirasmi, celebrating the king's dog's birthday wearing only a G-string (Ramboisan4somchai 2011). Rumors about this were already circulating, but things came into the open with the video. Images of the king's maltreatment of his mistress and his former princess also came to light, generating even more cynicism. However, no one was prepared for the magnitude of the 2020 protests.

The First Instance of the Great Subversion

Following the crackdown on the Red Shirt protest in 2010, the Thai government organized a "Big Cleaning Day," which would remove all the evidence of state crime (Cod 2020). The political situation stabilized the following year. The first anniversary of the crackdown in 2011 drew large crowds even though the Red Shirts were still viewed as the enemy of the people. To everyone's surprise, the ruins of the Central World department store were found to have been decorated with anti-monarchy graffiti, the most prominent of which showed Hitler blinded in one eye with the caption "The blind who cannot smile"—a reference to King Rama IX being blind in one eye and one of his biographies being titled *The King Never Smiles* (Ünaldi 2016). It directly accused the king of having ordered the violent crackdown. Many messages in the graffiti were about King Rama IX's sufficiency economy, such as "*Tha di jing prathet charoen kwa ni*" (If that was done, our country would be thriving) and "*Mi pen lan, tae hai ku phophiang*" (You have millions [of baht] but still made us stingy) (Ünaldi 2016). Such messages challenged the notion that a sufficiency economy was the universal solution to problems and highlighted the king's status as the world's richest monarch—a fact often disregarded by citizens due to the humble way in which he was represented. Another message in the graffiti was the widely circulated term *krasun praratchatan* (royally given bullet). This too implied that the crackdown was an order from the king (Ünaldi 2016).

At the Ratchaprasong intersection during the first anniversary of the 2010 Red Shirt massacre, an unknown individual put up a banner saying "*Gu mai roo gu puey*" (I don't know, I am sick) (Somsak 2011). "*Gu mai roo gu mao*" (I don't know, I was drunk) is a common excuse for denying responsibility for acts committed while someone is

drunk. It is connected to "*Yaa tue kon baa, yaa waa kon mao*" (Do not hold grudges against crazy people, and do not judge drunk people), which is a way to lessen the accountability of those whose senses are compromised. In a similar vein, being sick should exempt one from blame. At the time, King Rama IX was hospitalized. On that pretext, he should have been exempted from responsibility for his inaction. According to traditional beliefs, all Thais are children of the king, and a father should not abandon his own in the face of harm. Nevertheless, it is possible that the king chose not to prevent the 2010 massacre, like on October 6, 1976, when more than one hundred Thammasat University students were massacred.

The Faiyen band released their first album in 2011, just before the first commemoration of the crackdown. They had released their songs earlier but became more popular after the crackdown. Their most famous song is *Loong Somchai, Pa Somchit* (Uncle Somchai and Aunt Somchit), a parody of the Thai monarch. Somchai and Somchit are common names in Thailand (Khorapin 2017). The song tells the story of a broken family: the son and daughter's failing relationship, the aunt's gambling addiction and financial mismanagement, and the uncle's hospitalization. This greatly resembled the state of the royal family. Another song, *Ngua Yod Deaw* (Single drop of sweat), parodies the famous photo of King Bhumibol perspiring while commanding officials during a tour to "develop" Thailand. Via the photo, the song deromanticizes King Bhumibol's role in helping the country. The lyrics instead give credit to the farmer who does the actual work, implying that the king should not claim the country as his. The song exposes the glorification of the king's image as meaningless. Faiyen's most radical song is *Krai Ka Ror 8* (Who killed King Rama VIII?). This touches on the taboo subject of who killed King Rama VIII. It mentions the questions being asked, with no one able to give a definite answer, and ends with a young boy replying—but only a bleat comes out, suggesting that the supposed murderers were scapegoats. The death of King Rama VIII was mysterious and the investigations inconclusive. Three of his aides-de-camp were blamed and sentenced to death. However, many suspect that the murderer was King Rama IX (King 2011). Once people became brave enough to discuss this sensitive subject, the long-lived legitimacy of King Rama IX was finally challenged.

From 2006 to 2020, many activists-in-exile set up channels on YouTube or posted commentaries on Same Sky web boards such as *Lung Sanam Luang, DJ Soonho*, and *Chuphong Theethuan*. These commentaries were about gossip from the palace. "Canned Fish Factory" by "Grandma Hi" is another example of gossip and subversion preparing Thais for change. There were 199 weekly online publications of this story, which does contain some facts, from 2009 on a Same Sky web board narrating the situation of the royal family (Sirimalee 2022). After the 2014 coup, many of the activists-in-exile were

allegedly forced disappeared. Their sound bites, however, survived and enjoyed greater popularity during the 2020 wave of protests, which prompted more young people to question the royal institution.

Online and Real-Life Subversion

In 2011 social media was not as widely used as in 2020. Most of the protesters in 2011 were also of a different generation (Generation X or Y). During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, protesters came to fear the state of emergency. With widespread layoffs, the unemployed turned to freelancing and selling products online. One way to expand target customers was through educational networks. For example, Chula Marketplace was a trendy Facebook group for Chulalongkorn University alumni, students, and staff to sell their products. Later, Pavin Chachavalpongpun, an exiled pro-monarchical-reform academic, created another similarly named Facebook group—Royalist Marketplace—to mock the trend of marketplaces. Contrary to what its name suggests, Royalist Marketplace does not advocate for royal privilege. It is a discussion board for Pavin's followers, democracy sympathizers, and more radical republicans (Schaffar 2021). The group became a safe space to criticize and make fun of the monarchy. With increasing discontent over the expansion of royal privilege and government mismanagement, more people joined the group and it grew to over two million members, making it one of the world's largest Facebook groups. The name "Royalist Marketplace" cannot be taken at face value as the group sells nothing; its name is a mask for ridiculing the monarchy. This became one of the biggest inside jokes in Thailand. Pavin was given the mock royal name Somdej Phra Nangjao Pavinsuda Phraphanpee Luang (Queen Dowager Pavinsuda) and a royal coat of arms. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, another exiled pro-monarchical-reform critic activist-scholar, was given the title Somdej Phra Jeamklao Chao Yuu Hua (King Jeam) as can be observed in Fig. 1.

On Twitter, hashtags can intensify public opinion. Hashtags such as #WhyDoWeNeedAKing were used more than 1.2 million times in 24 hours on March 21–22, 2020, showing the public's attitude toward the king's abandoning the country during the Covid-19 pandemic (Reuters 2020). Hashtags such as #RoyalMotorcade and #IslandShutdown also showed the people's discontent with the monarchy: #RoyalMotorcade was a complaint about unplanned road closures causing traffic disruptions just because a member of the royal family wanted to travel. Another role of hashtags, together with the Facebook group, was to rally people to protest. Hashtags such as #15OctoberGoToRatchaprasong—to display protesters' strength through

Fig. 1 A Banner from the #ThammasatWillNotTolerate Protest on August 10, 2020 Projects the Image of Pavin and Somsak against a Gold Background, Usually Reserved for the Royal Family. Pavin and Somsak Also Have Their Coat of Arms. The Writing on the Banner Is "*Duay Kao Duay Kang-om Moo Krata*" (With Rice, Curry, and Pork Barbecue), a Parody of "*Duay Klao Duay Kramom Kor Decha*" (With the Top of My Forehead Paying Respects).
Source: Prachatai (2020)

numbers—reached 68,000 posts within minutes on October 15, 2020 (Cod 2020).

However, online subversion alone was not enough to bring about regime change; real-life mobilization was needed. From the Royalist Marketplace banner to the image of Pavin in royal uniform, there were frequent signs of resistance at gatherings and political events—even at Thammasat University's graduation ceremony, which was attended by the king. Anti-monarchists gave Pavin the title of queen dowager, ranked above Queen Suthida and Royal Consort Sineenat.

The power of hashtag activism transformed tweets into real-life activism. Two instances will be discussed here: the mobilization of #CastPatronusCharmProtectingDemocracy and People's Runway. The first hashtag event was inspired by the iconic Patronus Charm from the Harry Potter franchise. The charm was used against "He Who Must Not Be Named," an alias of "Lord Voldemort." Lord Voldemort was none other than the monarch, whose name cannot be uttered in a negative way. The creative theme represented the younger generation who participated in this protest. Not long after that, People's Runway was organized on Silom Road, Bangkok's financial hub. Intended to mock the lavish spending of Princess Sirivannavari on her fashion brand and runway events, the event took place on the same day as the release of the princess's new winter collection. Its iconic photo portrayed a woman in Thai national costume walking on a red carpet, similar to Queen Suthida walking to the Grand Palace, while the king described Thailand as the "Land of Compromise." Traditionally, Thai national costumes were

designed and promoted by Queen Dowager Sirikit. Wearing them symbolized loyalty to the monarchy. On the surface, People's Runway demonstrated loyalty, but its true intent was to mock Queen Suthida and Princess Sirivannavari. Both cases show how protesters avoided directly calling out the monarchy, instead doing so under the guise of a fictional character or a show of loyalty. Although the People's Runway leader was charged under Article 112, the district court put aside the matter by claiming that it fell under the criminal court's jurisdiction (Anonymous 2022a). However, the person dressed as Queen Suthida was sentenced to two years in prison (Anonymous 2022b).

Another example of subversion by innuendo is the "Mom Dew Diary" Facebook page. Mom Dew is a transgender woman who looks like Queen Dowager Sirikit. Using the word "Mom" (The Honorable) to pretend she has royal lineage, she imitates the way Queen Dowager Sirikit talks and dresses. Her cover photo shows her aiming a gun in a shooting range, similar to a famous photo of Queen Dowager Sirikit. She often visits places with her attendant to support (democratically aligned) people. Traditionally, wearing a royal-designed Thai dress signifies that one is upholding national values, which include loyalty to the monarch. Parodying acts of patriotism and Queen Dowager Sirikit has become one of Mom Dew's most iconic aspects. In late 2022 she started a TV program called *News from Mom Dew Page*, a parody of *News from the Palace*, which is broadcast every day at 8 a.m. With a marching song and a news anchor's voice reading the introduction, it is similar to *News from the Palace*.

Parit Chiwarak, one of the leaders of the resistance, wore a crop top (inspired by a photo of the king in Munich) to Siam Paragon, which is partly owned by King Rama X's sister Princess Sirindhorn, to mock the king by copying his infamous fashion choices. He was immediately charged under the lèse-majesté law. In another case, he performed a *Choi* song in public under the alias of "Khai Nui."[1] The lyrics were about two women fighting over a man. Viewers could immediately recognize that Khai Nui was a parodic version of Queen Suthida, as her nickname is Nui and the dress Parit wore was very obvious. The fight between Queen Suthida and Royal Consort Sineenart is a topic of gossip among Thai people, but previously no one vocalized it.

The Royalist Reasons

Before the protests started, Pavin and Somsak, together with many academics and activists, were labeled as "nation haters" for wanting to abolish the monarchy. Many of

1) A *Choi* song is a kind of folk song originating from the central part of Thailand. Normally it is sung by two or three singers. It frequently uses puns and double meanings to make fun of something.

them, including Pavin, explained that they were also "royalists" who cared, that they wanted to transform the monarchy to make it more resilient to change and adapt to the present-day world. They by no means wanted a republican Thailand. Therefore, Royalist Marketplace may not be a parody but indeed a genuine effort to improve the monarchy by pointing out its weaknesses.

Transnational Parodies

In 2020, at the peak of the youth protest, an insignificant Twitter post showing cityscapes from Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand and referring to Hong Kong as a country sparked a Twitter war between China and Thailand. The person who posted was the girlfriend of a Thai actor who had Chinese audiences. The actor retweeted the post, which led to his Chinese audience demanding that he apologize for calling Hong Kong a country rather than a territory (Buchanan 2020). Soon after, Chinese Twitter trolls joined in and a Twitter war erupted. Many Chinese trolls tweeted derogatory statements about Thailand, such as "The Thai government sucks" and "Your king is ugly." They found that Thai young adults already hated their government and questioned their king. As a result, not only did the Chinese Twitter trolls fail to insult Thais, but Thai Twitter accounts used the Chinese trolls' posts to criticize Thailand instead—something that confused even the angry Chinese. This roundabout criticism helped the Thais to avoid risking jail time of three to 15 years.

Some Thais countered Chinese trolls with memes undermining Chinese cultural hegemony by pointing out its oppressive nature. By mentioning the Tiananmen Square massacre and Winnie the Pooh, Thais put Chinese trolls in an uncomfortable situation, since such references are heavily censored in China. The adverse outcome for China from this Twitter war was pan-Asian solidarity against China's authoritarianism and in favor of democracy. The Milk Tea Alliance was formed by Thais, Hongkongers, and Taiwanese, followed by people from the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and India as a coalition for democracy (Barron 2020; Salam 2022). This greatly benefited the Thai youth movement as its democratic agenda gained international publicity. The practice of Thais taking the help of foreigners to question their own country became so normalized that a Malaysian model even asked Thais to roast the Malaysian government in exchange for Malaysians roasting the Thai monarchy—a way for both sides to avoid getting into legal trouble observable in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 This Post Illustrates Transnational Cooperation between Thais and Indonesians in Criticizing Each Other's Government to Avoid Being Prosecuted.
Source: @_nsyakinah (2022)

The Change

"No God, No King, Only Human," a quote from the BioShock video games, was displayed on Ratchaprasong SkyWalk during the 2020 protests and chanted by young protesters at the Pathumwan intersection. It indicated the people's loss of faith in religion and the king as an agent of positive change. Parody and cynicism weaken authoritarian regimes by exposing their flaws and mocking them under the guise of loyalty. Though it is not sufficient to topple a regime, satire can increase the cost of repression to a point that it is no longer worth the trouble, which may prompt a regime to reconsider its position. Demonstrations in Thailand have led to tremendous changes. People are bolder in speaking about the royal family in public, and reverence for the monarch has decreased. One example is discussions on the amendment and appropriateness of Article 112, previously a taboo topic, which every political party discussed openly during the 2023 election. Royal sayings became something to mock and change, such as "*Duay klao*

duay kramom kor decha" (With the top of my forehead paying respects) to "*Duay kao duay kang-om moo krata*" (With rice, curry, and pork barbecue). An abbreviation of SPCR, or "*Song phra charoen*" (May the monarch prosper), was trivialized to "*Thappee cha rueng*" (The rice paddle is falling).

The decreased reverence for the monarch is not merely superficial. Every graduation ceremony in Thailand is traditionally presided over by a member of the royal family. This is one of the few chances to get close to royalty in Thailand and usually counts as an opportunity of a lifetime. However, after King Rama IX died, fewer students began attending graduation ceremonies. The number dropped further after the start of the youth movement, with campaigns urging people not to attend. The Thammasat University graduation ceremony is always presided over by the king. In 2020, of the 7,756 graduating students only 3,280—or 42.29 percent—attended the graduation rehearsal, a requirement for attending the main ceremony (Isranews 2020). Attendance had already fallen from 70 percent to 50 percent in prior years, reflecting the monarch's drop in popularity among the younger generation (Isranews 2020). Instead, people printed out life-size models of three academics-in-exile—Pavin, Somsak, and Puey Ungphakorn—dressed as royals and received their degrees from the models instead as can be observable Fig. 3.

Many businesses joined in the protests to boost their sales, demonstrating that the younger generations are now the target audiences of businesses. In 2022 Thai Vietjet Air announced an April Fool's promotion of a flight from Nan Province to Munich for 1,010 baht, reflecting the country's ten reigns (ManagerOnline 2022). Nan is the birthplace of Royal Consort Sineenart, and Munich is the king's favorite luxury vacation destination. Lazada, one of Thailand's largest e-commerce platforms, issued a May 5 or 5.5 promotional video featuring Aniwat, a transgender woman, sitting in a wheelchair with an unusual neck position (BBC Thai 2022). The video was a caricature of Princess Chulabhorn, who often uses a wheelchair and has a distinctive posture. Both cases led to a public outcry from royalists demanding that the government take action. The video was even accused of mocking the disabled. Lazada was threatened with being charged under Article 112, and the army prohibited deliveries from the company (Hoskins 2022)—though as of this writing no legal action has been taken. Nevertheless, the cases showed that parodic sentiments had spread from the individual to the corporate level, reflecting the general perception of a legitimacy crisis with the royal family. Acts that were once meaningless displays for revering the monarch have become acts used against hegemony.

Salim is a word to describe conservative urban-educated middle-class baby boomers who support traditional establishments such as the monarchy and the use of military

Fig. 3 Life-Size Printout of Highly Respected People from Thammasat University on the Occasion of the 2020 Graduation Ceremony

Source: Freetupandit (2020)

force. As such, they distrust any elements that pose a threat to their core values, such as the Thaksin government and a more liberal democratic system. Since this generation are now adults, they are convinced they are more qualified and morally superior when it comes to judging politics (Faris 2011). Though *salim* were once the main determiners of government stability, the word has regressed to becoming a derogatory identifier for people who prefer authoritarian governance. *Kwai daeng* (Red buffalo), once a term for uneducated provincial people who protested against the *salim* and their system, became a symbol of pride as society began seeing their cause as pro-democracy. The commemoration of the 1976 massacre, which had come to be regarded as obsolete by the public, gained interest among young people as it represented the democratic movement that had been suppressed by the military. None of this would have happened if not through the use of social networks to spread information, mock the regime, and display cynicism. Similarly, the Siamese Revolution of 1932, once viewed as a premature

transformation to democracy, became a symbol of improvement for commoners.

Breaking with the Past

Waso Vandenhaute (2021) has discussed in detail how Thais have lost faith in "Thai-style democracy." Thai-style democracy and its belief in "goodman politics," supported by many royal speeches, originated from Dhammaracha occult and King Rama IX's speech in which he said Thais could not prevent bad people from politics but could select good people to prevent bad people from governing the country (Bhumibol 1969). As hyper-royalism intensified from 1992, King Rama IX represented the ultimate "goodman" since he practiced Dhammaracha precepts well. His guiding influence in Thai politics gave birth to "guided democracy," in which he guided his nation using goodmen. This strategy was successful in helping the economy prosper under the Prem Tinsulanonda government.

Prayut's coup and government were welcomed initially because of his appeal as a good and loyal man. Nevertheless, his regime lost support due to its mismanagement and inability to improve the country's economy. The death of King Rama IX and scandals of King Rama X had a ripple effect that lessened the junta's legitimacy, since the monarchy and junta were viewed as being aligned. The goodness of the royal institution, which supports the government's legitimacy, became questionable. With that came the realization that guided democracy or Thai-style democracy was not working anymore—what had been viewed as beneficial was actually contributing to people's despair politically, economically, and mentally. Consequently, many chose to distance themselves from the past, from good and moral politics. The state's emphasis on virtue and goodness became so intense that these qualities became objects of absurdity. Parodies and mockery of the monarch became a way for people to cope with reality, similar to *stiob* in the Socialist bloc during late socialism. The fact is that no matter how strong hegemony of form is, subversion will eventually find a way to bypass it. The irony of this type of regularity (where everything looks normal and people still perform meaningless activities, so there is no warning of change) is that the authoritarian system works with almost no direct resistance—a peaceful society. Nonetheless, since this system is not accustomed to change, it is also structurally fragile. The direct effect of laughter stemming from despair and anger is the delegitimization of the royal institution by convincing people to take it lightly (although the Thai government takes it very seriously). As a result, when there is an attempt at change, the system cannot adapt and maintain the status quo since people are already prepared for the change.

Dictators Have No Sense of Humor

As stated by Yurchak (2003) and Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002), small acts of subversion are allowed in the private sphere as a way for people to express their discontent. For the state, such acts in public must be prevented at all costs, apart from the few "acceptable" parodies in *stiob*. With traditional media in decline, the focus has shifted to new media and education. Thailand's army established the Information Operations Unit to combat subversion in the online world, while the new preschool curriculum forces children to learn about King Rama X—mostly about his virtues, such as being the wise patriarch of the nation and a unifying figure (Thailand, Ministry of Education 2018; Wongsapan 2022). However, the intensity of royal propaganda led to an increasing number of demonstrations by middle-school students advocating for a propaganda-free curriculum.

In 2020 a constitutional amendment was proposed to abolish the authority of the senate to vote for the prime minister. Ultimately rejected, this was a petition by the ILaw Project and received more than 100,000 signatures, double the original target. The reason for the proposal was that senators were handpicked by the junta, giving General Prayut the advantage to be elected as prime minister. A crowd rallied to the parliament at Kiakkai to pressure the senate to accept the amendment because they wanted a democratic system in which the prime minister could be chosen (indirectly) by the people. During deliberations, the parliament was heavily guarded by fully equipped riot police. The People's Party 2020 group rallied the people to confront the police. The protesters claimed to have an army (the masses) and navy (represented by floating rubber ducks) by their side. They brought rubber ducks to the Chaophraya River, behind the parliament. In the ensuing confrontation, the police deployed a high-pressure chemical water gun and the protesters used the rubber ducks as a shield. Rubber ducks, which are a protest symbol in Serbia, Kosovo, and Russia, are becoming a symbol of the masses in Thailand. Within a few days, the police banned a wholesale store in Bangkok from selling rubber ducks. The rubber ducks were called Kromluang Kiakkai Ratsadorn Boriruk, or "Prince Protector of People at Kiakkai." In subsequent protests, these rubber ducks became an icon. An anonymous Facebook user started selling "Royally given duck calendars," mocking the tradition of distributing calendars with photos of the royal family. The court jailed the seller for two years for selling something indirectly mocking King Rama X.

Sanctions against parodies and subversion came slow but firm. Many protest leaders were charged with lèse-majesté and accusations of sedition. Although most of the charges were eventually dismissed, the accused were ordered to be jailed without bail while awaiting the court's decision because the charges fell under national security.

In retaliation, many went on hunger strike to demand the right to bail. Many of them were not *sui juris*. The longest hunger strike lasted 64 days (Standard Team 2022). There were at least 15 cases of hunger strikes from 2021 to 2022 (Admin28 2022). All of this reflects the lengths to which both the state and youths were willing to go. While the state imposed sanctions to prevent anyone from undermining its authority, including through mockery, youths became more desperate. To protest against the regime and the abuse of legal power, they upped the stakes by going on dry fasts as a last resort.

On January 16, 2023, Orawan (Bam) and Thantawan (Tawan) announced their hunger strike against injustice, calling on the court to allow political prisoners to file for bail (Online Reporters 2023). They decided to go on hunger strike after the court canceled their friends' bail. Bam and Tawan found themselves pushed into a corner. With the movement's strength greatly weakened by despair, the chances of their being imprisoned while awaiting trial were now higher than before. They refused bail and used their bodies and lives as a final weapon against injustice; they had nothing left to lose. After nearly two months, the court finally heard their pleas and granted bail to 13 of their 16 fellow protesters who were on trial (Online Reporters 2023). On March 11, 2023, Bam and Tawan announced that they would stop their hunger strike as they could not survive much longer and their close confidant had asked them to stop (Online Reporters 2023). Some of their demands were met. They still urge the masses to continue fighting along with them.

