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POPULAR TELEVISION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY THAI CULTURAL IDENTITY

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of the requirements of the
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Abstract

Television in Thailand, as in many nations, can be regarded as an essential form of popular media. Although television plays an important role within and across all levels of society, the relationship between television and Thai cultural identity is a problematic and ambiguous one; it is also a subject of study often neglected or not taken seriously enough in Thailand.

This research project, "Popular Television and the Construction of Contemporary Thai Cultural Identity', is an exploration into the relationship between television and the formation of contemporary Thai cultural identity. It draws together media and cultural studies and the study of television in contemporary Thailand. Through interviews with key media practitioners and an analysis of popular television programmes (such as the controversial game show 'The Weakest Link', popular dramas, youth programmes, and broadcasts of national rituals), the research has found that television plays a prominent role in Thai cultural identity formation.

One existing line of argument is that Thai cultural identity in the era of globalisation has been inevitably influenced by western homogenisation, as is suggested by the thesis of Cultural Imperialism. Yet on the other hand, globalisation has played a multi-faceted role in creating the sense of Nationalism which has led to the strengthening of Thai traditional identity, evidence of which can be seen in the Thai government's use of television to support Thai tradition and values. In this way, television has played a unifying role in the formation of Thai cultural identity. Moreover, globalisation, as a new global-local articulation, has also created a new kind of cultural hybridity which is apparent in the styles, forms, and language usage in certain youth programmes.

In addition to the theoretical analyses, focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews have been conducted in order to examine the 'cultural hybridity' of 'mixed-race' youngsters in Thailand, and the roles television has played in the formation of their identity. The research has further found that 'mixed-race' youngsters ('third-culture kids' or TCKs) in Thailand have learnt to 'translate' themselves within the different cultures. And television, in some way, has helped them make sense of, and negotiate between, the different cultures they are living in.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Thitinan Boonpap

19 April 2007

Introduction

Television in Thailand, like other media, was initiated by the ruling-social class. It then became the medium of the common people, and for the past 50 years, television, as a popular medium, has played a prominent role in the formation of Thai society.

In December 2004, when the killer waves of the Asian Tsunami hit southern parts of Thailand, television brought a harmonizing and collective spirit to the country. Immediately following the tragedy, and throughout the long aftermath, Thai people were glued to television. They not only used television to follow the news, but also to stay up-dated with the needs of the Tsunami victims, in order to send much needed aid and help hands to their compatriots. At that time, every television station cancelled normal programme schedules, allocating air-time for news and public announcements about the catastrophic incident. Television played the single most important role in providing a channel of communication. Relief agencies used television as a means of requesting donations and support while many people used television to try and find their missing loved ones.

During the recent and on-going period of political uncertainty in Thailand, we have witnessed the tension within the divided country through television broadcasting. The prolonged political conflict can be followed on the news of every television channel. We have seen yellow flags emblazoned with the King's emblem being carried along the streets by people clad in yellow t-shirts and head-bands, a symbol of anti-Thaksin protest. Prior to the coup of September 2006, the then ruling TRT political party, led by acting Prime Minister Thaksin Shinnawatra, utilized television for its own political propaganda. The tension built to seriously high levels, verging on clashes between anti-Thaksin and pro-Thaksin groups and rallies. And then in June (2006), the political tension was suspended because of the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the King's accession to the throne. The protesters interupted their rallies, and together they joined the celebrations instead. On Diamond Jubilee Day, the 78 year old King delivered his speech in front of hundreds of thousands of people who had come to show their support and gratitude. The King asked the nation to bring back peace and harmony to the country in a speech which was witnessed by the whole country through live television broadcasting. During the celebrations of the King's Diamond Jubilee, all political protests and rallies ceased: again, television played the role of unifying the nation.

On the night of 19 September 2006, when the military group which called itself the Council for Democratic Reform (CDR) decided to stage a coup and to take control of political power, television stations were among the first places to be taken over by military control. At approximately 9:00 pm that night, all regular programming was suspended and replaced with patriotic music and documentaries about the King. Just before the official announcement from

the CDR, Channel 9 broadcasted a speech, via international telephone, by ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinnawat declaring a state of emergency. The speech went on for no longer than five minutes, before being abruptly terminated. Over the hours that followed, television stations broadcasted announcements by the CDR; in this way, television was used as a tool for political power by both the CDR and the ousted PM. On the morning following the coup, television stations were permitted to resume normal programming; predictably, the majority of channels devoted their air time to news relating to the coup. On screen, there were countless images of people coming to give flowers and food to the soldiers and of children stopping by to have photographs taken with the soldiers and the tanks. Such images can be regarded as a representation of the people's response to the actions of the CDR.

It is evident that television has had a profound impact upon Thai society. As a cultural agent, television now penetrates every corner of Thai society. Nevertheless, the relationship between television and Thai cultural identity is still ambiguous. This research project, 'Popular Television and the Construction of Contemporary Thai Cultural Identity', is an attempt to examine the roles television has played in the formation of cultural identity in contemporary Thailand. In one aspect, television has been perceived as a weapon of global cultural homogenisation, as claimed by the Cultural Imperialism thesis. It is regarded as eroding the uniqueness of Thai tradition and cultural identity, and subsequently paving the way for western cultural influences. On the other hand, it has become evident that the theory of Cultural Imperialism is too simplistic to accommodate the dynamics of the Thai context, which is more complex than the dichotomous model of 'Thai versus Anglo-American' or 'Tradition versus Modernity'. Furthermore, the Cultural Imperialism theory has been challenged by anti-essentialist discourse which offers an insight into conceptualizing identity as a discursively constituted and on-going process, rather than a fixed entity. Recent debates in Anglo-American cultural studies have been more concerned with the idea of cultural hybridity. Accordingly, this research project will explore the debate in Thai society, which has recently seen the development of what may be called 'the third-culture' or 'culture's in-between'. The research project is conducted towards the following research objectives:

1. To understand the meaning of Thai culture and Thai cultural identity.

2. To explore the relationship between popular television and the construction of contemporary Thai cultural identity.

3. To examine 'cultural spaces' and the roles which television has offered in the formation of contemporary Thai cultural identity.

4. To explore the new forms of Thai identity through the spaces which television has offered for the formation of cultural hybridity in contemporary Thailand.

5. To articulate the Thai context within the international framework of media and cultural studies.

The first chapter, 'Theories and Reviewed Literature', will be an exploration of theories and debates about identity discourse, television and Globalisation, Cultural Imperialism, and Hybridisation. This chapter will also present a literature review encompassing related works and research carried out within the field.

In Chapter two, 'Thai Cultural Identity', the historical background of Thailand will be examined. This will begin with a summary of the formation and development of the Thai nation: from the Siamese Empire to the Thai nation state. It will also consider the process of national identity building by the Thai ruling class, how Thailand has been transformed within global forces, and the emergence of Nationalism in Thailand, and will then explore the power struggle between the country's homogeneous image and its heterogeneous reality.

Chapter three, 'Television and the Formation of Thai Cultural Identity', will begin with a brief chronology of Thai television: its programme policy and its specificity. It will then move towards an investigation of the specificity of Thai cultural identities and the television context, drawing together 'media and cultural studies' and a study of television in contemporary Thailand. The chapter will also examine the relationship between television and Thai cultural identities. It contains detailed studies of textual analysis of popular television programmes such as Thai folklore dramas and broadcastings of national events and rituals as well as a study of the Western influenced game show 'The Weakest Link' (Thai version) and the popular Taiwanese series, 'Meteor Garden'. It will also include an examination of the forms, styles, and language used in youth programmes, in order to explore the space of cultural hybridity in Thai television.

Chapter four, 'Cultural Hybridity in Thai Society: the study of the third-culture kids and their identity formation', is a fieldwork research into the study of 'third-culture kids' (TCKs) in Thailand and the formation of their identity. This Chapter is derived from a focus-group interview and individual interviews with a group of mixed-race young adults. The interviews are focused on the process of cultural negotiation, the participants' cultural hybridity construction, and the roles of media in their identity formation.

Chapter five, 'Television and Thai Cultural Identity: creative practice', is focused on the accompanying practical work, which is also a part of the PhD submission. Scholars, media personel, media practitioners and media consumers were interviewed during the data collection, and these recorded interviews and materials have been utilized to produce an audiovisual presentation titled 'Television and Thai Cultural Identity'. The audiovisual work, which can be found on the accompanying DVD, demonstrates the relationship between television and Thai cultural identity. This chapter will thus be an articulation of the semiotic relationship between the creative practice and the thesis, serving as a reflective report of the work experiences throughout the production process of the work which formed part of the fieldwork research.

Chapter One
Theories and Reviewed Literature

In modern society, television is one of the principle sources for the production of cultural identity. Through television, viewers can be 'armchair global adventurers', travelling through the images and signs of cultural representation which are a major proliferating resource for the construction of cultural identity. However, it cannot be said that television has a 'hypodermic needle' effect upon the construction of cultural identity, since in cultural studies, audiences are considered as an 'active agent'. Moreover, the concept of cultural identity cannot be referred to as a universal and fixed entity, but rather as one which is discursively and politically constituted. De-territorialisation of culture in the post-modern age has also created the loss of the natural relation between culture and social territory. In this way, it has introduced a greater complexity into the dynamics of television and the construction of cultural identity, adding one of the most debated discourses into the multi-faceted field of cultural studies.

This research project, 'Popular Television and the Construction of Contemporary Thai Cultural Identity', is an attempt to draw together media and cultural studies and the study of television in contemporary Thailand. In order to establish a position within the field, chapter one, *Theories and Reviewed Literature*, begins with an exploration into key theoretical frameworks of media and cultural studies. This investigation encompasses a range of concepts and discourses relating to culture and identity, along with critical debates about globalisation and the complexity of its cultural impacts on identity in global modernity. The chapter also examines debates concerning the Cultural Imperialism thesis and key examples of its local resistance. It then leads into an exploration of the new global and local articulation which has opened up the creation of a new kind of cultural hybridity. Through reviewed literature of academic work and research built around the field, the chapter culminates in an examination of the relationship between broadcasting roles, specifically those of television, and the formation of cultural identity.

Television and Cultural Identity

'Culture', as Raymond Williams (Cited in Storey, 2001, pp. 1-2) has suggested, is one of the most complicated words in the English language. Williams has described culture, derived from the Latin 'cultura', in three broad definitions. Firstly, culture can be used to refer to 'a general intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development'. Secondly, it can be referred to as 'a particular way of life'. Lastly, the term can be used to describe 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity'.

Culture, according to Stuart Hall, is about 'shared meanings' where language is the privileged medium with which and through which we 'make sense of things' (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Culture also operates as a representational system in which meaning is produced and exchanged through the use of language in the form of signs and symbols (i.e. sounds, written words, electronically produced images,

musical notes, and objects). In this way, television, as an electronic language, has produced audiovisual signs and symbols through which thoughts, ideologies and feelings are shared by groups of people. Television thus becomes central to an understanding of cultural identity. As Tomlinson (1991) has suggested, the media are the dominant representational aspect of modern culture; but culture's meanings are mediated by the lived experience of everyday culture. The relationship between media and culture is therefore one of the subtle interplay of mediation.

Although cultural identity is always a difficult issue, it might not be quite so problematic if it were isolated in a community where people shared the same language and were limited to a single national broadcasting. However, in rapid paced modern society, where people from different countries speaking different languages are nevertheless connected internationally through advanced media and communication technology, it is problematic. Cultural identity becomes increasingly fragmented to the point of becoming a subject of 'crisis'. To quote Kobena Mercer, 'Identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty' (Cited in Gillespie, 1995, p. 13). In a world in which nations and communities can no longer be defined by physical boundaries but by electronic boundaries, cultural identity in modern society is being de-centred and dislocated. As Hall has suggested:

> 'The old identities which stabilised the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject. This so-called 'crisis of identity' is seen as part of a wider process of change which is dislocating the central structure and process of modern societies and understanding the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world' (1992, p. 274).

Cultural identity in modern society is being affected by changing world geographies which is the result of the globalisation process. Broadcasting, and specifically television, is central to the debate.

Globalisation and Cultural Identity

Similar to many other keywords used in the humanities and social sciences, 'globalisation' is a term that has been discussed in a number of ways. Like the concept of identity, globalisation is highly contested; it is subject of considerable debate and disagreement. The thesis of globalisation is concerned with changing time-space relations. Its consequences have an impact upon people's lives and culture, how people understand themselves and relate to others. It is claimed that globalisation suggests that we are now living in a world in which space and time have collapsed, the world has binded technologically and has shrunk into what many people, primarily, the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, have termed a 'global village'. As McLuhan puts it:

> After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned...as electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village.
>
> (Cited in Sreberny, 1991, p.93)

Other notions of globalisation have been proposed. Anthony Giddens, for instance, has defined globalisation as 'the intensification of worldwide social relation which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Another definition, given by Roland Robertson, sees globalisation as the 'crytallisation' of the entire world as a single place, the emergence of a 'global-human' condition (Cited in King, 1991, p. 11). The globalisation process has created a new 'world-system' and transformed how people understand themselves and the world. Anthony Smith (1995) has suggested that the compression of time and space has fundamentally changed the ways in which human beings relate to each other and central to this change is advanced communication technology.

In terms of the impact of globalisation, Arjun Appadurai has suggested five dimensions of global culture flows. The first refers to the *enthnoscape*, which is the people landscape shifted by the flow of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles and guestworkers. Secondly, there is the *technoscape*, mechanical and information technology moved by the flow of multinational and national corporations and government agencies. The *financescape* is produced by the flow of money in the currency market and stock exchange. The *mediascape* is the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information through media such as film, television and newspapers. Lastly, the *ideoscape* is the flow of images that are directly political and related to states and counter-state ideologies (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296-300).

Globalisation is not a new phenomenon, and Anthony Giddens (Cited in Hall, 1992, p. 299) has claimed that modernity is inherently globalisation. However, the concern about the impact of globalisation is still the subject of debates. One aspect is that the effect of global flow has created a borderless world community. From a superficial perspective, one might subscribe to the idea that the world becomes a single world, dominated by a single global culture. Hence, the integrity of authentic and indigenous culture is being threatened by the domination of global cultural homogenisation, as is claimed by the Cultural Imperialism thesis. Nevertheless, there has been much evidence of local resistance leading to the strengthening of indigenous culture. Moreover, it is apparent that globalisation has opened up spaces for a new kind of global and local articulation. This has led to an emergence of sets of what Mike Featherstone (1990, p. 1) has called 'third culture' the diversity of cultural flow, an insertion of localities into globalities which creates new forms of cultural hybridity. Morley and Robins (1995) noted that globalisation is similar to putting together a jigsaw puzzle; it is a

matter of inserting a multiplicity of localities into the overall picture of a new global system. Consequently, Globalisation cannot merely be regarded as the binary impact of a tension between the local and the global. The impact of Globalisation should rather be seen as a pluralizing effect upon the relationship between the global and the local. The subsequent section attempts to explore the complex consequences of globalisation's impact upon cultural identity in the three following dimensions.

- Globalisation and cultural homogenisation
- Globalisation and local resistance
- New global and local articulation

Globalisation and cultural homogenisation

The concern surrounding the cultural homogenisation of local authentic culture in the process of globalisation, as claimed by the Cultural Imperialism thesis, emerged in the 1960s as a dominant theoretical paradigm. Much literature dealing with this thesis has been written. One of the most quoted concepts of Cultural Imperialism is that of Jeremy Tunstall (1977, p. 57). Tunstall argues that the term Cultural Imperialism is often used to claim that authentic tradition and local culture in many parts of the world are being forced out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large quantities of slick commercial and media products, mainly from the United States. But the Cultural Imperialism thesis, as Tomlinson (1991) has suggested, includes a variety of strands, namely 1) media imperialism, 2) discourse of nationality, 3) a critique of global capitalism, and 4) a critique of modernity. Grounded in a structuralist conceptual framework, the theory of Cultural Imperialism assumes that audiences are a passive agent. Its concern is thus about an unequal flow of cultural forms, such as television programmes, films and newspapers. In this way, local cultures are overshadowed by a relentless deluge of world culture, specifically, American culture. One example can be seen from the success of fast-food franchises such as McDonald's, and George Ritzer (1993), among others, has analysed the process of McDonaldization, the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant dominate, not only in American society, but also in other parts of the world.

Oliver Boyd-Berrett (1977, p. 117) has described globalisation as the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial pressure from the media interest of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation or influence by the country so affected. Through transnational media, saturation of television programmes from another culture would destroy cultures and the value of local society. From this point of view, then, all third world societies today are victims of Cultural Imperialism.

Globalisation and local resistance

The thesis of Cultural Imperialism is challengeable. Recently, it has been contested as inadequate and attacked for its 'hypodermic model' of media effects. The thesis, it is claimed, denies the idea that audiences are active agents and humans have the ability to generate their own cultural meanings. An increasing series of debates about Cultural Imperialism has built up since the 1970s with UNESCO's concern about an equality of the flow of culture as a commercial practice. In 1976, UNESCO set up the commission, chaired by Sean McBride, to investigate world communication problems. Later, in 1980, the McBride committee had produced the report 'Many Voices, One World', addressed the so-called new world information order and called for the freedom of media and the protection of local culture. The acceptance of the McBride report by UNESCO led to a political dispute, with the United States withdrawing from the organization in January 1985, followed by the United Kingdom in January 1986.

Debates built around Cultural Imperialism power can also be seen from the anti-imperialist text 'How to read Donald Duck', written in Chile in 1973 by Ariel Dorfman and Armond Mathelart. The book aimed to demonstrate the imperialist ideology concealed behind the harmless and joyful Walt Disney character of Donald Duck. The writers exposed the argument that behind the innocent cartoon character was hidden the powerful tool of American Imperialism. The effect was that this book was publicly burnt in Chile in 1973 and the authors forced into exile. The English translation was also banned in the United States.

Another example can be seen in Ien Ang's (1989) audience analysis of the popular US series, 'Dallas'. The research in 'Watching Dallas' has shown that the key success of the popularity of the Texan soap opera resulted from its melodramatic narrative structure, with Ang's analysis revealing that the audience had no connection with the power of the US culture or the value of American capitalism. The research has also suggested that the cultural critics overlooked the capacity of the audiences to differentiate the pleasure of the text from the contradictory cultural values. Supporting Ang's analysis in 'Watching Dallas' is Albert Moran's attack on Cultural Imperialism. He has stated that the theory is extensively pessimistic and refers to viewers as passive recipients of dominating encoded messages (Moran, 1998, p. 171).

Cultural Imperialism largely fails to address the process of cultural translation. It is about cultural consumption rather than the production or circulation of culture. In addition, David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995, p.63) have pointed out that imported US programmes will succeed only when domestic television is not producing comparable entertainment programming. Language seems to be a barrier to imported US programmes; whenever viewers have an alternative of comparable entertainment programmes in their own language, the US programmes tend to come off second best. What has become evident in some Asian countries is that consumers of US programmes fall mainly into the affluent and educated social class, those who can afford to pay for the US programmes from

satellite and cable television providers. In this way, it cannot be assumed that Asian countries are being overwhelmed by US programmes. Moreover, different countries have different patterns of media regulation and censorship. In the case of Hong Kong, the international advertising media was once banned by the Chinese government. A Nike advertisement billboard was used featuring a comic picture of the US NBA basketball player, LeBron James defeating a master of Chinese martial arts by attacking him with the ball. After the launch of that Nike billboard, people filed complaints about its inappropriacy. Since the Chinese value martial arts as a high culture, the concept of a NBA basketball player hitting an old master of Chinese martial arts with a ball was highly unacceptable. After heavy complaints, the Chinese government had to force Nike to remove the controversial advertisement billboards. The above example can be interpreted as Americanisation not being an irresistible phenomenon, since governments in many countries and continents are aware of the threat of American global media conglomerates. The media industry is then assigned to act as cultural defender.

Figure 1.1 Controversial advertising billboard of Nike
Source: Bangkok Post, 10 December 2004

In the case of Europe, the European Union (EU) decided to enter the global media battle as one 'global player' by encouraging European programme makers to appeal to a large European audience. The EU had identified the audiovisual and other communication industries as key instruments in the creation of a sense of European cultural identity. With its slogan 'Unity in diversity', the EU believed that the media, and television broadcasts in particular, could help to develop a sense of belonging to the European community, and articulate a deep solidarity of European culture, in order to protect the community from Americanisation (Morley and Robins, 1995).

A similar case evolved within the Latin American community. A new pan-Latin American television channel, Telesur, emerged in July 2005. The channel is supported by the four left-wing governments of Venezuela, Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay. Telesur (Tele South) set itself up as an ideal service tool for the integration of the Latin American community. Broadcasing 24 hours a day to

23 Latin American countries, the channel shows news, documentaries and Latin American films. It claims itself to be a new television of the south, giving viewers the possibility for viewer leadership, and declares on its website that it is a new television model. Much more than just a signal, Telesur is a point of reference, a meeting point, a space to know and (re)know oneself, understand oneself and integrate oneself. (Translated from Spanish, http://www.telesurtv.net, Accessed: 25 July 2005)

Although Telesur channel president, Venezuelan communications minister Andres Izana, denied that Telesur is an ideological rival to CNN, the US television News network, critics have said that Telesur is politically set up to counter what it called anti-US propraganda led by Venezuela's left-wing president Hugo Chavez. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/471336.stm/, Accessed 25 July 2005)

Anti-cultural Imperialism has not only taken place in the European and Latin American context, but in the Asian context too, where it has shown that Americanisation is not irresistible. This is due to the fact that broadcasting in some Asian countries is set within a 'dominating-dominated model'. In his protectionist speech at the Asian media conference in November 1998, for instance, Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew emphasised that it was necessary 'to limit the unrestricted inflow of Western media within Asia in order to preserve and retain the fundamental values of Asian society' (Chadha and Kavoori, 2000, p. 417).

However, the thesis of Cultural Imperialism is inadequate in treating these conditions. As Tomlinson (1991) has stated, it can be metaphorically compared to a group of blind men trying to describe an elephant through touch alone; that is, the Cultural Imperialism thesis misses the point and fails to account for the whole. Tomlinson has also suggested that Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism are a dissimilar concept. Globalisation is a less coherent, less culturally directed process in comparison to the Cultural Imperialism thesis, which is an altogether more purposeful project. Globalisation, on the other hand, suggests an interconnection and interdependency of all global areas which happens in a far less purposeful way. A better way to think about globalisation is to think about discourse rather than thesis. Hence, it would appear that to consider Globalisation more as a discourse rather than a thesis would be a much more plausible and appropriate approach.