From Laughter to Symbols

It was clear that various types of violence—from tear gas to high-pressure chemical water canon—used by the state could undermine morale. Consequently, the movement had to adopt new tactics. Symbols became a handy tool, replacing laughter with something more serious and more representative of the struggle of the masses. The use of the Hunger Games' three-finger salute was the first symbol used to represent the movement's three demands. The rubber duck was introduced later as a mascot of the movement and a mockery of the state—a mere plastic toy turned into a security threat. Bam and Tawan's dry-fasting strikes were a symbol of nonviolent campaigns against the broken legal system. On March 29, 2023, a member of Taluwang (Penetrate the Palace), one of the many protesting groups, painted the wall of the Grand Palace with an anarchist symbol and a crossed-out number 112 (Khaosod English 2023). That man, along with his camerawoman, was apprehended on site by the police. To quote the anonymous artist Banksy, "Graffiti is one of the few tools you have if you have almost

nothing." The man who defaced the palace wall had almost nothing: he was a child of a CD vendor during the Red Shirt protest and had had to escape the bloody government crackdown. He was clearly a working-class person who had already experienced trauma and had nothing much left to lose (Khaosod English 2023). As for the camerawoman, at 15 she was the youngest person to be charged under Section 112 (Admin20 2023). She defied the court's authority and the entire procedure by turning her back to the judge during the hearing (Admin20 2023). Within a day, similar graffiti was found across Bangkok. The Grand Palace wall was swiftly repainted the day it was defaced, and the next day there were mounted police patrolling the area. Posters showing the crossed-out number 112 by Commoner publishing house were taken down by undercover police without notification to the publishing house (Natthapol and Kittiya 2023). All these incidents demonstrated the fragile state of the hegemony of form. Every small act of defiance was met with an exaggerated reaction from the state. These reactions created friction that seemed absurd to the people and displayed the vulnerability of the state.

Conclusion

Posts with statements such as "You will see what you never saw" are frequently put up by Charnvit Kasetsiri, a renowned Thai historian. Thailand has been mired in a political crisis for almost two decades, during which time many of the "old" have declined while the "new" have grown up. However, in order to understand why "you will see what you never saw," one has to understand the condition Thailand has been in for several years. There was hyper-royalism throughout the reign of King Rama IX and continuing into the reign of King Rama X. However, it intensified when the king had more power. As a result, at one point the state of hegemony in Thailand was similar to that of the late socialist Soviet bloc, as every act was reduced to face value and people performed meaningless acts in order to fit in. That was how the people were made to believe that things would stay the same forever. The eternal state ended when the reign was subjected to the differences between the two kings.

Cynicism and performativity have played an important role in creating and sustaining nations, especially in authoritarian societies. They are part of what Michael Herzfeld (2005) calls "cultural intimacy" by being part of the community of complicity. Simulation and pretense are means of cynicism and performativity in that they conceal people's true thinking and motives in order to save them from prosecution. When hegemony of form is imperfect and the eternal state is undermined, people start to question the system and protest against oppression, seeking more creative ways.

Thailand joined the third wave of democratization in the 1990s. However, the attempt was unsuccessful because of the coup in 2006. From the 1990s to 2006, hegemony of form was developed until the eternal state was achieved. The loss of hegemony became visible during the final phase of King Rama IX's reign and surfaced a few years into King Rama X's. However, the cracks had begun long before, with many scandals about the royal family being discussed privately.

The proclaimed neutrality of the royal institution was disproved when the institution sided with the anti-government Yellow Shirts. With the violent crackdown on the Red Shirts by the military, many people became disillusioned about the neutrality of the royal institution. Anti-monarchy graffiti was found in the ruins of the Central World department store, and the Faiyen band released satirical songs questioning royal propaganda. The songs challenged the Dhammaracha precepts even before the widespread use of social media.

The 2020 wave of protests had unprecedentedly young participants who were concerned about their future. Royalist Marketplace was created on Facebook and became popular among this demographic. On Twitter, there were hashtags attracting people to join the movement. Information on flash protests spread through these platforms. Such actions led to cultural change. Many people who would have been happy to receive their university degree from the royal family opted out and instead received it from a parodic figure of someone they respected. In protests and daily life, the use of innuendo became more common. This was not only in the real world but also in the safe haven of the digital world. The Twitter clash between Thai and Chinese netizens is one example of Thai netizens using others to indirectly ridicule their royal institution. With fewer people showing respect to the royalty through their words and actions, the cost of repression increased—but not enough for the government to give in. The corporate world also exploited this trend, which prompted the army to take action. The word *salim*, once used with pride for those who opposed the elected government, has become something many people prefer to forget, while *kwai daeng*, once a derogatory term for Red Shirts, has become a source of pride.

One characteristic of Thai politics is the yearning for a morally superior person to place on a pedestal. However, mismanagement of the royal institution has tainted its image. The government's intense hyper-royalism propaganda became so absurd after a point that people began responding with laughter.

The younger generation like to use Twitter. The social platform creates an illusion of masses of people, as retweets and comments perpetuate the fabricated reality of onsite political engagement. Though Twitter was used to rally people to protests, the number of people present was much lower than the number of tweets. The affect

generated by the illusion and empowerment of Twitter—fear and anger—also played a huge role. Fear discouraged some people from joining the protest movement, while anger helped to radicalize others. Police brutality and the risk of severe punishment led many people to contribute financially rather than showing up. Feeling alienated, protest leaders resorted to more risky methods. This was the case with Tawan and Bam, who went on a dry fast to demand their friends' right to bail. The government also arrested and charged children as young as 15 years with lèse-majesté.

With the government becoming more violent, cynicism could not protect the masses anymore. More people were charged with lèse-majesté for creating parodies, so the movement began using symbols instead. From the Hunger Games' three-finger salute to the anarchist graffiti at the Grand Palace, protests became more subjective, yet everyone understood their meaning. For radicalized participants, turning their backs to the judge and not uttering a word was an act of opposing the Thai judicial system and its nontransparent treatment.

This study continues the long tradition of studies of satire and cynicism from late socialism to the Arab Spring uprising. It shows the digitization of resistance by Internet users who learned from the past and from other movements such as the one in Hong Kong. However, the government also learned about those movements. With symbols and protests inspired by popular culture, it is complicated for the authorities to explain why certain jokes are offensive and a national threat. This demonstrates the fragility of the eternal state, which the establishment is fighting to protect.

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Transformations of *Anisong* Manuscripts in Luang Prabang: Application of Modern Printing Technologies*

Silpsupa Jaengsawang**

Printing technologies that arrived in Laos with French colonialism (1893–1945) facilitated the Lao manuscript culture by introducing new writing tools and writing support. When storing and categorizing manuscripts in a repository, librarians began using new technologies such as writing tools and paper labels as well as the Roman alphabet to encode pronunciations for vernacular titles of *anisong* manuscripts. Monk-preachers began using pen to correct sermonic texts written on palm leaves. Affiliation markers in the precolonial as well as colonial periods were written mostly in the modern script, since monastic lay assistants—who were sometimes responsible for transporting and storing manuscripts in the monastic library—were illiterate in the Dhamma script. Since the modern Lao script was available in modern printing machines, there was a gradual decrease in the use of the traditional Dhamma script. The modern Lao script was thus used to compensate for the dwindling knowledge of the Dhamma script and to accommodate those who could not read the traditional script but were still part of the manuscript culture.

Keywords: printing, transformation, Lao manuscripts, manuscript culture, *anisong*, colonialism

I Introduction

After King Saisetthathilat (1534–71) moved the capital of the Lao kingdom of Lan Sang from Siang Thòng to Vientiane in the mid-sixteenth century, Siang Thòng remained a

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center of Lao Buddhism.[1] It was renamed Luang Prabang in honor of the Phra Bang statue, which had become Laos's precious Buddha symbol. In the early eighteenth century Laos was split into three kingdoms: Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak. Each claimed to be the successor state of Lan Sang, and all were forced to recognize Siamese suzerainty in 1778. Following the failed uprising by King Anuvong of Vientiane in 1826–28 (in which Champasak—but not Luang Prabang—participated), Vientiane and Champasak became fully incorporated into the Siamese kingdom while Luang Prabang remained a vassal state. Hence, after 1893, when Siam ceded all territories on the left bank of the Mekong River to France, only Luang Prabang became a French protectorate while the rest of Laos became part of the French colony. This explains why Lao Buddhism was influenced by Siamese traditions even though Lao Buddhist practices depended upon local traditions (Khamvone 2015, 5). The French barely intervened in Buddhist activities in Luang Prabang, focusing instead on the restoration of Vientiane, which had been devastated by Siamese troops. Francis Garnier (1885, 286, cited in Ladwig 2018, 100) reported that the first French missions between 1866 and 1868 found Vientiane in ruins. Buddhist sermons were still part of daily life, which contributed to the commissioning of religious texts inscribed in palm-leaf manuscripts by laypeople. The Lao manuscript culture continued despite the French administration, which lasted approximately fifty years (1893–1945 with a brief interregnum in which Laos was a Japanese puppet state).[2]

Western technologies were applied to Lao manuscript production from the late nineteenth century and resulted in, for instance, typewritten palm-leaf manuscripts unique to Luang Prabang. The existence of several typewritten copies of palm-leaf manuscripts suggests an effort to preserve religious texts, particularly under the manuscript-copying projects led by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto (1920–2007).[3] While religious texts recorded in the manuscripts were preserved using this new method, Dhamma script literacy[4] gradually declined as typewriters had the modern Lao

1) After the kingdom was invaded first by the Siamese and then by the Burmese during the sixteenth century, in 1563 King Saisetthathilat moved the capital from Luang Prabang to Vientiane. Vientiane was more centrally situated with respect to the Lao territories and more easily defensible against Burmese attack (Stuart-Fox 1986, 8).

2) Based on the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts (DLLM) collection at the National Library of Laos, the earliest known palm-leaf manuscript from Laos is a Pali canon titled *Parivan*, written in 1520 during the reign of King Phothisalat (Code: 06018504078-00, National Museum, Luang Prabang).

3) Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto served as an abbot for sixty years, developed close relations with the highest-ranking individuals of the Lao sangha hierarchy, and rose to senior positions within the sangha. A huge corpus of documents and artifacts was left behind after his death (Khamvone 2015, vi–vii).

4) For the spread of the Dhamma script in the Upper and Middle Mekong region, see Grabowsky (2011).

script.[5] In the late twentieth century, manuscripts written in the Lao variant of the Dhamma script could only be produced by hand, on mulberry and industrial paper.[6]

Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in December 1995, the town of Luang Prabang has a long religious and political history, with a mixture of indigenous and European—notably French—cultures.[7] The use of palm leaf, mulberry paper, and industrial paper was steadily associated with new printing technologies that arrived there in the late nineteenth century. This article discusses manuscript transformations due to the application of new technologies in Luang Prabang. It also touches on the purposes behind and the results from encounters with modernity in Lao manuscript culture in the late nineteenth century. This study argues that French colonialism had a greater influence on the Lao manuscript culture than any other factor. After providing general information on the Lao manuscript culture and *anisong* manuscripts, this paper outlines the social and cultural setting of Luang Prabang in the late nineteenth century. The manuscripts discussed date from the French colonial period to the present. The use of new printing technologies is discussed next. The four key factors heuristic tool and paracontent are the core methodologies applied in this study.

Note on Quotations from Manuscripts

Since the manuscripts used as primary sources for this research were written in either the Dhamma or the modern Lao script, quotations are necessarily presented differently. Those from manuscripts written/typewritten in the modern Lao script are simply presented in that script, while texts written in Lao Dhamma (i.e., the Lao variant of the Dhamma script) have been transcribed into the modern Thai script, largely preserving the orthography of the original. Thus, readers familiar with modern Thai might better apprehend the English translations. I consider this approach—despite its shortcomings—more appropriate than transcribing the text into modern Lao (due to the script's limited number of consonants) or using a Lao Dhamma font.

5) The availability of the modern Lao script in typewriters helped monks and novices who were illiterate in the Lao Dhamma script, enabling them to study texts without having to learn a new script (Bounleuth 2016, 246–247).

6) For example, BAD-13-2-093 *Anisong thawai kathin* (Rewards derived from participation in the Kathin festival) and BAD-21-2-004 *Salòng than dòk mai* (Rewards derived from the donation of flowers).

7) Despite the transfer of the royal capital to Vientiane, Luang Prabang has retained its rich cultural heritage, with the highest density of monasteries in Laos and perhaps the whole of Southeast Asia. Since the mid-fourteenth century it has been the main pillar of Lao Buddhism (Khamvone and Grabowsky 2017, 1).

II General Information on *Anisong* Manuscripts

The impact of French colonialism on Lao Buddhist manuscript culture along with technological innovations in writing and composition is manifold. Some genres of texts reveal more nuanced perspectives on the changes than others. *Anisong* manuscripts' popularity, their position in the manuscript corpus as a whole, and their social relevance and ritualistic use are considered here. This previously under-researched genre of Lao Buddhist texts deals with the rewards obtained from meritorious deeds.

In the Buddhist social context, where meritorious benefits derived from praiseworthy activities are hard to measure, concrete manifestations referring particularly to the Buddha matter. The liturgical culture of delivering *anisong* sermons has been passed down for centuries. The ritual of delivering these sermons assures practitioners of blissful consequences acquired through religious ceremonies and rituals and assures them that no meritorious deed goes unrewarded:

> The outcomes and effects of this ritual engagement are people broadly subsumed under one notion—merit—in Lao called *boun* (from Pali *puñña*). Any ritual event conducted in temples is first and foremost labelled *boun*, which besides religious merit then refers to the event itself, also in the sense of a collective party. (Ladwig 2021, 26–27)

Anisong is the Lao (and Thai) pronunciation of the Pali word *ānisaṃsa*, meaning "rewards," "benefits," "advantages," or "results of positive deeds" corresponding to *puñña* in Pali. *Anisong* also represents a textual genre and a type of sermon declaring the benefits derived from meritorious acts.

Another terminological alternative for *anisong* sermons/texts is the Khmer word *sòng* or its variant *salòng*. *Sòng* or *salòng* (*chlòng* ឆ្លង, ສອງ/ສະຫຼອງ), corresponding to *chalòng* (ฉลอง, "to celebrate") in Thai, is a derivative of the Khmer verb *chlòng*, meaning "to cross," "to inaugurate," "to dedicate," "to celebrate," and "to spread" (Grabowsky 2017, 416). The sermons are called *salòng* or *thet salòng* (ເທດສະຫຼອງ) in Laos and *anisong* sermons or *thet anisong* (เทศน์อานิสงส์) in the historical region of Lan Na, in Thailand's north. The term *anisong* (Th: *thet anisong* เทศน์อานิสงส์) in Northern Thailand signifies "the announcement of rewards," while *salòng* or *sòng* (Lao: *thet salòng* ເທດ ສະຫຼອງ) in Laos signifies "the announcement of completion":

> *Anisong* is derived from Pali *ānisaṃsa* which means "benefit, advantage, good result." In the Buddhist context *Anisong* or *Salòng* (Lao, from Khmer: *chlaṅ*, "to dedicate," "to celebrate")—often contrasted to *Sòng*—are used for homiletic purposes, such as performing sermons and preaching. Those texts, generally rather short (rarely containing more than twenty folios), describe the rewards in terms of merit, or literally the "advantage" which a believer may expect from a par-

ticular religious deed. (Grabowsky 2017, 416)

Sometimes *salòng* is defined as "gratuity" or "benefits." Silpsupa Jaengsawang (2022, 66–67) discusses a manuscript containing five texts (BAD-13-1-0157, 1944 CE)[8] from Luang Prabang that was partly written with blue pen in the modern Lao script to introduce the *Anisong hask sin* sermon. In a colophon added later, *salòng* is defined as "gratuity" for one's religious faith (ฉลองศรัทธา) and "benefits" (ประโยชน์) one may gain from merit-making or listening to the Dhamma. For the second case, instead of *Anisong haksa sin* or *Salòng/Sòng haksa sin*, the sermon title is *Payot haeng kan haksa sin*: the term *anisong* or *salòng* or *sòng* is replaced by *payot haeng kan*,[9] meaning "benefits derived from the activity of." Accordingly, the two mentions of *salòng* in the newly written introduction define *anisong* as "gratuity" and "benefits" resulting from meritorious deeds. The new introduction is quoted below, with the key words related to *anisong/salòng/sòng* underlined:

> บัดนี้ จักแสดงพระธรรมเทศนา เพื่อสลองศรัทธา ประดับสติปัญญาของท่านสาธุชน ผู้มีกุศลจิตมาบำเพ็ญกุศลบุญราศีในพระพุทธศาสนา เพื่อสั่งสมบุญบารมีในตนให้หลายยิ่งขึ้นไป เพราะการเฮ็ดบุญไว้นี้ มีแต่เพิ่มพูนความสุขให้แก่ตนตลอดเวลา ตรงกันข้ามกับการเฮ็ดบาปหยาบช้า ยิ่งเฮ็ดหลาย ก็ยิ่งนำความทุกข์ลำบากให้แก่ตนทั้งในปัจจุบันและอนาคต พระธรรมเทศนาที่จะนำมาแสดงนี้มีชื่อว่า ประโยชน์แห่งการรักษาศีล ตามคาถาบาลีที่ได้อัญเชิญไว้เบื้องต้นว่า สีเลนะ สุคะติง ยันติ แปลความว่า บุคคลจะไปสู่สุคติ ก็เพราะมีศีลเป็นที่รักษา จะได้โภคสมบัติมาก็เพราะมีศีล จะมีวาสนาถึงพระนิพพานก็เพราะมีศีลเป็นหลักปฏิบัติ
> Now the Dhamma sermon will be delivered as remuneration for your religious faith (gratuity) in order to promote the wisdom of devotees (you) who virtuously make merit for Buddhism for the purpose of higher meritorious accumulation; because merit-making always increases happiness. [Merit-making] is contrary to sinful deeds; [namely,] the more sinful deeds one does, the more grief one experiences in both present and future times. The following Dhamma sermon is titled *Benefits of Precept Observance*, which is in accordance with the introductory Pali expression as *sīlena sugatiṃ yanti*, [literally] meaning "With precept observance, one is destined to rest in peace." Property and enlightenment are also derived from the following precepts. (BAP, code: BAD-13-1-0157, folio 8 [recto], Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1944 CE)

Titles of *anisong* texts in Lao manuscripts are mostly preceded by the word *salòng* or *sòng*: for example, *Salòng cedi sai* (Rewards derived from [building] sand stupas), *Sòng fang tham* (Rewards derived from listening to the Dhamma), *Salòng khamphi* (Rewards derived from copying religious books). *Thet salòng* or *salòng* sermons are apparently associated with "dedicating" and "celebrating," because they are delivered to mark a

8) The five texts are *Sòng dòk mai thup thian* (Rewards derived from the donation of flowers, incense sticks, and candles), *Sòng haksa sin* (Rewards derived from precept observance), *Sòng fang tham* (Rewards derived from listening to the Dhamma), *Sòng phao phi* (Rewards derived from the participation in funerals), and *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* (Rewards derived from listening to Vessantara Jātaka).

9) *Kan* (การ), meaning "action" or "activity," is a prefix used for nominalizing verbs.

completion of merit-making—to acknowledge, celebrate, and value donors' meritorious deeds: "The public act of lauding itself is in Laos called *saloong* ('to celebrate the outcome of the meritorious deed') and the donors have variously been described as having prestige or being worthy of veneration" (Ladwig 2008, 91).

In a sermonic ritual the monk usually holds an *anisong* manuscript while reading the text. However, sometimes monks improvise an *anisong* sermon or recite one by heart while holding another type of manuscript. An *anisong* sermon is delivered during or after a merit-making activity in a monastery's main ordination hall,[10] at a layperson's house where a meritorious event is held, or even outdoors where a monastic object donated by local people has been installed (Silpsupa 2022, 103–106). The sermon is delivered in public and therefore "witnessed" by all participants, especially by the preaching monk who approves the successful merit and delivers the sermon to explain or "affirm" the forthcoming rewards.

Anisong liturgical texts have been copied and transmitted on several kinds of writing support, from palm-leaf manuscripts to mulberry paper and industrial paper. The earliest dated Lao *anisong* manuscript is titled *Salòng paeng pham* (Rewards derived from the construction of pavilions) and is from Attapü Province. The manuscript, made of palm leaves, was written in 1652 (DLLM, code: 17010106001-11). The most recent Lao *anisong* manuscript, dated 2016, is made of industrial paper (a blank notebook). Titled *Anisong lai pae fai* (Rewards derived from the donation of light floating vessels), it is from Luang Prabang (DREAMSEA, code: DS 0056 00645). Compared to *anisong* manuscripts from Northern Thailand, those in Laos are made of a wider variety of writing support, writing tools and substances, and bookbinding materials, thanks to the advent of new printing technologies.

Anisong manuscripts have been found in many places in the Upper and Middle Mekong region—the Dhamma script's cultural domain, which includes Northern Thailand, large parts of Northeastern Thailand, Laos, the eastern parts of Myanmar's Shan State, and southwestern Yunnan. Luang Prabang has the most manuscripts in Laos because of its role as a center of Buddhist education, supported by royal patronage until 1975, and its monastic schools that were operated without French involvement or even the French language/curriculum. Most lay and ordained students in Laos studied at monastic schools

10) Due to the main Buddha image housed within, ordination halls are frequently used for delivering *anisong* sermons in which lay audiences sit silently on the floor facing the grand Buddha image, while the preaching monk sits on an elevated chair or pulpit, facing the audience. Thus, the laity listen to *anisong* sermons before the main Buddha image; it is as if the Buddha image "witnesses" their meritorious deeds and "blesses" them through the medium of the preaching monk. Monastic halls in which *anisong* sermons are delivered have a sacred aura (Silpsupa 2022, 324).

(McDaniel 2008, 39). Luang Namtha Province, bordering China and Myanmar, has the greatest variety of writing support: palm leaf, mulberry paper, and industrial paper.

III Luang Prabang Manuscript Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century

Although the French were not literate in the Dhamma script, they were involved in the manuscript culture. In 1900–53, for instance, they collected manuscripts from monastic libraries in Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Champasak, and Khammuan and deposited them in royal offices, libraries, and central monasteries. In doing so, they were able to learn about Laos's history and culture in their effort to colonize, consolidate the population, and monopolize power. Many manuscripts were never returned to their original monasteries (Bouakhay 2008, 62–63), and some ended up in unintended temples, as recorded in their colophons.[11] French efforts to rule Laos through building a harmonious and religion-friendly environment included the revival and patronage of Buddhism, with scholars from the École française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of the Far East) becoming engaged in historical and textual studies of the religion (Ladwig 2018, 104).

French colonialists aimed to incorporate Laos into French Indochina in order to use Lao territory, economically and strategically, for increased access to Vietnam and China (Stuart-Fox 1995, 111–112). They supported the construction and renovation of religious buildings, including That Luang (Laos's most important Buddhist relic shrine) and Vat Si Saket, because they realized the power of the sangha over Buddhist rulers and the emotional appeal of their actions for the Lao. This was a strategic colonial plan of initiating statecraft and moving from assimilation to association (Ladwig 2018). Thus, religious manuscripts continued to be produced and circulated among local monasteries.

The colonial period brought challenges for Buddhism, with Vientiane being destroyed by Siam in 1828, Luang Prabang having to pay tribute to Siam, and large parts of Laos coming under French rule (Khamvone 2015). But during this period Lao people reinforced their Buddhist identity. They commissioned a large number of manuscripts and promoted Lao as the national language, which caused considerable conflict during the 1940s between Lao elites, led by Cao Maha Uparat Petcharat, and French officials, led by Charles Rocher, the French director of public education in Vientiane. The Lao elites

11) Manuscripts have two main uses: cultic and discursive, depending on whether the text of a manuscript is involved. In a cultic use, to iconically or symbolically signify certain meanings, manuscripts are treated as "objects" in "seen" and/or "unseen mode." Manuscripts are discursively used when their texts are dealt with in three modes: composition, display, and storage (Griffiths 1999, 22–28; Veidlinger 2007, 5–7).

declined the French proposal to use the Roman alphabet for book printing, thus protecting the country's writing tradition, inherited manuscripts, and indigenous customs. The Lao elites' success against the French represented "intellectual liberation" from "intellectual colonization" (Bouakhay 2008, 74–75). At the opening ceremony for the newly rebuilt manuscript library in Vientiane, a head of the Lao sangha gave a speech referring to Lao manuscripts as "Dhamma" manuscripts written by the Lao, in order to clarify that the French were responsible merely for the building that housed the manuscripts, not for the production of the manuscripts (McDaniel 2008). Thus, the Lao accepted religious support from the French but under limited conditions.

The French supported architectural innovation and the rebuilding of Buddhist monasteries (Ladwig 2018, 99). Fig. 1 illustrates the unique phenomenon of Lao Buddhism during colonial times. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries French colonialism spread over and outside Laos. As shown in the gray shaded area, Lao Buddhism featured a combination of French influences and indigenous beliefs. It was trapped by the positive and negative effects of colonialism and Western influence, thereby remaining in the "gray zone," where indigenous traditions and a foreign power tolerated and negotiated with each other. Buddhism in other French colonies—represented by the white-colored parts of the diagram—had slightly different practices, depending on the people and history of the countries.

In its half-century under French colonialism, Laos absorbed the influence of Western modernity on the local manuscript culture:

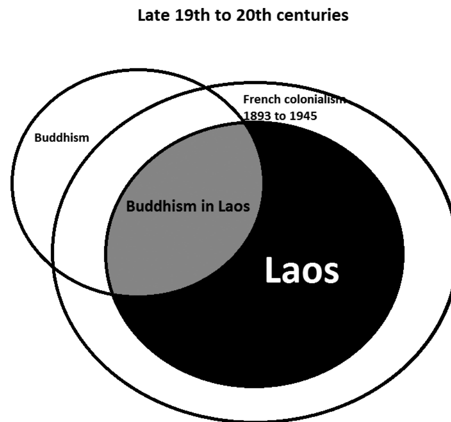

Fig. 1 Unique Situation of Buddhism in Laos during the French Colonial Period (1893–1945)

Source: Silpsupa Jaengsawang

> *Anisong* texts were also produced according to the traditional way of making manuscripts in the Buddhist circle of Luang Prabang. When the city was influenced by Western civilization in the twentieth century, it became possible for Buddhist scholars and scribes who had access to modern publications to employ modern techniques of writing for manuscript production. (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 250)

Typewriters were used to inscribe texts on palm leaf during 1960–90 by monks who had the required skills (Bounleuth 2016, 247).[12] The sole surviving typewriter used for typing palm-leaf manuscripts, made of iron and weighing about 20 kg, is in the monastic library at Vat Suvanna Khili (Fig. 2). Characterized by the special length of the platen—26 cm—the typewriter, with its 29 cm roll, was suitable for typing palm-leaf manuscripts, which were generally longer than normal paper. A white piece of paper attached to the platen reads (in English): "This typewriter, Achan Khamvone brought it from the Buddhist primary school Vat Mano[13] to the Buddhist Archive on 26 March 2014 for preservation." "Achan Khamvone" or Dr Khamvone Boulyaphonh is the director of the Buddhist Archive of Luang Prabang, whose head office is in Vat Suvanna Khili. Partly hidden behind the white paper, the phrase "ຫ້ອງການສຶກສາ [room of education]" was lightly inked on the platen in the modern Lao script before the typewriter was moved to Vat Suvanna Khili.

Because typewriters were used and donated among sangha communities in Luang Prabang monasteries, monks and novices were the only people who had access to them.

12) The advent of typewriters in Laos was followed by photographic cameras. In 1840, during the period of Siamese suzerainty over the Lao lands, photographic technology was invented in France. Europeans soon introduced cameras and printing technologies in Bangkok, evidenced by King Mongkut of Siam (r. 1851–68) being photographed as early as the mid-1850s. Gifts were regularly exchanged between the kings of Siam and Luang Prabang, and it is likely that cameras and film, soon after their arrival in Siam, came to the court of Luang Prabang. Lao princes, monks, and officials went to Bangkok for their studies and might have also brought back cameras to Luang Prabang. We may assume that by the late 1870s photography was being practiced in the town's monasteries. The presence of photographs from the 1890s in the Buddhist Archive of Photography's collection coincides historically with the arrival of French rule in 1893 (Berger 2015, 99).

13) One of the previous abbots founded Vat Mano or Vat Manorom, Luang Prabang's first and only monastic elementary school, in 1960. Due to the Laotian Civil War (1959–75), he was forced to migrate from Houne District (Müang Hun) in Udomsai, northwestern Laos, to Luang Prabang in late 1960. His students followed him there, and he set up a new school. There were fifty to sixty novice students in the school's early years. After Laos came under the Lao People's Revolutionary Party in 1975, the Communist government reorganized and intervened in the sangha community and monasteries. It opened a road through Vat Manorom, dividing the monastery in two. One of the rooms that had been occupied by the French was renovated by the monastery and used as a classroom. As of 2022, although the number of novices was below the minimum of thirty students required for classification as a school, the monastery was trying to keep the school active for its heritage value (Khamvone Boulyaphonh, phone interview, December 24, 2022).

Fig. 2 Typewriter for Typing Palm-Leaf Manuscripts (photo by Silpsupa Jaengsawang, Vat Suvanna Khili, Luang Prabang, August 24, 2022)

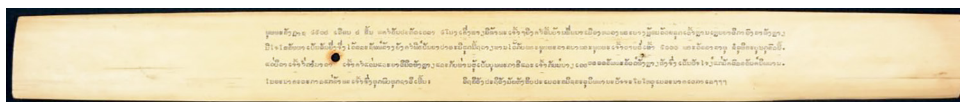

Fig. 3 Typewritten Colophon, *Panya barami* (Rewards Derived from Following the Thirty Perfections)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), BAD-13-1-0760, Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1963 CE

Fig. 3 shows the first dated hybrid palm-leaf manuscript with handwritten and typewritten text (Silpsupa and Grabowsky 2023, 115). The manuscript is titled *Panya barami* (Rewards derived from following the Thirty Perfections). The colophon is newly typed, marking 2506 BE (1963 CE) as the year of production.

Not only were colophons written with a typewriter, in a number of palm-leaf manuscripts even texts were written with a typewriter. For example, a 1984 palm-leaf manuscript titled *Anisong bun wan koet* (Rewards derived from merit-making on birthdays) from Luang Prabang (see Fig. 4) was typed, though its cover folio was decoratively handwritten with blue and red ink. Typewritten manuscripts were produced under the Buddhist dissemination project of religious text preservation led by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto, the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam. Between the 1940s and 1960s, he sponsored and donated hundreds of manuscripts to his monastery. He also asked monks (e.g., Sathu Phò Phan of Vat Hat Siao), novices, and laypeople to copy manuscript texts brought from neighboring countries (Khamvone 2015, 225). The availability of the modern Lao script on typewriters had two contrasting results: the decline of Dhamma script literacy and an increased accessibility to religious texts among non-Dhamma script communities. However, typewriters did not completely replace the Dhamma script—the latter was still used for handwriting texts and corrections and taking notes.

Fig. 4 Typewritten Manuscript *Anisong bun wan koet* (Rewards Derived from Merit-Making on Birthdays)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), BAD-19-1-0137, Vat Siang Muan, Luang Prabang, 1984 CE

The tradition of dedicating religious books or manuscripts to a monastery preserved handwriting habits: sponsors wrote their own names, names of family members, and names of merit recipients—usually their dead relatives—in handwritten, typewritten, or even printed manuscripts. Modern printing technology can replace the process of transmitting texts, but the tradition of manuscript donation is irreplaceable (Silpsupa 2022, 173). The example in Fig. 4 is excerpted from the typewritten *Anisong bun wan koet*, made of palm leaves and aligned in three columns. *Anisong* manuscripts from Northern Thailand were less influenced by modern printing technologies and tend to preserve local traditional styles (Silpsupa 2022, 172).

White correction fluid is widely found in manuscripts from Luang Prabang; the earliest evidence of dated manuscripts applying correction fluid is *Nangsü ha mü hai mü di* (Book of calculation for [in]auspicious days). The manuscript, from 1908, is made of mulberry paper in the leporello style (see Fig. 5). White correction fluid is frequently used, and new text and corrections have been handwritten.

Easier accessibility to industrial paper was accompanied by the use of ballpoint pens, which were used on palm-leaf and mulberry paper manuscripts for corrections or even for writing text. Paper was bound in various ways: gluing and folding multiple sheets to form a concertina-like folded book, using metal staples to form a whirlwind book, or using strong string at the top margin. The last technique is similar to stab

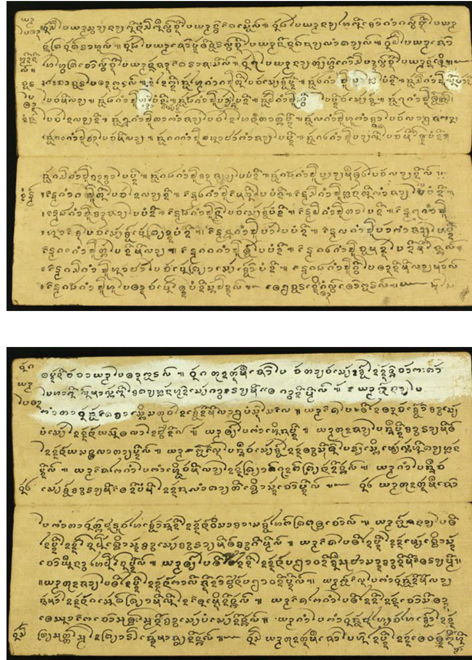

Fig. 5 Mulberry Paper Manuscript with White Correction Fluid: *Nangsü ha mü hai mü di* (Book of Calculation for [In]Auspicious Days)

Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), BAD-13-2-042, Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 1908 CE

bookbinding.[14] In many cases *anisong* manuscripts were written in blank school notebooks especially manufactured by Sawang Kanphim (Silpsupa 2022, 199–200). The notebooks are still in use and found in the library of Vat Ong Tü in Vientiane (Silpsupa 2022, 93). Since December 1975, when the Lao People's Revolutionary Party came to power, *anisong* manuscripts have been less monitored by the government, due to a lack of Dhamma script literacy. Compared to the era of French colonialism, *anisong* manuscripts drastically decreased in number under the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (Silpsupa 2022, 185–186), and religious activities were partly controlled and shaped according to Communist orientations: "Monks were constantly informed that Buddhism

14) Stab bookbinding is characterized by a thread stitch with many variations depending on the book's size, the materials, and the local binding tradition. A thread is pulled through stabbed holes on one side of a book, which then becomes a spine. Traditional Asian books bound in this way are usually lighter than leporello and loose-leaf books due to the properties of the paper used to make their leaves (Helman-Ważny *et al.* 2021, 142).

and socialism were congruent and complementary since both promoted equality, communal sharing, and the objective of ending suffering" (McDaniel 2008, 59).

One important case study was the collectivist religious event of building a temple in February 2019, hosted by a successful businesswoman in Vientiane (Ladwig 2021). Participants from different social backgrounds and both urban and rural areas made donations to join the construction campaign. However, the event seemed to have a business angle, because it included advertising and branding for a company. Merit was believed to be distributed among the participants, who treated one another as equals. However, in the end the businesswoman's family name was inscribed on the new temple gate and the "artificial" space of a stratification-free collective ritual quickly evaporated (Ladwig 2021, 12–38). Such "invented" and romanticized egalitarian strategies allow feudalists to exploit and convince laypeople to donate their labor for religious pursuits in exchange for merit (Khamtan 1976, 18; Ladwig and Rathie 2020, cited in Ladwig 2021, 34). Phoumi Vongvichit, the minister of religion in Laos after the revolution, argued that the new Lao Buddhism should promote solidarity and donations should be given by people from all strata of society (Vongvichit 1995, cited in Ladwig 2021, 34–35).

IV Application of New Technologies to the Lao Manuscript Culture

Three Oxford University Press dictionaries give similar definitions of "technology": the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes (Wehmeier 2005, 1576–1577); developed machinery and equipment (Stevenson 2010, 1826); and a branch of applied science knowledge (Turnbull 2010, 1589–1590). In general, with the application of new technologies, the quality and quantity of products are improved, time taken is reduced, and human labor requirements are reduced. New printing technologies were initially beneficial to religion and education in Laos, as these fields employed such technologies the most (Hindman 1991, 3).

Thanks to the living tradition of *anisong* sermons, manuscripts have been revised by contemporary users for purposes ranging from aiding in chanting to updating the contents, improving some chanting words with respect to the audience, adding a new salutation, and even reproducing a new *anisong* manuscript for inexperienced preaching monks. Due to their active use, *anisong* manuscripts have been changed using modern tools—to the modern Lao script and foreign languages. The French arrival gave monks and novices access to new technologies, as explained in the context of Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto's manuscript collection:

> Together with the manuscripts, a great number of various modern publications and printed materials—such as books, magazines, newspapers and documents—were found in Pha Khamchan's abode. This indicates that the Venerable Abbot himself might have had access to different types of such modern publications. This may have been the case for the other monks, novices, and lay Buddhist scholars. Anyone who was able to write the Dhamma script on palm-leaf might use similar "modern" techniques in his writings. Not only did some *anisong* texts found in Pha Khamchan's abode develop "modern" structures and contents, but the layout of such *anisong* manuscripts was influenced by features of modern printing technology as well. (Bounleuth 2015c, 259)

IV-1 *Writing Tools, Writing Materials, and Modern Lao Script*

Traditional palm-leaf manuscripts were inscribed with a stylus or pin-topped pencil. A dark substance such as lamp oil was applied on the inscribed surface to expose the textual traces engraved by the stylus. Ink, ballpoint pens, and pencils gradually came to be used not only in mulberry and industrial paper manuscripts but also in palm-leaf manuscripts. Additions and corrections often appear to have been made by ballpoint pen to avoid blurring by re-darkening processes.

White correction fluid was convenient and popular for deleting words and replacing them with new words written by pen or even typewriter.[15] The author (Silpsupa 2022) has highlighted a remarkable example of new writing on a spot covered by white correction fluid in a palm-leaf manuscript titled *Sòng Sapphathung* (Rewards derived from the donation of all kinds of religious flags) (BAD-13-1-0387, 1910 CE). Correction fluid "concealed" the inscribed traces of mistakes, so that dark resin would not remain in the inscribed traces while the surface was being coated (Silpsupa 2022, 350–351).

Computer printing is the most recent technology for facilitating the production of *anisong* and non-*anisong* texts. One example of a hybrid printed-handwritten *anisong* manuscript is *Anisong sang pha tai pidok* (อานิสงส์สร้างพระไตรปิฎก Rewards derived from copying the Buddhist canon, n.d.). The manuscript is made of paper and was printed by computer, with three columns and a running head resembling the modern format of printed books. The manuscript cover was also produced by computer, with the logo of the institution and a decorative title. The names of sponsors and merit recipients are handwritten.

With typewriters and computer printers featuring the modern Lao script,[16] this script replaced the Dhamma script, which could only be written by hand. In the late

15) The use of typewriters required a special technique to "soften" palm leaves so they could be flexibly adjusted. The preparation of typewritten palm-leaf manuscripts is thus different from the preparation of traditional palm-leaf manuscripts (Bounleuth 2016, 246).

16) Like the modern Lao script, the modern Thai script was employed in Lao manuscript culture and influenced by new printing technologies during the second half of the twentieth century (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 6).

nineteenth century the Dhamma script was not widely installed in typing machines, although it was first used in the 1890s by the American Presbyterian Mission Press in Chiang Mai (Anonymous 1890, 115–116, cited in Dao 2022, 88). Modern and foreign characters could be used in Luang Prabang manuscripts due to Lao people's exposure to foreign influences. Increasing numbers of *anisong* manuscripts were therefore produced with new kinds of writing machines, which allowed preaching monks who were newly ordained or less experienced in the Dhamma script as well as laypeople to use typed or printed manuscripts. Mass-produced manuscripts had blank spaces for adding personal details: sponsors' names, recipients' names, colophons, or wishes. Such handwritten entries made some manuscripts unique.[17)]

Colophons appear to include more entries in the modern Lao script than the main texts. According to Bounleuth Sengsoulin (2015c, 255), due to their short length—usually fewer than 15 folios—*anisong* manuscripts were popular for newly ordained monks and novices to practice reading and copying the Dhamma script. Apart from the model texts written in Pali, mostly in the Dhamma script, student monks were supposed to write colophons with various wishes[18)] and were sometimes allowed to write in the more familiar modern Lao script. Colophons are thus found in several scripts.

IV-2 *Roman Alphabet and Foreign Languages*

The Roman alphabet was most frequently used by librarians for categorizing and organizing manuscripts on shelves, especially in the case of *anisong* manuscripts at the National Library of Laos in Vientiane. Added in the first or second folio, the manuscript titles were spelled in the Roman script, with the Thai-Lao pronunciations provided. This was intended to help foreigners catalogue the manuscripts and shows the involvement of Westerners in Lao manuscript libraries. A striking example is the aforementioned case of the French gathering manuscripts for their own cultural and historical investigation into Laos along with other projects.[19)] According to Harald Hundius (2009), 3,678

17) Featuring interrelated content and physical elements, handwritten manuscripts are unique: "Such interplay between content and physical characteristics is by no means limited to hand-written books (or alternative formats). In contrast to printed books, however, each manuscript is a *unicum* which reflects the choices, preferences, requirements, skills and errors of individual producers, users and owners" (Wimmer *et al.* 2015, 2).

18) Colophons of manuscripts found in Venerable Khamchan's abode contain the names and personal backgrounds of scribes (*phu chan*) and sponsors/donors (*phu sang*), their desires and moods, and dates of manuscript completion (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 13). In some cases there is information on the occasions for which the manuscripts were produced and the production processes. Relationships among scribes, sponsors, donors, and users are also included.

19) The École française d'Extrême-Orient played an important role in rematerializing Lao Buddhism as a governmental strategy.

manuscripts from 94 monasteries in nine provinces were surveyed by Lao and French scholars in 1970–73:

> A notable initiative is the work of the Chanthabouly Buddhist Council, under the leadership of Chao Phetsarat, which asked abbots throughout the country to submit lists of their manuscript holdings between 1934 and 1936.
>
> Work on the EFEO [École française d'Extrême-Orient] inventory, plus research and analysis of manuscripts, followed in the 1950s and 1960s by Henri Deydier, Pierre-Bernard Lafont, and Charles Archaimbault. An Inventaire des Manuscrits des Pagodes du Laos (Lafont 1965), building on the previous work of French scholars, was conducted under the leadership of Pierre-Bernard Lafont in 1959 and covered altogether 83 monasteries: 13 in Luang Prabang, 25 in Vientiane, and 45 in Champasak. (Hundius 2009, 21)

Not only did Western technology permeate the written language, but French words were also used in manuscripts from Luang Prabang. French words are written in the Dhamma script in modern Lao orthography and appear in the colophons of some *anisong* manuscripts (see Section V-1). Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto headed several Buddhist missions and helped in the transmission of Buddhist texts from palm-leaf manuscripts. He was knowledgeable in French (Khamvone 2015, 46) as well as Lü and Pali (phone interview with Khamvone Boulyaphonh, August 31, 2023).

IV-3 *Paper and Ink Stamps*

The most widespread use of new technologies was in the manufacture of labels: these were made of various new materials, including paper, glued paper (stickers), and ink

Fig. 6 Palm-Leaf Manuscripts with Inked Stamps and White Sticker
01012906004-05, n.d.: *Salòng phasat phüng* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Beeswax Castles)
01012906005-01, 1901 CE: *Salòng umong* (Rewards Derived from the Construction of Chapels)
01012906006-07, n.d.: *Sòng thammat* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Pulpits)
Source: Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, National Library of Laos (n.d.)

stamps. Ready-to-use stickers were mass-produced in different shapes, indicating their popular usage and the development of the industrial paper business. Ink stamps were made of wood or rubber and engraved with institute logos. Red and blue were the most common ink colors. Fig. 6 shows examples from three palm-leaf manuscripts at the National Library; red and blue stamps appear in their first folios. The white label in the last picture is on the right-side margin that bears the beginning of the text. The label indicates the code "554," the title *Sòng thammat* (Rewards derived from the donation of pulpits), and the number of fascicles—"1 fascicle"—in the bundle.

V Manuscript Transformations in Luang Prabang

Anisong manuscripts appear to have been most strikingly influenced by new printing technologies, according to the survey by Bounleuth (2015c, 250) on manuscripts kept in the abode (*kuti*) of Pha Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto. For instance, a palm-leaf manuscript titled *Salòng khao phan kòn* (Rewards derived from the donation of one thousand rice balls) (BAD-13-1-0685, 1985 CE) was written with a typewriter and ink; a palm-leaf manuscript titled *Sòng pathip hüan fai* (Rewards derived from the donation of light floating vessels) (BAD-13-1-0714, n.d.) was revised with ink by later users; the colophon of a palm-leaf manuscript titled *Anisong katham bun taeng ngan* (Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies) (BAD-22-1-0899, 1997 CE) was written in blue ink. Blank school notebooks became popular for writing *anisong* manuscripts: for instance, *Sòng pha nam fon* (Rewards derived from the donation of monk robes in the rainy season) (DS 0056 00643, n.d.) and *Anisong thung* (Rewards derived from the donation of all kinds of religious flags) (DS 0056 00644, 2012 CE). *Anisong* preaching is a living tradition, and *anisong* manuscripts are still produced, with new technologies being adopted. The transformation of Luang Prabang's manuscript culture is relevant for the following six purposes: production, librarians' work, editions and revisions, affiliation and ownership statements, dedication rituals, and Buddhisization.