New global and local articulation

Globalisation has created a new flow of culture in the 'worldscape'. The physical movement of people, driven by world economics and politics, has created a changing ethnoscape across and in the world geographies, evidence of which can be seen, for instance, in the emergence of Black British, Afro-Caribbean and Asian Communities in the UK since the 1970s - the result of migration and post-colonisation. At the same time, the compression of time and space has created a new electronic community in the mediascape and technoscape. People are now connected not by a physical boundary, but by 'imaginary boundaries' created by new electronic cultural spaces such as television, the internet, satellites, fax machines, shared webcams and e-cinema. This changing geography has shaped people's

lives and people's culture. As Featherstone (1995, pp. 12-13) has proposed, 'it is no longer possible to conceive global process in terms of the dominance of a single centre over the peripheries, rather, there are a number of competing centres which are bringing about shifts in the global balance of power between nation-states and blocs and forging new sets of interdependencies'. However, this is not to suggest a condition of equality between participants; rather it is a process in which more players are entering into the game and demanding access to communication and the right to be heard. The cases of the EU audiovisual campaign 'Europe without Frontiers', the Latin American television network 'Telesur', and Asian governments' media policies are quintessential to this argument. Thus, the process of Globalisation does not produce cultural uniformity, but instead suggests a level of diversity. If there is a global culture, it would be better to conceive it not as a common culture, but as a field in which differences, power struggles and cultural prestige contests are played out (Featherstone, 1995).

Globalisation is associated with a new dynamic of re-localisation. The global world is also being globalised. Globalisation is then, as Jan Noderveen Pieterse (1995, p. 45) has suggested, a process of hybridisation which gives rise to a global melange. Globalisation can also mean the reinforcement of localism. The global can go together with the local, with the resulting ethos of 'think globally, act locally' and this global and local dynamic can be termed 'glocalisation'. The term and concept of 'glocalisation' has been discussed by Roland Robertson, who has noted that according to the Oxford English Dictionary of new words, the term 'glocal' and the process noun 'glocalisation' are 'formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend'(Robertson, 1995, p.28). The idea of 'glocalisation' has been modelled on the Japanese dochakuka (deriving from dochaku 'living on one's own land), originally the agricultural principle of adapting one's farming techniques to local conditions, but also adopted in Japanese business for global localisation, a global outlook adapted to local conditions. The terms 'glocal' and 'glocalisation' became aspects of Japanese business philosophy in the 1980s. Japananese media employs the glocalisation strategy to create a market of goods and products, by employing global celebrities to present its products. For example, Audrey Hapburn sold wigs to Japanese women. Sophia Loren appeared in advertisements for toddlers. Recently, David Beckham and his wife signed a contract with the Japanese beauty product TBC and the large confectionery company Meiji Seika. The couple have acted as presenters for Japanese products on television and in other media advertisements and campaigns (Guardian Newspaper, 18 June 2003). Following the 2002 World Cup, Beckham gained a huge popularity across the Southeast Asian region, including Japan. According to the report, Meiji Seika has doubled its chocolate sales by offering purchasers the chance to enter a lottery to attend a 'press conference' by the visiting British stars.

The interplay between global and local has been termed in another way as the 'creolization' of global culture (Friedman, 1990 and Hannerz, 1987, cited in Pieterse, 1995, pp. 53-54).This notion is derived, in the field of linguistics, from creole languages. Yet 'Creolisation' itself is an odd and hybrid term. In the Caribbean and North America it represents a mixture of African and European (the Creole

cuisine of New Orleans, etc.), while in Hispanic America 'criollo' originally refers to those of European descent born in the new continent. Creolization means a Carribbean window to the world. Another Latin American term, 'mestizaje' refers to a boundary-crossing mixture. The term has served as a hegemonic elite ideology, referring to 'whitening', or 'Europeanization', as the overall project for Latin American countries. Another phrase is the 'orientalization of the world', which has been referred to as 'a distinct global process' (Featherstone 1990, cited in Pieterse: 1995, p. 54). The terms 'creolisation', 'mestizaje', and 'orientalisation' are confined to the experience of post-sixteenth-century America. However, and as Pieterse (1995) has argued, the terms open a different window on the global melange.

In terms of the cultural form, hybridisation can be defined as 'the ways in which forms become separated from existing practice and recombine with new forms in new practices' (Rowe and Schelling, cited in Pieterse, 1995, p. 49). The hybridisation of culture as a result of globalisation has created a cultural 'cut and mix', 'crisscross' and 'crossover'. For instance, the global and local interplay of media, as Tunstall (1977) has suggested, has created a hybrid form of broadcasting systems and institutions in the Third world countries. Since broadcasting technology is originally western-oriented, broadcasting in the third world has adopted media hardware from the west. At the same time, it has borrowed the western form and genre of programme format, as well as the administrative system. This has led to a hybrid system of regulation and broadcasting content. With regards to media content, the local has come to play an important role within the new dynamics of re-localisation. The motto 'think globally, act locally', has moved to the forefront of the Asian media industry. When international media conglomerates turn to Asian viewers, for example, to pursue success in the Asian region, the US news network, CNN, had to dramatically change its vision of a single, English speaking global network. As a result, the network produced CNN in an Asian version, adding more local news content in order to reach its viewers.

A similar case can be seen with STAR network, the Hong Kong based company, whose target goal was the Asian region. Rupert Murdoch paid 525 million US dollars in 1993 in order to be the controlling shareholder of STAR. However, STAR has had to find the right balance between 'market integration' and 'market diversity'. One good example is the locolisation of STAR in India, which has not only led to a hybrid form of programme content, but also a hybrid form of language called 'Hinglish'. Daya Kishan (2000) has explored the complexities encountered in global-local media interaction in India by examining the impact of western media. Kishan has suggested that the US has adapted to the Indian condition as there has been a growth of Indian-made programmes in Indian language broadcast on foreign-owned channels. In 1991, when STAR made its first penetration into India in its English language form (via satellite), its main consumer was a small group of Urban Indian elites. In order to reach more viewers, STAR had to localise its programmes by adding sub-titles and voice dubbing in Hindi to Hollywood films. Later, the Indian elite, who were ironically the target audience of STAR's English version, demanded television in their own language. STAR network had

to adapt programme strategies locally, which led to a process of hybridisation. In 1996, STAR Plus began telecasting locally made programmes in English and Hindi, in addition to Western programmes. This strategy was aimed at reaching more viewers and increasing advertising revenues. Moreover, local-made programming has turned out cheaper in terms of production cost. A final and important effect regards language; the localisation of STAR has led to the development of 'Hinglish', the mixture of English and Hindi languages used in Indian television channels. Although 'Hinglish' does not have a clearly defined phonology, grammar and lexicon, and the degree of language mixing is varied, 'Hinglish' is a quintessential outcome of the complex negotiation between global and local media interaction in India. A similar use of such a hybrid kind of language can also be seen in Hong Kong, and also in Singapore, where 'Chinglish' and 'Singlish', in both cases a hybrid mix of Chinese and English, play a major part in everyday culture.

Television, Globalisation, and Cultural Identity

Academic consensus agrees that television is one of the most popular forms of media in modern society. It gains popularity through connection with people's experiences, both in real life and fantasy life. Television also wins support through audience's pleasure of viewing. At the same time, the medium carries ideology and meaningful representations which play a part in the construction of cultural identity. In relation to the formation of cultural identity, television has come to play a prominent role. Anderson (1991) has defined the nation as imagined political community in which people never know their fellow members. However, their minds are imaginationally connected through shared-experiences, shared-history, shared-stories, and shared-literature. Television, as a cultural vehicle, is a major device for disseminating the signs and symbols of representation which are a proliferating source for identity formation. The changing landscape of television, which is the result of globalisation, has created new communication across space. Through television, viewers are nowadays 'armchair global travellers' accessing remote and alien cultures.

Identity itself, as Hall (1990, p. 222) has claimed, is deceivingly problematic. In this way, television has added more complexity to cultural identity construction. Broadcasting is a key institution in which people can come to imagine themselves as a member of a community. Watching television can create a common shared-experience among the nation state members, since the images constructed through television and the cinema are a necessary part in the process of the formation of a nation, especially in their capacity to bridge the public and the private (Featherstone, 1995, p. 112). Therefore, as Morley and Robins have suggested, 'film and television play a powerful role in the construction of collective memories and identity' (1995, p. 91). Television, as Featherstone (1995, p. 112) has further proposed, does not merely represent the events, but also constructs them. Signs and symbols represented on television offer possibilities for individuals and families to reconstitute the ceremonial space in the home by observing rituals, dressing up and 'participating', in the knowledge that countless others are doing the very same things. This allows an 'atomized' audience to

occasionally be united via television media events. Television's relation to cultural identity is like a two-edged sword. In one aspect, television is deemed to be a powerful weapon of cultural destruction, as claimed by the classical theoretical paradigms of Cultural Imperialism. However, and as mentioned before, the debate about the influence of television on the homogenisation of cultural identity is problematic, since it reads audiences as passive media consumers. Moreover, the thesis has forgotten the fact that television is 'polysemic'; the text can be read in different ways. As Fiske (1989, p.59) has suggested, television not only delivers programmes but it carries what can be called a semiotic experience, an experience which is characterised by its openness and polysemy. As he observes:

> 'Television is not quite a do-it-yourself meaning kit, but rather it is a box of ready-made meanings for sale. Although it works within cultural determination, it also offers freedoms and the power to evade, modify, or challenge these limitations and controls. All texts are polysemic but polysemy is absolutely central to television's textuality'.
>
> (Fiske, 1989, p. 59).

On the other hand, television has played a unifying role within the construction of nation-state cultural identity. One fine example is the case of the UK. When the BBC was first established, it was described by Reith as 'making a nation as one man', since the central aim of the first director of the BBC, John Reith was to use broadcasting to unify the great British Cultural tradition. This is similar to the case of the European Union's *television without frontiers* campaign, where broadcasting was identified as a key instrument in the creation of a sense of European cultural identity. In the Asian context, most of the governments are aware of the consequences of Cultural and Media Imperialism as subversive threats to their political and cultural stability. They have tried to maintain their cultural distinctiveness by using protectionist policies that deny the audiences access to technology which would facilitate cross-border transmission. For example, Malaysia is considered as fitting the model of 'suppressive openness'; in theory, transnational reception is banned and penalties are severe, but in practice, enforcement is difficult. By comparison, Thailand can be characterised by the term 'regulated openness', where the government allows reception, while Indonesia is a mixture of 'regulated openness' and 'illegal openness', where reception occurs by default because there is little attempt to enforce restriction (Richards, 2000, p. 34).

However, the majority of most Asian governments have recognised the importance of television. The medium is then frequently assigned a role in both promoting national cultural policy and in serving state interests. In this way, broadcasting in the globalisation world has led to both the strengthening of local indigenous culture and the creation of nationalism, since the value that Asian governments have tried to promote via television and other forms of media is mainly a simple, unproblematic, and non-contradictory notion of cultural tradition. In traditional society, as Giddens (Cited in Hall, 1992, p. 274) has suggested, the past is honoured; symbols are valued because they

contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. To put it another way, most Asian governments have tried to promote what is known as 'cultural elitism', traditional cultural identity chosen and defined by the powerful political and cultural controllers in order to restore purity and strengthen their traditional society. This traditional cultural identity is selectively defined by the government. As Homi Bhabha (1990) has observed, the continuing renewal of national identity requires a form of forgetting past origins, ethnicities and places, and there is no doubt that television has been implicated in both denying and suppressing the past, as well as in extracting preferred features of national identity and using them to reconstitute the present and its relationship to the future.

In contemporary society, however, it can be said that television drama plays a pivotel role in understanding people's life and culture. John Gaughie indeed stated that, 'television drama is central to the culture' (Gaughie, 2000, p. 2). In his text 'Television Drama', Gaughie (ibid.) has tried to situate television drama in the context of historical debates and culture shifts, believing that television drama is a central component of post-war British culture. One example can be seen from the longest-running British drama series 'Coronation Street', which, for its 47 years on screen, has presented a portrait of the changing face of British culture and society. In the US, the popular adult animation, 'The Simpsons' can be seen as a reflection on American culture and life. In India, the government-sponsored television series 'Ramayana' became extremely popular in the late 1980s, and is widely thought to have helped topple the Rajiv Gandhi government. Based on the storyline which depicts the struggle between 'good Hinduism' and evil, the subversive programme galvanised a revival of Hindu fundamentalism which led to widespread political unrest. Moreover, it was reported that rural and poor urban people even created small temples for their television sets in the corner of their homes. It is claimed that they treated the series as if the Hindu god himself was coming through the television screen (San Francisco Chronicle, 22 April 1991, Cited in Lull, 1995, p. 126). A similar scene happened in Venezuela in 1992, when a popular soap opera integrated controversial political issues such as government corruption into the storyline. The soap opera then gave impetus to the attempted military coup against the then president Antonio Carlos Pierez.

The relationship between cultural identity formation and television has been a subject of scholarly discussion. A number of studies have emerged within this complex relationship, employing a range of approaches drawn from cultural, ethnographic, textual and audience analytical viewpoints. A number of PhD researchers have shown considerable interest in the relationship between television and the construction of identity, albeit from and within different contexts, and numerous theses have demonstrated how television offers and constructs cultural identities. Liza Tsaliki, for instance, in her PhD research project 'The role of Greek television in the construction of national identity since broadcasting deregulation', has aimed to examine the role Greek television has offered to the construction of national identity. The research has involved the examination of the ratio of domestic and imported television programmes, along with interviews with key figures in the media industry. The thesis also explored the construction of 'Greekness' in various popular television productions, and

through the live transmission of specific events and national ceremonies. The research has maintained that television has a complex relationship with the production of national culture. It has also maintained that Greek television has managed this relationship through a 'flexible articulation' between tradition and modernity (Tsaliki, 1990). In the Cypriot context, PhD research by N Roussou entitled 'Television and the cultural identity of Cyprus youth', has investigated and uncovered the role of youth television programmes in the transformation of cultural identity among Cypriot youth (Roussou, 2001). In the case of Canada, on the other hand, the (1998) PhD thesis 'Culture communication and national identity' by R. E. Collins has argued that 'symbolic culture' such as television culture is neither a sufficient nor necessary agent for the formation of national identity.

In the thesis of Hong Kong researcher Eric Kit-Wai Ma's (2000), 'Television ideologies and cultural identities: the case of Hong Kong television', the central aim is an exploration into the relationship between television ideologies and cultural identities. Kit-Wai has employed textual analysis and audience analysis to examine the role of television dramas in the process of identity formation and maintenance in Hong Kong. The research has indicated that the audiences co-produce meanings of television texts. The research has also shown that when Hong Kong was politically separated from China in the seventies, and the resentment against the immigrants from mainland China was widespread, the melodramatic serials had strong reinforcing effects in stigmatising outsiders and consolidating an indigenous cultural identity for established Hongkongers, However, when China regained sovereignty over the colony in the nineties, there was a deeply felt identity confusion.

In another case study from Hong Kong, 'Hong Kong television: An Anchor for local identity', researcher Paul S.N. Lee (2000) has shown that due to citizens being British colonial subjects, with a dislike of both the Chinese communist and nationalist regions, Hong Kong people were reluctant to assume a national identity after the Hong Kong handover on 1 July 1997. Having little choice, people in Hong Kong had to assume a cultural identity of Chinese origin, without any political or national overtones. However, over time and due to long-time separation from the people on the mainland and in Taiwan, the Hong Kong people had formed their own cultural identity. Television performed a strong role of identity consolidation among people in the 1970s. It served to articulate the sameness of the 'Hongkongers' and cultivate a sense of togetherness among the people. In addition, it helped to manifest the differences of Hongkongers from others and restructure their daily life experiences. The research has shown that a sense of togetherness has brought together Hongkongers. Moreover, the Tiananmen crackdown on students' democratic movements crystallised the Hong Kong people's identity. The brutal suppression of the Beijing students and masses seen on Hong Kong television screens reinforced the people's belief that the communist regime was not the government they wanted. The events sent the message that they did not belong to China, and they realised that they were different from their compatriots in Taiwan through their reaction.

Research by Nain and Annuar (in Richards, 2000, pp. 35-36) in the Malaysian context has indicated that television in Malaysia is an important element in the development of Malaysian national identity and culture. In particular, their research has stated that along with television, language is a key element in this process of cultural identity formation. From the mid-1960s onwards, Malaysian television has used Malay language as the national language on television, although the Malaysian population is comprised of three different ethnic groups who speak the different languages of Tamil, Malay and Chinese mandarin. The research has also pointed out that as a result of an increasing threat of programming from Singapore, there has been an increasing emphasis on the family and religious values as features of national identity in Malaysian broadcasting.

After considering all the above, we can conclude that Globalisation has changed the landscape of modern television and this has led to a more complex relationship within the cultural identity formation. However, different nations responded to the phenomenon of globalisation in different ways. We have witnessed the power of global integration, and, at the same time, an attempt to strengthen cultural identity and nationalism, as well as a clash between the tradition and modernity. In addition, there has been a relocalisation of culture, creating what is called the 'third culture', a mixing of cultural identity as a result of deterritorialisation, the loss of the natural relation between culture, geography and social territory (Lull, 1995, p.151).

In order to understand how a nation culturally responds to the process of identity formation in the globalisation era, it is necessary to understand the cultural background of the nation. The next chapter, 'Thai Cultural Identity', is an exploration into the process of cultural formation in Thailand and the meaning of Thainess. The chapter provides background knowledge which can facilitate an understanding of the role television has played in the formation of Thai cultural identity.

Chapter 2

Thai Cultural Identity

Thai cultural identity has long been subject to power struggles. During the old days of the Siamese Empire, the ruling elite class created rituals and ceremonies centrally focused around the court traditions. Scholarly, traditional court practices such as 'Coronation Day', 'The Royal Barge Procession', and the "crop-beginning Ceremony', have been named as 'great traditions'. At the same time, common Thais have created their own ways of life, centrally focused around village life; these, in contrast, can be referred to as 'little traditions'. Srisak Valipodom (Valipodom, 2001) has suggested that the 'great traditions' is the culture of integration, as this tradition is meant to unify the nation as a whole. It is, as Srisak has claimed, the culture which can only be found in the society of a unified nation-state. 'Little traditions', on the other hand, is the culture of diversity and differentiation. It can be described as the way of life of a people living in the same society. While 'little traditions' create diversity, 'great traditions' create sameness and integration. Importantly, 'great traditions' always play a crucial role during times of conflict, preventing and easing discord within the society. In contemporary Thailand, under the constitutional monarchy, the 'great traditions' still play a profound role in unifying Thai society. This is evident in the reprieve of recent mounting political tension, which was momentarily paused for the celebrations of the King's Diamond Jubilee (explained in the introduction). The study of Thai culture should therefore be seen as a dynamic process in which the two levels of inseparable traditions interact within the changing society.

This chapter is a study into the transformation of Thai cultural identity. It begins with a short historical background of Thailand: from its controversial origins to the establishment of a multicultural Siamese Empire. It then moves on to focus on the formation of the modern Thai-nation state in the nineteenth century. Unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand has not been directly affected by western colonisation. However, colonial power has had an indirect effect on the formation of Thai Society. This chapter demonstrates the processes of self-modernisation, which is the operative response to the rise of Imperialism. This leads to a discussion of the creation of Thai official nationalism and the formation of its national ideology, led by the Thai ruling classes and their successors. The final section of the chapter addresses the notion of Thainess, and the growing debates about its homogeneous image and the heterogeneous reality.

Historical Background:
from traditional Siamese Empire to modern Thai-nation state

Origin

There is some disagreement about the origins and formation of Thailand as a nation. Even until three decades ago, it was generally believed that origins lay in a group of Thai-speaking peoples who

inhabited Szechuan in the southern part of China about 4,500 years ago. Driven by the Mongol Empire, the Thai later migrated to their present homeland. However, this theory has been challenged by the discovery of prehistorical artefacts in Ban Chieng, a historical village in Udon Thani province in Northeast Thailand. The retrieved artefacts include bronze metallurgy going back 3,500 years, and other indications of a culture far more sophisticated than any previously suspected by archeologists. This evidence has shown that Thais might have originated here in Thailand and later scattered to various parts of Asia, including some parts of China and India.

The Kingdom of Siam

Thailand - known as the Kingdom of Siam until 1939 -has a long history, one which dates back 700 years to the foundation of Sukhothai, the first capital state, in 1238. Prior to that time, archeological evidence has shown that the Thai had established small states in the north, namely Lanna and Phayao, by the early 1200s.

During the 1300s, another group of Thai established the fledgling state of Ayutthaya while Sukhothai declined, eventually becoming a vassal state of the Ayutthaya kingdom (1350-1767). Ayutthaya's ideal location as a commercial port, and its richness in natural resources, was inscribed on a historical stone by King Ramkhamhaeng the Great in 1283: 'There is rice in the field, there are fish in the river'. Ayutthaya later became a major power in Southeast Asia. It also attracted numerous outsiders, including the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Spanish, the English, the French, the Arabs, the Chinese and the Japanese.

To those outsiders during that time the Kingdom was known as 'Siam'. The word was used by the Khmer people, the Cambodians of the present day, to refer to the area along the Chao Phraya River of mainland Southeast Asia. In the Khmer language, the word 'Siam' came to be pronounced 'Sien'. The origin of the word, as pointed out by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab in his serial lectures on the history of Thailand at Chulalongkorn University, derived from the Indian Sansakrit, meaning 'gold'. Indians must therefore have been the first to call the country by this name. The Chinese and the Europeans, who increasingly came into contact with the Thai, then copied it and called the kingdom itself 'the kingdom of Siam', meaning the kingdom of gold. However, the word was used only by foreigners, while Thais perceived themselves as Thai and even in those days called their country 'Kingdom of Thai'.

Ayutthaya remained the Thai capital until 1767, when the Burmese sacked and burned it. The Thai then established the new capital of Thonburi (1767-1782) along the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. They, subsequently, moved to the other side of the river, to the district of Bangkok, and founded the new capital of Bangkok under the formation of the present Chakri dynasty's first king. Although 'Khrungthep', meaning city of angels, is the actual name of the city, Westerners prefer to call it Bangkok.

The name Siam was used until 1939, at which point the government made an official proclamation changing the name of the country to 'Prathet Thai' or Thailand---the land of Thai. The word 'Thai' means 'independence'; so, Thailand literally means 'land of independence'.

'Imagined Thailand': the routes to modernity

One of the first sociologists to warn of the uncritical use of models of modernisation, Eisenstadt argued against the simplistic view of the 'tradition versus modernity' dichotomy. He emphasised the various responses of non-western societies 'to the external forces of modernisation and the persistence of cultural codes under the pressure of modernising circumstance which, in his view, led to the emergence of various 'post-traditional' social orders which are neither modern in the western sense nor 'transitional', that is, moving toward Western-type modernity.' (Cited in Cohen, 1994, p.36). The development of modern societies was often conceived as tantamount to the decline of tradition, but in the case of Thailand there has been a complex relationship between tradition and modernity.

Chai-anan Samudavanija (Samudavanija, 1991) has observed that the process of modernisation in Thailand was in sharp contrast to that in the West, one which was conditioned by the rise of capitalism and which in turn, created liberal democracy. As a consequence, the West became modern in all aspects: political, economic and cultural. The process of modernisation in Thailand cannot simply be viewed as the imposition of the western model upon a declining, old, traditional society. Instead, it should rather be seen as a process of self-reform in response to what Benedict Anderson refers to as 'the world-wide spread of the nationally-imagined community' (Anderson, 1991).

The routes to modernity in Thailand began in the mid-nineteenth century, during the time of French and British Imperialist expansion. Although Thailand, or Siam during that time, maintained its independence from colonial control, colonialism was nevertheless an external force of modernisation in the country. One of the operations in response to British and French colonial expansion was the process of transformation from the traditional Siam Empire to the Thai nation-state, the selective process exercised by the absolute power of the ruler King and elite Thai aristocrats. Siam had encountered Westerners since the glorious era of Ayuthaya, when the Protuguese first arrived in 1551, followed by Spaniards, the Dutch in 1604, British in 1612 and the French in 1612. The social intercourse with them had seriously begun in the early days of the Rattanakhosin era, with Bangkok as the new capital, and this interaction was increasingly intensified by the encroachment of French and British imperialism.

The process of becoming the Thai nation-state was initiated by King Mongkut (Rama IV (1851-1868)) of the Chakri dynasty, at a time when Siam was confronted with increasing pressure from the colonial powers of Britain and France. The process of transformation was an attempt by the king to safeguard the country and preserve its independence from Western encroachment. Officially, and with academic consensus, the routes to modernity began in 1855, when Siam signed the 'Bowring

Treaty' (a commercial treaty named after Sir John Bowring), with Great Britain. At that time, a period now seen as the threshold of Thai modernisation, a wide range of technological, administrative and symbolic innovations were introduced by King Mongkut who had a keen interest in western culture and technology. At the same time, however, the King, who had resided in the monkhood (i.e. living as a Buddhist monk) 26 years prior to his accession to the throne, also sought to utilise Western knowledge to strengthen Theravada Buddhism, the basis of traditional Siam. The process was therefore deemed as the first attempt to create a national ideology and unify the nation. King Mongkut also realised the usefulness of English. He hired an English widow from Singapore, Mrs Anna Leonowens, to teach English to his son and the court. Among her royal pupils was Prince Chulalongkorn who later became King Rama V of Siam.

Continued by King Chulalongkorn (or Rama V (1868-1910)), the transformation process progressed with wider, systematic, and more ambitious programmes in full swing. With the assistance of his half-brother, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, King Chulalongkorn utilised modern western methods and technologies and brought great progress to Siam, notably the reform of education standards, a royal navy and army, an administrative strategy, and road and bridge building. Furthermore, Rama V was known as a benevolent autocrat concerned about the welfare of his people. One of his prominent merits was the abolition of slavery without bloodshed, for which people humbly refer to him as King Chulalongkorn the 'Beloved Great'.

On the world stage, the King, who never had an education abroad, set out on official tours to many countries and made friends through personal contact with various heads of state. These included Emperor William II of Germany, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, the Prince of Wales (who was four years later crowned as King Edward VII of Great Britain), and President Loubet of France. In this way, he succeeded in putting Siam on the world map.

With respect to unifying the nation, King Chulalongkorn was also the first Siamese ruler to refer to the national collectivity as a whole. He initially used the word 'samakkhi', a term deriving from an Indian language and meaning 'to have unity or harmony'. Transforming the image of 'god-like king' to 'father-like king' in order to redefine the relationship of monarchy and people, he transformed many of the traditional rituals within the court and opened them to all his subjects throughout the country. During his reign, women's education was promoted in the court; also, a number of royal members and noblemen were sent for western education in Britain and other European countries, among them his heir, Prince Vajiravuhd, who later became King Rama VI.

King Vajiravudh (1910-1925), having a thoroughly western education, selectively pursued his father's programme of modernisation. Yet betraying his western education, and seeing westernisation as somewhat of a threat, he was passionately attached to the traditions of his country and intended to pursue western methods and customs in ways that contributed to the happiness and material welfare of his people. As he once stated:

'I do not at all object to all Western knowledge, for I myself have obtained much knowledge from the West. So I do not take exception to the point that Westerners have much to offer in the way of techniques and abilities. But I do question that if something is good for Westerners it must necessarily be good for everyone else.'

(Cited in Vella, 1978, p 176)

During his reign, he actively continued to improve Thai national progress in areas such as the re-organisation of the administration of the country. He intended to teach self-governance to the people by constructing a miniature city called Dusit Palace. The project did not receive wide support, however, and it was consequently dropped at the end of his reign. Education was the priority for him; he realised that if more people were educated, they would help develop the country better than previously. He proclaimed a new national scheme of education in 1913, and Siam became the first country in mainland Asia to initiate compulsory education. With his absolute power, King Vajiravudh also changed the Thai National flag from the logo picture of a white elephant on a red background to the present day one, successfully bringing it in line with the flags of other modern nation states. Thus, the process of nation-state creation was deemed to be complete during the reign of King Vajiravuhd, known as the father of Thai Nationalism.

In conclusion, the emergence of 'imagined Thailand' into the contemporary world was through the process of modernisation, a process which had taken place in many parts of the world as a rise of new nation-states during nineteenth century. Yet for Thailand, a country which had never been colonised or experienced socio-cultural breakdown, the process was far more complex than the imposition of a modernising power over traditional society. The process has been a form of resistance to imperialist power, and essentially the subject of power struggle. It has therefore been a process of selective self-reform, a process led by the Thai ruling elites who were threatened with, as Benedict Anderson has claimed, exclusion from an emerging 'nationally-imagined community' (Anderson, 1991, p. 101).

Thai cultural Identity

In 'Imagined Communities', Anderson (1991, p.99) places Siam as an example of the character of 'official nationalism', a term first coined by Seton-Watson (Cited in Anderson, 1991, p.109). In his writing, Anderson has referred to anticipatory policies (such as compulsory state controlled primary education, state-organised propaganda, official rewriting of history, militarism, and so forth) adopted by dynastic-aristocratic nations threatened with marginalisation from an emerging nationally-imagined community. In this way, the term 'official nationalism' is used in the same sense as what was referred to in the previous section as the process of 'selective self-reform' or 'self-modernisation'. The 'official

nationalism policy' involved not only physical and technological reform, but also engaged a national ideology development exercised by the Thai ruling classes and their successors. This section will explore the creation of Thai national ideology, and the 'official nationalism policy' which has put 'imagined Thailand' as a modern state into the global nation standard.

Nation by design: The King and the creation of Thai National-ideology

The first attempt to create Thai national ideology was initiated by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), during the time Siam was being intensely invaded by colonial powers. The King used the word 'Samakkee', meaning 'unity and harmony', as the motto for all Thais to follow in order to withstand the western encroachment.

His succeeding heir, King Vajiravudh was obviously aware that western culture would diminish the uniqueness of Thai culture and identity. He stressed that Thai people must understand what being Thai and the nation meant. As the father of Thai Nationalism, King vajiravudh created a series of writings and publications aimed at promoting a sense of unity and national pride. In this nationalist writing, the King also created the 'otherness' in order to differentiate those who were Thai from those who were not[1]. In his own words:

> 'We must remember that we Thai have characteristics basically different from those of foreigners. What set the Thai nation apart? A combination of things including Thai history, Thai arts, Thai language, Thai literature, Thai Buddhism, Thai love of the royal leader and an essential Thai spirit, a fierce devotion to Thai in the sense of 'free'.'
>
> (Cited in Vella, 1978, p 176)

Through the use of signs and symbols, King Vajiravudh moved on to inventing the tripartite formula of Thai collective identity in an attempt to create national ideology. This formula was represented by the three pillars of Thai society embodied in 'Nation, Religion and Monarchy'. The formula is also associated with the colours represented on the modern Thai flag which he initiated in 1917. This modern flag comprises of five-horizontal bands. The double red at the outer edge represents the 'Nation', as red signifies the colour of blood. The next double white bands represent religion, as white symbolizes virtue. And at the center of the flag, the blue band represents the blue-blood of the monarchy.

The concept of three pillars has played a central role in promoting a sense of unity. It has been promoted as the basic symbol of Thai collective identity and officially used by cultural managers, such as the National Identity Board of Thailand, and the latest Ministry of Culture.

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[1] The targets of King Vajiravudh's nationalism were not only westerners such as French and British Imperialists, but also included Chinese immigrations. This can be seen in his two anti-Chinese writings: *The Jew of the Orient* (1914), and *Clogs on our wheels* (1915).

State-Identity in the post-revolution: cultural mandates, bureaucratic elites and the establishment of national ideology

Thailand had an absolute monarchy until June 24, 1932, when a bloodless revolution instigated by a group called the 'people party', and led by European-educated Thais[2], broke out. The 1932 revolution, ushering in a new era of constitutional government, brought a temporary eclipse of the monarchy. The tripartite formula of King Vajiravudh was given little emphasis during the post-1932 period: the new military government had succeeded in the creation of national ideology. This crucial period of time, Thailand was ruled by Prime Minister Field Marshall Plaek Pibulsongkram. During Plaek Pibulsongkram's regime, one key figure played a profound role in the development of state ideology. He was Plaek's right hand man, Wichit Wathakan[3], a dominant nationalist intellectual during post-1932. One of Wichit's most important projects in state ideology development was the creation of cultural mandates.

Cultural mandates were a series of state conventions. They were invented to create a way of removing the sense of the 'flaws' of Thai society which hampered the country's progress. The 'flaws', according to the official document, were defined as the unsightly dress and undisciplined social behaviour of the population in the capital, which made the country seem 'unprogressive' to foreigners and therefore unworthy of retaining its independence. The first proclaimed state convention was the change of the country's name from 'Siam' to 'Thailand' in 1939.[4] There was a degree of opposition to that idea both inside and outside the cabinet. Inside the cabinet, it was argued that there were many races in Siam and they were all loyal to Thailand; non-Thai races would feel discriminated against by this idea. This concern was also expressed by the press outside of the cabinet.

Following the first proclamation, the government, acting as cultural manager, went on to issue another eleven conventions to promote 'Thainess' and 'Thai consciousness'. These included state conventions on ritual behaviour, language, dress, and daily life. The cultural mandates, designed to promote Thainess in Plaek and Wichit's sense, was an attempt to distinguish the Thai from 'the others'[5] by formulating a pattern of cultural conventions for Thais to follow. Strict action was

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[2] June 24, 1932: Rama VII, or King Prajadhipok (half-brother of Rama VI) was away at his summer palace in Hua-Hin Petchaburi province. In the early morning of that day, the people party, consisting of civil and military officials, took over the administration of the country. They took members of the royal family hostage and issued a proclamation announcing the end of the absolute monarchy. After the incident, there was criticism from the people in the way the party people treated the royal family and demanded them to make a formal apology to the king. The people party finally made an apology and invited the king to return to the capital to reign as king under the constitutional monarchy established by the people party.

[3] Wichit Vatakharn was a close associate of Plaek and member of the cabinet. He was on a diverse rank of government position and began to produce a number of works on Thai history and foreign relations that expressed the new ideology in a chauvinistic manner.

[4] In the official government proclamation it was said, 'the use of the term Siam to refer to the Thai nation was inappropriate since it had no relation to the actual inhabitants of the territory, as in the tenth century A.D. the area in which Thais are now living was under the control of part of India-Khom people called Sayam. Later the Thais overthrew and proclaimed its independence, then inaugurated Sukothai. '

[5] During that time in Siam, diverse races such as Mon, Lao, Karen, Khmer and Burmese, who were war captives and refugees, were living as labour workers and rice cultivaters. Also, the number of Chinese diasporas had been increasing. They had started to dominate the Thai economy, launched a series of strikes against government tax policy and sometimes thrown the capital into turmoil. These were considered as threats for the Thai government at that time.

requested during his regime. However, Plaek's regime and its unsuccessful cultural mandates eventually declined after the end of World War II.

State-Identity Building in Comparative View

King Vajiravudh and Wichit Vatthakan were always referred to as dominant figures of Thai nationalism who played a profound role in Thai national identity formation. However, in a comparative view, the two phases of state-identity building might simply have been seen as an analogy of the top-down policies from the ruling elites. However, the former took place at the same time of nation-state building. It was an attempt to reinforce the strength of the Thais and unify the nation following the dispute over the land with France and Britain, a dispute which Thailand had lost in the World Court, consequently being forced to give up some parts of the country to British and French imperialism. King Vajiravudh's contributions, such as literature, songs, plays and prose were therefore essentially aimed at arousing the consciousness of Thais to the true sense of Nationalism. Whilst the post-1932 phase, the process took place separately from the nation-state building. It was an artificial process intended to utilize state power for its own purposes. As Chai-anan Samudavanija has claimed, it was an intention of the government to augment the capacity of the bureaucratic and military elites to prevent the emergent forces in civil society from controlling the state. In this way, the state-ideological building during Phibul's regime was absolutely *not* the *national identity*, but rather it was purely *political identity*, divorced from cultural identity. Without a true sense of nationalism, Wichit and Phibul should not be perceived as Thai nationalists, but, instead as military 'statism' (Samudavanija, 1991, p. 67).

Chai-anan also pointed out that under the absolute monarchy the nation-state was only a technical and administrative instrument of the regime, and there was no need to build state-identity since the identity of Siam state was inseparable from the reigning monarchy. Therefore, the nation-state building process did not essentially change the character of the state or the identity of the nation, nor did the bureaucratic and military elites (Samudavanija, 1991, p. 60).

Worth noting is the fact that it is evident in the present day that the King's tripartite formula has been passed on from generation to generation, whilst Plaek's cultural mandates were not given any recognition.

Cultural Managers: the official promotion of Thai national identities

The official promotion of Thai identity within the country through the schools and the media has been one of the Thai government's policies. During 1980 and 1981, the National Identity Board (NIB) of Thailand was established under the office of the Prime Minister. It originally aimed at reviving the spirit of 1940s nationalism, a response of state power elites to the series of identity crises which had emerged in the nation during the 1973-1976 period. Acting as cultural manager, the National Identity Board of Thailand formulated the nine-fold schema labeled 'Thai national Identity'. The schema,

together with the three pillars of Thai society, was used as an official notion of Thai collective identity.

In the NIB's concept, national identity is in association with national security. It is the distinctive characteristic of nationhood that differentiates 'Thais' from 'others'. The NIB issued nine-components of National Identity. These are: 1) territory, 2) people, 3) independence and sovereignty, 4) government, 5) religion, Buddhism in the narrow sense, 6) monarchy, 7) language, 8) culture, 9) national pride. These nine-components are claimed by the NIB to be the foundation of Thai national identity. The NIB also stated that the promotion of national identity is one of the Thai government's policies in order to maintain national security, to promote stability and to reinforce the integrity of Nation, Religion and Monarchy'.

In promoting this notion, the National Identity Board of Thailand issued a monthly journal, the culture magazine 'Warasan Wattanatam Thai'. First published in the 1960s under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, the journal's contents are typical of the several journals devoted to celebrating and promoting Thai national culture. Everything from food to folk culture, martial arts, national holidays, languages and rituals are presented in an unscholarly style for a popular readership. The NIB also has its in-house production unit to produce radio and television programmes which are centrally aimed at promoting Thai culture under the umbrella of the three pillars of Thai society.

In October 2001, the most recent cultural manager, 'the Ministry of Culture', was inaugurated as a result of the reorganization of the governmental administrative system. The NIB was then transferred to report under the cultural ministry. Over the several years since its inauguration, the cultural ministry has not played any vital role in the Thai cultural context, due largely to the lack of actual direction and practical polices that suit with contemporary Thai society. Its policy has focused on the nostalgic desire to recover the 'lost tradition' and to restore the past identity. In this way, the ministry of culture has been criticized as being misguided and working against the cultivation of open-mindedness. A good example of this was an idea of the first cultural minister, Uraiwan Thienthong, who signaled that young people yielding to foreign influence are among her primary concern. She suggested a plan to enforce nationalism through a diet of the patriotic plays of Wichit Wathakan, who enjoyed a heyday in her youth. The plan received strong opposition from the public and criticism from the press, as it was incompatible with contemporary society. An article in the newspaper, *The Bangkok Post*, openly criticized the plan, stating that 'returning patriotic plays to theatres is like inviting back the cold war...as an educated woman of 60, Ms Uraiwan should know that smart people do not fight globalization, but rather learn to enjoy it and use it for their own ends...' (Bangkok Post, 30 October 2002). Consequently, not only did Uraiwan's nostalgically nationalist policy not receive any support, it also brought an obsolete image to the Ministry of Culture.

As Immanuel Wallerstein has stated, 'Culture is always the weapon of the powerful'. (Wallerstein 1973, cited in King, 1991, p. 99). Thai cultural identity has always been subject to the power struggle of the ruling classes to maintain their power through a weapon of culture. Wallerstein

also maintained that, 'If the powerful can legitimize their expropriations by transforming them into 'customs', the weak can appeal to the legitimacy of these same 'customs' to resist new and different expropriations'(ibid.). In contemporary Thai society, while the powerful are still struggling to maintain their legitimacy, the silent power of the resistance seems to be increasing. Consequently, a cultural clash between 'the old' and 'the new' has been created in Thai society. Some examples of this cultural clash can be seen in the issue of controversial media content, and specifically television programmes. A detailed analysis of the roles of television in the formation of Thai cultural identity will be discussed in the next chapter.

Discourse on 'Thainess' and its growing debates

There is a widespread consensus that Thailand is a homogeneous country with a long history and which has preserved its independence throughout the centuries. This notion, along with the three pillars of Thai society (an official version of Thai national identity) has been fostered by the National Identity Board of Thailand and the Ministry of Culture, playing consecutive roles as cultural managers. In this way, the meaning of 'Thainess' has always been a pre-ordained and timeless idea monopolized by ruling elites in Thai society. Nevertheless, what is meant by 'to be Thai' has recently been introduced into common discourse through debates about Thai cultural identity. The growing challenges to the conservative version, and specifically to the idea of a homogenous country, are among those argued by intellectuals who point out discrepancies between a 'homogenous image' and the 'heterogeneous reality'.

Edward Said pointed out that because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid (Said, 1993). Long before the word 'multiculturalism' was invented, Siam (during the early era of Sukkothai to Ayuthaya and early Ratanakosin) had been a multi-ethnic society, with Thai and non-Thai (Mon, Khmer, Laos) people living together. The Thais not only asserted their power over the empire, but also assimilated the traditions and cultures of those living with them. Hence, the history of Thai culture is a history of the relationship between culture and empire.

Nidhi Aeusrivongse has pointed out that Thai society is rooted in the mixing of various races of people (Aeusrivongse, 2001). By intermarriage and social intercourse between people dating back to pre-modern Siam, the empire was historically plural, having embraced from the offset these non-Thai and non-Buddhists who were all loyal to Siam (Aeusrivongse, 2001).

The growth of actual plurality in Thailand has been considerably evident from the latest tourism campaigns orchestrated by the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The campaigns employ the country's rich heritage, selling itself abroad by promoting its culture and tradition under the slogan, 'Amazing Thailand, experience the 'diversity''. In this way, various communities and regional

cultures were deployed; ironically, the idea of Thai diversity being promoted is contradictory to the idea of the homogenous country so claimed by those cultural managers.

There is a growing debate about the notion of Thai identity proposed by the concept of cultural pluralism and the increasing desire for greater self-assertion and cultural autonomy in recent years. It may be regarded fascinating that Thailand has never experienced major racial or ethnic problems; moreover, the notion of the three pillars of Thai society has never been violated, and is still embedded in the consciousness of Thais. It might be the openness of Buddhism and the King that underpins the coexistence of plural Thai society. Nation, religion and monarchy can therefore be seen as the three pillars supporting a large, open structure with room for a diversity of peoples, rather than a small one with reinforced walls acting as barriers to the alien influence.

To that end, it is still difficult to provide a definitive answer to what 'Thainess' is. As Atthachak Sritranuwat has suggested, the process of becoming 'Thainess' should be considered a dynamic process, and its meanings can only be understood by historically observing the meaning of 'Thainess' in each period, conditioned by the changing socio-cultural and political atmosphere of each time (Sritranuwat, 2001). In this way, 'Thainess' should be understood through considering the degree to which Thai society has been transformed by political and economic forces that have impinged upon it from the outside, and the degree to which Thai society perpetuates pre-modern social forms (Aeusrivongse, 2001).

Conclusion

> 'National cultures have usually emerged alongside state formation processes in which cultural specialists have reinvented traditions and reshaped and refurbished the ethnic core of the people. As nation-states became increasingly drawn together in a tighter figuration of competing nations, they faced strong pressure to develop a coherent cultural identity. The process of the homogenisation of culture, the project of creating a common culture must be understood as a process in the unification of culture of the need to ignore, or at best refine, synthesis and blend, local differences.'
>
> (Featherstone, 1990, p. 89)

The formation of Thai cultural identity, through power struggles, emerged during the transformation of the country from the Siamese Empire to the Thai nation-state. The creation of cultures, traditions and values designed by 'cultural specialists', such as the ruling elite classes, has been the force within the nation in an attempt to unify a Thai nation-state.