V-1 *Production*

New printing technologies are important for producing *anisong* manuscripts as both texts and objects. As mentioned above, the breakthrough project of manuscript reproduction led by Venerable Khamchan Virachitto in the late twentieth century was associated with modern printing. *Anisong* manuscripts came to be reproduced easily and quickly, in unlimited quantities. Printing houses manufactured paper, published books, produced

blank notebooks, and printed manuscripts in the *pothi* shape[20] using paper. Mulberry paper and industrial paper were popularly used for printing *pothi*-shaped leporello manuscripts known as *lan thiam* (ลานเทียม), literally, "artificial palm-leaf manuscripts" (they resembled traditional palm-leaf manuscripts). The manuscripts had blank spaces for filling in the names of manuscript donors (*phu sang* ผู้สร้าง) and deceased persons to whom the merit derived from donation was transferred. This practice reveals the surviving tradition of offering religious books to monasteries and the common belief in meritorious dedication to the dead. Traditions and beliefs remain alive even with the rise of modern printing technology (Silpsupa 2022, 116).

During my 2018 research trip to Phrae Province, I found *lan thiam* manuscripts at a supermarket near the provincial temple Wat Sung Men. The temple is known to be the largest repository of palm-leaf manuscripts. The manuscripts were, interestingly, placed near the bottom of the shelves, even though they were intended for donation to the monastery. I found that disrespectful because religious manuscripts are normally placed at an elevation. For the business owner, however, the manuscripts were simply commodities. Customers could buy them, write their names, and dedicate them to a monastery.

This case study reveals two dimensions of the transformation of manuscript culture. First, the relationships and statuses of manuscript commissioners and production agents[21] have changed. Compared to the traditional commissioning and dedicating of *anisong* manuscripts to monasteries, "scribes" have become "factories" of printed or *lan thiam* manuscripts, and "sponsors" have become "customers." The traditional merit-reciprocal relationship between scribes and sponsors has been replaced by a demand-supply or market-centered relationship, and the special aura that manuscripts take on in rituals has been weakened through the demand-supply circuit. Printed manuscripts are mass-produced and traded as normal products in the market; they are elevated to sacred objects only after being ritually dedicated to a monastery. Thus, spatial or

20) *Pothi* manuscripts are oblong, and their text is read by flipping upward. Giovanni Ciotti (2021, 866) explains *pothi* as an umbrella term for any manuscript made of a stack of folios in landscape format that are prepared for writing and possibly illuminations and which are flipped upward rather than sideways. The term is preferred to its Sanskrit etymological antecedent *pustaka*, or *pustikā*, or to alternative terms in other languages, since it is widely understood by scholars working on manuscripts from Central, South, and Southeast Asia.

21) Production agents and production practices are included under "production," one of the four key factors in the heuristic tool for comparative studies of manuscripts from different manuscript cultures. The tool was established in 2015 by a group of scholars led by Hanna Wimmer from the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures. The four key factors are production, use, setting, and patterns. Production agents can be people or institutes, either a group or a single person (Wimmer *et al.* 2015, 2–3).

environmental changes transform them from commercial products to sacred objects. The micro-settings[22] of the two locations (supermarket and monastery) determine the role of the manuscript. A book is a carrier of two relationships: between the book and its makers, and the book and its readers (Davis 1975, 92, cited in Hindman 1991, 3). Books are thus characterized by commercial and social factors, corresponding to two broad approaches in the sociology of literature. This study explains that literature is concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it (Laurenson and Swingewood 1972, 12) and that literature exists in its own sociology. The first and more popular approach adopts the documentary aspect of literature, arguing that it provides a mirror of the age. The second approach emphasizes the production aspect, especially the social situation of the writer (Laurenson and Swingewood 1972, 7–17).

Figs. 7 and 8 show hybrid productions combining new technologies (typewriters and computer printers) with handwriting.

The cover folio, containing the manuscript title, is handwritten in modern black ink to resemble printed books in which titles tend to be enlarged and aligned in the middle. The title is flanked on the left by the usage purpose, "*Anisong* liturgical text for religious merit-making occasions," and on the right by the sponsor and his affiliation, "Pha Khamchan Virachitta Thera, affiliated with Vat Saen Sukharam in Luang Prabang." The title folio is handwritten in the modern Lao script, like the text, which is typewritten

Fig. 7 Hybrid Typewritten-Handwritten Manuscript
Salòng khao phan kòn (Rewards Derived from the Donation of One Thousand Rice Balls)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), BAD-13-1-0685 (1985 CE), Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang

22) Also part of the four key factors of the heuristic tool, micro-setting and macro-setting are subdivisions of "setting": "The spatial setting applies to a very specific, 'micro'-setting (a lectern/a book shrine or, one step up, a scriptorium/a library), as well as the 'macro'-setting (a monastery/a city/a region)" (Wimmer *et al.* 2015, 6).

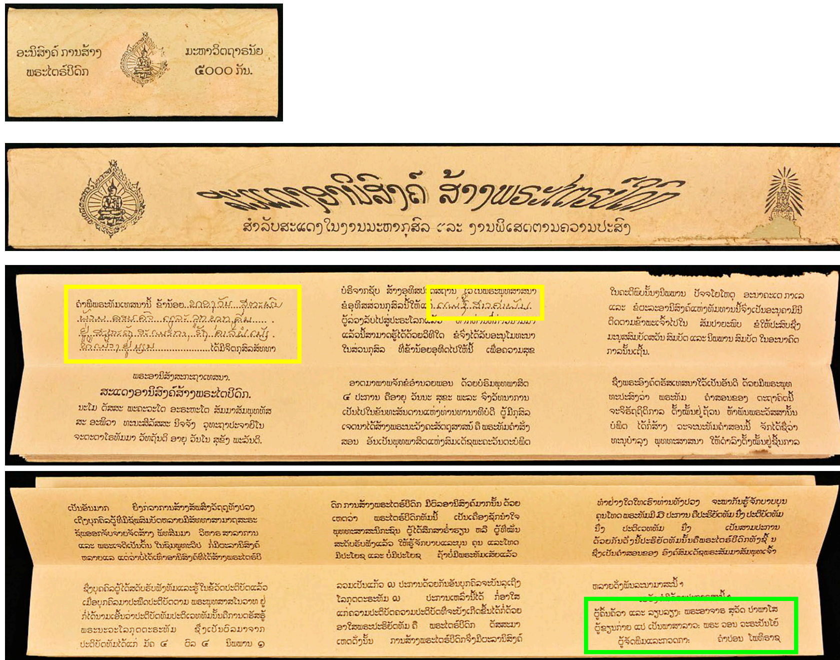

Fig. 8 Hybrid Printed-Handwritten Manuscript *Anisong sang pra tai pidok* (Rewards Derived from Copying the Buddhist Canon)

Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), BAD-13-2-033 (n.d.), Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang

in that script. The text is set in three columns to be read sequentially rather than in one column as in the case of handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts. The title and foliation orders are typewritten vertically on the left margins of the recto sides (black box, Fig. 7), influenced by the modern templates of printed books. This is different from handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts, in which foliation is generally on the verso side.

The manuscript in Fig. 8 is made of paper and computer-printed in the modern Lao script. The first picture shows a small paper cover for holding the manuscript in order, while the second shows the cover page. On the cover page the centralized title is enlarged and curved, followed by a statement showing the usage purpose: "[this manuscript text is] for liturgical uses on great merit-making occasions and at other special events." There are emblems in the left and right margins: the left one is a Buddha image in a locket-like frame; the right one is the national emblem of the Lao Kingdom, a triple-headed elephant under a tiered umbrella.[23] The left-side emblem is

23) The old Lao Kingdom was named Lan Chang, literally, "Land of a Million Elephants." Elephants thus symbolize the national identity.

identical to that on the paper cover, which is flanked by the title (left) and source of text (right).

The third picture shows the beginning of the text, which is—unlike in handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts—preceded by a colophon. The colophon dominates the first page and has blank spaces to be filled in with sponsors' names (two boxes in the third element) (ທອງວັນ ສຸຕະພົມ ພ້ອມຄອບຄົວ ແລະລູກທຸກຄົນ ຢູ່ສະຫະຣັຖອະເມຣິກາ ຣັຖຄາລີຟໍເນັຽ ທີ່ເມືອງຢູ່ນຽນ Thòngwan Sutaphrom and his/her family who live in Union City, California in the US) and merit recipients' names (ແມ່ຊື່ສາວຄໍາພັນ His/her mother named Khamphan). Providing a colophon at the beginning of the manuscript allows a recipient monk to navigate the names of sponsors to be announced in dedicational rituals, which is traditionally followed by a water-pouring act (*kruat nam*)[24] (see Silpsupa 2022, 351). The tradition of writing colophons at the end of the main text was perhaps unfamiliar among laypeople because monks and novices were mostly responsible for manuscript production and therefore knew where the colophons were. Colophons at the end of the text could be unintentionally overlooked, and manuscript donors could miss filling in their names. Hence, placing the colophon at the beginning made the donation act more visible—future readers and users could see the sponsors' names at first glance.

In the last picture of Fig. 8 the box in the last element shows the names of those who participated in the manuscript's production by composing the text from other sources (Master Monk Suwat Paphaso), transcribing and translating the text into the Lao language and script (Monk Wòn Varapañño), and printing and checking the manuscript (Khampòn Phothirat). While the work of the production team (scribal task) is shown through printing, the work of the dedication team (sponsoring task) is shown through handwriting, which eventually results in a *codex unicum* and creates an original. Dedicated manuscripts can thus be donated individually to one monastery. As the scribal tasks in this case included translation and consultation of other sources, this printed manuscript was not merely a copy like traditional handwritten manuscripts. Rather, the production team adapted the text in order to serve market demand. Such a scribal practice is somewhat innovative and leads to language change: "Observing language change over time, we can see that scribes are both active agents of change but also have a more passive role when—perhaps unknowingly and unintentionally—documenting variation or developmental tendencies and patterns in language" (Wagner *et al.* 2013, 3).

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24) In the *kruat nam* ritual, donors in the same group touch one another in a chain together with the water-pouring donor, with the belief that merit can be shared. After the monk finishes the blessing, the water is poured on a tree root, as it is believed that merit can be further transmitted and dedicated to the dead via the ground or the Earth Goddess (Th: *mae thòrani*, แม่ธรณี). The act is animistic, contagious, indirect, and positive (see Silpsupa 2022, 64).

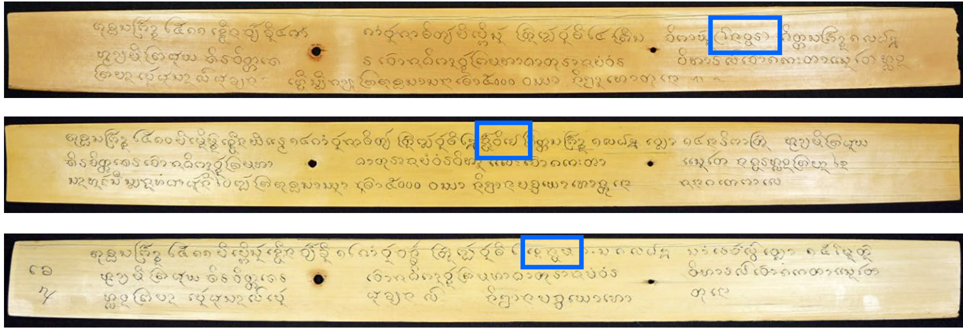

Fig. 9 Manuscripts with French Words in Colophons
(Top) BAD-22-1-0910, 1968 CE: *Sòng cedi* (Rewards Derived from the Construction of Pagodas)
(Middle) BAD-22-1-0934, 1967 CE: *Salòng hò pha* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Cloth)
(Bottom) BAD-22-1-0936, 1968 CE: *Sòng cedi* (Rewards Derived from the Construction of Pagodas)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang

Because computerization allows for the production of several copies, many people besides sponsors and scribes are involved in textual corrections and visual design, as shown by the list of people and their tasks in Fig. 8. Traditional manuscripts require precision and writing expertise from monks, while modern manuscripts require skillful typing and proofreading from lay technicians. The collaboration between sangha and laity is similar to the commissioning of handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts, though experts are required for more elaborate tasks:

> By changing their work and their writing, it [print] forced the writer, the scholar, and the teacher—the standard literary roles—to redefine themselves, and if it did not entirely create it, it noticeably increased the importance and the number of critics, editors, bibliographers, and literary historians. (Kernan 1987, 4)

French text occasionally shows up in colophons. The scribe of the manuscripts in Fig. 9 was a monk named Phui Thiracitto (ผุย ถิระจิตโต),[25] who sponsored *Anisong bun wan koet*, the aforementioned *anisong* palm-leaf manuscript typewritten by a monk named Cinna Thammo (จินนะธัมโม).[26] Thiracitto was familiar with commissioning typewritten palm-leaf manuscripts and with other modern—namely, French—influences. Fig. 9 shows the colophons of three handwritten manuscripts, with French words for years and months.

The three French month names, in the boxes in each element, are written in the

25) Phra Phui Thiracitto (1925–2005), a great intellectual monk and abbot of Vat Maha That, exclusively used manuscripts kept in his abode (Grabowsky 2019, 136).

26) *Anisong bun wan koet* (BAD-19-1-0137) is kept at Vat Siang Muan, Luang Prabang.

Dhamma script and orthography and indicate the pronunciations of *nowòn* (novembre), *chòngwiye* (janvier), and *desòm* (décembre). In the first picture *nowòn* is in parentheses, followed by the vernacular term "November," while the French words in the next two pictures replace the vernacular words for January and December, implying that the monastic scribal community was familiar with the French language—or even French people. Venerable Khamchan Virachitto's personal letters contain both English and French words: "They (i.e., personal letters) were written in various languages such as Lao, Thai, English and French, and in various scripts such as old Lao (pre-1975), modern Lao (post-1975), Tham-Lao, Thai, and Latin" (Khamvone 2015, 161). The use of French shows communications and interrelationships between the Lao and the French, as well as French influences on Laos, especially on Lao manuscript culture:

> It is not unusual for scribes to mix the orthographic systems (Lao: *labop akkhalavithi* or *lak khian thuai*) of both scripts, and in some instances, we find idiosyncrasies, reflecting particular multilingual and multi-ethnic cultural environments the scribes were exposed to. (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 7)

V-2 *Librarians' Tasks*

Librarians used new technologies for identifying and cataloguing manuscripts in archival storage. Individual fascicles of *anisong* manuscripts are identified by their titles, codes, and textual genre labels with inked stamps and paper stickers. These identifiers were added after the manuscripts were moved from their original repositories to be restored at the National Library, where they were catalogued and digitized for online access. Roman numerals and the Latin alphabet were used for the titles, revealing the participation of Westerners in librarians' work.

When the National Library (Fig. 10) was made a repository of manuscripts, categorization aids were devised to indicate textual genres, mark dates of manuscript acquisition, identify fascicle orders, and add tables of contents. Cataloguing facilitates the digitization of manuscripts. Begun in January 2012, digitization was completed through collaboration with the University of Passau and Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz and funded by the German Research Foundation and German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (National Library of Laos, n.d.). With manuscripts sourced from several repositories, the National Library required international financial and collaborative support to systematize registration codes, shelves, and online access. Coding phrases newly written on the manuscript pages or on glued white paper have different handwriting styles, scripts, and languages.

Fig. 11 shows a round paper sticker made and attached by a librarian on the verso

Fig. 10 Manuscript Bookshelves in the National Library of Laos (photo by Silpsupa Jaengsawang, March 15, 2017)

Fig. 11 Paper Sticker Used for Cataloguing
01012906006-04, 1870 CE: *Sòng thung lek* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Religious Iron Flags)
Source: Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, National Library of Laos (n.d.)

side of the last folio for cataloguing purposes. On it in blue ink is written "206" (code), *Sòng thung lek* (manuscript title), and "1 fascicle" (number of fascicles). The numbers 206 and 1 are written in Roman numerals and the words *Sòng thung lek* and *fascicle* in the modern Lao script. Instead of the Dhamma script, which was understood by only a limited group, librarians used the modern script and Roman numerals. Through the use

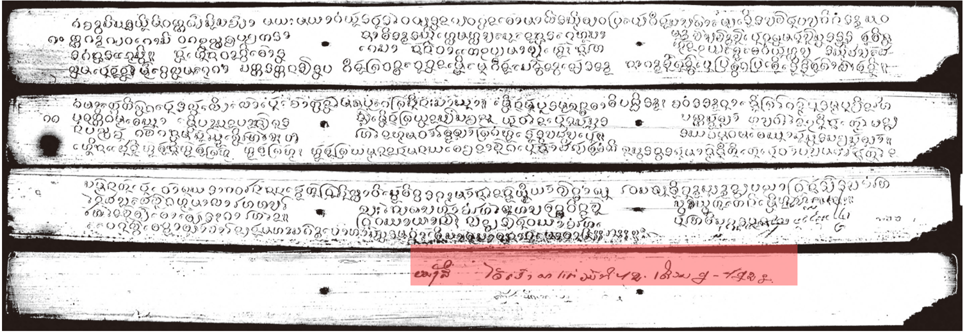

Fig. 12 Notation on the Date of Manuscript Acquisition
06011406004-09, 1847 CE: *Sòng pha sangkat lòng* (Rewards Derived from Merit-Making at Traditional New Year Festivals)
Source: Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, Vat Mai Suvanna Phumaram, Luang Prabang

of a non-Dhamma script and modern writing/printing materials, *anisong* manuscripts written in the Dhamma script gained a wider audience.

In Fig. 12 the gray-highlighted writing in the last folio reads "ໜັງສື ໄດ້ເອົາມາແຕ່ ວັນທີ່ 12 ເດືອນ 9 1938" (This manuscript was given on the 12th day of the ninth month in the year 1938). The date is written according to the Common Era, with the ninth month referring to September and not to the ninth month of the Lao lunar calendar (August). According to its colophon in the following quote, the manuscript was written in 1847 by a monk from Vat Sop Sikkharam before it was, almost a century later, forwarded to its current location, Vat Mai Suvanna Phumaram:

> จุลศักราชได้พัน ๒ ร้อย ๙ ตัว ปีเปิกสัน วันอาทิตย์ เดือน ๑๑ ขึ้นค่ำ ๑ รจนาแล้วยามกองดึก หมายมีเจ้าหม่อมพ่อมั่น วัดสบ เป็นมูลศรัทธา ได้สร้างธรรมปิฎกะผูกนี้ไว้กับศาสนาเท่า ๕ พันวัสสา ขอให้อานิสงส์ส่วนบุญอันนี้ ไปค้ำชูพ่อแม่ลูกเมียแห่งข้าพเจ้า ผู้ที่จุติไปสู่ปรโลกภายหน้านั้นแด ก็ข้าเทอญ นิพฺพา นิพฺพา ปรมํ โหนฺตุ
> [The writing of this manuscript was finished] in 1209 CS (1847), a *poek san* year, on a Sunday, on the first waxing-moon day of the 11th [lunar] month,[27] at the time of the evening drum (19:30–21:00). Cao Mòm Phò (father-aged monk) Man from Vat Sop [Sikkharam] was the principal initiator who sponsored the production of this *Piṭaka* religious manuscript to ensure the continuation of the five-thousand-year Buddhist era. May this merit support my parents, my wife, and my children who passed away and entered the other world. *Nibbā nibbā paramaṃ sukkhaṃ hontu*.

The notation was written as a new layer of affiliation (see Section V-4) with ballpoint pen in the modern Lao script, with Arabic numerals and the year of the Common Era. This implies either that the librarian of Vat Mai Suvanna Phumaram was more familiar

27) The date corresponds to 1209 Asvina 1 = Sunday, October 10, 1847. However, CS 1209 was a *moeng mao* year. The nearest *poek san* year was CS 1210.

Fig. 13 A Piece of Palm Leaf and Cloth Sewn to Strengthen Bookbinding and Edges (photos by Silpsupa Jaengsawang, February 21, 2017; February 24, 2017)

with modern and Western scripts or that the librarian wrote the notation for future librarians who may be inexperienced in the Dhamma script. The librarians' work in the two examples above can assist users illiterate in the Dhamma script.

V-3 *Editions and Revisions*

The third purpose of using new technologies was for editing and revising manuscripts, for both texts and objects/leaves. In sermonic practices, aids such as pronunciation markers and pause markers were added. Scriptural learning (Lao: *hian thet hian sut* ຮຽນເທດຮຽນສູດ, literally "learning preaching and learning sermons") is an important task (Lao: *thit-thang nathi* ທິດທາງໜ້າທີ່)[28] of the Lao Buddhist sangha, as defined by the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization in 2007 (Bounleuth 2015a, 51). Monks are thus required to devote themselves to supporting basic pedagogy.

The text of a manuscript is not shown to the audience during a sermon, and a number of manuscripts are filled with corrections made in ink. Inscribing manuscripts is a one-way process in which no stroke can be undone, especially in the case of writing tools that leave permanent traces, e.g., inked handwriting and traces of engravings. Mistakes cannot be corrected without affecting adjacent words, worsening surface texture, and reducing legibility. White correction fluid was commonly applied to manuscript surfaces to correct mistakes. Ink and ballpoint pens were used to write additions, delete mistakes, emphasize faded traces, provide a statement for organizing folios, and mark replacement positions. New writing and correction tools saved scribes time: scribes no longer had to discard wrongly written folios and start afresh. In the case of palm-leaf manuscripts, a small piece of palm leaf or cloth was sewn with yarn to fix fragile spots but not to make textual corrections (Fig. 13).

In Figs. 14 and 15 revisions were made with blue ballpoint pen: faded spots were

28) Examples of monks' tasks are: (1) administering the sangha, (2) educating the sangha, (3) disseminating the Dhamma and moral codes, (4) meditating, (5) managing public facilities, and (6) improving foreign relations (Bounleuth 2015a, 49).

Fig. 14 Corrections with Blue Ballpoint Pen
BAD-13-1-0714, n.d.: *Sòng pathip hüan fai* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Light Floating Vessels)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang

Fig. 15 Deletion of Lines and Sentences with Blue Ballpoint Pen
BAD-22-1-0181, n.d.: *Sòng sim* (Rewards Derived from the Construction of Ordination Halls)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang

emphasized, unwanted words were deleted or marked for deletion, and new words were added to replace unwanted ones. In Fig. 15 unwanted sentences were framed to be deleted and marked “discard” (ບໍ່ເອົາ) and “delete this row” (ແຖວນີ້ເອົາອອກ) in the modern Lao script. It is not unusual for *anisong* manuscripts to have corrections, even the most organized ones. Especially in the late twentieth century, manuscripts were regarded as utilitarian objects for scientific studies rather than sacred objects that it was sinful to interfere with; correctness of spelling was considered more important than the sacredness of the Dhamma script (Bounleuth 2015b, 213–214). Revisions made by later users are considered acceptable as long as the texts have not deteriorated and are still out of the audience’s sight. Since some colophons have scribal statements openly inviting users to correct mistakes, revisions are not regarded as sinful but as helpful, as in the following example:

> เจ้าหม่อมหมั้นได้สร้างสองทุงเหล็กไว้กับศาสนาโคตมะเจ้า ๕๐๐๐ วัสสา ขอให้ได้ดังคำมักคำปรารถนาสู่เยิงสู่ประการก็ข้าเทอญ ตัวหนังสือบ่งามเท่าใดแล้ว อายเจ้าหม่อมอายจัว ตกผิดเหลือผิดให้คอยพิจารณาหาใส่ได้เน้อ

Fig. 16 Indication of a Wrong Folio
01012906006-04, n.d.: *Sòng thung lek* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Religious Iron Flags)
Source: Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, National Library of Laos, Vientiane

> Cao Mòm (monk) Man sponsored this manuscript titled *Sòng thung lek* to ensure the continuation of the five-thousand-year Buddhist era. May all my wishes be fulfilled. It is embarrassing [if] monks and novices [see this manuscript, because] my handwriting is not elaborate. [You are allowed to] correct missing parts and mistakes. (*Sòng thung lek* [Rewards derived from the donation of religious iron flags], code: BAD-22-1-0366, Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang, n.d.)