This chapter has focused on examples of cultural identity created within the nation-state and within the indirect outside force of western colonisation. As Featherstone has suggested, 'The process of formation of such a culture cannot be understood merely as a response to forces within the nation-state, but must also be seen in relation to forces outside of it.' (Featherstone, 1990, p. 90). Along with

globalisation, global forces such as western imperialism have been important external forces in the process of the formation of Thai cultural identity. The following chapter will move to an exploration into Thai cultural identity through an analysis of television, a medium influenced by external global forces, and its central role in the formation of Thai cultural identity.

Chapter 3

Television and the formation of Thai cultural identity

> 'Television is local, defined by quite different systems of national regulation, different historical relations with the state and with capital-even different points of entry...these different histories add up to different national experiences, and different understandings of what television is.' (Caughie, 2000, p. 16).

In order to understand the role of television in the formation of Thai cultural identity, an understanding of the history of Thai television and its culture is needed. This chapter will begin with an exploration into the historical background of Thai television and its specificity. This will include a brief chronology of Thai television: from its invention through political purpose, to its evolution through forces of globalisation. This will be followed by a look at the specificity of its programmes, through an analysis of popular programmes such as folklore dramas, soap operas, news programmes, and live broadcasts of national rituals. The discussion will then move to discourse surrounding the roles which television has contributed in the formation of Thai cultural identity. This part is an analysis of controversial television programmes such as 'The Weakest Link' in its Thai version, and the popular Taiwanese series, 'Meteor Garden', which have raised debates about the clash between Thai tradition and modernity. The final part of the chapter will focus on 'cultural hybridity' in Thai society, through an analysis of style, form, language and representation in youth television programmes.

Thai television: a brief chronology

Just as in other in Southeast Asian countries, television in Thailand was initiated for political purposes. Thai television was initially inaugurated by former Prime Minister Field Marshall Plake Phibulsongkram as a mean of supporting his political power. During WWII, while television in Europe was abruptly brought to a temporary end, the news about this 'new medium' was spreading through Thailand. Sanpisiri Viriyasiri, the radio operator of the Department of Propaganda (now the Public Relations Department) had heard news of the emergence of television in the west. This inspired him to the realization of television in Thailand. After the war, Sanparisi wrote the first Thai article about television in a Buddhist ceremony souvenir book. In the article, he described television as being the 'magic eyes' for people to see the world.

The inception of Thai television

Field Marshall Plake Phibulsongkram was the man who made Sanpasiri's dream possible. After reading the article, he had the idea of forming Thai television in order to use it as an instrument for

political and cultural propaganda. General Plake foresaw the power of this 'new medium', which he thought would be highly effective in relaying government messages. From 1948 to 1955, he made a systematic attempt to establish the first station, despite strong opposition from the House of Representatives. The press also criticised the project. Central to the project of the first Thai television was General Plake's intention of employing television as a tool to fight back against the suppressive press, and also of halting the expansion of communism at that time. In addition, the economic expansion of the west, and the radio and television corporations in particular, was another significant force that triggered interest in setting up television. For example, the American Company RCA sent detailed information and catalogues of television technology to the Public Relations Department of Thailand, and also offered to demonstrate the operation of television technology. Both the interest in technological development and economic pressures were the pretexts for establishing the first television network in Thailand.

Having encountered strong opposition from within the political and social spheres, the government withdrew the proposal to set up a state television wholly supported by a state budget. Instead, it turned to the form of state enterprise which had allowed government involvement in other industries such as logging, rubber, and postal delivery. To make the idea viable, the government hastily repeated the 1935 Radio Communication Act and was able to pass two new Bills, the 1955 Radio Communications Act and the 1955 Radio and Television Broadcasting Act, both of which were passed within one day. Although the project was legalised, the question of raising the capital remained unsolved. Four state enterprises and the Navy together had contributed 5 million baht to the founding fund of the first meeting of shareholders in 1953. However, the government was unable to allocate its share of 15 million baht to the Thai television Company investment capital. Although inundated with numerous problems, the public Relations Department, which had been designated the legal, major shareholder of the government was nonetheless able to carry out its commitment. Thai television Channel 4 (in black and white) was inaugurated on 24 June 1955, and the role of television to legitimise the political power of Field Marshall Plake Phibulsongkram began.

Despite great efforts to legitimise his political platform, Prime Minister Plake Phibulsonkram failed to maintain the military bloc. His arch rival General Sarit Thanarat, the Army Commander in Chief, was already vying for power against the PM's close aide, Police Commander General Pao Sriyanond. It was during the 1957 general election that General Sarit Thanarat decided to set up Army Television. However, in September 1957, and before the Army's Channel 7 (also in the black and white system) was able to start its broadcasts, General Sarit staged a coup and took over the Premiership from Field Marshall Plake Phibulsongkram. On 25 January 1958, Army Memorial Day, Thailand's second television station was inaugurated.[1]

[1] Due to the change of the transmission system from NTSC 525-line to PAL 625-line, the black and white Channel 4 and Channel 7 were switched to the colour system Channel 9 and Channel 5 in colour system respectively.

Although Channel 4 and Channel 7 were initiated for political purposes, their programme policy was centrally focused on offering entertainment to the people. The programme schedules were mainly filled with news and folkloric music and performance, as well as relaying signal of plays and performances from the National theatre. At that post WWII time, Thailand was in patriotic mood. All dramas and plays were based on the patriotic writings of Wichit Vattakan which aimed to support a sense of nationalism in Thailand. The programme schedule also included daily news, the broadcasting of state events such as the celebration of twenty five centuries of Buddhism, programmes on Thai cultural heritage and an emphasis on proper manners and 'Thainess'.

The rise of commercial television

The historical details outlined in the previous section demonstrate how the political patronage of television broadcasting in Thai society was formed. At the end of the 1950s, Thailand had two free-to-air television stations in which advertising expenditure was the main source of funding.

Although, television was initiated for political purposes, the following decades saw dramatic changes in television's roles. State networks began giving privileged franchises to two private enterprises, Krungthep Witayu Lae Thoratat Ltd., and Bangkok Entertainment Ltd., to operate Channel 7 and Channel 3 (both in colour system) respectively. The emergence of these private networks led to an increase in competition in the broadcasting business, and the two networks became business rivals.

The growing popularity of television in the 1960s and 1970s could be seen through the steady rise in sales of television sets. More homes were equipped with television sets than were with telephones, and television entered into the everyday life of Thai people as a main source of entertainment and leisure.

Thai television in the golden age

The 1980s were seen as the 'Golden Age' of Thai television, particularly commercial television, as Channel 7 and Channel 3 had won the lion's share of the audience due to the improvement of production quality and the offering of a variety of programmes. By contrast, owing to the conservative format of programmes, low-cost production and an inert administrative system not suited to broadcasting operations, Channel 9 and Channel 5 were seen as old-fashioned

At the end of the '80s, the first public service television network was inaugurated. Channel 11, owned by the Public Relations Department, aimed to provide educational programmes and public service announcements for the Thai people. The station was founded with a budget offered by the Japanese government, and has since been funded by a national state budget. Channel 11 was the only station transmitted without advertisment interruptions, most of its airtime being devoted to public service announcements and information programmes such as documentaries and serious talk shows, as

well as educational programmes from the Open University. Unfortunately, its informative image could not attract much audience attention, leading to its position as the least popular channel in Thailand.

Thai television in the post-revolution 1992

In the decade which followed, the 1990s, the Thai television industry flourished. Intense competitiveness between the two popular stations, Channel 7 and Channel 3, further increased. Moreover, the beginning of this decade saw the emergence of cable and satellite television, providing a multiplicity of channels. Three Thai companies were given license to operate subscription television networks, broadcasting via cable and satellite transmission (Thailand launched its own communications satellite, 'Thai Com', in1994). This led to a new form of competition between free-to-air television and subscription television networks. Local producers were aware of these new competitors, so there was investment in programme development and advanced production technologies in order to compete with them.

In the academic arena, the development of the television industry and cable and satellite services has also brought popularity to mass communication studies, including studies in radio and television broadcasting, advertising, film, and journalism. At the majority of universities, courses within the faculty of Mass Communication and Communication Arts have become the most popular. The competition amongst applicants to serve a place at top-ranking universities such as Chulalongkorn University and Thammasatra University is very high. Graduates from these two universities in particular have later had an influence on the programme development of radio and television in Thailand.

One major event which had a profound impact on Thai television was the political crackdown of 1992. In May of that year, a military group, led by General Suchinda Kraprayul, decided to stage a coup, and Suchinda elected himself a Prime Minister. This in tern led to demonstrations and protest against the self-elected Prime Minister. During the political confrontation, the key issues were 'freedom of expression' and 'the public's right to know'. The state media, including radio and television, were used to legitimize official power; all opposition opinion was censored, leaving the public furious and confused. Television was the main propaganda tool of the government, presenting lies and distorted information to its audiences. On the other hand, the press, as the only open space, cried out against state manipulation of information and reported the events independently, despite facing the threat of censorship and internal editorial conflicts. When the government and the state media failed to convince the public, the public turned to demonstrations which led to violent bloodshed, with the military deciding to use force and seize the demonstrators with arms and bullets. The King had to intervene in conflicts, and finally brought the violence to an end.

In the aftermath of the May 1992 political crackdown (known as 'Bloody May'), the role of television was seriously questioned. The criticism was made that state networks, coupled with the privileged franchises, were the primary constraints upon the freedom of television expression and the

public's right to know. The call to reform the existing television system consequently came along with the demand to reform the political system. Two public discussions were organized on May 28 and 29 at Thammasatra University and Chulalongkorn University, calling for the liberalisation of television and state media as a whole. More than 6,000 people attended the events. For the first time in the history of broadcasting in Thailand, freedom of expression on radio and television was considered as a 'natural right' equal to other basic human rights. It was suggested that the state media system should be liberalised and state ownership should be diversified. This would enable the private sector to have genuine access to the broadcasting system.

The call for media liberalisation was achieved when the interim government, led by appointed-prime minister Anan Panyarachun, announced the scheme to set up five new television channels under the premise that the channels would be equally divided between the government and the private sector. Futhermore, one of these channels would be reserved for emergency purposes. The television industry and government believed that in liberalising the broadcasting system, freedom of expression could be guaranteed for both the press and the audience. From the marketing perspective, more channels and more competition would naturally lead to an improvement in the overall quality of television pragrammes.

In 1995, a new television station, Independent Television (ITV), was launched with a radical identity. With The Nation Group (an independent newspaper based media group) owning the biggest share, the network presents itself as independent from both government and commercial intervention. Informative programmes such as news and current affairs, documentaries and other forms of info-tainment account for more than 80 percent of its programming. Its news programme was also presented in a unique style, which brought warning to all other channels, strongly criticized in the aftermath of May 1992. All other networks started to improve their programme quality, and specifically that of news programmes, in order to bring back the audience share.

The emergence of ITV has also brought about a radical change to the image of Thai television. Before its arrival, the majority of the programmes were entertainment programmes, and television was generally considered as 'brain washing', swamped with valueless and meaningless content and promoting consumerism. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the amount of news and other informative programmes steadily increased in relation to the rising number of well-educated, middle class. ITV was launched at the right time to serve this audience's need for an alternative choice. It also marked the new development phase of Thai television contexts and opened up a new era of liberal Thai television.

To reiterate, Thai television was initially inaugurated to serve the political purposes of the ruling Thai government. From this 'state ideological apparatus' of the old military regime, television then become the medium of common Thais, and a market-driven industry. For 50 years, it has played a role as 'cultural theatre', where all information and entertainment are played out to the Thai public.

During the current decade, since the turn of the millennium, globalisation has brought about great changes throughout the world, and also to Thailand included. Thai television has evolved to keep up with the world scenario, and there have been significant investments in advanced technology, both in terms of broadcasting systems and production technology. Like the rest of the world, for instance, broadcasting technology is currently under the process of digitalisation. There has also been an institutionalisation and deregulation of broadcasting laws, in accordance with the 1997 constitution. These are the key accelerators driving the development of Thai television.

In programming, global television has had both a direct and indirect effect on Thai television. Globalisation has a direct effect in that it has overcome barriers of space and time, which in turn creates the experience of the global 'armchair viewer', where audiences can metaphorically travel the world via cable and satellite television. In this way, global television can be viewed as a new rival in the television market share of the viewers. Local Thai producers have had to develop programme style and format to retain their market share of Thai audiences. At the same time, with globalisation's creation of homogenisation, global television has had an indirect effect on the development of forms and styles of Thai programming. As local producers learn from global television, they develop global styles to the local tastes, which create new hybrid forms of programmes.

Yet despite advanced production technology and the modern development of programmes, Thai television has still retained its own unique character. And as the following section argues, this can be seen through an analysis of the cultural specificity of Thai television.

The Cultural Specificity of Thai television

It was discussed in the previous chapter that Thai cultural society has resulted from an interaction between the 'great tradition' and the 'little tradition'. The interplay between the two traditions has been evident in the spaces provided by television. From the programme policy, it has been seen that elements of the 'little traditions' have dominated the screen through popular programmes for common Thais; namely dramas, music and news programmes, and game shows.

News programmes have gained popularity among Thai people since they provide information for following current situations. Each television channel seems highly energetic in promoting and developing its news reporting in order to compete with one another. However, the most popular television genre in Thailand is drama, specifically soap operas. Nearly every television channel fills its prime-time schedule (20:00-22:00 hr) with dramas. The central plots of these popular dramas are mainly focused on love, jealousy, and relationships, which reflects the stereotypical lifestyle of the common people. After prime-time, programme schedules are predominantly filled by game shows, talk shows and variety shows. These are usually followed by late night news reporting and analysis.

One specific type of popular drama in Thailand is the 'folklore drama', the story lines of which are largely based on ancient folklore stories. The basic plot of this sub-genre drama concerns a struggle or battle between 'the good', normally personified as a prince, and 'the devil', usually

characterised by demons or witches. Ultimately, 'the good' always emerges victorious over 'the devil'. This type of folklore drama is scheduled to be broadcast on weekend mornings, its targeted viewers being children who love stories about 'heros and villains, and housewives who enjoy romance stories between heros and princesses. The central plot of the story is typically to show that bad people must always pay for their bad karma, while the hero will earn the benefits of his good karma. This folklore-drama cannot simply be seen as another form of entertainment: the original purpose of these ancient stories is to encourage good behaviour.

Figure 3.1
A still from a Thai folklore-drama, aimed at encouraging good merit-making

Although Thai television is largely occupied by spaces of the 'little tradition' mentioned above, there is still sufficient room for the 'great tradition'. This can be seen from live broadcasting of national rituals and ceremonies, some of which are performed by the King and the Royal Family. Examples of spaces of the 'great tradition' can thus be explained through the relationship between television and the monarchy.

The present King of Thailand, King Bhumiphol, or Rama IX, has been considered a unifying figure of Thai society. Each television channel dedicates its air time to broadcasting royal news at 8 p.m. every evening. Special occasions performed by The King and Royal Family, such as national rituals and Buddhist ceremonies, are also broadcasted live. Moreover, on December 5th every year, the King's birthday speech is televised throughout the nation. Each year that time, the speech can be heard from every Thai household.

This live broadcasting of national rituals and ceremonies cannot be interpreted in isolation as the 'great tradition' standing alone, since the King has performed the rituals on behalf of the Thais, who witness the events from television. In this way, television has played a role in integrating the court tradition with the common Thai way of life. In addition, another quintessential example of the integration of the 'great tradition' and the 'little tradition' can be witnessed through the celebration of the King's Diamond Jubilee. Since the commencement of celebrations in June 2005, television has contributed air time for the broadcasting of a year long celebration. Official documentary programmes

about the King's life and work produced by both government and private agencies, along with songs written and performed by popular artists and 'pop music videos' reinforcing the king's devotion to the country, have inundated Thai television screens. Television presenters, news anchors, and celebrities have been wearing yellow T-shirts emblazoned with the King's logo, a symbolic representation of the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee.

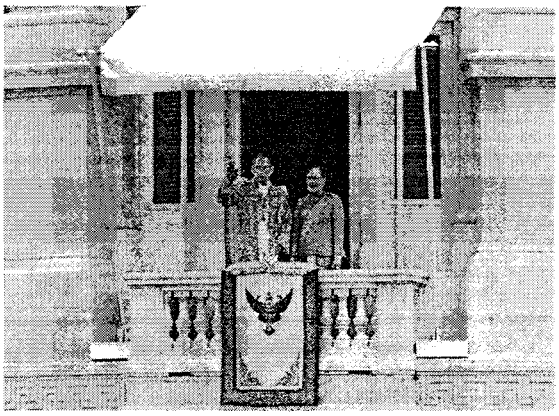

Figure 3.2
The King and The Queen were greeting the crowd who came to bless his Majesty on his Diamond Jubilee celebration.

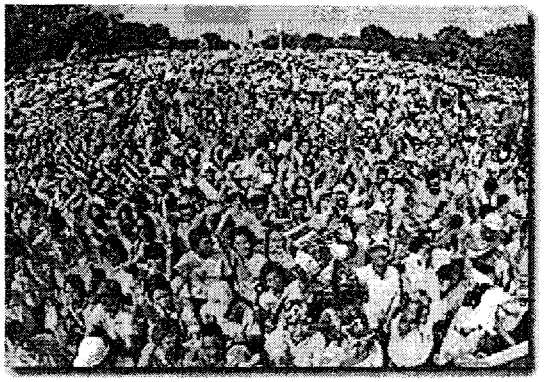

Figure 3.3
The crowd of people, wearing yellow t-shirts with the king's logo, who came to support his Majesty on the celebration of his Diamond Jubilee.

A similar example can be seen from a sport event which took place eleven years ago. In 1996, in Atlanta, Georgia, the Thai boxer, Somrak Khamsing won Thailand's first Olympic gold medal. Thailand's first ever gold medallist went on stage to receive his medal with tears of pride and happiness. On the satellite broadcasting which had kept Thais awake all night, viewers witnessed Somrak holding a portrait of the King in his right hand while receiving his medal. 1996 is a year to remember for Thais not only because it was the year they produced their first Olympic gold medallist, but also because it marked the King's Golden Jubilee. For Somrak, his gold medal was his gift to the King in celebration of the 50th anniversary of his accession to the throne. The portrait of the King in his hand was the presentation of his proud cultural identity, with the King as the unifying figure of the country. Soon after the live broadcast of Somrak's Olympic fight, the Thai sports commentator of the channel that offered a live broadcast of that event received a telephone call from the secretary to the King, stating that the King had assigned him to send a congratulatory message to Somrak and the Thai

people. The relayed message of the King through his secretary was transmitted via live national broadcast. Again, this event is evidence of the role television has played in the integration of Thai cultural identity. Ever since that first gold medal, it has become a tradition for Thai athletes to carry a portrait of the King with them as an auspicious symbol, and to display it when they receive medals.

Figure 3.4
Somrak Khamsing displaying a portrait of His Majesty the King in the boxing fighting ring, after he won the first Olympic gold medal for Thailand in 1996.

Figure 3.5
Wijan Pol-lit holding a portrait of His Majesty the King after winning the gold medal in boxing at the 2000 Olympic.

As well as the King, the other two aspects of Thai national identity, namely religion and the nation, have also played a cultural role in the creation of Thai television identity. The broadcasting act requires Thai television and radio stations to play the national anthem twice a day, at 08:00 hrs and 18:00 hrs. It also encourages radio and television stations to broadcast *dharma* (Buddhist teaching), delivered by monks every Sunday morning.

Another cultural specificity of Thai television is the greeting. Thailand has its own traditional greeting called the 'wai'. The 'wai' is a gesture in which the hands are placed together in a semi-cupped 'lotus' position, and the head is slightly bowed. Thais uses the 'wai' for greeting and generally paying gratitude to one another. In Thailand, television presenters always 'wai' the audience as a symbol of greeting: both at the beginning and the end of the programme. At one point, ITV decided to disgard the 'wai' tradition from there news programmes. ITV wanted to emphasise its vibrant and modern identity, and decided that news anchors should not be using a 'wai' for greeting the viewers. However, after a week's trial, ITV received numerous complaints from Thai viewers, who had regarded the lack of the 'wai' as impolite for Thai culture. ITV was therefore forced to return to the traditional greeting of the 'wai' to conform to expectations of Thai identity.

The role of television in the formation of Thai cultural identity

Television, as a cultural form, is socially meaningful. The expression of cultural forms through signs, symbolic systems and images of representation creates lifestyle experiences and daily practices that are shared by a group of people, and consequently constructs identities for the groups represented. Although the process of construction of Thai cultural identity was in existence long before the invention of television, television nevertheless does play a key role in the construction and de-construction of identity in Thai society. As quoted in chapter one, Featherstone (1995) observes that images that are constructed through television are a necessary part in the process of the formation of a nation, especially in their capacity to bridge the public and the private. From the previous discussion relating to the cultural specificity of Thai television, examples of the relationship between the two traditions on television spaces are evidence that television has played a role in unifying the nation. Moreover, The Ministry of Culture, has utilised television as a tool to preserve Thai traditions. Thai television has been officially assigned by the government to play a part in supporting Thai culture, which can be seen from the preservation of the Thai traditional greeting the 'wai', and the twice daily television broadcasting of the national anthem.

In terms of language content, broadcasting acts have imposed strict rules on the use of proper Thai language. Television presenters, news anchors and radio disk jockeys are requested to pass the 'test for announcer' designed by the Public Relations Department of Thailand, in order to guarantee their proper use of language, which includes clearness of voice and correct pronunciation.

In preserving Thai culture, the cultural ministry has assigned in-house production to produce documentary programmes and fillers aimed at promoting authenticity and indigenous traditions. These programmes are mainly focused on the promotion of cultural materials such as food, craft work, heritage and performances, rather than on promoting culture as a Thai way of life.