In Fig. 16, according to the comment in the gray box—"ໃບນີ້ບໍ່ແມ່ນ ເຈົ້າຂອງໃສ່ຜິດ" (This folio is wrong; the owner put the wrong one)—a blue ballpoint pen has been used to delete the mistaken folio. The comment is written in the modern Lao script in vernacular, indicating a folio wrongly allocated. This wrong folio likely belongs to a Jātaka story, as it mentions a Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be).

V-4 *Affiliation and Ownership Statements*

Affiliation and ownership statements are reflected through a new layer of affiliation notes written in ink or ballpoint pen. The new layer reflects the tradition of manuscripts being circulated among local temples. Secular and even religious manuscripts were limited in number due to the lack of Dhamma script literacy, which was restricted to (ex-) monks and (ex-)novices. It was thus quite common for a sermonic manuscript to be available at only one monastery. Since circulating manuscripts could get lost, affiliation and ownership statements (monasteries and monks) were added to remind users to return the manuscripts to their original owners after use. As affiliation/ownership statements are not found in every extant manuscript, those with new entries may be considered to have been particularly popular: if a manuscript had not been borrowed often by other monasteries, an ownership statement would not have been added.

The newly added affiliations shown in the gray boxes in Figs. 17 and 18 read "[This manuscript] belongs to Monk Phui" and "Vat [temple] Pa Fang," respectively. Both

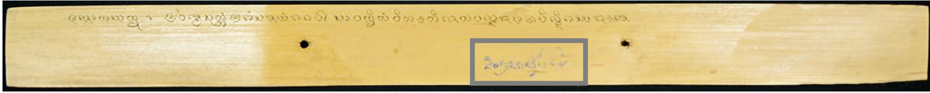

Fig. 17 Affiliation Monk
BAD-22-1-0913, 1975 CE: *Salòng thung lek* (Rewards Derived from the Donation of Religious Iron Flags)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang

Fig. 18 Affiliation Monastery
BAD-15-1-0031, n.d.: A compilation of *anisong* texts
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Pak Khan, Luang Prabang

ownership statements are written in blue pen in vernacular in the modern Lao script, at the end of the text. Monk Phui or Sathu Nyai Phui Thirachitta Maha Thela (1925–2005) was the abbot of Vat Maha That (Grabowsky 2019, 136); the manuscript in Fig. 17 is thus marked with his name as the affiliation or principal authority. This manuscript's colophon also mentions his name as the sponsor and scribe.[29] In the example in Fig. 18, the affiliation "Vat [temple] Pa Fang" was added in the last folio of the manuscript fascicle even though, according to its code preceded with "BAD-15," its current monastic archive is Vat Pak Khan. The manuscript was sponsored by a couple and donated to Vat Pa Phai, according to its short colophon: "มูลศรัทธาทิดยา ผัวเมียสร้างแล ป่าไผ่" (The principal sponsors [of this manuscript] were Thit [ex-monk] Ya and his wife. [The manuscript was donated to a temple] named Pa Phai). The manuscript's journey thus commenced at Pa Phai Monastery through the donation of the sponsors, traveled to Pa Fang Monastery, and eventually reached Pak Khan Monastery. The three monasteries are close to one another. Manuscripts were ordinarily circulated within a local community, with village monasteries having limited numbers of liturgical or educational manuscripts. Monastic libraries functioned as local or public ones. Manuscripts are thus held by either monasteries or individuals, and ownership is not static (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 12).

29) พุทธศักราช ๒๕๑๘ ปีรับเหม้า เดือน ๑๑ ขึ้น ๕ ค่ำ วันศุกร์ ยามแถเที่ยง หมายมีพระผุย ถิรจิตฺโตภิกฺขุ เจ้าอธิการวัดพระมหาธาตุราชบวรวิหาร และเจ้าคณะตาแสง วัดธาตุ กำแพงนครหลวงพระบาง เป็นเจ้าศรัทธาสร้างและเขียน
[The writing of this manuscript was finished in] 2518 BE [1975], a *hap mao* year, on the fifth waxing-moon day of the 11th [lunar] month, on a Friday, at the time of the late morning horn (9:00–10:30). [The manuscript was] sponsored and inscribed by Phra [Monk] Phui Thiracitto Bhikkhu, the abbot of Vat Phra Maha That Ratchabòvoravihan [Vat Maha That] and the head of the monastic subdistrict affiliated with Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang.

A number of colophons in *anisong* manuscripts include reminders that borrowed manuscripts need to be returned to their home affiliations.

V-5 *Dedication Rituals*

Since the dedication of manuscripts to a monastery requires a short religious ritual for *anumodanā* or a celebration of merit-making,[30] a number of manuscripts have the names of sponsors to be announced at the ritual. There are two kinds of donation: original donation and re-donation. Originally donated manuscripts were never donated elsewhere after being produced. Re-donated manuscripts were donated to a monastery before being circulated or "allowing" the names of new donors to be written. New donors can offer money to support monastic tasks such as repairing a monastic library, funding monk-scribes, and providing funds for monastic education. People still believe in merit gained through sustaining the Dhamma and the next Buddha Metteyya after the end of the current five-thousand-year Buddhist era.[31] The use of modern ink pen for writing re-donation statements reflects the living tradition of religious manuscripts being donated to monasteries. Re-donated manuscripts are viewed as multilayered manuscripts[32] as they contain representations of different donation authorities.

Fig. 19 shows a statement of manuscript donation newly written with blue pen in the modern Lao script: "ໜັງສືຊຽງສຸກຜົວສາວຈັນ" (This manuscript [belongs to] Siang [ex-novice] Suk [who is] the husband of Sao [Miss] Can). The names of the sponsors also appear at the end of the text, as shown in the gray box reading "Ban [village] Bak

30) Short verse recitations bless donors (*anumodanā*) without explaining the content of the text. They are different from *anisong* sermons, in which monks read out texts written in Pali and vernacular so that the audience can understand. Another difference is in the length of the two: while *anumodanā* verses last less than one minute, *anisong* sermons last about twenty minutes and are more structured and serious. Nicolas Sihlé explains *anumodanā* as an expression of thanks or rejoicing for alms or donations. Often described as "blessings," *anumodanā* verses aim at granting liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth and contain wishes for happiness, well-being, protection from misfortune, and fulfillment of the donor's desires (Sihlé 2015, 363).

31) "The earliest of these inscriptions is the 'Nakhon Chum' inscription dated 1356, during the reign of King Lithai. The inscription refers to the prophecy of the gradual disappearance of the Buddhist religion. The prophecy in fact was of some antiquity, usually being attributed to the fifth century Sinhalese commentator Buddhaghosa. It predicts five major disappearances to take place within five thousand years of the Buddha's death: that of the Tripitaka or sacred Buddhist scriptures, proper monastic conduct, the achievement of enlightenment and *nirvana*, the institution of the monkhood, and finally the Buddha's relics. The final extinction of the Buddhist religion would be followed by a dark age in which the people, lacking a moral teaching to guide their actions, would commit sins and be condemned to rebirth in hell" (Jory 1996, 11).

32) Multilayered written artifacts have various formatting practices: adding or deleting contents or even combining written artifacts, such as codicological units, in a composite (Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures 2023).

Fig. 19 Statement of Original Donation
BAD-22-1-0440, n.d.: *Sòng anisong pitaka* (Rewards Derived from Copying the Buddhist Canon)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang

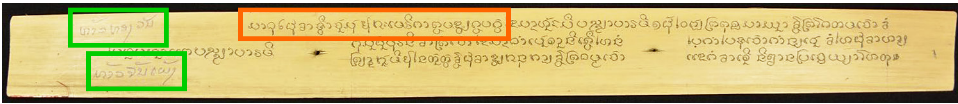

Fig. 20 Statements of Original Donation and Re-donation
BAD-13-1-0155, n.d.: *Panya barami* (Rewards Derived from Following the Thirty Perfections)
Source: Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP), Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang

Lüng, Siang [ex-novice] Suk [and] Sao [Miss] Can," which was inscribed with a stylus in the Dhamma script before the new text was written. The only occasion where sponsors are addressed is a dedication ritual in which a recipient monk announces the names of donors when praising their meritorious deeds. The paracontent[33] in the manuscript provides barely any traces, probably why the sponsors' names are repeated in the modern Lao script. However, the position of the last folio leads to speculation on the purpose of the new writing. It was likely an aid for a recipient monk who was moderately skilled in the Dhamma script but responsible for holding a dedication ritual in which the sponsors' names had to be announced. The names were therefore written in the modern Lao script in the last folio or back cover, which was easily visible.

Fig. 20 shows the first folio of a palm-leaf manuscript containing a colophon. Unlike this example, colophons in *anisong* manuscripts were normally at the end of the text. This photograph shows original donation and re-donation. The initial colophon was inscribed in the Dhamma script with a stylus and mentions "[A]Can [teacher] Suk" and his family, who lived in the United States (black box). Framed in the gray rectangles, the names "Thao [Mr.] Thòng Wan" and "Thao [Mr.] Can Pheng" were newly added in the modern Lao script with blue pen, obviously showing the re-donation of this manuscript by the two new donors to gain shared merit from dedicating the manuscript. Re-donated manuscripts can thus contain several donor names. Like the example in Fig. 19, the modern Lao script may have aided a recipient monk inexperienced in the Dhamma script in a dedication ritual.

33) Paracontent is a set of visual signs (writing, images, marks) in a manuscript in addition to the core content and serves three functions: structuring, commenting, and documenting. Paracontent can be part of the original production or a later addition (Ciotti *et al.* 2018, 1).

V-6 *Buddhisization*

Like in other regions whose manuscript cultures were transformed through new printing technologies and writing tools, manuscripts as objects in Laos were influenced by modernity in the postcolonial period. Particularly in Luang Prabang, however, *anisong* manuscripts were regarded as texts in the contemporary cultural context. They were created for actual events and to Buddhisize secular[34] or non-Buddhist rituals—such as birthdays and marriages—as evidenced by the extant *anisong* manuscripts. *Anisong*, as studied by Gregory Kourilsky and Patrice Ladwig (2017–18), is regarded as a case of hybrid writing, a genre composed in Pali and vernacular languages to link vernacular writings to local customs:

> A review of existing manuscripts in Laos reveals that while the most ancient manuscripts available (sixteenth century) are Pali texts, vernacular language writings progressively replaced Pali to such an extent that from the nineteenth century onwards, the vast majority of texts is actually written in Lao, but interspersed with Pali fragments, sentences or words. These hybrid writings belong to specific categories such as *nissaya*, *vohāra*, *sap*, *anisong* (P. *ānisaṃsa*), *sutmon* (P. *sutta-manta*), *gāthā*, *nithan*, (P. *nidāna*), *tamnan* ("chronicles"), and so forth. Actually, Pali (or, to a lesser extent, Sanskrit) scriptures are used as a "tool box" of notions, concepts and technical terms, whose main purpose is to connect vernacular writings and local customs to what Steven Collins has aptly termed the "Pali imaginaire." (Kourilsky and Ladwig 2017–18, 200–201)

Formerly non-Buddhist rituals were elevated to Buddhist ones by inviting a (chapter of) monk(s) to give an *anisong* sermon explaining meritorious rewards. Among other definitions given by various scholars, Justin McDaniel defines *anisong* and *salòng*, which also deal with non-monastic rituals, as follows: "*Ānisong* (*ānisaṃsa*) are 'blessings' that honor gifts made to the sangha and are often preludes to honor other Buddhist texts. *Xalǭng* (*Chalong*) are 'celebratory' texts used to describe and instruct, often, non-monastic rituals" (McDaniel 2009, 130). Manuscripts concerning birthdays and weddings did not originate from Buddhism, because birth and marriage, as part of the cycle of birth and rebirth, are contrary to Buddhism's ultimate goal of enlightenment (*nibbāna*). To Buddhisize these secular ceremonies, *anisong* manuscripts were composed from

34) The terms "religious" and "secular" originated in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, the former defining the communal life of Christian monks and the latter the world beyond monastic communities. With the diversity of religious beliefs and behaviors making it difficult to provide universal definitions, applying these terms to non-Western cultures and societies is sometimes misleading and inappropriate. In general, there is a separation between the church and state that during some periods developed into inclusive and exclusive secularism. The former is an adapted coexistence of the state and church, while the latter has a clear-cut division between the two (Kettell 2019). The general understanding is that "religious" and "secular" are opposites: the former aimed at gaining ultimate goals (e.g., eternal peace, immortality, celestial rebirth) under the guidance of prophets and the latter unrelated to goals taught by prophets. This is the interpretation applied in this paper.

several (non-)canonical sources and associated with the teachings of the Buddha so that audiences at *anisong* sermons could be convinced the Buddha's teachings could be applied to their everyday lives.

Although the two main duties of Buddhist monks were—and still are—scriptural learning and meditation training, monks were invited to give blessings, hold religious sessions, and add a sacred element to nonreligious ceremonies (Bounleuth 2015a, 44; Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 3). The Buddhist sangha held a privileged position in traditional Lao society and was in times of political crisis even able to intervene in secular matters (Grabowsky 2007, 137). There was a reciprocal relationship between monks and laypeople: "while a *vat* (temple-monastery) determines the identity of a community, the members of that community have the obligation to maintain the *vat*" (Khamvone and Grabowsky 2017, 19). Buddhisization of secular ceremonies was a result of mutual agreement between the sangha and the laity who promoted activities that were unrelated to the goal of *nibbāna* but not sinful. Buddhism does not prohibit secular life, and the Buddha even delivered teachings for those who were not part of the monkhood, e.g., *Iddipāda* (Paths of accomplishment),[35] *Brahmavihāra* (Sublime states of mind),[36] *Saṅgahavatthu* (Bases of social solidarity).[37]

Anisong manuscripts containing sermonic texts to Buddhisize secular rituals and ceremonies and even other profane matters have been discovered in Luang Prabang: *Anisong taeng ngan lü kin dòng* (Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies), *Anisong tham bun wan koet* (Rewards derived from merit-making on birthdays),[38] among others.[39] Ten *anisong* manuscripts concerning birth and marriage

35) There are four paths of accomplishment: will (*chanda*), effort (*viriya*), dedication (*citta*), and examination (*vīmaṁsā*) (Payutto 2012, 160).

36) There are four sublime states of mind: loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Payutto 2012, 124).

37) There are four bases of social solidarity: generosity (*dāna*), kindly speech (*piyavācā*), useful conduct (*atthacariyā*), and participation and proper behavior in all circumstances (*samānattatā*) (Payutto 2012, 143).

38) Source: DLLM, code: 06011406005-15, Vat Mai Suvanna Phumaram, Luang Prabang, 1973 CE. *Anisong* manuscripts on rewards derived from merit-making on birthdays are hardly found, since birth is part of the cycle of rebirth, which is contrary to the goal of *nibbāna*. Birthday celebrations are thus secular events. Even though there are only a few manuscripts, a number of clues show their frequent use as shared objects at birthday sermons, reflecting the popularity of merit-making at birthday ceremonies (see Silpsupa 2022, 70–71).

39) For example, *Anisong kratham bun taeng ngan* (Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies) (Source: BAP, code: BAD-22-1-0899, Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang, 1997 CE); *Anisong taeng ngan bao sao* (Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies) (Source: BAP, code: BAD-22-1-0923, Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang, 1975 CE); *Anisong katham bun taeng ngan* (Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies) (Source: BAP, code: BAD-22-1-0467, Vat Maha That, Luang Prabang, 1997 CE).

(1952–98) have been discovered in Luang Prabang. Nine of them were donated by monks, implying monks' openness to Buddhisizing secular rituals by giving *anisong* sermons. Within the expansion of the *anisong* preaching tradition, secular activities contributing to beneficial outcomes are valued as merit-making:

> This "Buddhization" of formerly non-Buddhist rites and rituals is best reflected in *Anisong* texts which are generally known under the terms Salòng or Sòng in Lao. . . . More surprisingly, collections of manuscripts also include titles referring to non-Buddhist rituals, such as marriage ceremony (*Anisong taeng ngan*) in which monks are not supposed to intervene in this region of Southeast Asia. In truth, *Anisong* could be seen as a paradigm of the principle of what we might call "Buddhization by means of text," that is, the legitimization of a given practice by its written record with a sacred script (the Dhamma script) on a sacred object (the manuscript). In this way, any local custom may become unquestionably "Buddhist" if it is included as a subject in an *Anisong*. (Bounleuth and Grabowsky 2016, 3)

One example is a manuscript titled *Anisong salòng taeng ngan lü kin dòng* (Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies), which is combined with another text titled *Anisong thawai pha pa* (Rewards derived from the donation of monk robes) to make a multi-text manuscript,[40] from Vat Mai Suvanna Phumaram. The text pertains to two types of marriage in India: *awaha*,[41] which is performed at the husband's house and the couple live in the husband's house; and *wiwaha*,[42] which is performed at the wife's house and the couple live in the wife's house. It explains what the wealthy man (*setthi*) Thananchai taught his devout and generous daughter Nang Wisakha (Visākhā),[43] the ten proper habits of a good wife and how to cherish married life. The manuscript was used in wedding ceremonies to teach couples how to keep the family peaceful and happy, even though marriage was not regarded as a way to enlightenment. With hopes for a bright future, luck, and propitiousness during life transitions or rites of passage, ceremonies could be Buddhisized by making merit, offering alms to monks, and inviting monks to pray and give blessings. This was often accompanied by an *anisong* sermon.

40) The manuscript is coded 06011406004-17 and was written in 1962, on the first waning-moon day of the third lunar month, at 14:00, by the Supreme Patriarch and Pha (monk) Wandi from Vat Pha Khom.

41) The Thai Royal Institute defines *awaha* (noun) as "taking a woman to live [in one's house]." In the *awahamongkhon* marriage, common in northern India, the groom takes the bride to live in his house (Thai Royal Institute 2013, 1410).

42) The Thai Royal Institute defines *wiwaha* (noun) as "taking [someone] out." In the *wiwahamongkhon* marriage, common in southern India, the groom is taken to live in the bride's house. In Thailand marriage is called *wiwaha*, no matter where the bride and groom live (Thai Royal Institute 2013, 1124–1125).

43) Visākhā attained the initial stage of sainthood immediately after first hearing the Dhamma from the Buddha (Buddha Dharma Education Association and BuddhaNet 2008).

Evidently, Buddhisizing *anisong* manuscripts reflects the harmonious coexistence of non-Buddhist activities in the Buddhist context and the reciprocal relations between the sangha and laity, who, as long as they are not sinful, support one another.

VI Conclusion

During the period of French colonialism, the relationship between Lao people and their French administrators influenced the use of the vernacular language as well as manuscript culture in Laos. New printing technologies introduced by the French affected the Lao manuscript culture in the following four ways. First, projects pertaining to the dissemination of Buddhist teachings were supported by new writing tools and writing support for mass production. New printing technologies helped monks and novices to propagate the Buddha's teachings. Second, the librarians' tasks of storing and categorizing manuscripts in a repository used the new technologies of writing tools, paper labels, and especially the Roman alphabet to encode pronunciations for vernacular titles of *anisong* manuscripts; this reflected the participation of foreigners. Third, delivering a sermon requires familiarity with the recorded text; monk-preachers thus took time to practice and in the process marked and corrected texts written on palm leaves by using pens. Due to this, the original texts inscribed with a stylus look completely different from the text added in ink. Lastly, affiliation markers were written mostly in the modern script, reflecting the illiteracy in the Dhamma script of the monastic lay assistants who sometimes transported and stored manuscripts in monastic libraries.

There were four kinds of actors involved in the use of new technologies: sponsors, scribes, monks, and librarians. The modern Lao script was accompanied by new technologies, with a gradual decrease in the use of the Dhamma script. The modern Lao script was used to compensate for the dwindling knowledge of the Dhamma script and to accommodate those who could not read the script but were still part of the manuscript culture.

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17010106001-11. สลองแปงผาม *Salòng paeng pham* [Rewards derived from the construction of pavilions]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: Tham Lao; 11 folios; CS 1014 (1652 CE).

BAD-13-1-0155. ปัญญาบารมี *Panya barami* [Rewards derived from following the Thirty Perfections]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: Tham Lao; 8 folios; n.d.

BAD-13-1-0157. รวมอานิสงส์: สองดอกไม้ธูปเทียน; สองรักษาศีล; สองฟังธรรม; สองเผาผี; สองมหาเวสสันตระชาดก [A com-

pilation of *anisong* texts: *Sòng dònk mai thup thian* rewards derived from the donation of flowers, incense sticks, and candles; *Sòng haksa sin* rewards derived from precept observance; *Sòng fang tham* rewards derived from listening to the Dhamma; *Sòng phao phi* rewards derived from the participation in funerals; *Sòng maha wetsantara chadok* rewards derived from listening to Vessantara Jātaka]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: Tham Lao; 40 folios; CS 1306 (1944 CE).

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BAD-13-2-033. อานิสงส์สร้างพระไตรปิฎก *Anisong sang pha tai pidok* [Rewards derived from copying the Buddhist canon]. Mulberry paper manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: modern Lao; 6 sides; n.d.

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BAD-19-1-0137. อานิสงส์บุญวันเกิด *Anisong bun wan koet* [Rewards derived from merit-making on birthdays]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: modern Lao; 9 folios; CS 1346 (1984 CE).

BAD-21-2-004. สลองทานดอกไม้ *Salòng than dòk mai* [Rewards derived from the donation of flowers]. Mulberry paper manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: Tham Lao; 10 folios; CS 1357 (1995 CE).

BAD-22-1-0181. สองสิม *Sòng sim* [Rewards derived from the construction of ordination halls]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: Tham Lao; 11 folios; n.d.

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BAD-22-1-0467. อานิสงส์กระทำบุญแต่งงาน *Anisong katham bun taeng ngan* [Rewards derived from merit-making at wedding ceremonies]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; scripts: Tham Lao and modern Lao; 10 folios; CS 1359 (1997 CE).

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BAD-22-1-0910. สลองเจดีย์ *Sòng cedi* [Rewards derived from the construction of pagodas]. Palm-leaf manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; script: Tham Lao; 9 folios; CS 1330 (1968 CE).

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DS 0056 00644. อานิสงส์ทุง *Anisong thung* [Rewards derived from the donation of all kinds of religious flags]. Industrial paper manuscript; languages: Lao and Pali; scripts: Tham Lao and modern Lao; 32 sides; CS 1374 (2012 CE).

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BOOK REVIEWS

A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine
C. Pierce Salguero
New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

In her review of C. Pierce Salguero's 2014 book *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China*, Janet Gyatso observed: "There has been a small explosion in the study of Buddhist medicine in the last several years" (Gyatso 2017, 96). This boom has since expanded even further, being felt primarily in the fields of Asian medicine and Buddhist studies. It has become increasingly clear to people within the field that the time has come to "leave the ghetto," to quote a remark by Gyatso on another occasion[1)]—that the subject of Buddhist medicine is relevant beyond its own confines. It is relevant also for historians of medicine, for historians of Asia, and for historians in general. Hence the need, and the huge challenge, to provide a general history of Buddhist medicine, something that *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine* set out to accomplish. And it has definitely succeeded.

If there is anyone who is up to this momentous task, it is Salguero. He has spearheaded many endeavors related to Buddhist medicine for almost two decades. The present book is, in many respects, an outcome of several of these initiatives.

Salguero has written extensively on Chinese Buddhist medicine and Thai medicine, edited two monumental collections of premodern and modern primary sources on Buddhist medicine, and set up a Facebook discussion group. He started the Blue Beryl podcast (Salguero 2022) and is also the editor-in-chief of *Asian Medicine: Journal of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine* (formerly *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity*). There are other undertakings to his credit, but for lack of space these will suffice to give the overall picture.

Spearheading the above efforts has meant, first, that Salguero has for quite some time probed and written about the tricky question of what "Buddhist medicine" might mean, and indeed how difficult it is to define. Buddhist medicine is not really a field in any static, potentially comforting manner, but rather—as Salguero himself has defined it in several of his publications—a "moving

1) Janet Gyatso, opening address to the 11th seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Bonn University, August 2006.

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target." There is no potential comfort in ever knowing the field, since one can never even define it, let alone cover it. But one can probe it and explore its multiple facets, and this is precisely what Salguero has been doing. He is a pioneer, sufficiently content to dwell in uncharted territory.

Scholarship aside, the ubiquity of the fascination with mindfulness in today's world is reason enough for a need for a history of Buddhism and medicine that is academically rich, readable by a general audience, as well as useful for teaching. And so, as Salguero states in his introduction, the primary motivation of his book is to situate this contemporary fascination within the long, multifaceted history of the myriad ways in which Buddhism and medicine have intertwined.

The field of Buddhist medicine—if we zoom out to observe where this "moving target" is roaming—covers nearly two and a half millennia and most of the inhabited world. To be sure, the focus is predominantly on Asia, but in the modern period it has extended also to Europe and North America. In any case, the breadth of the field is enough to keep an army of scholars busy for a long time.

Salguero realized early on that compiling a history of Buddhist medicine on his own would be impossible, that it would have to be a collective endeavor. And so, a decade or so ago, he took on the momentous task, working together with a few dozen people. A major part of the process involved enlisting a host of scholars to translate and introduce a breathtaking collection of primary sources from the entire expanse of the Buddhist world dealing with medicine, health, and healing (broadly conceived) in the premodern age (Salguero 2017) and the modern age (Salguero 2020). The 2017 anthology included 62 contributions from leading scholars across the fields of Buddhology and Asian medicine in an impressive linguistic variety: Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Pāli, Khmer, Thai, Burmese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Mongolian. The 2020 anthology, again with leading scholars but shorter with 35 chapters, was also remarkably varied in both its geographical expanse and its types of sources: it started with Buddhist monastic physicians' encounters with Jesuits in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japan and ended with "Conversations about Buddhism and Health Care in Multiethnic Philadelphia." Both anthologies followed a similar format: each chapter included a text (or interview, sometimes a few short texts), preceded by an introduction contextualizing the source and followed by a short list of suggested readings.

From the outset, Salguero envisaged the project as a trilogy: the two anthologies, with their breathtaking wealth of material, would serve as the basis for the volume under review here, which is a general overview of the topic. *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine* is thus the third part of the three-stage project. Building on the two books that he edited, Salguero has woven an effective and readable synthesis of a wealth of primary and secondary sources covering the entire Buddhist world. The outcome is a history of almost two and a half millennia of links between Buddhism and medicine in Asia, Europe, and North America, a very much needed and readable introduction to the field. It is essential reading for anyone interested in Buddhism, the history of medicine, or both. The breadth of the book makes it useful for both students and scholars.

Salguero provides plenty of food for thought on the complex question of what we might call Buddhist medicine, a discussion that continues previous ones by him and others. While the book's title avoids the impossible-to-define "Buddhist medicine," the book itself begins with a succinct discussion of the term, its problematics and usefulness.

The first part of the book provides an overview of the relevant doctrines and practices as found in the three divisions of Buddhism, termed here as Nikāya, Mahāyāna, and Tantric Buddhism. Salguero masterfully presents the essence of these three contexts in an accessible way, suitable even for those with no background in Buddhism, and provides the backdrop for the topics discussed in the second part of the book. The second part is devoted to the myriad forms of transformation undergone by the ideas and practices discussed in the first part. The author frames this part of the volume under the rubrics of circulations, translations, localizations, and modernizations. He eloquently steers us through both the macro-level processes and micro-level examples. We get a clear sense of what Buddhist medical networks consisted of and the multiple ways in which knowledge moved. In the chapter devoted to translations, Salguero discusses the key texts that were translated and adapted across the Buddhist world, and how through this tracing of the movement of texts across time and space—observing not just straight-up translations but also cultural translations and adaptations—we are able to understand the ways in which people understood and practiced Buddhist medicine. The author then moves on to the specifics of some aspects in his discussion on domestications, displacements, and "translocations"—cases where ideas originating from India planted seeds that grew into Buddhist-related and culturally specific medical traditions. He has chosen two case studies within this overall category: Tibet and Southeast Asia, each having its own trajectory of development.

The last two chapters, "Modernizations" and "Contemporary Buddhist Medicine," bring us to the present. The historical background and the analysis of key themes discussed up to this point serve as a strong base for these two fascinating chapters. These chapters help the reader appreciate and reflect on contemporary Buddhist medicine, mostly likely to be found in a local clinic or school, no matter where one is.

So when, for example, Salguero discusses both the enthusiasm and the backlash of mindfulness in the "Contemporary Buddhist Medicine" chapter, and more generally the links between Buddhism and biomedicine of our time, it is thanks to the principles, histories, and analyses that he has dealt with up to this point that we can understand these links as yet more cases of the complex multidirectional processes "entangled in complex feedback loops" (p. 167) that the book has discussed throughout.

Salguero points out that while "the history of Buddhist medicine in previous historical periods is enormously complex," the contemporary ocean of practice, with its "fractal swirl of currents and counter currents," is even more chaotic (p. 174).

The author provides plenty of food for thought on how Buddhism and medicine have interacted

and how they continue to do so. This overall theme is relevant not only in the history of Buddhism and medicine but also in the more general questions of relationships between religions and medicine, questions that have been discussed more at length with regard to other religions—primarily Christianity, but also Islam and to a lesser extent Judaism. In this sense, too, this book is important as it brings the discussion of Buddhism and medicine within the playing fields of relevant mainstream disciplines where Buddhism and medicine are still not sufficiently known, taught, and researched. With this excellent volume at hand, we are in a much better position to hope that Buddhism and medicine will become better known in contexts and disciplines where they are not yet well known.

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Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia

Karen Strassler

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020.

It took a decade for Karen Strassler to come up with her second and much-awaited book. Indeed, it could have taken much longer to do the ethnographic fieldwork, converse with a whole gamut of sources, and finally put together a monograph that sustains her analysis of the productive work of images in contemporary Indonesia. *Demanding Images* is a fascinating study that younger scholars can only aspire to do. The author introduces the concept of the "image-event" or "a political process set in motion when a specific image or set of images erupts onto and intervenes in a social field, becoming a focal point of discursive and affective engagement across diverse publics" (p. 8) to help us analyze Indonesian visual culture in the wake of Suharto's downfall.

Benedict Anderson remarked that the mass medium of print enables the creation of the nation when it conjures communities, when people of the same polity imagine others as fellow subjects in the nation. Strassler broadens this continuing imagination by exploring images existing in the public sphere: photographs, videos, money, street art, graffiti, banners, posters, and digital media. As both cause and consequence, images are demanded by certain situations as they also demand the creation of different kinds of order for the people that produce and consume them. In other words, images neither simply exist nor are created: they happen and make things happen.

Strassler calls attention to "ludic" images instead of the "evidentiary" mode of documentary images such as photographs. Ludic images "deploy remediation, repurposing, and reworking to generate new constellations of truth and modalities of revelation on the surface of the image" (p. 24), which are suggestive of the pleasurable, conservative, redemptive, and revolutionary functions of images, depending on one's manner and purpose of using them. Yet there is something that exceeds the intentionality of the image-maker and user. There are possibilities of reversal and an opening to new ends. After reeling from three decades of authoritarian rule, Indonesia is experiencing an exponential proliferation of images in its public sphere, at once a testament to initiatives beyond what was once the center, which is the state, and part of the worldwide technological and artistic innovations in crafting images.

The author begins by discussing the doctoring of the rupiah, the country's currency, in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis of 2008 that devastated the economy and led to Suharto's resignation. Suharto's images resurfaced as a man hiding in shame, asking the public whether times had been better during his three-decade rule. In response, people manipulated Suharto's face on printed currency as the image of money became the focal point for criticizing the New Order regime, which had delivered rapid economic growth but collapsed under the weight of fiscal mismanagement and cronyism. Arrested students attended law court hearings using pictures of Suharto's face as masks, demanding that he appear instead and be accountable. The abundance of counterfeit money, called *aspal* (a combination of *aslu* or "authentic" and *palsu* or "false")—issued by the state bank, no less—exposed the corruption that lay at the heart of Indonesian politics. Counterfeit money also served as a platform for evoking nostalgia for the Sukarno era as a counterweight to the Suharto period, when Megawati Sukarnoputri, Sukarno's daughter, appeared on fake currency. The politician Megawati also had authoritarian tendencies of her own, though, and her short-lived presidency failed to deliver on the promises of democracy. Strassler deepens the anthropological conceptions of the face as a mask, the fetish of money and power, and examinations of appearances: the malevolent force hiding behind the mask and images, the Javanese pleasure in appearances, and the prowess (and cowardice) and strongman's rule centrality (and its decentralization and deterritorialization) in the archipelago.

While photography became pivotal as a *document* for witnessing history during the Reformasi and as a *play* in the satirical exposition of corrupt regimes, it became fodder for misogynistic and

racist attitudes when its presence and—especially—its absence became a defining ground for adjudicating the rape cases of ethnic Chinese women in the heady days of Suharto's ouster. Since the prosecution of crime relies on proof, for which photography provides the supreme objective and impartial form, the disinclination on the part of Indonesian Chinese women to present documentation of their sexual abuse highlights the question of the authenticity of both their violation and their status as Indonesians. Here, what Strassler calls "the dream of transparency" (p. 68) grapples with "forced visibility" (p. 73), and national pride staves off the "international gaze" (p. 79). The possibility of photographic falsification, "conjur[ing] specters of obscurity and manipulation" (pp. 80–81), not only belies transparency but also discloses the gendered dimensions of violence in what was supposedly a democratizing society. Indonesian Chinese women are victimized anew by this obsession with transparency that works against them: Who would want to be stigmatized and retraumatized by photos of one's violation? It is telling that the bodily violations of Indonesian Chinese suggest their persistent marginalization from the Indonesian body politic. The author does not include pictures in this second chapter, so as to avoid replicating the violence of the visual on silenced subjects.

The third chapter shows leading political figures embroiled in sex scandals that could not be denied because of the authenticating evidence of videos and photos. At a time when citizens are finally cherishing the production and circulation of images beyond state control, it is the lurid side that (expectedly) animates the public and produces a productive relationship between democracy and morality. Self-proclaimed telematics expert Roy Suryo's role is pivotal in unmasking pornography, though his expertise is questioned by hardline Islamic groups that support the politicians. It is also through publicity that porn stars have tried to make amends or correct public perception by public displays of piety. The following chapter delves into the controversy generated by the *Pinkswing Park* exhibit showing naked celebrities. Usually, artworks attract a limited audience, being enclosed in galleries and museums that tend to alienate the populace who must spend time and money and may not know much about art. Yet this time around, the policing gaze of political Islam thrust the image into the public sphere and subjected the exhibit to a moral campaign that radicalized adherents of political Islam. The Indonesian art world and its secular middle-class champions, in turn (and unfortunately), responded by segregating artistic production from religious interpretation, saying that the artworks' value should be appraised by the keen eyes of artists, critics, and curators.

The last chapter, "Street Signs," is particularly absorbing as it analyzes the people's appropriation of public spaces through street art. Dominated by state and private interests simultaneously announcing and advertising their control and soliciting support, urban inscriptions by guerrilla street artists testify to the reclamation of the commons. However, the same spaces are being repossessed by government agents who are out to fabricate overwhelming support for extrajudicial acts of punishing criminals. And here is where the possibility (or threat) of reversal to more

authoritarian times portends both residual and emerging repressions and dares artists and citizens to be bolder in critiquing and wrestling state power. In 2013, street artists called for justice for the human rights activist Munir, who had been assassinated in 2004, and yet the same spaces of mediation are now being reconquered by evil forces most likely guilty of present-day violations. This is coupled with Yogyakartan natives' rebuke of "outsiders" who use the city as a canvas for social critique, revealing the other kinds of social boundaries regnant in the country. While the banner-posting operation was surreptitiously carried out by the military immediately after the prison-killing operation, the presence of banners in public places conceals right-wing and counterrevolutionary violence insofar as it proclaims public approval from authors hiding in anonymity. Banners proclaiming support as if it was coming from the public demonstrate the manipulation of the people and uncover the tendentious character of actually existing democracy. This "as if" quality is central to images as it unwraps artifice, (un)truth, play, potentiality, and redemption.

Strassler's conclusion draws our attention to the most explicit demonstration of public visibility of the contemporary moment: the selfie. Belying accusations that backing for the popular candidate (and by now twice elected and outgoing president) Joko Widodo (Jokowi) was fake or exaggerated, supporters flooded social media with selfies of their attendance at campaign rallies, even demonstrating the technical details that indexed the mammoth crowd. As a self-made entrepreneur and political figure with no ties to the New Order regime, Jokowi also embodies the "dream of transparency" in fighting the lies and fakery of his electoral opponent, Prabowo Subianto, the dictator Suharto's former son-in-law and himself a military general involved in the murder case of Reformasi activists. Although selfie-taking demonstrates a very active kind of self-produced visibility using the benefits of technology, group selfies by middle-class participants at electoral campaign rallies also show the limits of democracy: this is not substantive democracy—a democracy of civil freedoms, human rights, and material equality—but electoral (and to some extent) elite (because elitist) democracy, congenial to neoliberal self-fashioning that includes insofar as it excludes many others. "Neoliberal volunteerism" that calls for a "mental revolution" (pp. 236–237) is far removed from the structural transformation that revolutions desire. Admiring themselves and relishing the technology through which they produce themselves, the middle classes and educated people also tend to look down on others and brand them as susceptible to fake news and disinformation, the unworthy subjects of democracy.

It is expected that the relatively open political climate of the last two and a half decades will result in the full flowering of image production and contending ideas in the marketplace of democracy. Yet this marketplace is something that is presumed—not a given, and maybe not the ideal. As more and more people gain the knowledge and creativity to craft images, there is a tendency for image creation and reception to be monopolized by "people who know" instead of being fully exercised and enjoyed by the "people from below." The former aggressively remediate our understanding of the world, limiting our capacity for changing it. There is the gatekeeping of

democratization, its subjection to problematically nationalist, elitist, religious, partisan, conservative, and even right-wing and counterrevolutionary pursuits. Who has the right to say and determine what democracy is and what determines its course? The authenticity expert? The religious cleric? Art curators and critics? Government bureaucrats? Old elites seeping into new politics, displaying their revanchism in the public sphere? Strassler's book is a perceptive study of the visual in a time of neoliberal democracy, and we hold our breath for more of her work.

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Ramayana Theater in Contemporary Southeast Asia

Madoka Fukuoka, ed.
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Ramayana Theater in Contemporary Southeast Asia provides an introduction to Ramayana performances across contemporary Southeast Asia, with chapters on Cambodia (Sam-Ang Sam on a range of Khmer art forms inspired by the *Reamker*), Thailand (Hinata Shinsuke on Khon masked dance and Hiramatsu Hideki on Ramayana-inspired films by Chaiyo Studio), Indonesia (Umeda Hideharu on Wayang puppet theater in Bali and Fukuoka Madoka on Sendratari dance drama in Java), Singapore (Takemura Yoshiaki on dance performance in the Indian diaspora community of Singapore), and Japan (Fukuoka Shota on Ramayana displays at the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan).

Each of the contributors has taken care to make their work accessible to non-specialists, so the book should be of interest not only to Ramayana scholars but also to scholars working in Southeast Asian media studies more generally. While the title refers to Ramayana "theater," the chapters actually cover a wide range of performance media including dance, song, film, animation, comic books—what the editor calls "dramatic art forms"—along with other visual arts as well as cultural practices such as astrology. For readers unfamiliar with the Indian Ramayana, there is an appendix with a summary of Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana, which is an important point of reference for all the performance traditions discussed in the book.

The chapters are written such that they can be read independently. This results in some redundancy, as historical background about the Ramayana is provided repeatedly. However, each time the writers present the specific literary and performance history in a way that is most relevant to their own national context, providing a kind of crash course in the many centuries of Ramayana literature and performances throughout Southeast Asia.

Because the chapters are introductory overviews, they do not engage in detailed critical or

theoretical analysis, although they do provide hints about the approaches that would be most relevant within each context. For example, globalization and cultural heritage preservation are important themes in Sam-Ang Sam's chapter about Khmer arts both in Cambodia and in the Cambodian diaspora. Government cultural policies play a key role in Takemura Yoshiaki's chapter about the Singapore government's involvement in Ramayana preservation efforts and also in Fukuoka Shota's chapter about the evolving presentation of Ramayana-related materials at the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan. Tourism culture and "tourist gaze" is another recurrent theme, as in Umeda Hideharu's discussion of Kecak performances in Bali which date back to the 1930s and Fukuoka Madoka's chapter on Sendratari dance drama in Java.

Each chapter references the political contexts that shaped the meaning of the Ramayana in different places at different times throughout Southeast Asia. In her introduction to the book, Fukuoka Madoka discusses Suharto's support for Ramayana puppet theater performances during the economic crisis in Indonesia in the late 1990s. Hiramatsu Hideki situates Chaiyo Studio's *Hanuman vs. 7 Ultraman* in the context of strained Japanese-Thai relations in the early 1970s, with the Thai hero Hanuman fighting side by side with Ultraman, a Japanese hero, retelling a story from the Thai *Ramakien* in the *tokusatsu* style of Japanese film. Writing about Ramayana theater in Cambodia, Sam-Ang Sam discusses the teaching of traditional arts to the second generation of Khmer-Americans whose parents fled the Khmer Rouge regime. Hinata Shinsuke discusses more recent events, describing tensions between Thailand and Cambodia regarding the origin and ownership of Ramayana performance traditions in light of the 2018 UNESCO decision to include Ramayana art forms from both Thailand and Cambodia on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Several studies in the book demonstrate how media such as film and comic books have popularized elite performance art forms to reach new audiences. New technologies also play a role. For example, Takemura Yoshiaki looks at how Facebook can make performances available to global audiences, as with Singapore's Indian Heritage Center's CultureFest 2020 (Digital Edition)—a "festival focused on the richness of Indian arts, culture, and heritage as seen through the lens of the Ramayana" (p. 125)—which reached well over a million people in Singapore and beyond via Facebook.

The book itself takes advantage of a new technology platform as well: thanks to the power of YouTube, it is possible to enjoy three brand-new Ramayana performances by Indonesian artists that were commissioned as part of this project. These commissioned artworks are accessible at the editor's YouTube channel via QR codes and URLs supplied in the book. The descriptions of these artworks appear in the final part of the book, along with supplementary materials from the artists:

- Didik Nini Thowok, an internationally renowned cross-gender dancer, plays the role of Hanuman's lover, Urang Rayung, in a new performance that he created, inspired by both Indonesian and Cambodian sources.
- Nanang Ananto Wicaksono, a "post-traditional" shadow puppet artist and animator, has created

a new animated film that depicts Rama's despair when he loses Sita despite his victory over Ravana.
- Ken Steven, a choral music composer, uses both song and dance to tell the story of Sita's trial by fire, with a chorus of performers from Voice of Bali (who also have their own YouTube channel).

These three works of art provide a kind of portal through which one can see many of the themes discussed in the chapters come to life in actual performance. For example, consider the theme of gender, which is central to the plot tensions of the Ramayana story. Didik Nini Thowok wears a mask when he dances, with exquisite beauty, as the sea goddess, and then in the book he is seen posing for a photograph after the performance, holding the mask in his hands—what does that juxtaposition tell us about gender as performance? In Nanang Ananto Wicaksono's animated film, the character of Ravana appears in traditional wayang style, but then his heads begin to multiply: one pops up out of his head, and then another, and then the heads start popping out of other parts of his body until one sees the ten heads of Ravana, although depicted emerging from his body in a way that is different from any traditional style of representation. Then those heads separate from Ravana's body and participate independently in the fight with Rama, a visual drama that is possible only through the new medium of animated film. It is a perfect example of the blending of old and new which is a recurrent theme in the chapters of the book. So too with globalization and disparate cultural influences: just listen to the unexpected harmonies of Ken Steven's *Sinta Obong* that are used to depict the traditional drama of Sita's trial by fire (*pati obong*); one can even see how the harmonies are arranged, because Steven's musical score is also included in the book.

In addition to the artworks commissioned for the book, one of the chapters—"Death of Kumbhakarna: Interpretation of the Story by *Dalang* of Balinese *Wayang*"—comes from an ethnomusicologist, Umeda, who is also a Japanese *dalang* puppeteer. Thus, his scholarship is informed by his own experience as a performer of the Kumbhakarna story, based on a script he learned in the 1990s from I Nyoman Sumandi, a puppeteer from Tunjuk, Tabanan in Bali.

Each chapter is accompanied by a detailed bibliography for both primary sources and secondary scholarship. While the focus of the chapters is on performance traditions, there is also much useful information regarding written Ramayana traditions; for example, Hinata's chapter on Khon performance in Thailand includes a detailed account of the *Ramakien* textual tradition, and Fukuoka Shota's chapter on the Ramayana in Japan provides a fascinating version of the Ramayana story from the *Hobutsushu*, a twelfth-century Japanese Buddhist text. The religious diversity of Southeast Asia is another important theme throughout the book, including both the Buddhist elements in various Southeast Asian Ramayana traditions and Islamic elements in Indonesia.