Although, the cultural ministry employs television as a tool to support Thai tradition, ironically, it regards television as a threat to Thai culture. This can be seen from the attempt to control

television through censorship and a cultural monitoring scheme. The first Minister of culture, Uraiwan Tieantong, appointed a centre called the 'culture watcher', which acts as a television cultural watchdog. The idea of 'culture watcher' was opposed by both media practitioners and television producers, as the two agents perceive 'Thai culture' in a different way. For The Ministry of Culture, Thai identity is seen a fixed entity; preserving Thai identity means trying to hold on to the old traditions. In an interview with the Bangkok Post Newspaper, Uraiwan stated, 'Our Society is changing rapidly and our teenagers have gone too far in pursuing western culture'. The first priority was, as she put it, 'to pull them (teenagers) back as much as we can'. In contrast, the media are more open to modernisation, as the following column in The Bangkok Post shows:

> 'As an educated woman of 60, Ms Uraiwan should know that smart people do not fight globalisation, but rather learn to enjoy it, and use it for their own ends. If she were more friendly to the mouse by her computer, she would find that information technology does not only bring undesirable things like shocking announcements defaming Thailand as a sex capital, but also desirable knowledge spanning a wide range of disciplines. Returning patriotic plays to theatres is like inviting back the Cold War, the age of the great divide, when governments use all manner of cultural tools to drum up a feeling of national pride, or hostility against the other side. Since such tactics served only to entrench and widen divisions rather that solve conflicts, and to stunt arts rather than encourage creative thinking, what is the minister thinking in making such a suggestion?' (Bangkok Post, 30 October 2002)

The youth also responded to Uraiwan's cultural scheme with a negative attitude. One example of the culture clash between the old traditional cultural ministry and modernity is the dress code of female teenagers during the celebrations of Thai traditional New Year, Songkran. During the Songkran festival, water is a symbol of celebration. The young bless elders and monks with fragrant water as a sign of respect and gratitude. Similarly, water fighting among friends is an entertaining celebration under the heat of April. Uraiwan wanted to promote a rule that female Thai teenagers only wear proper clothes when playing with water in public areas such as Khow San road. She tried to ban sleeveless tops, shorts, tight fitting T-shirts, and any kind of clothes that might reveal the body when wet. The teenagers protested against the idea and argued that they had a right to wear whatever they wanted. When the actual water celebration of Songkran arrived, the Ministry of Culture sent officers to monitor the situation and to warn the teenagers who were not wearing appropriate clothes. However, it appeared that teenagers who came to participate in the infamous water fighting at Kow San road had openly mocked her suggestion by wearing antiquated traditional clothing of women from bygone days.

Further examples of the clash between 'the old' and 'the new' can also be seen through an analysis of the Western-oriented game show 'The Weakest Link' in its Thai version, and the popular Taiwanese Series 'Meteor Garden', both of which have brought a conflicting culture view into the discourse of Thai cultural identity.

'The Weakest Link': the clash between 'tradition' and 'modernity'

In a world where it is no longer easily possible to distinguish reality from the reality of the image, globalisation can create a tension between the traditional and the modern. Sometimes, television can increase this tension and raise it to a national issue. A particularly notable example of this can be seen in the western-oriented programme, 'The Weakest Link'.

'The Weakest Link' in its Thai version was launched in February 2002 and ran until December 2002. After the broadcast of the first episode, the issue of its compatibility to Thai culture became a national topic. The production team had envisaged this problem and was prepared for the criticism that would ensure. Having realized that the radical new idea of this programme would face resistance and disagreement from the people, they decided to schedule the programme after the watershed time, the producers discerning that it was not suitable for children. At the end of the programme, the host reminded viewers that what they had seen was just a game. Yet irrespective of the cautious preparation, it seems that many people were not able to differentiate reality from the reality of the image. Local resistance arose, and 'The Weakest Link' was labeled as being a western capitalist programme that encouraged people to point an accusing finger at one another. On the launch day of the first episode, the production team opened for comments via the internet. Within 15 minutes, the website server was down, bombarded with criticism. The vast majority of people had responded with a negative attitude towards the programme. One viewer wrote, for example, 'What on earth was this programme?'. Others wrote, 'How could they produce a programme such as this', and, 'Did they intend to destroy Thai unity and persuade people to fight with each other?'.

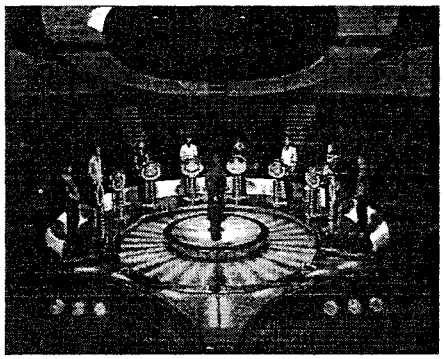

Figure 3.6
The controversial game show, 'The Weakest Link', in its Thai version.

The case of 'The Weakest Link' and Thai culture values provoked wide spread discussion, and was discussed by people on the street, university scholars, newspaper columnists, and even in parliament. In one Parliament meeting, one MP, Lalita Rirksamran, voiced concern over the incompatibility of this programme to the Thai culture. She suggested that 'It preached selfishness rather than generosity, put rivalry above teamwork and brought more stress than amusement'. The criticism was fierce, and the production team received official letters form various organizations. The office of the Prime Minister also sent a warning message to the producers of 'The Weakest Link'. The

Prime Minister's office Minister, Somsak Thepsuthin, gave an interview to the press stating that 'The Weakest Link' could be axed unless it was toned down, and that Channel Network would loose its broadcasting license if it continued to show anything deemed 'unbecoming and contradictory to Thai culture and morality'(Bangkok Post, 22 February 2002).

Many people who continue to hold on to the past believe that Thais are renowned as being one of the world's most diplomatic peoples, and that criticising people openly is not a normal thing to do in the society. For such people, 'The Weakest Link' is considered contradictory to Thai values. Also central to the criticism was the host of the programme, Dr Kritika Kongsompong, a university lecturer who was given Ann Robinson's role in the Thai version. However, Kritika herself does not agree with the idea that 'The Weakest Link' is not compatible with Thai culture:

> 'The question is what is the Thai value. With years of studies, Thai value means we are supposed to have (sic) homogeneous society, collective in nature. We are not supposed to make people made. We are not supposed to say negative things towards each other, especially when we are in the same team. That's the original Thai value. But, the reality is Thai value has changed into the capitalism (sic) society, whoever is the best, pretty much wins. That's the Thai value right now. So, whether this particular show is compatible with the Thai value, we have to ask ourselves what is exactly Thai value, the traditional Thai value or the reality of the Thai value. If it's the traditional Thai value, yes, it's totally opposite, but if it's the reality, it goes in line. It's congruent with the reality of Thai values right now.' (Kritika Kongsompong, Interviewed by Thitinan Boonpap, 26 February 2004).

Figure 3.7
Dr Kritika Kongsompong, the host of 'The Weakest Link' in its Thai version.

Kritika has also pointed out that the show has brought in the truth of Thai society. She is convinced that it is not only her who believes in this idea, stating, 'Not just me who are (sic) seeing this, but I think the audience as well'. (ibid).

Andrew Biggs, an Australian journalist who has been working within the Thai media for 15 years, is another supporting voice of 'The Weakest Link'. Biggs is known as an expatriate who

understands Thai people and culture, and has written numerous articles expressing his views on Thai culture. Regarding 'The Weakest Link', he offered these thoughts:

> 'Thai can play that game show very well (sic) than 'farang' (white European), because you are very good in playing politics, smiling with your mouths and stabbing in the back at the same time. You are good at that (laugh). Thais are polite, but they can be impolite like 'farang'. I don't believe that the show went against Thai values. Thais are very competitive. In business, they are ruthless, which is a good thing. That is exactly in line with Thai culture. The Weakest Link' reflects Thai culture. What people are getting upset about is the false image of what Thai culture is, that we're all very polite, nice people. We really try to be like that, but we're not, and you're not'. (Andrew Biggs, Interviewed by Thitinan Boonpap, 23 March 2004)

Supit Rattichunhachot, the producer of the game show 'The Weakest Link' has suggested that it is an anti-game show (Interview, 18 February 2004). Since commerce intervenes in the majority of the Thai game shows, the content is generally driven by the programme sponsors' desire to promote their products. Thai game shows therefore contain numerous banners of product sponsors with prices hidden behind. Contenders are asked to answer questions related to the sponsoring products and have to uncover them in order to search for the highest price. Supit has said that the idea of the show 'The Weakest Link', in contrast, is to bring a radical concept of a real game show free from commercial dominance into Thailand. And as the show has bought its programme license from the BBC, the Thai production team must comply with a programme format which has a specific setting, including lighting, music and camera movements. The programme is not allowed to include sponsors' banners, and questions in the game are free from any prescribed commercial orientation. Supit interprets the idea of the show as a 'radical' one, an 'anti-Thai game show'. In terms of culture, he believes that just one television game show alone cannot destroy Thai culture and values. As he postulates, 'I don't think it's a bad programme. If you look from a different perspective, this programme reflects the reality in our real life. It reflects how people's mentality and emotions work when they're put under pressure. How people survive, how they avoid pressure or defend themselves under that situation.' (Supit Rattichunhachot, Interviewed by Thitinan Boonpap, 18 February 2004)

From the producer's point of view, 'The Weakest Link' is simply meant to be a radical game show. However, people have read it in a different way. Public opinion is divided, with the opposing voice appearing to be louder. However, whether Thai people like it or not, 'The Weakest Link' became the most watched programme at that time.

The argument about the compatibility of the show with Thai culture became a 'living room war', with the discussion moving into television talk shows. The producer, executive producer, programme host, and contenders of the show were invited onto the popular television talk programme,

'Kom Chad Leuk'. The show also opened for phone-in comments, and people were similarly encouraged to send their opinion via fax or SMS messaging services.

The discussion became heated when the newspaper columnist Santi Sawetvimon telephoned in to make the following comment:

> 'This programme is just a western copy cat. It encourages people to kill their team one by one in order to take the prize. It's suitable for sadistic people who love to see people getting hurt. It's stupid to pay money to a foreign company. The producers are stupid to pay for the licence fee in order to be a slave of the west's consumerist ideology, and to destroy Thai culture.' (Kom Chad Leuk' (translated from Thai),13 February 2002).

Supol Vichearnchay, the executive producer of 'The Weakest Link' responded to Sati's comment calmly. He first turned to the host of the talk show and suggested that the audience should not watch the current talk show programme 'Kom Chad Leuk'. He further advised that viewers, especially, children should not watch 'Kom Chad Leuk' since it was full of impoliteness and harsh language, referring to the language used by Santi in his direct comments. Supol then added:

> 'The programme (The Weakest Link) encourages people not to cheat but to learn to be frank to the team and to speak out their opinion in front of people, instead of stabbing at the back of people. Also, the programme does not allow the use of impolite and rude language. Contenders are not allowed to criticise personal affairs, only criticism about the game is allowed, and with reason, not emotion.' ('Kom Chad Leuk' (translated from Thai),13 February 2002)

In his comment, Supol indirectly referred to Santi's emotionally generated criticism and his personal conflicts with Channel 3, who provide air time for 'The Weakest Link'. (Santi had proposed his own programme, but this was rejected by Channel 3). Supol's implication was that Santi made his comments personally and emotionally, which in itself was more impolite than the show 'The Weakest Link'.

A more compromising comment came from the minister of the office of the Prime Minister, Krasae Chanawong:

> 'I have watched it with my family, we discussed that it was radical to the Thai feeling. I have received a lot of telephone calls from people and agencies complaining about the programme. Thai society always takes the side of the loser and gives sympathy. They cannot easily accept it when they see people speaking out and criticizing each other, like this programme. I think we should be more open-minded. Thai society has gone through changes and is now changing;

our youth are more educated and able to differentiate things by themselves. This is a radical idea. It's another experience of life. We should give time for people to justify the Thai society.' ('Kom Chad Leuk' (translated from Thai),13 February 2002)

The controversial issue surrounding the game show 'The Weakest Link' in its Thai version and its compatibility with Thai cultural identity is an example of the clash between modernity and the old traditions. The question of whether or not 'The Weakest Link' has eroded Thai cultural identity has been brought into Thai discourse. From the fixed traditional perspective, 'The Weakest Link' is seen as an image representation of the global threat, therefore eroding the Thai cultural value of a compromising society. Nevertheless, from a different point of view, 'The Weakest Link' has opened up spaces for Thais to reconsider and re-articulate what Thai cultural identity is. In this way, television has played a role in the self-realisation and re-configuration of Thai cultural identity.

'Meteor Garden': the tension between the 'young' and the 'old'

The tension between the traditional and the modern is not only limited to Thai culture and the west. Recently, another case emerged within the Asian region. The popularity of celebrities from other Asian countries is notable in Thailand, and Thai girls are no less crazy for Japanese rock bands or Taiwanese boy bands than they are for Westlife or Blue. Such music videos and series seemed to be just another form of entertainment, until the arrival of the Taiwanese boy band, 'F4' and their TV series, 'Meteor Garden'. With 'F4', the Asian TV series became a serious issue. It was from this series based on a Japanese comic, that the four boys launched their careers. They then teamed up as a boy band. 'F4' have gained fans throughout the Asian region, including many in Thailand. Their popularity is so immense that they were chosen both as presenters of Pepsi and to sing on the sound track for the Disney animation 'Lilo and Stitch'. Thai fans have even created a website especially for the band and organized activities within their fan base.

Figure 3.8
Four members of the popular Asian boy band, 'F4', who played roles in the controversial popular drama 'Meteor garden'.

For youngsters, this might just be another example of pleasure and enjoyment. But the Cultural Ministry thinks differently, as culture can always be a weapon of power. The Cultural

Ministry sent warning messages to parents to keep an eye on the series, suggesting that the teenage love story themes tended to give youngsters improper values. As one of the female characters in the series has a somewhat liberal attitude towards her love life, they were concerned that Thai girls would copy her character, and thus abandon the perceived traditional values of Thai women. Similarly, in the Cultural Ministry's view, the role that F4 themselves played as rich boys ganging up as a university mafia was a bad role model for Thai teenagers.

Phuvanida Kunpalin, spokesperson of the Culture Ministry, has said that the Cultural Ministry has concerns about the popularity of the Taiwanese series because the series might create wrong values for Thai teenagers. (Manager Newspapers, 14 March 2003)

The Culture Ministry made an announcement warning Thai teenagers about the improper values presented in the series. This announcement reminded Thai teenagers not to forget that sweetness is a charm and a traditional value of the Thai female. Such traits, they advised, should not be replaced by radical western values, such as expressing true feelings towards a male.

The Thai government did not ban the series, but did issue warnings that annoyed Thai teenagers. In this instance, the tension was between youngsters and authoritative adults.

Apart from the resistance of the teenagers, members of the Thai media have also expressed opinions against the Cultural Minister's concern. For example, the television soap producer Varayuth Milinthajinda has suggested that the popularity of this series derives from the plot, which is closely related to teenage life. (Bangkok Today Newspaper, 10 March 2003). Nanthakwang Sirasoontorn, a media critique, has pointed out that the new faces of Taiwanese actors and actresses was the key factor in bringing popularity to the series. In terms of culture, Nanthakwang has taken the teenager's side, and he has suggested that a fixed notion of Thai traditional values can bring an obsolete image to Thailand as a nation. He adds that the Cultural Ministry should be more open to the changing society which in turn creates changing values (Bangkok Today Newspaper, 10 March 2003). Sonthi Limtongkun, the founder of Manager Newspaper, has noted that 'F4 fever' is not a new phenomenon; long before that had been the popularity among Thai teenagers of western singers such as Elvis Presley and The Beatles Thai teenagers who are now those adults concerned about present day teenagers. (Manager Newspaper, 11 March 2003).

Also, Senator Montree Sinthavichai has suggested that the warning announcements of the Cultural Ministry run in opposition to the nature of teenagers. As he points out:

> 'The love relationship is a personal issue with which teenagers have a right to express their feelings to each other. There is no right or wrong of who (male or female) should be the one to make the first move. Culture is not just about show or performance, but ways of life. The Culture Ministry should reconsider their work direction and be more concerned about culture as a way of life, instead of concerning themselves with television trends, and telling teenagers what to do or what not to do. (Manager Newspaper, 11 March 2003)

In China, 'Meteor Garden' and 'F4 fever' met similar problems. The Chinese government banned the series after only 6 episodes because parents complained that it created the wrong attitude amongst teenagers. And in June 2002 the Chinese leg of the F4 concert was cancelled at the last minute because the organizers were afraid that they might not be able to control the fans.

Television and Cultural Hybridity

From the protective point of view, the Thai Cultural Ministry appears to interpret globalisation as a simple process of cultural homogenisation, in which television is a tool of media imperialism for western influenced broadcasting. However, as Mike Featherstone suggests, 'It's no longer possible to conceive global process in terms of the dominance of a single centre over the peripheries.' (Featherstone, 1995, p.12). Hence, instead of thinking of the global replacing the local, globalisation should be seen as the new global and local articulation which leads to the creation of a new kind of hybrid identity. Featherstone further adds that 'The process of globalisation does not seem to be producing cultural conformity, rather, it makes us aware of new levels of diversity. In this way, television has played a role in the new global-local articulation, therefore producing a new kind of cultural hybridity. The example of cultural hybridity in Thai television can be seen from an analysis of the influence of 'transnational television' broadcasting in Thailand.

The term 'transnational', as Usha Vyasulu Reddi proposes, is used to describe broadcast services that are essentially satellite based with production of content in one country, transmission from a second country and addressed to audiences in a third (Reddi, 2000, p.70). MTV (Music Television), the international music channel aimed at adolescents and young adult, was one of the first 'transnational networks' to start its transmission throughout Asian countries. MTV started its campaign of universalism, with the slogan 'one planet-one music', broadcasting the same music in the same language-English-across Asia and the world. 'Channel V', an international music channel chain owned by STAR TV, has since arrived in the Asian region with a localised identity. In contrast to MTV, which uses western presenters, Channel V has recruited Thai and mixed-race Thai/western presenters as video disk jockeys (VJs). Channel V's VJs shift their language between Thai and English, presenting both Thai and western music. This hybrid kind of programme presentation has appealed to the local taste, especially with the Thai viewers whose English seems to be barrier of understanding. They feel more comfortable to phone in and request tracks, as well as to participate in the games and activities (with the VJs) in the Thai language. Localised identity brought popularity to Channel V, and MTV consequently lost a considerable viewer share. As a result, MTV had to learn from Channel V's success, changing its programme policy to adapt more to the local needs. First MTV launched its new breed of channel, based in Singapore and called MTV Asia, employing VJs from different Asian countries fluent in both English and local languages. However, the channel still focused on western music and mainly used English as the language of presentation; only occasionally did the VJs switch

to their local languages to communicates with viewers who had phoned in to request a song or to participate in the activities. Also, the programme schedule was not entirely local but rather 'regional'; it was a regional channel which provided for local viewers in different countries, such as MTV Thailand, MTV Malaysia, MTV Indonesia. Each local section employed local VJs, presented in the local languages and played local music. Only later did MTV adapt fully to the local Thai viewers, by changing to MTV Thailand, presenting both western and local content by the Thai VJs in Thai language.

Figure 3.9
ID station of MTV Thailand, presenting a mix of the international MTV image and Thai feature.

The above image is an example of a new global and local articulation of MTV as an international company, utilising a localisation strategy in order to win support from the local audience by creating a hybrid form of presentation on the channel logo. The 'M' and 'TV' script is an international form of logo, which retains the format of the MTV identity; however, the classical image of a Thai woman playing a Thai classical instrument is employed to emphasise the localized identity of MTV Thailand.

Channel V and MTV Thailand are the epitome of the type of localisation of transnational broadcasting in Thailand and Asia which has led to the creation of hybridity in programme broadcasting. As Reddi observes, 'Years into the existence of transnational television, many broadcasting organizations are having to make major changes in programming strategies, whether in language, programme content or telecast schedule.' (Reddi, 2000, p.83). Many transnational satellite television companies have substituted most of their foreign programmes with indigenous programmes.' As long as language continues to be a barrier of communication, transnational media players have to adapt their programme policy in order to overcome cultural diversity of local taste.

With regard to producers, the power of transnational networks via satellite and cable has alerted Thai television producers to alter their production and programme policy in order to compete with international rivals. This can be seen from the style and format of youth programmes which target the same young adults who are the target of transnational networks such as MTV and Channel V. Thai producers have mixed local tastes with a modern style of production, creating a hybrid kind of programme. Modern styles of presentation and production, as well as the modern look of presenters, have been employed to generate trendy youth programmes.

One good example of hybridity in Thai television is 'We're Za', a popular teenage travel programme presented by Ray McDonald, who is half Thai half Scot. This hybrid title, 'We're Za', is a mix of the Thai and the English language. 'Za', in Thai, means 'cool' or 'liberal'; 'We're Za' thus means 'We're cool' or 'We're liberal'. Homophonically, however, it is the same as 'wee-sah', the Thai word for 'visa'. Ray McDonald is a hero of his generation; he brought popularity into 'We're za' through his eccentric personality and unique style of language, code switching between Thai and English. Traveling around exotic places in a backpacking style, Ray and 'We're Za' are an eye-opener for Thai teenagers, the programme enabling them to learn about different cultures.

Figure 3.10
Ray McDonald in his popular hybrid youth programme 'We're Za'.

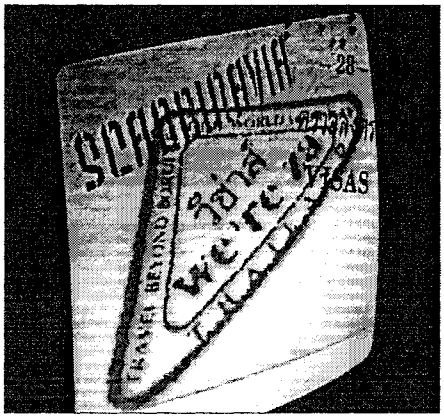

Figure 3.11
Logo of the popular youth programme, 'We're Za', showing the usage of the mix of Thai and English languages.

Another notable example is the popular youth programme 'Red Seed', which targets Thai teenagers. Its English language title, 'Red Seed', represents the meaning of a new breed or new generation of energetic and powerful Thai youths. The programme content is focused on teenagers' interests: fashion, life style, travel, music, film, and interviews with artists and celebrities, both at the national and international level. The two male presenters, Map and Palm, present the programme with their own trendy look, mainly using the Thai language; however, they are able to switch to English when interviewing international artists and celebrities. Although the presenters possess a modern look, they retain the Thai tradition, always begining their show with a 'wai', the traditional Thai way of greeting.

Figure 3.12
Map and Palm (presenters of the popular youth programme 'Red Seed'), greeting audiences with a 'wai', the traditional Thai style of greeting.

At the same time, the presenters are also able to shift their characters to fit in with international culture, such as when they have to interview international celebrities. On one occasion, for instance, Map and Palm presented their show with an articulation between global celebrities and Thai tradition. The two presenters had special international guests the 'Cheeky Girls' on their programme. Knowing that the 'Cheeky Girls' were famous for their unique dancing style, Map and Palm decided to bring the 'Cheeky Girls' to a Thai classical dancing class. In this way, Map and Palm intended to play with local-global articulation. The 'Cheeky Girls', as a global subject, were presented in a localised style; and by practicing Thai traditional dancing, a new hybrid style of presentation was consequently created.

Figure 3.13
Map and Plam, with their modern looks, presenting their popular youth programme, 'Red Seed'.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of popular television programmes, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate the relationship between television and the formation of Thai cultural identity. Television in Thailand, as one of the most powerful forms of electronic media, has led to a construction of the social life of the Thais. Television has proven intrinsic in the formation of Thai cultural identity. Live broadcasting of national events, along with ceremonies of the 'great tradition', have played a profound part in unifying

a nation, and, at the same time, in bridging the space between different social classes within society. In addition, Thai television has been assigned by official Thai institutions such as the Cultural Ministry to preserve Thai traditions through broadcasting laws and regulations as well as the broadcasting of programmes which aim to promote Thai traditional culture. Ironically, however, television is still condemned as an ally of the globalisation power which, from the cultural minister's perspective, is eroding Thai traditions. In this way, television in Thailand has been struggling to find its position within the broader context of Thai identity formation.

As a cultural agent, television has opened up spaces for cultural influences from the outside via transnational broadcasting in the globalisation age. This has led to controversial debates about the power of television in the reconstruction of Thai cultural identity. One line of a simplistic argument is that television has supported western influences; hence, it has weakened an indigenous cultural identity. On the other hand, global television has encouraged the local towards a self-realisation of a forgotten identity. Through television, the meaning of Thainess has been brought into the discourse. The resistance towards globalisation has created a sense of nationalism, which is evident in the way that Thai television still keeps a hold on traditions such as the 'wai' (the traditional way of greeting), and the use of proper Thai language by television personalities. At the same time, television has created spaces for the local and global articulation, leading to a new kind of cultural hybridity. Through an analysis of examples of hybrid kinds of youth programmes, it is evident that cultural hybridity has emerged through a new form, style, and use of language in Thai television. However, as cultural identity is a continuous process which can never be completed, television's roles in the formation of Thai identity must also be recognised as an on-going process. The new kind of cultural hybridity apparent in Thai society is bourgeoning not only in television images and representation, but also in the reality of the Thai society. The next chapter will move to an investigation of cultural hybridity in Thai society through a field work research study of mixed-raced youngsters in Thailand, and the roles of television in their identity formation.

Chapter 4

Cultural Hybridity in Thai Society: the study of the third-culture kids and their identity formation.

This chapter, Cultural Hybridity in Thai Society: the study of the third-culture kids and their identity formation, is an exploration into the study of 'mixed-race' young people in Thailand and their identity construction. Thai society has recently seen an increase in its number of 'mixed-race' people. This group of people has become increasingly significant within the Thai media context. Over the past decade, mixed-race celebrities and personalities in the Thai media, especially on television, have been notably popular. We have seen the faces of 'mixed-race' actors in Thai dramas, game-show programmes, music videos, and advertising campaigns. For example, United Broadcasting Company Limited (UBC) - the biggest subscription television provider in Thailand - recently used 'mixed-race' young presenters on their advertising campaign to promote the newly launched knowledge package (Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel, and Animal Planet). This campaign showed images of different 'mixed-race' youngsters watching UBC in their homes; they are then shown at school using knowledge that they have learnt from television to intelligently participate in and answer all the classroom questions.

Figure 1.1 An example of UBC's advertising campaign, employing mixed-race young presenters to promote the newly launched knowledge package.

From the marketing aspect, one might conclude that the popularity of employing mixed-race presenters in the Thai media derives from the idea that mixed-race people are perceived as good-looking, cool and modern. However, from a political / cultural perspective, an increase in the use of 'mixed-race' celebrities in the Thai media symbolizes a significant increase in the population of this group of people in cosmopolitan Thai society, most notably in Bangkok.

The increasing population of 'mixed-race' people is not, however, a new phenomenon. As Pollock and Van Reken state in their text 'Third Culture Kids: the experience of growing up among the worlds', "'Third-culture kids' (TCKs) are not new, and they are not few." (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001, p. 21). TCKs - the term used by Pollock to refer to mixed race and young expatriates - have been a part of the earth's population from the earliest migrations. In today's borderless world, advanced communication and technology and transportation have catalysed the movement and re-

location of people. There is an increase in cross cultural marriages, and accordingly, the number of 'third-culture kids' rises. In a 1999 News Week article titled 'Always Home', Barbie Nadeau points out that global change, an increase in humanitarian aid programmes, the expansion of multinational corporations, large embassy states and ongoing military activities are steadily increasing the number of expatriate families. American passports issued in foreign countries have nearly doubled in the last decade, from 3.6 million to more than 7 million. The number of British citizens living abroad has also risen: from 8.6 million to more than 14 million since 1992 (News Week, 27 January 2003). A number of books and websites have recently been produced to serve the growing population of TCKs. Examples include Pollock and Van Reken's popular guide 'Third Culture Kids: the experience of growing up among the worlds', and Van Swol-Ulbrich and Kattenhauser's text 'When Abroad, Do as Local Children Do', which is targeted at 8-12 year olds and covers everything from re-patriation to saying goodbye to old friends. The website Expat-Moms.com deals with specific issues such how to tell your kids you are moving again, and ExpatExpert.com talks about integration and socialisation, as well as culture shock, grieving and being unable to see your grandparents.

Great attention has been paid to the rising community of 'third-culture people'. In Thailand, there has been a rocketing number of International schools targeting these TCKs. This, together with the popularity of 'mixed-race' celebrities in the Thai media, is evidence that TCKs are now playing a significant role in Thai society. Nevertheless, their cultural position in Thai society is still under explored. And although TCKs may look physically similar to normal Thais, under the accepted notion of Thainess their identities seem to have something different from – and even contradictory to - Thai culture. This chapter is thus an attempt to examine the cultural hybridity of TCKs in Thailand, drawing together the study of identities with hybridisation theory.

This fieldwork study focuses on the study of TCKs identity formation; their perception of themselves, their experience of culture shock, the role of television and other forms of media in their identity formation, and the process of their cultural negotiation between the different cultures. The study has been conducted within the following objectives:

1. To explore the 'culture's in-between' of the mixed-race young adults (TCKs) in Thailand
2. To explore the ways TCKs negotiate between the different cultures
3. To study the roles of television in their identity formation

Theoretical origins and meanings of the concept of hybridity

In the last decade, the term 'hybridity' has been extensively used. From usage in academic papers, it has spread into the popular media, into areas as diverse as styles of fashion, models of cars, and types of food. The word 'hybrid', as Robert Young states, developed from biological and botanical origins (Young, 1995). In Latin, it meant the off-spring of a tame sow and a wild boar; hence, as the Oxford English Dictionary phrases it, 'of human parents of different races'. A hybrid is defined by Websters as 'a mongrel or mute, an animal or plant produced from the mixture of two species'. The use of

hybridity as a form of cultural exchange sprang from the linguistic model introduced in the 1930s by Mikhail Bakhtin. He defined a key distinction between two forms of linguistic hybridisation: organic hybridity and intentional hybridity. Hybridisation, for Bahktin, is the mixture of two languages, an encounter between two different linguistic consciousnesses. Applying to culture and society, as Pnina Werbner suggested that cultures evolve historically through unreflective borrowings, exchanges and interventions (Werbner, 1997, p. 4-5). Later, Homi Bhabha applied the theory of hybridisation to colonial discourse analysis. He argued that new hybrid identity is the result of cultural production. It is the culture of 'neither the one thing nor the other' (Bhabha, 1994, p.33). From anti-essentialist point of view, Bhabha claimed that hybridisation constructs the culture of 'third-space', an area of culture for negotiation which contains multiple voices, practices and feelings. For Bhabha, hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of language of the other. The study of cultural hybridity within colonial discourse has been widely documented. Stuart Hall, another contributor to the theory of cultural hybridity, points out that cultural identity is always hybrid; hybridity is therefore not a new phenomenon (Hall, 1990). He suggests that precise forms of hybridity should be determined by specific historical formation. An example of the study of cultural hybridity can be seen in Paul Gilroy's work of the Black identity. In 'Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciouseness', Gilroy (1993) analysed aesthetic works by transnational black intellectuals and musicians in order to define black identity. From an essentialist view, Gilroy argues that black hybridity shows authenticity. However, in the anti-essentialist respect, he also claims hybridity represents a model of resistance to homogeneity. In the British context, the work of Marie Gillespies ('Television ethnicity and cultural change', 1995) is an exploration into the study of Asian youth in Southhall, London. The study indicated that these young people were able to shift from one position to another as they determined it to be situationally appropriate. Furthermore, Gillespies (ibid.) suggests that television has played a role in providing them with useful information in learning the culture of their migrant parents, and at the same time, in providing a tool to learn about the British culture. In 'Media Consumption and identity formation: the case of the homeland viewers', Larry Nathan Strelitz (2000, p.497) studied the relationship between media consumption and the identity formation of working class African male students in Rhodes University, South Africa. Strelitz noted that the students created their own television viewing space, which they called 'homeland', in one of the university dormitories. In addition, Strelitz claimed that the perceived meaning of local programmes watched by the students in the 'homeland' played an important role in both cementing their particular identity, and in helping them experience the social space of Rhodes University.

Methodology and Samplings

The research about TCKs in Thailand is still in its infancy. Related background data in this area have little to offer. Thus, the focus group interview is used as the preliminary exploration into the study of TCKs and their identity formation. And as Michael Bloor (2000) suggests, focus group interviews can

be used as a pre-pilot project in the initial phase of a large survey study. This focus group project generated useful contextual data, which in turn helped development of the later stages of the study, i.e. the individual in-depth interviews.

The focus group comprised of six TCKs: three males and three females. All participants were between 18 and 25 years of age. This age range is considered, in Thai standard, as young adult or late youth. The rational behind the choice of this particular age group was that the participants were considered mature enough to understand the concept of the discussion. Names and details of the participants are listed below.

Miss Choawarat Yongjiranon (Poupae) and Mr Pachara Yongjiranon (Billy)

The two siblings were born to a Thai mother and a Dubaian father. Poupae is 22 years old and Billy is 20 years old. They left Thailand an early age to stay in Dubai with their mother and their American stepfather. They had been exposed to American Arabic culture for 10 years prior to returning to Thailand.

Miss Mintra Tantikijrunruang (Mint) and Mr Pakasit Tantikijrunruang (Eric)

These siblings were born to a half French half Vietnamese mother, and a half Thai half Chinese father. Mintra is 19 years old, Eric is 21 years old. They lived in The United States for 12 years before their family decided to move back to Thailand to set up the family business.

Miss Yassawan Puangchanpatch (Yui)

Yui is a 24 year old full-blooded Thai who moved to The United States at the age of five. After spending 15 years immersed in American Culture, her strict mother, who is descended from the Thai Royal bloodline, forced her to return with her to Thailand.

Mr Chinapat Chin (Chin)

Chin is a 23 year old, half Thai half Chinese male, who spent 15 years of his childhood in Malaysia with his grandmother. He is currently studying Advertising at Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand.

'Snowball Sampling' Method

The focus group participants were selected through the 'snowball sampling' method, which is, as Bloor (2000) explains, recruitment via an intermediary. 'Snowball Sampling' is the recruitment of participants by the pre-existing group, by which one member or leader of the group is approached to recruit another member to take part in the research. The advantage of this method of sampling is that the group members will bring 'natural interaction' into the discussion and promote discussion and

debates. Because each member is familiar with at least one other member, they should feel more comfortable to express their ideas and beliefs – and at the same time, to challenge any discrepancies.

Sampling procedure

Poupae was introduced to the project by an ex-colleague of the United Broadcasting Corporation Limited (UBC). She was contacted via telephone and informed about the details of the research project. Poupae expressed her interest in participating in this research, and agreed to be the contact person and to recruit more members from her preexisting social group.

Poupae then invited two more members: a University friend named Chin, and her younger brother, Billy. Billy subsequently invited his own friend from University, Mintra, along with Mintra's older brother, Eric, to participate in the project. At this point, there were altogether five participants. In order to achieve gender balance in the group discussion, I decided to invite Yui, one of my University students, to join the project.

Time and Place

This fieldwork study was conducted in March 2004. The focus group interview method was conducted with the group of TCKs, and subsequently followed by individual interviews. All of the interviews took place in a television studio and were recorded in video tape format.

The initial focus group interview was conducted in the television studio of Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand. Both the two hour group discussion and individual interviews were recorded with the permission of the informants. The footage from the interview was further used in the audio-visual work titled, 'Television and Thai Cultural identity', an accompanying part of the practical work submission.

The two hour discussion was divided into two sessions, with each session lasting approximately an hour. The first discussion session centred around topics such as the participants' culture shock experiences, their identity formation, their perception of themselves, and the process of cultural negotiation between different cultures. After a twenty minute break, the second session continued with a discussion about patterns of media consumption, followed by the participants' views of the role of the media, especially television, in the construction and re-construction of their identities.

After the focus group discussion, the informants gave an in-depth individual interview about their experiences as 'third-culture kids'. The individual interviews were also recorded for both data analysis and audio-visual material.

Terminologies: mixed-race or TCKs

In the initial stages of this research project, the term 'mixed-race' people was generally used to refer to people who were born to parents of different nationalities. However, there have also been people who were born to parents of the same nationality, yet were born and grew up outside of their parents'

country. Although these people are not hybrid in the biological sense, they are nevertheless culturally mixed, as they have been exposed to more than one culture. The term 'mixed-race' cannot be used to define the above type of hybridism; the term third-culture kids (TCKs) is more appropriate as a generic term for both types of hybridism.

Definitions of TCKs

TCKs is the term used by David C. Pollock in his text *Third Culture Kids: the experience of growing up among the worlds*, to refer to the expatriate children and young adults fitting the aforementioned hybrid description. As he quoted from John and Ruth Useen , 'third-culture kids' is defined as a generic term to discuss the lifestyle created, shared and learned by those who are from one culture and are in the process of relating to another one. From this definition, TCKs can be understood as the children or youngsters accompanying their parents into another society. In this sense, TCKs is the most appropriate term for this research project, since it encompasses both biological and cultural hybridism. The twofold interpretation of TCKs in the current fieldwork study can thus be defined as:

1. Mixed-race people who are born to an inter-marriage between a Thai parent and a parent of another nationality
2. Full-blood Thais who were born and/or grew up in countries and cultures outside of Thailand

Findings

Part one: Cultural Identities

In the following and subsequent sections, some of the salient findings from the interviews are presented. These are not, however, in depth analyses. Rather, both Part one (which addresses the notions of 'culture shock experiences', cultural negotiation' and 'language barriers') and Part two (which concerns television and cultural identity formation) are intended as a means of establishing context with regards to the general perceptions and feelings of the TCKs. At the expense of written linguistic accuracy, individual responses are presented as closely as possible to the actual language used by the participants.

Culture Shock Experiences

Like the vast majority of TCKs, all of the informants have experienced some form of culture shock in Thailand. The two siblings **Billy** and **Poupae**, who have been living within a large family headed by a strict grandmother, appear to have had the biggest problem in trying to assimilate to the Thai culture.

> **Billy:** 'The way that I have to behave to an adult and Thai people are a shock because usually when you're abroad you're more open. You can be more open with yourself and to other people.'
>
> **Poupae:** 'It's a clash because we used to be head to head with adults and show our opinions, speak whatever we want. I couldn't even 'wai' (the traditional Thai gesture used

in greeting and thanking people), but I have to learn here. Thai culture is so complex. You can't understand it just the first day you get in. It takes a long time to fit in.

After 15 years of living in the United States, **Yui** was forced by her mother to come back to Thailand. Her experience of culture shock is one of fear and depression.

'I didn't want to come back, my mum forced me. It was scary. I think I was not Thai after my 15 years in the States. I was screaming and shouting and I was not Thai at all. I used my feet with my mum a lot. My mum was like screaming and smacked me.'

Eric, who cannot speak Thai well, points out that he has suffered from culture shock.

'I've a lot of culture shock experience. The general one is that I can't speak Thai well. I order food and 99 percent of the time I always get something else. I ordered 'kowpad' (fried rice) and got 'kra prow' (stir-fried food with basil leaves), for instance. And they charged me more because they thought I was not Thai. I speak horrible Thai. I can't make it'.

Mintra, Eric's younger sister, is a confident and independent girl; however, her independence does not seem to conform with the male-dominated Thai culture. Her predicament is clear in the following discourse:

'I have three brothers and I am the only daughter. I'm a very tough female. When we were visiting Thailand, my brother said something and I hit his head. My grandmother was like, you can't do that, females have to be polite. I just looked around, but inside I felt that it's bullshit. I prefer to be American in the fact that they encourage women to be out-going and be themselves. I can't fit in with the idea that phoo-ying (woman) is lower than the male. I think that's crap.'

Chin seems to be the only person who doesn't have a problem fitting in with the Thai culture. As he expresses, 'you have to learn to do it. Just do it, like getting something done. It doesn't matter that you like it or not.' However, Chin went to Malaysia when he was only four years old because his dad wanted him to - although *he* did not want to. He returned to Thailand when he was eighteen years old. He explains that he did not enjoy being in Malaysia: 'My dad sent me to live with my grandmother who let me do what I want. It had the downside that I don't feel close to anybody. Most of my family lives here in Thailand'.

Cultural Negotiation

Through such culture shocks experiences, TCKs learn that they have to adapt themselves in order to fit in with the Thai culture. Growing up in a third-culture world, the TCKs must learn how to

inhabit at least two identities, to speak two languages, and to translate and negotiate between them. As **Poupae** notes (above), Thai culture is too complex and difficult to understand. However, she has to negotiate with it. She explains her cultural negotiation as being similar to the way chameleons change their colour. She states that 'You are a kind of chameleon, you have to adapt. If you don't, you are going to be upset with yourself and people. At the end you're going to be very sad'. Nonetheless, **Billy** finds that changing identity like a chameleon is difficult. His opinion is that 'that's really hard to do, to change your colour around people, because I'm a negative person. I don't understand.' At this point of the discussion, **Poupae** argues with her younger brother, asserting that 'people can be negative, but understanding'.

Chin responds to the chameleon discourse with a positive attitude. Directly addressing Billy, he proposes that 'you don't have to be a chameleon, but you know both cultures very well. You have to answer for both. Why don't you go home and learn more, you know?'

The difficulties in negotiating with Thai culture are expressed by **Billy** in the following comment: 'I have personal feeling that if you believe in something, you should conform to people, but not fully. At least, keep your uniqueness. That's the fact that keeps me from adapting totally to Thai culture, because I was raised up this way. This is what I am. It's not that because people think that it's wrong, and I have to change myself fully'.

Eric adds, 'It's difficult to negotiate, especially with a guy. Sometime they held my hand; then, I thought what's wrong, why they (sic.) touched me? I thought he was gay...go south!' <laughs>.

In the discussion about cultural negotiation, the informants were asked to consider the Thai politeness characteristic of 'Kreng-jai'. To briefly define the term, 'Kreng-jai' is considered one of the distinctive Thai characteristics. The term is habitually translated into English as meaning 'thoughtful' and 'considerate', but also includes the sentiment of not wishing to impede and the socio-pragmatic concept of face and face-saving (c.f. Goffman, 1967 and Brown and Levinson, 1981), as well as the underlying notion of culturally specific deference strategies. As Thai people largely wish to avoid conflict, or even confront an issue which could involve or lead to conflict, they often let things pass by uttering 'mai pen rai' which can mean 'it's alright', 'that's ok' or 'never mind'. When Thais are 'kreng-jai' of somebody, they refrain from expressing their true feelings because of being considerate, being direct might upset people.

The informants express their attitudes towards 'Thai kerng-jai' discourse differently. **Billy** observes that although he does not necessarily like this aspect of the Thai character, he sometimes has to follow it. As he says, 'you have to watch how you act because if you offend

somebody you offend all of them. You have to be 'kreng-jai'. Like her younger brother, **Puepae** expresses her negative opinion of 'kreng-jai'. She exemplifies this, for instance, by noting that in going to the classroom of a US or western teacher she would go with the attitude of, 'I'm here to learn, ask me. I have back up and support for my argument.' Going to a Thai teacher's class, on the other hand, is more a case of the teacher saying 'be quiet, listen to me'. It is for this reason, she adds, that 'Thai kids don't speak a lot in class'. **Eric** refuses to conform to the idea of 'kreng-jai. As he says, 'I don't kreng-jai that much. I do what I want. I don't really care what people think. I know that 'kreng-jai' is a form of politeness, but I'm not used to it'.

Apart from the notion of 'kreng-jai' and the discussion it provoked, the informants pointed out another Thai characteristic that seems to be a problem for TCKs in Thailand: the tendency towards forming and staying in particular groups. **Yui** opens the discussion, observing that Thais are really 'groupy', and prefer to stay together all the time. **Poupae** adds that when she was in the United States, she was encouraged to be independent. However, in Thailand her independence does not seem to go in line with the Thai 'groupiness'. As she explains, in the States, you are encouraged to be independent or at least have a sort of identity. 'But when you're here, if you don't go into the group and don't think the same way people think, you're weird. When I was in high school here I wasn't in any group of the class, and people thought I was weird. They go to bathroom together and take a long time deciding what to eat'.

Yui shares the experience she had when she first came back to Thailand and went to school, she went everywhere by herself and did not group herself with anybody. As a result, she did not have any friends. As she says, 'When I went everywhere alone, people said I didn't have any friends. I don't speak Thai that well, so no one spoke to me. I didn't have friends. They were all gone'. **Billy** supports this, adding that it can be seen from school open days: international kids are by themselves, while the Thais stay together.

TCKs have different ways of negotiation. Poupae and Chin have tried to integrate into the Thai culture. Billy and Eric find that changing their identities to fit in with Thai culture is difficult, while Yui and Mintra have their own ways of dealing with cultural negotiation.
Yui explains that she has tried to be very quiet to everyone, as she's afraid of saying or doing something wrong. In this way, she can get out of the problem. **Mintra** describes herself as a fortunate person and explains that she has a weird personality. 'I take things as a whole. I don't separate over and over. If people start to question me or give me a look, I give them shit! I'm a spontaneous person, leave me alone', she says.