In sum, this volume is a welcome addition to what might be called the "many Ramayanas" genre that began with Paula Richman's edited volume *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (University of California Press, 1991), which included A. K. Ramanujan's

1987 essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." Thanks to Fukuoka Madoka and her collaborators, the many Ramayanas of Southeast Asia have now been made more accessible not just to scholars and specialists but also to a general audience of all readers who want to learn more about one of the world's greatest epic traditions.

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In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human-Becomings in West Papua

Sophie Chao
Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.

Nausea. Anger. Grief. With these three words, Sophie Chao introduces the reader to the feelings that overwhelm her whenever she drives through the vast, monotonous fields of monocrop oil palm that blanket Marind lands in West Papua. Two years after I first read Chao's book, I am still viscerally affected by her powerful portrayals of Marind communities and the devastation to which they have been subjected. They make me shudder.

Nausea. Chao's poetic and poignant style of writing enables the reader to feel revulsion at the destruction of Marind lifeworlds, which comprise human and more-than-human kin, most especially the generous, nurturing sago palm. Marind people are also nauseous: they retch with the fumes of agricultural chemicals and choking smoke from corporate forest clearing. They recoiled when Chao offered to show them drone footage of the surrounding plantations: the sight of tens of thousands of hectares of decimated forest was too distressing. *Anger*. Chao explores the corporate greed and the false promises of development and jobs that government officials roll out to justify the ruin that plantations cause. Marind people are angry, but they must be careful about expressing anger in a context of repression and retribution. *Grief*. Chao clarifies that what has been lost is gone forever. Marind people know there is no way to reconstitute their multispecies lifeworlds or the memories, stories, and dreams that anchored them to particular landscapes and events. They survive, but they are not healthy: shorn of access to sago palms and the plants and animals that sustained them, they eat white rice and instant noodles, if they can afford them. Cassowaries that belong in the forest wander into hamlets confused and lost, unsure where they are supposed to be. Dreams are nightmares that bring no rest. Skin dries up and loses its shine. Rivers cease to flow. Everything is out of kilter.

Together with Pujo Semedi, I have studied West Kalimantan's oil palm plantation zone and the particular form of domination to which customary communities are subjected when their land is occupied by corporations (Li and Semedi 2021). The violence we witnessed in West Kalimantan

was mainly "infrastructural": once community forests and farms have been flattened by bulldozers and a plantation is installed, the violence is built into the landscape and there is little further need for guns and guards. Yet in West Papua, as Chao explains, arrests, beatings, and mysterious disappearances are ongoing; the military and police are directly and continuously involved in surveillance and patrols; plantation roads are guarded by men with guns; and activists and researchers are exposed to attack. For Marind people, crossing a plantation to get to remnant patches of sago forest is a dangerous venture. Everything is company property. Like the lost cassowary, Marind people struggle to figure out where they are supposed to be in a hostile landscape that has no place for them.

Tragically, the desolate world Chao describes is the future: almost all the land in Sumatra and Kalimantan that is suited for oil palm has already been licensed to oil palm corporations—22 million hectares thus far, a third of Indonesia's farmland. Now the corporations are fixated on Papua as the new frontier. Much of the land in Papua is peatland and swamp forest, quite unsuited for oil palm, but corporations owned by multinationals and Indonesian tycoons are taking it anyway—more than 3 million hectares thus far—backed by government officials who are paid for issuing plantation licenses (Varkkey 2012; Transformasi untuk Keadilan Indonesia [TuK] 2018; Chain Reaction Research 2019). Hence, money will still flow, contractors will contract, forests will be felled, and roads will be built even if not a single palm is planted.

In the government's eyes, as Chao shows, Marind people are primitives and their dependence on the forests is evidence of their backwardness. Their success in sustaining themselves for countless generations with knowledge and skill count for nothing since they do not produce for markets and furnish no profits for middlemen or payoffs to government officials. According to Indonesia's land law, Marind people have no legal right to their customary land—they are mere squatters on the state-claimed forest. Hence, from a government perspective, taking over their lands and forests has no cost—and as for the people, they are, in the words of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, "like mosquitos," a nuisance to be flicked out of the way (Geertz 1963, 110).

Corporations and their government allies make no provisions for how Marind people and other customary landholders will sustain themselves once their land and forest is gone. The prospect of plantation jobs is hollow since most jobs go to migrants, and many Marind hesitate to work for corporations that have wreaked such devastation. But sustaining themselves in the old way is increasingly difficult: plantation corporations do not just occupy some of the land, they occupy all of it; and when multiple plantations are located side by side, they leave no space for customary landholders to survive. Rather, plantations "creep right up to the edge of the villages, encroaching on sago groves, hunting zones, sacred graveyards, and ceremonial sites" (p. 20). Marind people cannot move away to avoid oil palms; they are forced to live in their shadow.

As the map in Fig. 1 shows, in the district of Merauke, where Chao focused her research, oil palm plantation concessions (white lines), industrial timber plantation concessions (white dashes),

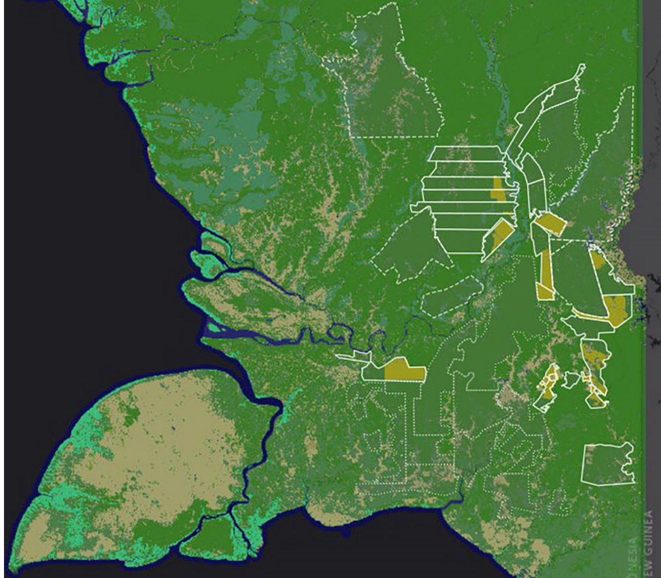

Fig. 1 Merauke District, West Papua
Source: Nusantara Atlas (2022)

and logging concessions (dotted lines) have taken control over huge areas, excluding previous land users and land uses in the name of corporate-led development.

Chao brings to her writing two sensibilities: that of an activist researching the dispossessory dynamics of oil palm expansion across the Southeast Asian region (Colchester and Chao 2011), and that of an anthropologist steeped in contemporary theorizing around multispecies being and critiques of the residual coloniality of anthropology. This book demonstrates both sensibilities, but its tone is set by the second: it is the words, practices, and analyses of Chao's Marind interlocutors and their entanglement with multispecies kin, living and dead, that direct the narrative. The author explains how she designed her fieldwork in collaboration with her Marind hosts, respecting their decisions about what she should write about and how they wanted their lives and struggles to be represented. The book is based on 18 months of fieldwork, much of it spent with Marind families in the sago groves. It was during these ventures that Chao learned how Marind people live, work, play, recall histories and adventures, and map out their worlds through stories and relationships. The subject matter could easily lend itself to exoticism, but there is no trace of it in Chao's careful prose. Nor does Chao succumb to the temptation to end the book with a redemptive twist—as if Marind peoples' survivance somehow outweighs the devastation and the reader can relax. Chao notes that she is still haunted by everything she experienced, and I am still haunted by her writing. It is an exceptional book on all counts—theoretically astute, ethnographically rigorous, and above all profoundly moving.

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Public Health in Asia during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Health Governance, Migrant Labour, and International Health Crises

Anoma P. van der Veere, Florian Schneider, and Catherine Yuk-ping Lo, eds.
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022.

Global Health and South Asia in a Time of Crisis: A Short Review

Introduction

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic may soon be behind us, researchers will be occupied for years trying to better understand its causes and how to handle the complex issues it brought up (Ali *et al.* 2024). Choosing the right actions required to address public health concerns in an effective manner while preserving confidence in public authority will be one of the challenges facing policymakers going forward (Aslam and Gunaratna 2022). In that regard *Public Health in Asia during the COVID-19 Pandemic* is relevant and provides some guidance, though it leaves certain significant holes unfilled. The chapters in this edited volume provide an extensive study of the worldwide

public health crisis that has plagued the world since January 2020, as well as how labor migration—a crucial component of the global political economy—complicated the virus's spread. However, the selection of case studies feature examples that are too distinct from one another to produce workable policy recommendations. And some of the important players have been left out of the debate on migrant labor despite its being recognized as a crucial aspect of global health governance.

Theme and Goals of the Book

The editors' main contention is that because Asia is a diverse continent, its nations responded to the pandemic in a variety of ways. However, the inclusion of Malaysia and Indonesia raises concerns about the exclusion of other significant nations such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines, all of which rank among the top ten sending countries in the world for migrant arrivals. The book would have benefited from these nations' perspectives since it claims to be a discussion on transnational labor migration in connection with public health in Asia. These additions would undoubtedly have resulted in a longer book, though simply one chapter per nation would not have provided enough room for all crucial concerns. The briefness of the book's chapters, which provides limited opportunity for policy prescription and analysis, is another drawback.

Despite its drawbacks, the book clarifies that East Asian nations were prompt in their pandemic response. Thankfully, none of the writers have adopted the clumsy defense that the success of East Asian regimes may be explained by a common Confucian history and the presumed greater willingness of inhabitants to submit to rulers. Instead, the chapters emphasize the various aspects of state capacity that are either enabled or hindered by a small number of crucial policy decisions. As is sometimes the case with edited volumes with several contributors, the writings in this collection offer a range of viewpoints on the same subject. With the notable exception of the three coeditors, who are qualified to conduct research on global health, public policy, and political communication in East Asia, the majority of the contributors are experts on migration studies in the region. They have produced concise, factual chapters that include a surprising number of current online references. The editors' lack of expertise in migration studies may account for why only two of the four essays in the section on transnational migration truly address the issue.

Covid-19 and Global South Challenges

The volume's best chapters are the first three, which provide a global background for the initiatives by Asian governments. In the first chapter, Satoh Haruko points out that China has not been able to establish itself as a serious competitor to the United States for global leadership in spite of its economic expansion in the early stages of the pandemic. According to Koga Kei, the competition between China and the United States has shown both countries that they would be better off

learning from each other than depending on outside superpowers. This has given the nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations a valuable chance. In their examination of the long-term effects of SARS's unexpected spread across Asia two decades ago, Ishikawa Yumi and Kohara Miki discover that scientific collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) lessened the public's mistrust of governments in the wake of the pandemic. Significant details are added to the story in the next four chapters. I wish there had been a chapter on the ways in which South Asian societies handled Covid-19 under the most challenging conditions, including widespread poverty and constrained state capacity. Surprisingly, these societies fared better than many much wealthier nations.

In response to the argument that China had an excessive influence on the WHO's decision making during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, Gong Xue and Li Xirui contend that China's contribution to the organization was insufficient for it to have undue influence. They go on to say that China's health diplomacy backfired and that its fragmented and illiberal governance hindered it from responding to the pandemic in a timely and effective manner. In his chapter, Brendan Howe contends that despite the major powers' challenges in managing the pandemic, middle-sized nations like South Korea took advantage of the opportunity to excel internationally by closely following the WHO's guidelines, and they did so rather well. Catherine Yuk-ping Lo's case study of Taiwan reveals an even more startling paradox: despite being shut out from the global community due to pressure from China, Taiwan managed to limit the impact of the pandemic. Taiwan made the case for its involvement in the WHO by taking required actions prior to the global organization declaring the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). Anoma van der Veere argues in his chapter that Japan's suspicion of the WHO stemmed from the organization's perceived over-deference to China, a perception that was reinforced by the WHO's delay in issuing the declaration of a PHEIC. The main lesson to be learned from these four chapters is that even if the WHO's reputation was severely damaged by mistrust stemming from the acts of major powers, it could still support global governance through cooperative efforts amongst smaller nations.

The volume's third section discusses domestic Covid-19 reaction strategies. In their chapter, Nurliana Kamaruddin and Zokhri Idris note the value of a competent civil service in maintaining national unity in Malaysia in times of political unrest. They also observe that the pandemic made political authorities aware of the need to consider migrant workers' rights in order to balance the goals of economic expansion, political stability, and health security. The Korean government's acceptance of multilateralism and collaboration with the WHO in response to Covid-19 is discussed by Kim Eun Mee and Song Jisun, with the important caveat that the public lacks faith in the WHO. Nguyen Anh Tuyet observes that prior to the WHO issuing its Covid-19 warning, Vietnam, like Taiwan, took early steps to restrict movements across its border with China. The nation's relative success in containing the spread of the disease may be attributed to this early intervention,

though worries about the sustainability of this achievement will persist given the underfunding for the care of vulnerable groups such as the elderly. Studying the relationship between the state and society in Vietnam during the pandemic, Mirjam Le and Franziska Nicolaisen note that mobilizing the populace through nationalist appeals guaranteed adherence to public measures to contain the pandemic and strengthened the regime's legitimacy. However, they come to the same conclusion as Nguyen, noting that these gains were undermined by a lack of transparency and inadequate care for economically vulnerable populations. This section's value is diminished by the choice of case studies: two chapters focus on the same nation (Vietnam), and the other nations (Malaysia and South Korea) are so dissimilar that it is hard to draw any meaningful conclusions about the best ways to handle a health emergency like Covid-19.

The book's fourth section is even less successful: just two of the four chapters fulfill the promise made to explore how the pandemic affected international migration and the world economy. Lo emphasizes the degree to which China's Covid-19 containment measures compromised the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) performative legitimacy and the extent to which the nation's confinement threatened to undermine Li Keqiang's proposed "dual circulation strategy" for economic growth. The strategy called for a greater reliance on domestic consumption and a decreased reliance on exports. The Covid-19 pandemic caused significant losses in international migration, a subject that is not addressed in this chapter. The problem of international migration is tackled head on in the second and fourth chapters. Liu Mei-Chun draws attention to the vulnerability of Taiwan's public health system stemming from a lack of health coverage for migrant live-in caregivers of senior patients. She advises that the gap needs to be closed in order to limit the outbreak and protect the general public's health. Shibata Saori notes that the WHO's and national governments' attempts to offer guidance on public health were impacted by the socioeconomic structures in various nations. The different versions of capitalism that exist in many nations affected these nations' ability to manage public health during the Covid-19 epidemic. Sylvia Yazid examines sending nations on the other side of the labor migration spectrum. She notes that Indonesia needs to address both the danger of transmission posed by workers returning home and the domestic pandemic situation at the same time.

Concluding Thoughts

In summary, though this is a valuable collection of writings, the imbalance in case studies is one of its shortcomings. One chapter per country would have been plenty. An additional chapter on any of the nations discussed would have been insufficient to make up for the knowledge that could have been gleaned from the experiences of other significant Asian nations that surprised everyone by much being less affected by the pandemic than could have been anticipated given their circumstances.

It would have been good to hear about the policies of Thailand, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. These five nations, each in their own unique manner, produced outstanding outcomes (Ryan 2020). When it comes to the number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, Taiwan, South Korea, and the three heavily populated South Asian nations performed better than Japan, and the Philippines' death toll was almost identical to Japan's. These nations did not see the same death rates as wealthier Western European nations despite their comparatively low public investment in healthcare.

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Just Another Crisis? The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Southeast Asia's Rice Sector

Jamie S. Davidson, ed.
Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.

Nearly all fields of social science have analyzed the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Just Another Crisis?* focuses on the pandemic's impact on the agricultural sector in Southeast Asia. This edited volume is based on the academic products of an online seminar held during the pandemic, in December 2021, by the National University of Singapore. The editor and the contributors, who attended the seminar, are experts on food, agricultural policy, and economics from research institutes in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore. As indicated by its subtitle—*The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Southeast Asia's Rice Sector*—the book sets out to evaluate the pandemic's impact on the rice sector in Southeast Asia. The significant worldwide negative impacts of the pandemic on the industry and service sectors can be easily imagined. However, a novel conclusion of this book is that the pandemic did not cause a serious rice crisis in Southeast Asia, although it did have other negative effects, such as a widening

of the inequity gap and increased food insecurity among people experiencing poverty. It is suggested that one of the main reasons for this outcome is that, even though unpredictable ecological factors naturally influence agricultural production in Southeast Asia, the region had good rice harvests during the period due to favorable weather conditions. The damage from and social reactions to the pandemic were more severe and restrictive in urban areas, affecting urban economies more than rural areas and agriculture. Furthermore, as reported in Chapter 4, rural areas absorbed urban workers who were unemployed due to the pandemic, which potentially mitigated the negative impact (this point is discussed further below).

Given the pandemic's mild impact on the rice sector, the authors did not find any significant agricultural policy reform in Southeast Asian countries during the period. The findings might be a bit removed from those expected at the initial stage of this research project; however, the authors immediately discovered another space for their academic work. They paid attention to important policies set up before the pandemic in each country's rice sector, carefully examined their subsequent developments during the pandemic, and elaborated on the expected directions in the post-pandemic period. As a result, this book covers not only the impact of the pandemic on the rice sector but also a broader review of rice policies, a review of the historical background, and an analysis of long-term national policies. The authors have ties to policymakers in each country, which allowed them to closely examine the details of the cases while considering the national context. The profound knowledge and experience of the authors make this book a valuable contribution.

Chapter 1, by Jamie S. Davidson, the book's editor, lies at the core of the work. It provides a general background and concisely presents the volume's major findings. This chapter is also the hub for the following five chapters, providing insightful summaries of them. Chapters 2 to 6 deal with the detailed cases of five Southeast Asian countries, which may be classified into three types based on their international supply and demand for rice: the importer countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, which despite their substantial rice production regularly import the commodity to help meet domestic demand; the pure importer, Singapore, whose position is exceptional in Southeast Asia; and the big exporter, Thailand, which has long produced a significant surplus of rice. The case studies are valuable records of dynamics in the agricultural sector (especially rice policies) during the pandemic, a historic worldwide crisis, providing specific hints to researchers and policymakers in the region to be ready for the next crisis.

The different types of Southeast Asian countries are united with regard to the political significance of rice. Even though the relative importance of agriculture in their national economies has steadily decreased, their rice-related policies—with respect to international trade, price controls, subsidies, and so on—have been prioritized. The conventional framework addresses the old but unsettled dilemmas of producer or consumer, rural or urban, and agriculture or other industries; these are closely related to debates on national food security and the mitigation of

economic disparity (poverty alleviation)—in other words, the "production versus livelihood" framework referred to in Chapter 1. Vested interests also come into play.

Chapter 2, by Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, reveals the historical development of Malaysia's rice policy by analyzing the subsectors from input to consumer over an extended period, including previous rice price crises. Arshad points out problems with the government's strong commitment, such as monopolized rice imports and centralized distribution of agricultural input.

In the Philippines, the liberalization of rice imports was enacted before the pandemic. Chapter 3, by Roehlano M. Briones and Isabel B. Espineli, explains that the policy resulted in cheaper prices in the domestic rice market, suggesting that prices stabilized under the policy even though Vietnam, a major rice exporter, temporarily suspended exports during the pandemic. Consumers in the Philippines would have welcomed the situation, but support for domestic producers was necessary. Liberalization in the rice sector was a controversial issue and, according to Briones and Espineli, could have caused political instability.

Chapter 4, by Bustanul Arifin, deals with the case of Indonesia, including a discussion of government intervention in the rice sector. Interestingly, it reports that the growth of the agricultural sector during the pandemic partially contributed to Indonesia's riding out the recession, although the country suffered a high death rate and negative economic impact. Compared with the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s, the impact of the pandemic was less severe, at least in the Indonesian rice sector, and the latter may be said to have been "just another crisis."

In Thailand also, rice is an issue according to the conventional framework, but in the context of an exporter. Chapter 5, by Thanapan Laiprakobsup and Manthana Noksawak, finds that the government has historically controlled domestic prices and taxed rice farmers. The authors examine the recently implemented subsidy program and the income guarantee policy to support producers. A large number of farmers could be an important political actor in democracy in general. The chapter finds that rice farmers have been left behind in Thailand, recently as well as during the pandemic.

Singapore's food security is guaranteed by economic liberalism; thus, this was the country whose food sector was most affected by the pandemic. Chapter 6, by Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros and Paul S. Teng, finds that Singapore paid more attention to its national food security after the pandemic, learning from the experiences of Vietnam's rice export restriction during the pandemic and the previous global food price crisis in the 2000s. The authors insist on the necessity of an import diversification strategy.

While this volume highlights the commercial aspects of rice production and distribution, especially in the international market, rice has another aspect as an staple subsistence crop in Southeast Asia. It is important in Southeast Asia at the household level as well as the national level. It is consumed extensively by rural residents, and the amount required for domestic

consumption is much larger than the amount exported and imported—although the ratio of the rural population to the urban population and the share of rice in household expenditure (as shown in the table on p. 12) have decreased in recent years. The impact of the pandemic on the rice (or agricultural) sector in Southeast Asia might have been softened by the subsistence nature of rice farming in the region.

Meaningful socioeconomic relations between rural and urban areas in Southeast Asia emerged during the pandemic. Chapter 4 points out that in Indonesia, many urban laborers who temporarily lost their jobs returned to rural areas and engaged in the agricultural sector during the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s as well as during the pandemic. The author refers to this as the "ruralization phenomenon" (p. 106). Such functioning of rural areas and agriculture as a safety net during an economic crisis has been observed widely in Southeast Asia. Rural villages in Northeast Thailand absorbed unemployed urban laborers from Bangkok during the Asian Financial Crisis (Sukaesinee *et al.* 2004) as well as the financial crisis in the late 2000s (Tomita *et al.* 2018); the same phenomenon seems to have occurred also during the pandemic. In Myanmar also, many international migrants to Thailand and Malaysia returned to their villages during the pandemic. Takahashi Akio (2020) found an economic shift from non-farm to farm work within rural villages during the pandemic in Myanmar, referring to it as "re-agrarianization" and pointing out the important role of agriculture as a fallback sector during a crisis. Many urban workers in Southeast Asia have the option to return to rural areas, where the cost of living is cheaper, and to work in agriculture if they choose. The pandemic shed light on the enduring rural–urban social bonds, which have existed for a long time and continue to exist even in contemporary Southeast Asia, where de-agrarianization has taken place. This could be an indication of society's resilience to shocks such as the pandemic, supported by the subsistence aspect of agriculture.

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Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia: From the Past to the Present

Bérénice Bellina, Roger Blench, and Jean-Christophe Galipaud, eds.
Singapore: NUS Press, 2021.

Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia: From the Past to the Present offers a fresh perspective on sea nomad-related issues by presenting, linking, and formulating new insights through a multidisciplinary lens. The book's contributors, who previously focused on different research areas, bring a broader perspective to studying maritime culture, history, archeology, and area studies related to sea nomads. Their research findings, fused into one cohesive volume, shed light on the sea nomads of Southeast Asia and highlight the importance of further exploring this topic.