Language Barrier

It is often said that in order to understand a culture, one has to know the language of that culture. Growing up outside of Thailand, and using English as the first language in the family, the language becomes one of the main barriers to understanding and fitting in with Thai culture. As **Billy** notes 'There are certain experiences, like you go and buy some stuff and speak English or speak Thai, but not proper or correct Thai. People look at you like you're trying to look good or something.' **Poupae** substantiates the dilemma, adding 'So they expect us to speak Thai but you're struggling with yourself because you're not Thai. I was in a group of Thai people, they started talking but I didn't get the joke until 5 minutes later.'

According to **Billy**, there is a misconception in the family that learning Thai is always easy. As he says, 'When you are at a certain age, you lose your ability to learn or to fix your tongue to adapt to that language or accent. I learn faster because I'm younger than Puepae. But there's still weakness in my accent. They don't understand and try to teach. They got frustrated and banged the table.' Not having good skills in Thai language can be a disadvantage in many ways. **Eric** describes his experience, which is not an unfamiliar one: 'They thought I was Singaporean and charged me more in the restaurant. I went to the noodle shop, it was only 15 baht, but they charged me 10 baht more.'

Shifting Identity: How TCKs perceive themselves

In the discussion, one of the most difficult questions for the participants was the question regarding how they perceive themselves. This question was therefore raised at the end of the first session, since the participants had shared their ideas and opinions for some time and seemed comfortable with each group member.

Chin and **Yui** are more adaptable to Thai culture. **Yui** did not hesitate to express the fact that she now feels settled within Thai culture. As she explains 'I feel more Thai, pretty much Thai now. Time has helped. I go to Thai school with Thai friends.' **Chin** also states that he feels content. 'I'm a kind of mixed if you like. Just be who you are.'

Nevertheless, the rest of the group perceive themselves differently. Time, it would seem, cannot help Poupae, Billy, Eric and Mintra. They describe themselves as 'third-culture kids' who do not fit in anywhere they go, which may be a positive thing. **Poupae** acknowledges, 'My home is not just in Thailand. It can be anywhere, so I have an urge to travel. So that's how I perceive myself. I'm not exactly Thai or American and I'm kind of happy that I'm that way. I can understand people that why they talk that way (sic), and behave the way they behave.'

Billy agrees with his sister. 'I have the same feeling,' he explains. 'I would rather be that way. I can feel why a lot of Thais and people hate Americans. I understand different view points and analyse it in different way. I understand 'the clash', why Americans don't like Thais or why Thais don't like Americans, and that's better. I don't feel Thai or American.'

Mintra and **Eric** also have interesting views on the issue. 'It's so weird!' exclaims Mintra, 'When I'm here I like to stress the fact that I'm an American citizen, speaking English to friends and my brothers when we go out. But when I went to America, it slipped to my Thai code thing (sic), so I chose to speak Thai with my brother when we went to the supermarket! And people look at us like we're freaks! So you get the fact that when I'm in one place, I wish that I was another, but when I'm here, I wish that I was my other personality. So, I'm a multi-personality person. I'm confused all the time. But then, I think I love some American ideas and values, but I also like Thai too. I believe between those two most of the time.' Eric seems to have an even stronger sense of belonging. 'I feel like I'm Mr. Planet. I'm European, Asian... and the world' he says.

Sense of Belonging

Billy notes that as TCKs are misplaced and misunderstood, it is difficult to explain where the sense of belonging is. Time has helped Yui and Chin: they feel more adapted to the Thai culture. As Yui says, she goes to school with Thai friends, and this has helped her to assimilate to the Thais. Chin prefers to stay in Thailand, rather than in Malaysia. 'I want to stay in Thailand. I grew up in Malaysia where Chinese are second-class citizen(s). In Thailand, I'm not discriminated (against). That's why I like it.'

Poupae and Billy are still struggling. They do not feel that they belong in Thailand. However, when Poupae had to travel outside Thailand to Singapore, she admits that she missed Thailand. 'I missed Thailand when I went to Singapore. People here are very nice. They have the 'kreng-jai' thing.' However, when it comes to cultural practice, Poupae still cannot fully fit into the characteristics of the 'kreng-jai'. She continues: 'When you do that (kreng-jai) so much, you try to fit in so much, you lose your identity. To stay in Thailand is really sad.'

Billy shares the idea that it is a strange feeling, since he has no sense of belonging to anywhere, including Thailand. However, there are some moments when he can tune into the Thai sense of belonging. He says that, 'Going to see the movies, they show the King's anthem. I stand up and look at the image of the King, I thought I'm Thai. I have a great respect for the King. In sport events, I definitely cheer Thai(land) over America. Thai patriotism shows, okay! But getting out of the patriotic to meet society, I don't belong.'

Eric is in the same situation as Poupae and Billy. He expresses that he has a sense of belonging for neither Thailand nor The United States, and also feels that he cannot live permanently in either country. 'A lot like I want to go back to America once a year, but I can't stay there forever. I can't stay in Thailand forever either. It's not me to stay in one place all the time' he says.

Mintra adds that identity is slippery. She has been through the stage of identity 'lost and found'. And as she explains, she sometimes feels like she is losing her identity, then she finds it again. When she tries to hold on to it, it slips through and she loses it again.

Shifting Identity

Having no place to call home, TCKs' identities have been shifting from one to 'the other'. Through the conversation in the group discussion, the participants shifted themselves form 'Thainess' to 'non-Thainess'. This can be seen through the analysis of an example of the discussion regarding the English learning system in Thailand. The transcribed conversation is between Poupae and her brother Billy. They were recounting to the group an incident when they tried to apply for a part-time job at a language centre in Thailand during their summer break. Their applications were rejected because the employer did not consider them native English speakers, due to their appearance as mixed-race. Poupae and Billy were bitter of that rejection. They also disagreed with the idea that only white Europeans could be offered the job as an English teacher, while mixed-race look-alikes fluent in English – such as themselves - are refused. The following is an extract from the conversation. Pronouns have been placed in bold for case of recognition.

> **Billy**: 'It's really angry me (sic) when I don't see Thai people having faith in **'themselves'**. Always think that 'Farang' (the term Thai people use to call white Europeans) are always the best, have to be the right one, the one who can teach **'us'**. If **'you'** learn from **'them'**, **'we'** can teach.'
>
> **Poupae:** 'Yes, if **'we'** have more trust in **'ourselves'**, **'we'** can do better. Why should **'we'** have to fly to another country to get a better education? I don't want to do it but I have to because **'our country'** doesn't develop it **'themselves'**.'

It can be observed in this stretch of discourse how Billy and Poupae shift themselves away from 'Thai-ness'. Billy uses **'themselves'** to refer to Thai people who, as Billy comments, have no confidence in English skills. He points out that if Thai people believe in themselves, they can learn English as well as a native English speaker, and will then have the ability to teach English. In using the personal pronouns **'you'** and **'them'** in his utterance 'If you learn from them', Billy differentiates himself from both Thai and foreigner: he uses **'you'** to refer to the Thais and **'them'** to refer to the foreigners.

Subconsciously, however, Billy has associated himself to 'Thai-ness', as he uses the inclusive second person plural pronoun **'us'** to refer to the Thais (which includes himself) who are taught by foreigners. He also switches from you to **'we'** in the final line, arguably to associate himself with those Thais who are able to teach English.

Poupae begins her discourse by associating herself with Thais. In the first line, she uses **'we'** and **'ourselves'** to (inclusively) refer to herself as a Thai. This would appear to be because she shares the same belief as that which Billy has just expressed, that Thai people are able to learn English to the native speaker level. In the last sentence, she emphasizes her Thai-associated identity by using **'our country'** to refer to Thailand. Then rather interestingly, at the end of the sentence, she shifts herself away from the 'Thai-ness' through her use of **'themselves'** to refer to Thais as being the 'other-ness'.

Findings

Part two: television and cultural identity formation

The second session of the discussion is oriented towards the relationship between television and TCKs' identity formation. In this part, the participants were asked to discuss questions about their media consumption and the roles television has played in shaping their identities. The discussion topics include viewing behaviours, favourite programmes, usage of television in everyday life, television and Americanisation, and the roles of television in the construction of identity. Part two is organized, in the same way as the previous sections, in a manner which places prioritizing on the actual spoken responses rather than interpreted written language. Although this approach may appear to compromise the linguistic accuracy it is necessary in order to present the valuable attitudes and language style of the participants in as natural way as possible.

Viewing Habits

It was found that the participants had different television viewing patterns. These are summarized below:

- Eric is a heavy viewer. He spends long hours watching television everyday. 'I spend 15 hours a day watching television. That's why I got fat'.
- Chin is studying media. He finds watching television is necessary for his study, because it's the way of keeping abreast of information.
- Poupae has just started a job. Her time is limited, so she can only watch television for about one and a half hours a day.
- Yui is more into reading. She only watches television for an hour a day.
- Billy has to study hard. His university is very far from the house and he returns home late and tired. This restricts him to watching television only once a week.

- Mintra is studying at the same university as Billy. Through the week, she stays in a university dormitory - unfortunately, without television. 'I stay in a dormitory, with no television. It's sad, so I spend my whole weekend watching television.'

Television Talk

As a popular medium, television is considered as an entertainment machine in the house. Some views are as follows:

Billy: 'It's just entertainment, just a relief when you need something to look at, or if you want to learn from news or relax with comedy'.

Mintra: 'Television for me is a convenient distraction, the hideous [sic.] of life'.

Yui: 'Television is for entertaining. I watch it when I'm stressed.'

However, the participants admit that they not only use television for entertainment, but also as a tool for seeing the world.

Poupae: 'Television is a tool for me to get an insight of what happens around the world, and a tool to let your brain rest, not thinking when you watch television. I must confess that sometimes I'm addicted to television. I switch it on, laugh and cry, then, end up being alone on the couch and not doing anything for a whole day.'

Chin: 'Television is like a window to the world for me to learn new things from the different places, things that you never know.'

The informants also agree that television is a means of linking them to society.

Chin mostly watches news channels in order to follow the current situation in the world. As an animal lover, **Yui**'s favourite channel is Animal Planet because she dreams of being a veterinarian in the future. She also learns Thai language through lyrics from songs and television music videos. **Billy** affirms that he learnt knowledge about Thai culture through the Thai version of the game show 'Who wants to be a millionaire'.

Television and Americanisation

Most of the informants had spent many years in the United States. They have American accents, and mainly watch western programmes. However, when discussing the western-oriented game show 'The Weakest Link' in its Thai version, nobody seems to agree with the concept of the show.

Chin: 'The Weakest Link' is not about making fun. It's really nasty, bashing each other up. It's not making fun like you are fat or whatever, but it was 'you are an idiot, pathetic - mean stuff'.

Everybody seems to agree with Chin's opinion.

Poupae: 'It goes beyond what I expected. I don't like the game show.'

Eric: 'I don't like the host that treats people like a dog, like sit down! Disappointing.

Mintra: (Referring to the host) 'She's bitchy. I don't think it's good'.

They do not agree with the concept of some western-influenced programmes. However, when discussing the impact of television upon Thai culture, they don't think that television is the culprit for Americanisation in Thai society. As **Mintra** suggests, 'It does not destroy Thai culture, but changes (it). The new generation they watch TV (sic) and want to be like a star, like...'oh Britney Speares! My role model! You see that the new generation they're not respectful anymore. They have changed a lot. They are more materialistic.'

They point out that it is essentially the responsibility of the viewer to separate television from real life, in order not to be Americanized by what they have seen on television

As **Billy** expresses:

> 'Like for me, I went to America to live with Americans. When I came back, I took it as real, as the truth of what I think it is. But some Thai when they see things on TV, it's an over exaggeration of the real picture of reality is. And they take it and they over-extended themselves and do it to the extent that it's not appropriate. For instance, I went to New Zealand and I saw Thai people. They are 'mak kwa farang eek' (more than foreigner). They are even more, you know. They take it into extreme. You know and then they don't expose to the real thing, so they act into extreme. And then, they make it look bad for what Thai traditional people say American look bad. But in the reality, it's not like that. It's just TV and TV is not really what reality is'.

The other participants then offer opinions about the subject, presented unedited in dialogue format below.

Chin: 'A lot from what they see on TV. It's ok if you want to be that way as long as you have responsibilities that come along with. If you know what reality is and what you get yourself into. It's ok. But most of them don't really know. Like Billy said, they just see and make believe of the picture that what American is really like, which is not accurately.'

Billy: 'Thai people don't know how to differentiate the reality. What is TV, what is reality.'

Eric: 'Every bad you blame American, but that's not true. You brought the culture.'

Yui: 'Everybody watch American programme and think I want to be independent and free. I want to go to America to be free and independent...bla bla bla. Let's go to the bathroom together <all laugh>.'

Poupae: 'Right now, I don't feel American now, but I was Americanised when I was in Dubai. Because I was exposed to everything in American and I just felt like I didn't want to be Thai I wanted to be American. So I know now how much influences TV can give you because you want to have the right clothes, you want to be a little bit skinny, and you want to know everything they're talking about. I'm afraid that it might happen to Thais here. It started to be Americanised when I came here. There're other people in the world accept American. There are Thai, Spanish, Chinese and we need to make a separation between that. And I know American are very into exaggeration, they are very strong. Thai teens are very much influenced.'

Mintra: 'For example, the way television betrays the image of America. It's a great country, green grass. Once you go back 'home'. I got back to my 'homeland' and you see the decoration that is actually there. It shadows your whole memory of what America used to be like. Then you know that American is not always happy, smile and sunny day and stuff. And it's actually very opposite of that. So for people who really have a taste of what it's real, when they see thing they can differentiate. For people who have only television as a main medium to know the world. Then they won't know ever, unless, somebody told them.'

Television and the construction of identity

Although television is not the main part of TCKs' identity formation, Billy and Eric offered some interesting opinions about the relationship between the two.

Billy: 'Television is just a small part. The real people who shapes your identity is the people who meet you everyday, or the people who teach you. Everybody is your role model in the real life. The television is like a form of relief. You have a stressful day, you want to get the insight and you get TV. Watching movies you can really relate one character that helps you form your identity because you can relate to other people in that movie or that character. Yes! That's me. I can see myself in that person. From the most part I see from the people that around you and the role model around you or your background'.

Eric: 'I agree with Billy. It's people who surrounded me that help you form your identity. But, also television, some programmes are good'.

However, television has played some role in shaping their identity. As Eric further explains, he likes watching music programmes, and he has learnt a lot from the music. 'I like 'Great Rock Star'. I like Jimmy Hendrix and Jim Morrison. Everything they say is real. It's not always a happy day. Everything is good and bad, 'yin-yang'.' In this way, Eric's identity has been shaped partly by the music and his star idols, via television.

Chin also agrees that television has played a part in his identity construction. He watched cable television when he was living in Malaysia, and interestingly, he explained that he watched the same thing there as he is watching in Thailand. Indirectly, television links him to the Thai society. As he observes, 'It (television) represents, not directly, but bit of pieces. Like everybody say we expose to so many culture and you can't pinpoint that this is what shapes me. Bit of pieces and you form your own identity.'

Poupae adds, 'It's something that you take it bit by bit. You don't just take a whole thing. It's the easiest and fastest way of knowing more about people out there and their viewpoints. When you take it in, you always change yourself and try to understand why they think that way.'

For Mintra, television is sometimes a link back to where she was before. 'Because I have been away from my home country for so long, sometimes I forget what it was like living there because I was so young. When you watch TV, sometimes like movies, particular scene in the movies. When you see and you're like, oh yes! I remember the time when I did that and I thought like that. Yes it was like that. You don't carry it around you don't feel. For me, television has help in somewhat to remember what my identity was.'

Poupae and Billy also use television to bring back memories of their identity through their favourite American series, 'Friends'. 'Friends' was with me since I was young, Billy admits. It's such a long series and I watched it since I was in Dubai and until here. It's something that I can relate to my childhood, my past.' Poupae adds, 'I like 'Friends'. It's something that I'm Americanised. I like the characters and the comedy. It's the show that I can watch and never get bored of it. I like sitcom because it's just more relax. It's really funny and the characters are more really good.'

For TCKs television is sometimes a means to escape form their cultural confusion. As Poupae maintains, 'It's good to have TV here, so at least it can link me to the world outside. Because sometimes I don't want to think about Thailand or the culture, and anything. I understand the jokes and things in television. I understand why the characters act. It's so relaxing. Eric has a similar view: 'I consider it as a medicine. When you feel down and want to find answer. You don't know how rejected I am in the society. I watch MTV. I read through the music and relate a lot to music. It's a crazy connection.'

Conclusion

From an Anglo-American cultural study perspective, cultural hybridity is the result of a cultural product of the new diasporas created by the post-colonial migrations. However, in Thailand, a country which has never been politically colonised, cultural hybridity can not simply be considered as a colonial representation, the interaction between the dominant coloniser and the subordinate colonised. Within a different historical and cultural context, cultural hybridity of TCKs in Thailand should be seen more as a product of globalisation and re-location of people in the modern society.

Globalisation has the power to dislocate and contest identity. It has an impact in opening the way for a new kind of identification; at the same time, however, different groups of people give different responses to globalisation. What is evident from the outcome of the research is that TCKs participants have responded differently to the process of cultural translation. Therefore, instead of focusing on the process of identification of TCKs, the central concern of this fieldwork research will be placed on the translation within the different cultures. TCKs identities are not rooted in one single culture, either Thai or American; instead, it depends on their ability to negotiate within different cultures. Stuart Hall suggests that members of such 'cultures of hybridity' are 'irrevocably translated', adding that 'translated men and women must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two languages, to translate and negotiate between them' (Hall, 1992, p. 310).

The research study has shown that TCKs do not perceive themselves as either citizens of Thailand or the US; rather, they perceive themselves as, to quote Poupae, 'the citizen of the earth'. They acknowledge an increasing population and significant movement of TCKs throughout the world, and therefore associate themselves with the 'TCKs imagined community'. Mintra and Poupae explain that TCKs have special instincts which enable them to sense each other. They give the specific example that when they first met one another, they knew instinctively that each was a TCK. They could subsequently tune into a mutual understanding and friendship more quickly.

With no place called home, TCKs perceive themselves as a unique people who cannot fit in with any culture; however, unconsciously, the cultures that they have been living within do have an impact upon their identity formation. It is shown through the focus group discussion that the TCKs shift themselves from Thai to American most of the time. For example, they speak two languages, Thai and English, both with an American accent. Although they chose to use English as the language for the discussion, they sometimes switched across into Thai code, seemingly unconsciously. Similarly, in social greetings, the TCKs are very quick in shifting from Thai to Western tradition. Although they greeted the project researcher and other studio team with a 'wai' - the Thai traditional way of greeting where both hands are placed together in the lotus position with the head bowed as a gesture of paying gratitude - the TCKs used hand-shaking for greeting each other.

Television does not have a direct role in the formation of cultural hybridity for the TCKs. The participants agree that it is principally the people surrounding them, such as family and friends, who have shaped their identity. However, television, as a cultural agent does play a role in providing

resources for the formation of their identity. Since all of them spent their childhood in the US, it is inevitable that they were exposed to American culture via the image representation on television. They speak English with an American accent; their favourite television programmes are American TV programmes. Now that they are living in Thailand, they are still exposed to American television via cable and satellite services, and they continue speaking American English.

TCKs use television as a tool to link themselves to the world. News programmes are, as Chin suggests, a window to the world – a window which can help them to follow the global situation. Game show programmes provide an informative insight into helping them understand the (Thai) culture. For example, Billy uses the game show 'Who wants to be a millionnaire' in its Thai version to gather information and ideas about Thai culture and knowledge. Yui has spent years studying Thai language through the love song lyrics of television music programmes.

As people of a third culture, the TCKs have to translate themselves across and within the cultures. For them, identity is sometimes, as Mintra phrases it, a case of 'lost and found'. When they switch or adjust themselves to adapt with one culture, they feel as if they are losing the other identity. The loss of a stable 'sense of self', as Stuart Hall suggests, is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject (Hall, 1992, p. 275). As Ernesto Laclau puts it, 'Dislocation has a positive feature. It unhinges the stable identities of the past, but it also opens up the possibility of new articulations- the forging of new identities, the production of new subjects, and the recomposition of the structure around particular points of articulations.' (Cited in Hall, 1992, p. 279).

Television has helped to bring back the memory which reinforces the lost identity. Mintra explains that scenes and images representing American society on television remind her of the childhood life in the US and help her recall and better understand who she was and who she is. Billy and Poupae are die-hard fans of the American series 'Friends'. For them, 'Friends' is used not only for entertainment and pleasure, but equally to link them back to the American culture in which they used to live.

The characters, scenes, dialogues and representations in 'Friends' remind them of one of the identities they belong to, and from this can be concluded that electronic media such as television has the power to disrupt the traditional link between culture and geography. TCKs identities can be forged and reinforced by cultural representations on television.

Although TCKs have the ability to articulate themselves within the different cultures depending on the people and situation they encounter, cultural negotiation nevertheless seems to be challenging for TCKs in Thailand. Thai culture is, as Poupae observes, far more complex, and needs time to be understood. Moreover, in some ways the two cultures in which they are living are not only dissimilar but even contradictory to one another. This can sometimes lead to the so called 'cultural clash'. For example, the American values to which they have been exposed since childhood have encouraged them to be independent and to believe in individuality. However, there is a feeling that this sort of identity can not fit in with the prevalent Thai characteristic of 'groupiness'. Another

quintessential example is the discourse regarding 'kreng-jai'. As stated earlier, this culturally specific and almost nationally idiosyncratic characteristic, which has no direct English translation, encompasses mental, emotional and psychological concepts of 'being considerate' and 'mindful' of the other's feelings and wishes. Scholars of Thai behaviour and personality suggest that the Thai strives to achieve interpersonal harmony, with smooth face-to-face social interaction. Hence, expression of true feelings, aggression and disagreement with others is disguised and suppressed. Thai individuals are able to detach their deep sentiments from their interpersonal interaction, therefore, preserving ego identity and independence. This concept of 'kreng Jai', then, is a contradiction to fundamental Western values, which tend towards directness and assertiveness.

This culture clash experience sometimes creates a feeling of alienation for TCKs. As they suggest in the discussion, to adapt themselves fully to the Thai characteristics of 'groupiness' and 'kreng-Jai' in a metaphorically chameleon-like way seems to be akin to losing their true self. However, not trying to fit in can also cause a clash. In this way, TCKs are somehow still struggling to negotiate themselves between the two different cultures. Living in the Thai society as TCKs of at least some part Thai blood, they are inevitably expected to integrate into Thai culture. During the process of behaviour translation, they have gradually, and consciously, restored a new kind of identity. By the time they realise the change, the new form of identity has already been forged.