This book delves into the nuanced issues faced by the Sama-Bajau, Orang Laut, and Moken/Moklen communities within their local contexts. Through case studies spanning Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Myanmar and some that mention sea nomads in the Philippines, readers are presented with ethnographic and longitudinal data critically analyzed through various approaches and methodologies. The volume covers topics ranging from history and archeology to diaspora, genome, language, and intercultural trading across its 14 chapters.

This book is the second synthetic research project on sea nomads in Southeast Asia. The first research book on them was written by David E. Sopher (1965), an edited version of his PhD dissertation. Sopher used the literature review method to present the relationship and single identity of sea nomads in insular Southeast Asia. He profiled the general information of each sea nomad group through a single lens as a cultural geographer. However, since his research method was based on armchair philosophizing, details and grassroots issues regarding sea nomads were not considered in his book, titled *The Sea Nomads*. However, *Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia* highlights diverse aspect of sea nomads, such as their nomadic nature, cultural time frame, language, and history. One minor limitation of this book is that it uses data and issues irrelevant to the complexities of sea nomads in the contemporary world (even though the subtitle of the volume is *From the Past to the Present*)—for example, differences and differentiations within subgroups and emerging challenges such as land title issues, borders, nationalities, massive tourism development, conservation agenda, and climate change. In addition, it seems that the writing style for each chapter uses an ethnographic approach rather than action research. As the world is fast evolving, action research is urgently needed for sea nomads to increase their self-determination, increase their rights to resources, improve their livelihoods, and deal with other development alternatives.

As outlined in the book, a multidisciplinary approach is one of the keys to tackling developmental challenges, acknowledging the sea nomads' marine transboundary activities, and protecting their historical pledges. The contributors have dedicated their efforts to illuminating the unique obstacles faced by sea nomads, aiming to increase awareness and inspire action. By examining the intersection of various issues, the contributors have underscored the importance of sea nomads

within the broader context of development and maritime culture in insular Southeast Asia. Chapter 11 in particular, by Ayesha Pamela Rogers and Richard Engelhardt, offers valuable insights into resilience and adaptive capacity that can inform co-management programs involving sea nomads and other stakeholders. Such knowledge is essential for navigating contemporary developments in marine resource governance.

This book offers a comprehensive exploration of nomadism from prehistory to modern times, including the Holocene and the transition to the Anthropocene. Despite extensive research on sea nomads, there is still much to be uncovered, as the identification and interpretation of these communities are multifaceted. The contributors to this volume have made several attempts to trace the evolution of sea nomadism through archeological records and modern genetics, as explained in Chapter 7 by Pradiptajati Kusuma *et al.* However, sea nomad communities have faced a particular bias due to a lack of cultural remains, leading to their archeological invisibility. Examining their cultural beliefs and movements is rudimentary to understanding sea nomadism. Cynthia Chou's analysis in Chapter 5 offers a fascinating look at the ontology and cultural pledges of the Orang Suku Laut, including their movements and mapping. Such a critical analysis is invaluable for gaining a deeper understanding of sea nomadism.

Unfortunately, the demographic data provided in this volume is not up to date. For instance, there are two identical maps (Maps 1.1 and 6.1) with different titles, both of which use old data and do not detail the present locations of sea nomads. In the case of Thailand, neither Map 1.1 nor Map 6.1 shows the Urak Lawoi (Orang Laut). The contributors may have assumed Urak Lawoi to be part of the Moken/Moklen group, whereas actually they are a different subgroup of sea nomads. Nagatsu Kazufumi (Chapter 14) has mapped the Sama-Bajau diaspora in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Map 14.3). However, the data is neither up to date (a data source from 2000 has been used) nor valid, due to the division of villages and changing names. One example of outdated data in the map is the Sama-Bajau population in Wakatobi Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province (for further details, see Ariando and Narumon 2022). Mola Bajau, Wakatobi Regency, now has five villages while earlier it had only two. Likewise, the data on Orang Laut in Chou's chapter (Map 5.1) is out of date. There have been some changes in the village names and locations in Batam, Rempang, and Galang Island.

In Chapter 1 (pp. 16–21) the editors provide a comprehensive overview of the interrelated topics highlighted in the book, from the past to the present. However, upon closer examination, certain chapters only touch on some aspects of sea nomad communities, while others appear unrelated to the broader topic. It is worth noting that the chapters represent sea nomadism from different perspectives, particularly when it comes to intercultural relations. Some contributors explore the subject through the lens of intercultural trading and archeology, focusing on Austronesian groups or other missions. Topics in their chapters include, for example, the maritime Silk Road; inter-island exchange and language in Tetun-Terik, East Timor; the history of trading between insular

and mainland Southeast Asia; as well as maritime archeology in the South China Sea.

Apart from historical documentation, a new form of post-positivist research has made significant progress in addressing the current issues faced by sea nomads in Southeast Asia. Issues that intersect with the study of sea nomads include institutional complexity in marine governance (Ariando *et al.* 2023), marine collaborative management (Ariando and Narumon 2022), systematic local knowledge and development alternatives (Narumon 2017), marine resources and fishing practices (Stacey 2007), and even the challenges faced by sea nomads during the Covid-19 pandemic (Wianti and McWilliam 2023). Although some current issues are briefly mentioned in the book, they are not explored in depth.

Overall, the chapters in this volume are not entirely interconnected, so readers may selectively concentrate on those that interest them most. The book would have benefited from explanations of information written in sea nomads' local languages. This would have helped general readers to better understand their way of life. The book could also benefit from the inclusion of sea nomads' folklore and tales as researched by local historians to connect the past, present, and future. Additionally, greater consistency in the use of Bajau and Bajaw terminology is needed in Chapter 7.

One particularly noteworthy sentence in the book is: "a significant portion of Southeast Asian history may need to be revised to include sea nomads" (p. 22). This concise statement encapsulates the book's significance and makes it a valuable research resource. We sincerely appreciate the authors and editors for their exceptional work, and we are confident that this book will offer crucial insights for future endeavors. Its historical records are of particular value in the study of sea nomads and mark a significant addition to the existing knowledge about this group of people in Southeast Asia. We encourage continued research, collaboration, and cultural exchange on sea nomads in the region propelled by this remarkable contribution.

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Infiltrating Society: The Thai Military's Internal Security Affairs

Puangthong Pawakapan

Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021.

> All of the Thai rulers' traditional rivals—Burmese, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese—were demilitarized by being subjected to European colonialism. As a result, the "modern Thai" army (and navy) had no serious external defense function, and indeed virtually never fought except against "domestic" forces (compare Japan!). The Thai military was mainly a means for internal royalist consolidation; it was, in addition, an emblem of modernity for the outside world. (Anderson 1978, 202–204)

In his controversial account of Thai studies, titled "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies," Benedict Anderson (1978) pointed out why and how the modern Thai military's deep penetration into the domestic political arena was understudied. Thanks to the scholars who heeded his critique, there gradually emerged studies focusing on the political role of the Thai military, particularly its role in the modernization and democratization processes in Thailand.

The importance and contribution that Puangthong Pawakapan's *Infiltrating Society* makes to Thai studies should be understood in this context. Before the early 1980s, the Thai military's political role and its active involvement in Thailand's nation-building processes under the influence of the popular monarchy were rarely studied. In the "post-counterinsurgency" era from the 1980s, there was a brief uptick in studies on the political role of the Thai military. Yet, as the author astutely points out, most of these studies did not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which the Thai military, with substantial aid from the palace, strived to control civil society through its nebulous "civil affairs projects (*kitchakan phonlaruean*)." *Infiltrating Society*'s revelation of the deep permeation of the military in civil society in the cities and rural areas completes the puzzle,

something that many scholars in Thai studies have long awaited.

Infiltrating Society's main arguments on the role of the Thai military throughout the counterinsurgency (1960s–1980s) and post-counterinsurgency (1980s to present) can be summarized in the following three thematic statements. First, the US-led anticommunist counterinsurgency projects during the Cold War that modernized and expanded the role of the military in Thai politics and society and also endowed the monarchy with the role of political legitimizer prepared the ground for the military to continue playing the role of security force and leader of socioeconomic development in the post-Cold War period. An in-depth analysis of the background of Thailand's counterinsurgency operations led by the Thai monarchy, Thai military, and United States can be found in Chapter 2. This chapter also sets the context for how the concept of the "political offensive (*kanmueang nam kanthahan*)" enabled the military to expand its role in the sociopolitical sphere from the 1980s to the present day. The author stresses that the military's extended counterinsurgency operations helped to create an intimate relationship between the monarchy and the military that provided legitimacy for the latter, helping it to extend its control over the whole of civil society. The author notes that the military's engagement in socioeconomic development "benefitted the military and its traditional allies, allowing them to establish and expand political control over society" (p. 59).

Second, at every turning point in Thai political history, the military revamped and expanded its role as the guardian of the nation through its increased involvement in socioeconomic development projects and propagation of Thai-style democracy, where the monarch acted as the head of state. This is extensively discussed in Chapter 3, which begins with an elaborate explanation of how the "development for security (*yutthaphatthana*)" concept continued to be modified to further the cause of the military. In the discussion of the post-counterinsurgency "development for security" projects, the author delves into military-led projects like Isan Khiao (Green Isan), which began in 1987, and Mulnithi anurak pa roi to 5 changwat (the Five Provinces Bordering Forest Presentation Foundation) in 1992. The succeeding military regime led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha similarly devised a forest master plan after the 2014 coup, and its maltreatment of small-scale peasants continued.

It is noteworthy that this chapter points out that the evolving role of the monarch as the development king paralleled the expansion of the military's development programs in rural and urban areas: "The definition of development for security in the king's speech slipped from defeating communism to 'a war on poverty'" (p. 70). From the Cold War era, the military and royalist elites relied on King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who garnered massive support and loyalty from the populace as their political legitimizer. King Bhumibol's concern for the Thai people's well-being, especially amid the economic crisis in 1997, gave birth to one of the most widely celebrated philosophies, "sufficiency economy (*setthakit phophiang*)." The author argues that the promotion of this philosophy by the military and the ruling elites was to demonstrate the highest moral authority of the

monarch in sharp contrast to "short-sighted policymakers and politicians" (p. 85), thereby undermining the "legitimacy of politicians and electoral politics" (p. 89). The military and ruling elites' anxiety about the king's declining health ultimately led them to make the security of the monarchy "the top priority of internal security policy" (p. 53).

The third schematic statement is that despite the military's attempts at controlling and suppressing civil society's challenges to authoritarian rule, its innate limitations of reliance on royal charisma and nonprofessionalism in development policies resulted in civil society's profound distrust toward the Thai military. Detailed accounts of mass organizations mobilized by the military and its political arm, Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), in Chapters 4 and 5 elucidate the goal and impacts of the military-led political offensives during and after the counterinsurgency era. Based on these analyses, the author questions the widely accepted interpretation of Prime Ministerial Orders No. 66/2523 in 1980 and 65/2525 in 1982. According to the author, the "state victory of the CPT [Communist Party of Thailand]" (p. 15) is not only misleading but also deceiving. There is "no proof that the army was successful in enforcing its political offensive at the ground level at all" (p. 112). Yet, the success of the two orders has been propagated to legitimize "the military's role in the socio-political arena in the post-counterinsurgency period" (p. 112).

The author's reassessment of the two orders highlights the limited impact, if not failure, of the Thai military's "political offensive." Signs of failure were evident from the beginning of the counterinsurgency era, as the lack of knowledge and enthusiasm to pursue political means among armed circles caused concern for the military architects themselves (p. 107). As it turned out, the military leaders did not trust Thai citizens despite their own emphasis on "people participation" in their political offensive strategies. Citizens were portrayed "as being too ignorant and easily misled by dangerous organizations or self-serving politicians" (p. 116). The most salient example of the military's misuse of the counterinsurgency strategy is its violent crackdown on civilian protesters and students at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976.

Through its response to the overextension of military rule and its conceptualization of the Thai military's role in society, *Infiltrating Society* demonstrates both the scholarly vigors and personal courage and, more important, undying desire for the democratization of Thailand, which this reviewer admires greatly. This reviewer would like to express her deepest gratitude for the author's detailed, carefully thought out, and sharp critique of the relationship between the Thai military and monarchy. The reviewer would go so far as to say that it will be difficult to find another such bold account by a Thai scholar on Thai military politics in the near future.

Impressed by the author's insights, this reviewer became more curious about the author's perception of the origin and nature of the so-called Thai counterinsurgency era and the Thai military's perception of it. Among Thai scholars, especially in security studies, it has been assumed that the historical event that marks the beginning of the so-called Thai counterinsurgency era is the "Gun Firing Day (*wan siang puen tek*)" on August 7, 1965, when an armed group of Communists

attacked the police station in Nakhon Phanom Province. The year 1965 was indeed a turning point, and the establishment of ISOC in that year clearly shows the military's increased interest in pursuing anticommunist counterinsurgency strategies. If we trace the history further, signs of increased Communist activities in the Thai border areas of the North and Northeast were found from the early 1960s, and the Thai military and monarchy certainly did not take too lightly the intelligence on subversive activities from Thai and US security organizations. In particular, when the International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos was declared in July 1962, the Viet Minh's involvement in Lao affairs increased visibly, alongside that of the US government, which came to weigh in more on covert operations. These evolving regional and international developments prompted the Thai military to become keener on a "political offensive," which was in essence the "civilian counterinsurgency" strategies exemplified through building strategic hamlets in South Vietnam. Is it possible to find an earlier historical event that could be considered the beginning of the Thai counterinsurgency era?

Defining the "counterinsurgency era" also demands additional research on how the meaning and role of "counterinsurgency" have been understood and put into use by the Thai military. For instance, Saiyud Kerdpol, the founder of the civilian-police-military (CPM) concept, was exposed to different types of wars from the 1940s until he attended the US Army Infantry Advanced Course at Fort Benning in the mid-1950s and was involved in a clandestine US-backed operation in Laos in the 1960s. All these experiences should have had a considerable influence on architecting the CPM. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Saiyud's concept of counterinsurgency was not always welcomed by the Thai military, as discussed in the book, leading the reader to wonder what other concepts of counterinsurgency circulated within the military. This reviewer believes that supplementary accounts of the meaning and role of counterinsurgency as perceived by the Thai military will not only enhance the reader's understanding of the counterinsurgency era and its continuation in the post-Cold War era but also invite more critical scholarship on the "internal security affairs" that have been dominated by the Thai military and its allies for over half a century.

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Postcolonial Configurations: Dictatorship, the Racial Cold War, and Filipino America
Josen Masangkay Diaz
Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023.

Josen Masangkay Diaz's book is a timely intervention on issues of Filipino identity vis-à-vis the Philippine diaspora, postcolonial specificity, and authoritarian history. Indeed, Bongbong Marcos's victory in the 2022 elections necessitates cutting-edge scholarship on the New Society's aesthetic regime and its legacies of violence. *Postcolonial Configurations* emphasizes the centrality of Filipino American history in Philippine studies by juxtaposing representative cultural texts alongside the discourses of Marcos's New Society and the US empire. In each of the four chapters, Diaz uses what she calls "postcolonial configuration" as a lens to unravel the cultural, racial, and political relationship between the Philippines and the United States (p. 8). She uses an interdisciplinary approach in mapping out this configuration through an eclectic examination of policy reports, newspapers, and magazines. These include documents from the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, the National Housing Authority, and the World Bank.

Diaz also interrogates how the conjugal dictatorship's discourse fits within the broader geopolitical configuration that resulted from the Cold War. Thus, the author proposes unraveling postcolonial configurations by analyzing works such as *Empire of Memory* (1990, Eric Gamalinda), *Insiang* (1976, dir. Lino Brocka), and "Teacher, It's Nice to Meet You, Too" (1985, Ruby Ibañez). For Diaz, the simultaneous location and dislocation of these configurations can potentially "forge other critiques and imaginations" (p. 26) that extend the subjectivity of Filipino America. These postcolonial configurations reveal how the Marcos regime was inextricably entangled with the hypocrisy of US liberalism, which enabled authoritarianism in Asia in order to contain Communism in the region.

The first chapter, "The Fictions of National Culture," explores the "underlying political investments of the Cold War cultural exchange" between the United States and the Philippines (p. 29). Diaz begins by contextualizing Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society campaign, which envisioned a United States built on freedom, multiculturalism, and racial justice. The fabrication of this "national culture" allowed the US empire to "supply a discourse for employing racial pluralism and national progress" (p. 32). Diaz reads the 1966 Manila Summit (centered on the Vietnam War) as a place that enabled the transnational exchange of national cultures in service to foreign policy. In the summit, First Lady Imelda Marcos and the Bayanihan dance troupe employed "national culture" to integrate "state fictions . . . within cohesive narratives of global cooperation" (p. 35). Diaz argues that Marcos similarly constructed a national culture that reconfigured the Philippine postcolonial condition, which in turn helped legitimize the use of martial law as a way to "manage economic and political crises" (p. 38). Thus, the construction of the US-funded Cultural Center of

the Philippines allowed the regime to rehabilitate national culture in its image. Diaz then reads Eric Gamalinda's *Empire of Memory*, a novel centered on two officers from Marcos's censorship department (Agency for the Scientific Investigation of the Absurd). The protagonists of the novel are tasked to create a new history for the Marcoses. Diaz uses this novel "to reconsider national culture as a configuration of empire and authoritarian statecraft" (p. 29). She argues that the novel's distortion of history unmakes the fictional constructs of national culture in the New Society. By challenging the "historical coherence of Filipino subjectivity" (p. 56), the novel "defamiliarize[s] any one configuration of Filipino America" (p. 57).

The second chapter focuses on another postcolonial configuration, this one made up of the *balikbayan* (returnee), squatter communities, and the state policies of the Marcos dictatorship. The author examines Floy Quintos's article in *Balikbayan Magazine* to unmake the "strangely innocent" figure of the *balikbayan*, arguing that the figure is intertwined with a "Cold War discourse of postcolonial raciality" as embodied by US immigration law (p. 64). Diaz makes the case that the Marcos regime created an economic and masculine configuration of the *balikbayan* that rendered invisible the role of women in that very configuration (p. 68). Diaz also analyzes how Ferdinand Marcos's management of Philippine Airlines and the reconstruction of Manila International Airport (MIA) regulated the mobility of the Philippine diaspora. The regime was able to harness the returnees' economic potential while limiting their exposure to the dismal urban conditions of Manila. While MIA allowed the regime to isolate new arrivals from the urban squalor of Manila, its construction necessitated the displacement of squatter communities. The regime's rhetoric and policies deemed these communities as a hurdle in the goal to transform Manila into the City of Man. Thus, as Diaz writes, the "mandates that governed both the balikbayan and the squatter used transnational mobility to define the structure of the Filipino polity" (p. 78). Diaz makes the case that the squatter communities during the Marcos dictatorship "point to the historical and political circumstances" that "made legible the configuration of the balikbayan" (p. 83). Toward the end, she contends that the present historical moment in both the US and the Philippines speaks "to the incapacity" of the *balikbayan* configuration to "address the multiple forms of marginalization and subjugation enabled by Cold War conflict and its attendant transnational alliances" (p. 84).

Chapter 3 focuses on the New Filipina, a configuration constructed by the dictatorship. This figure is an "important compromise" between Western and Filipino feminism that simultaneously valorizes agency and the natural role of women as homemakers (p. 85). This configuration sought to integrate women into the New Society's narrative of progress and development. What it created was a culture of labor export built on a narrative of "Life giving labor" as valorized by Imelda Marcos (p. 92). The figure of the New Filipina is also a configuration shaped by the wider Cold War and its ensuing politics. The Marcos regime drew from a wider transnational discourse on human rights to simultaneously contain the subjectivity of Filipino women in the name of global capital. Thus, Diaz closely analyzes Lino Brocka's *Insiang*, a social realist film that articulates the universality of

gendered suffering. She argues that the "cinematic juxtaposition between beauty and violence in the film illustrates the extent" to which the regime "structured Filipina women's suitability for transnational circulation and labor" (p. 105). Thus, the film shows that the "New Filipina is not a promise of empowerment but an overdetermination of Filipina women's being" (p. 109).

In the next chapter, Diaz analyzes a configuration that consists of Filipino "raciality" (p. 114), US Cold War liberal discourse, and international humanitarianism. She argues that the dictatorship "cultivated a discourse of race and gender grounded in the 'ultimate ideology' of humanism" that further enabled "the regime's state of exception" (p. 114). Diaz examines the role of the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) in allowing the Marcos regime to "better position itself within the demands of Cold War politics" (p. 119). The PRPC became a transit point that allowed the US to justify its liberal agenda through refugee rehabilitation. The Marcos regime, informed by its own conceptualization of "human potential," employed Filipino English teachers to take part in humanitarian work that would help Vietnamese refugees (pp. 125–126). The postcolonial subject thus became a tool for the US empire to "facilitate the refugee's transition into modernity" (p. 133). The author then presents a letter written by Rudy Ibañez as a manifestation of how the US empire "overdetermined" the figure of the refugee. The letter is written from the point of view of a refugee named Sombath and is addressed to a teacher. Diaz argues that the text tries to undo the "overdetermination of liberal rehabilitation and postcolonial subjectivity pronounced by the PRPC" (p. 136). Diaz concludes her book with a reading of R. Zamora Linmark's poem titled "What Some Are Saying about the Body" (p. 145). She writes that the poem articulates the "the paradox of Marcosian logic," which demands "that the balance of power must be suspended to preserve the sanctity of liberal governance" (p. 145). The poem's multiple narrators (or masses) "gestures toward another kind of people power" that draws from a force that is "not predetermined" (p. 153).

Postcolonial Configurations sets out to unmake dominant perceptions of Filipino America and makes an invaluable theoretical contribution toward that goal. The book is driven by the spirit of Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, who have collectively critiqued the paradoxes of democratic state power and the biopolitical and aesthetic regimes it has engendered in the West. Diaz follows a similar line of thought in her inquiry that allows a reconfiguration of the Philippine postcolonial condition within the wider ambit of Cold War geopolitics, the global diaspora, and US liberal hypocrisy. The urgency of such forays cannot be understated as vestiges of the New Society continue to endure in the present. Diaz provides an astute analysis of archival, theoretical, cultural, and literary material that becomes a configuration in itself; the interdisciplinary approach she utilizes allows an engagement that is not possible if one is methodologically bound. Her seamless analysis allows her to propose ways to potentially unmake the configurations she writes about. Of note are the second and fourth chapters, which convincingly highlight the role of the oft-ignored displaced communities in the legitimization of Marcos's regime.

Thinking in terms of configurations is indeed an insightful way to confront the Marcos dictatorship. However, the author's engagement with Filipino texts would benefit from further contextualization. It might be useful to indicate in the first chapter that Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* focuses on the Tagalog regions of the Philippines rather than the entire country. While empirical and economic concerns are outside the main scope of the book being reviewed here, the use of economic concepts and terms such as "transnational finance" (p. 38) would benefit from further elaboration. Regardless, Diaz's incisive work will be invaluable to scholars working on the Marcos regime and its political, social, and aesthetic legacies. Scholars working on postcolonialism and cultural studies will also find Diaz's theoretical contribution very rewarding.

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