TCKs have been, and still are, struggling to not only articulate themselves between the different cultures, but also to find answers about who and what their identities are. As Poupae mentions in the in-depth individual interview, 'I can't tell you who I am because I'm discovering myself everyday.' Hence, the identity of TCKs should be seen as an on-going process rather than a fixed entity. As Stuart Hall (1990, p. 222) notes, 'Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic. We should think of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within representation'.

Although the TCKs are not considered as second class citizens, they are still considered culturally peripheral. As long as Thai society still eschews the multicultural reality of the changing society, and continues to hold on to its homogeneous image, TCKs will have to continue struggling to find their space within Thai society. The ubiquity of images of mixed-race presenters and the popularity of mixed-race celebrities in the Thai media is evidence in itself of the rising number of mixed-race TCKs in Thailand. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is superficially considered by Thai cultural managers, such as those in the government and the ministry of culture, as a marketing trend. Meanwhile, ordinary people merely see it as just another face of media entertainment. As long as Thailand still holds on to the notion of Thainess, and Thailand as being a homogeneous country, and as long as it does not respect TCKs as a serious subject, TCKs will only be a hidden voice speaking from the suppressed Thai peripheral. It is a hidden voice which may seem to be rather an insignificant voice within the country; however, in the global context, this little voice is a steadily growing voice of the so called 'imagined TCKs community'.

Chapter Five

Television and Thai Cultural Identity: creative practice

I have worked in the Thai television industry for a number of years. With this background as an active media practitioner, it has been possible to utilise existing creative skills in conjunction with theoretical practice. The result of this collaboration is the production of an audiovisual presentation entitled 'Television and Thai Cultural Identity'. This audiovisual production, which represents the accompanying practical work to this written thesis, explores the relationship between television and the construction of Thai cultural identity.

In producing and directing the audiovisual work, I have two main purposes. Firstly, this creative practice is used as an instrument of the research inquiry (i.e. data collecting, interviews, compilation of archive television programmes). Secondly, in order to further inform and reflect upon my research, this audiovisual work is an exploration and consolidation of my thesis findings and arguments.

This chapter, 'Television and Thai Cultural Identity: creative practice', is a reflective report of the exploratory journey of my creative practice. It includes an introductory background to the project, along with details of the production process. The practical work, in addition, is a mode of expression of my research experiences. The audiovisual material is itself analysed through an 'autoethnographic' approach, an approach whereby anthropologists utilise and analyse their own or others' ethnographic films, fiction and poetry as a method of reflecting cultural experience (Marcus and Fischer, 1986, p. 74).

Point of View and Modes of Representations

This audiovisual presentation, 'Television and Thai Cultural Identity', is an approachable version of the written dissertation. Employing a documentary style approach, this lens-based practice is an illustration of the semiotic relationship between academic writing and the creative space. As a 'creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson, cited in Rabiger, 1998, p. 3), documentary aims to explore actual people and actual situations. In this way, the genre is suitable for demonstrating evidence of the relationship between television and the formation of Thai cultural identity, the central aim of this practical work.

Documentary, as a genre, is claimed to be the highest form of the news and information arts (Hilliard, 2004, p. 181). As a concept of practice, documentary offers us a perspective of looking at the world, because documentarians insert their point of view (POV) into their story-telling. By definition, it contains topics relating to social issues, current affairs and cultural values, and POV is the means by which the director or producer addresses these issues and tells the story from their perspective. The POV of this audiovisual presentation is to portray the image of television as a cultural theatre that has played a constructive role in the formation of Thai cultural identity.

Following an analysis of television programmes, as well as the compilation of old archive Thai television footage and interviews with key media informants, the content of the presentation has been organised in three parts. Although these parts, detailed below, demonstrate the basic structure of the audiovisual text, the presentation itself is not explicitly separated.

1. An introduction to Thai television
2. The role of television in the formation of Thai cultural identity
3. An exploration into cultural hybridity in Thai society

Part one: An introduction to Thai television

This part is comprised of a short history of Thai television, its inception for political purposes, and its evolution both institutionally and culturally. It contains archive images of Thai television and includes an interview with Sanpasiri Viriyasiri, a figure who played an important role in the establishing of Thai television.

Part two: The role of television in the formation of Thai cultural identity

This part shows images and interviews built around the issue concerning the role of television in the construction of Thai cultural identity. The argument includes the impact of globalisation upon Thai television and Thai identity, both in terms of western homogenisation and the strengthening of Thai traditional identity. It also includes discourse surrounding the role of controversial popular programmes such as the game show 'The Weakest Link' and the Taiwanese television drama 'Meteor Garden', and their power to contest Thai cultural identity. This is presented with excerpts from the programmes and interviews with key media figures and practitioners, such as programme hosts and producers.

Part three: An exploration into cultural hybridity in Thai society

This part explores the hybrid form and style of popular youth programmes such as 'Red Seed' and 'We're Za'. Also included is an interview with programme presenters Map and Palm, who, through their perception of Thai cultural identity within the global context and their cultural negotiation between traditional values and modernity, represent the new generation of young Thais. This then leads on to an exploration of cultural hybridity in cosmopolitan society, through dialogues with expatriates Andrew Biggs and Lena Demon, and additionally through the views of a group of Third-culture kids living in Thai society. Finally, through a montage of images, the audiovisual presentation closes by offering a captured image of Thai society, from peasant life to cityscape, and during incidents and events such as the Tsunami catastrophe and the King's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Different documentarians have different POVs from which to present their stories; they consequently have different styles, or, in the words of Bill Nichols (1991, pp. 32 - 33), different 'modes of representation' with which to deliver their ideologies and stories. Nichols suggests four

modes of representation: 1.) expository documentary (with a 'voice of god' commentary, a poetic perspective of disclosing the information); 2.) observational documentary (presenting people's actions when they are not directly addressing the camera); 3.) interactive documentary (active participation of producers through interview and other interventionist techniques); 4.) reflexive documentary (a highly 'self aware' mode which elevates the very conventions of representation to the forefront and questions a generally accepted reality, bringing the viewers attention to the device as well as the effect).

Representation, in the documentary sense, is the action of arranging facts and statements by means of discourse in order to present the director or producer's POV. In this audiovisual presentation, 'Television and Thai Cultural Identity', the expository mode is chosen as the main approach of representing the POV. Similarly, the narration or 'voice of god' commentary is adopted, as this approach allows the director a considerable amount of control over the discourse and can therefore be regarded as an informative and comprehensible way of disclosing the information. In addition, the American accent voice over is used to present the story as this accent represents a cosmopolitan Thai society in which American English is largely spoken – a fact noticeable in this audiovisual presentation, where the majority of the informants and interviewees speak a localised form of American English.

However, along with the voice of god style, the discourse of this audiovisual presentation is also narrated from the perspective of the informants; that is, through an interactive mode of representation. The change in narrative structure is a gradual and subtle one, a change which reflects and emphasises the changing phases of the text. The beginning of the presentation (which focuses on the history and evolution of Thai television and cultural identity) is presented through voice over narration, as this is arguably the most informative part of the text. At this stage, the omniscient narrator is the most direct, comprehensible and appropriate way of imparting the historical information and background story. Following this, as the audiovisual work moves to discourse surrounding the role of controversial television programmes and Thai cultural identity, the function of the narration changes from main story teller to supporter of discourse – a discourse primarily constructed from interviewees' arguments and comments. During the subsequent discussion of TCKs and the concept of cultural hybridity, the role of the 'voice of god' is greatly reduced, leaving more space for the TCKs to speak for themselves. Finally, at the end of the presentation, the 'voice of god' is entirely absent, leaving only a montage of images and words (in character generator [CG] technique) to 'narrate' the closing stages of the presentation. The images take on the role of speaking for themselves, and the silent words allow the viewer to *read* (rather than listen) and think for her or himself. In this way, the end part of the presentation opens spaces for viewers to make their own interpretations.

The Production: from script to screen

This audiovisual presentation is constructed with through un-scripted approach. Beginning without a full-script, there was merely an outline of the envisioned story, deriving from the POV. The three parts

mentioned above contain the salient elements, both audio and visual, necessary to construct the story; this list of basic considerations constitutes the organisational framework, the road map for the exploration of the practical work. Below are examples of the fundamental elements which make up the framework:

- Archive footages of old images of Thai television
- Excerpts of related television programmes ('The Weakest Link', 'Meteor Garden', 'Red seed', We're Za', etc.)
- Action shots of Thai society (peasant life, cityscapes, symbolic images, shots of people watching television, etc.), both from streets snapshots and reconstruction shots
- Interviews with keys informants
- Group discussions and in-depth interviews with TCKs
- Shots of important events (the Asian Tsunami, the celebration of the King's Diamond Jubilee, etc.)

The pre-production

In order to obtain the above material, it was necessary to network with related media organisations. I needed to establish contact and relations with television stations, production houses, The Public Relations Department of Thailand, The Mass Communication Organisation of Thailand, The Thai Film Foundation and other key informants. I was obliged to introduce myself and my research project, initially by telephone contact, in order to request support. Accordingly, and in line with the regular process, it was necessary to produce formal letters of request for materials such as old archive footage of Thai television and excerpts of relevant television programmes. At this stage, the copyright of borrowed materials had to be agreed in writing; the materials were allowed to be used solely for educational purposes. The next step was the arrangement of times and places for interviewing and shooting.

The production

In the production process, video technology was selected instead of film technique for the shooting of the documentary. Compared to film, which is more expensive and time-consuming because of the additional need for laboratory work, video is more economical and convenient. Video is a small production; it is altogether more mobile, and allows us to see the recorded materials immediately after shooting.

The material shot comprised of the aforementioned action shots (both street snap shots and reconstruction shots) and interviews. Interviewing is a core element of this audiovisual presentation, since informants' discourses and arguments are key factors for presenting the POV of this audiovisual work.

In conducting interviews, the initial, challenging stage is persuading the informants to take part in the project. After this is successfully accomplished, times and places of interviews need to be arranged. These were mainly conducted at either the offices or the houses of the informants, with the exception of the TCKs' group discussion, which, for practical purposes, was organised to take place in a television studio. Arguably the most important stage is that of the actual interviewing. Successful interviewing, of any kind, requires good communication skills. It can be challenging in the way that the interviewer has to conduct and participate in person-to-person communication, exchanging information and feelings at a deeper level in front of the camera, yet at the same time try to achieve a natural look. The interviewer's primary job is to stimulate the conversation; but in addition, she has to listen to and analyse the responses in order to ensure that all the required information is gathered. From my experience, planning is imperative to a successful interview. The interviewer needs to prepare questions beforehand then review these questions and try to memorise them. This allows the interviewer to appear to ask questions off the top of her head, rather than reading them from notes. This technique can help the interviewees feel more relaxed, which can facilitate a more natural conversation. Furthermore, prior to the actual interview, there should be some degree of phatic communion, and even a light conversation, in order to establish familiarity between the interviewer and interviewee(s). During the interview, maintaining eye-contact is equally important because it can focus the interviewees' attention on the interviewer. In this way, they may temporarily forget about the camera, which in turn brings about a more natural form of expression.

The postproduction

This stage is the process of transforming the materials (rushes, audio and visual components, etc.) into the story which (re)presents the discourse of the POV. The process begins by checking and analysing all of the materials. At this stage, a transcription of the interviews was needed. The time codes of selected audio texts and visual images also needed to be noted down. Then followed the most important part - the organising and collating of materials to tell the story. At this point, the full script was written, and the voice over was recorded. All material was then ready to be digitised into the computer for the editing process.

If we compare the practical work to the standard process of written research, the preproduction and production processes can be compared to data collection; the post-production can then be compared to the dissertation writing up stage. The postproduction is the construction of arguments and discourses of my findings in the form of electronic language, presented through images, audio, signs and symbols.

Practical work as an experience of self-exploration

The production of this audiovisual work can be considered as a self-exploration into the relationship between television and the formation of Thai cultural identity. Both theoretical research and the

creative practice have combined with and informed one another. Through the theoretical exploration in chapter one and the study of the specificity of Thai cultural identity in chapter two, I have established a framework which assists in constructing the POV of my creative practice. Equally, through the process of shooting and interviewing during the production process of the audiovisual work, I have discovered more concrete evidence and useful information. These sources of information have not only helped in creating the audiovisual work, but have also provided helpful, additional empirical evidence important to the construction of arguments in chapters three and chapter four of the written dissertation. In this way, the practical work has also acted as a tool for my research inquiry.

The postproduction process of this creative practice has also been helpful to the writing-up of the dissertation. Writing up the full script of the audiovisual work, and recognizing the arguments and comments of the informants has given me a clearer visualisation of the organisation and arguments of my written academic presentation. Having a media practitioner background, I am reasonably familiar with creative writing styles, and find creative writing (such as the writing of the audiovisual script) considerably less taxing than academic writing. In effect, the audiovisual script is a simplified version of the dissertation, and it has been invaluable in facilitating the academic mode of presentation.

Moreover, during a prolonged absence from Thailand whilst studying in The UK, it has been difficult to remain fully updated on the continuous changes and developments in Thai society and television. Keeping in touch via internet has certainly provided channels of communication and information, but this electronic contact has not been able to supply a true feeling or sense of understanding for what is happening in Thai society. When 'The Weakest link' was initially launched in Thailand, for instance, and became the 'talk of the town', I could not fully understand and appreciate the sentiments of the society due to being away from home. It was a similar case with 'F4' and their drama series 'Meteor Garden', the popularity of which I was unable to sense. During the production of the audiovisual work, I had the opportunity to discuss such issues with people involved in the programmes. In this way, the production process provided me with a deeper understanding and feeling, and allowed me to write from the inside, rather than feeling as though I was writing as an outsider.

Although having an interest in conducting research into cultural hybridity, being born a full-blood Thai has not made it inherently easy for me to present a piece of work about people representing the 'culture's in between'. Nevertheless, undertaking this audiovisual presentation has afforded me a valuable opportunity to discuss the issue deeply with well known expatriates like Andrew Biggs and Lina Demon, as well as with the group of TCKs. This has provided me with a greater, more profound understanding of cultural hybridity. The more I have learnt about hybridity in Thai society, the more clearly I have been able to conceive an image of cosmopolitanism in both Thailand and the global context. This awareness and understanding of the subtle nuances and complexities of hybridity are perhaps most eloquently reinforced by Beck (2002, p. 31), who notes that

> ...an increasing number of people nowadays trade internationally, work internationally, love internationally, marry internationally, do research internationally, and their children are growing up and are being educated internationally. These children are not only bi-lingual; they move through the non-place of television and the internet like fish through water. So why do we except that political loyalties and identities will continue to be tied exclusively to a nation?

The experience offered through my creative practice supports what Beck has so succinctly suggested above, and has additionally given weight to the idea that cosmopolitanism in Thai society is supported by the notion of cultural hybridity. Through autoethnographic self-exploration, this creative practice has not only afforded me a clearer perspective with which to understand Thai cultural society in the global context, but has also opened up new perspectives for future research projects relating to cosmopolitanism in Thai society. In short, it is both the outcomes of the findings and the idea these outcomes suggest which are valuable and insightful.

Analysis and interpretation of the audiovisual presentation

When dealing with the notion of interpretation, we must first and foremost acknowledge that interpretation is not, and can never be unequivocal. For every context of any piece of discourse, there may be any number of individual, personal contexts created or constructed by the viewer or reader. And although meaning and interpretation can be *intended*, the interpreted meanings are not something which the producer, speaker or writer can completely control. In other words, the inevitable idiosyncratic interpretations are largely beyond the control of the production and directorial team, interpretations which change due to an infinite number of factors deriving from and relating to personal experience, belief, expectation, mood and relevance, etc. Nevertheless, a documentary style audiovisual presentation such as the current piece will, in the majority of cases, have some degree of intended interpretation; there will be elements of content which demand a particular reading. In audio-visual media, images and sound are seldom there by accident or chance.

Although viewers are invited, and indeed encouraged to construct or derive their own interpretations and draw their own conclusions, this section attempts to elucidate certain intended meaning(s) of the audiovisual work, with the aim of providing a plausible interpretation of salient elements. The following aspects are analysed and interpreted for the benefit of the reader: the overture, the use of colour and pace of editing, the closing montage, other representations of the mix of cultures, the localisation of Ronald McDonald, the interviews and the use of voice over.

The overture

The audiovisual presentation opens with a quotation, the words of Raymond Williams, one of the founding fathers of British Cultural Studies. It describes the phenomenon of the changing face of

society, altered by the arrival of television. This opening scene is an attempt to combine the intellectual framework with creative practice, in order to bring an academic dimension to what is essentially a creative piece. The character generator of the quotation is accompanied by the sound of an oriental drum; this type of drum is customarily used at the beginning of a Thai performance, representing the oriental context and signaling the beginning.

The use of colour and pace of editing

Following the quotation of Raymond Williams is a shot of an old television set showing the image of the 'Angel of the Light', the logo of the Thailand's first television. The slow pace of editing and the use of monochrome, accompanied by the narration of a brief historical overview of Thai television, represents the slow pace of the development of television in Thailand, with the content focusing on traditional Thai dance and performance. However, there is evidence of a slight western influence, seen in the name of the programme's sponsors ('Strepcil', for instance). The images then start to change with more speed and added colour, as the narrator explains the development and changing face of Thai television. The key image of this evolution is the shot of the two young girls in traditional Thai costume watching television in the Thai house. One of the girls uses a remote control to switch the channels of television. The presentation then cuts to a shot of multiple television sets, representing the dawn of modern Thai television. Multiple channels and content is portrayed through the vibrant and colourful images which follow, and the idea of mixed language is also shown in the television programme's titles.

The use of voice over

For professional purposes, a native English speaker was selected to provide the voice over rather than use that of the researcher. When it came to the choice of British or American accent, it was decided to opt for an American-English accent. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the American accent represents the voice of cosmopolitanism in Thai society; in the words of Stuart Hall, globalisation speaks the English language, specifically, American English. In this audiovisual presentation, all the informants speak English with an American accent. This represents the idea that Thai cosmopolitan society is, like the rest of the world, some way influenced by American culture.

The interviews

There are two types of informants in this presentation: one is the media practitioners, and the other is the TCKs. The location where the interviews took place is different for the two parties. For the media practitioners, interviews took place at workplaces. This is indicative and representative of professionalism. For example, for Supit, the producer of 'The Weakest Link' the interview was conducted in his office, with leather chair representing his professional position. The Biggs and Krittika interviews also took place in their offices, with the office location representing their media

personal identity. Kritika's interview background is dominated by the IBM computer set, representing her Americanized view (she was educated in the US and gives the interview in an American-English accent). Lena was interviewed in her office, the studio of Virgin Radio. Sanpasiri's interview was conducted in his home office, where he still uses his old type-writer machine; the antiquated machine is analogous both of the technology of the old days (in analogue system) and of he himself as the first generation of Thai television. Map and Palm, the Red Seed presenters, were interviewed on location while filming their show. Even with the informal outdoor interview setting (sitting on a couch with an old television set in the background) and more relaxed dress code, the element of professionalism is nonetheless apparent.

The TCKs' interview took place in an altogether more relaxing environment, as they were considered and treated as youngsters. The initial intention was to book a table in a restaurant in an attempt to create the relaxed kind of environment where friendly, open talk could take place. However, it was decided that such an environment, although conducive to relaxed interview, would cause difficulties to filming – in particular with respect to noise control, sound quality and filming convenience. Instead, the participants were invited to a studio which was set up in the style of a living room; it was hoped that this familiar, unthreatening setting (although contrived) would enable relaxed group discussions about the TCKs' views, ideas and way of life. In the presentation, the effect of this informal context is evident in their casual dress code and the somewhat comfortable nature of the group shots.

The localisation of McDonald clown

The iconic McDonald's clown (affectionately known as Ronald McDonald) in the audiovisual presentation represents a powerful symbol of globalisation. The intention is to show the infusion of the west into Thai culture – a demonstration of the adaptation of the global into the local. At a fundamental level, Ronald McDonald represents American's famous fast food restaurant chain; more importantly, the McDonald's clown is a globally recognisable symbol of American culture. As can be seen in the presentation, in the Thai context he is making the "wai" gesture; this image represents the adaptation of American culture into Thai culture, a change which is leading to and driving the hybridisation of cultural identity in Thai society.

Other representations of the mix of cultures

Scenes depicting the notion of cultural hybridity in Thai society are not only limited to the inclusion of the localised McDonald's clown, and similarly, not merely restricted to a representation of west-to-east global symbolism. The concept of the cosmopolitan is also an important theme, presented through a montage of images, such as the shot of a high rise building and the image of the Thai flag. The high rise building stands for modern society, whilst traditional nationalism is still valued and represented by the Thai flag. We also see a shot of the sky train and raised motor vehicle toll-ways cutting in front of

a Buddhist temple. Again, this shot represents the coexistence of the modern and the old within Thai society. The sky train and the toll-way reach out to modernity, while the temple holds onto the traditional, the two entwined in semi-harmonious matrimony in present day cosmopolitan society. The montage is followed by interviews with Andrew Biggs and Lena Demon, again, representing the mix of culture. Both Andrew and Lena are, and physically resemble foreigners; however, Lena greets the camera with a perfect "wai" and Andrew chooses to share his views and feelings towards Thailand in Thai, not his native English. Furthermore, he expresses his sentiments with perfect Thai pronunciation, and states "Pom rak pratet Thai", which means 'I love Thailand.'

The closing montage

The audiovisual presentation closes with a montage of images of Thai society alternating with the CG (character generator) technique. Immediately prior to this set of the closing montage is Poupae's last interview, in which she concludes that her identity is being discovered everyday. The final shot of Poupae is slow, and from the expression on her face it is as if she is trying to find the answer to her identity. From this final mid shot it is difficult to pinpoint how she feels about her identity, a shot which encapsulates the overriding sense of uncertainty and ambiguity. The slow motion of her face compliments the closing music, further adding to the mixed feeling of sadness and happiness regarding this uncertainty of Thai identity.

The montage which follows is intended to lead audiences outside of studio, and to capture the image of Thai society. In it are contained the three aspects of Thai cultural identity: the Nation, Religion and the King. It begins with representational images of the nation - the Thai flag as a basic symbol of the nation, the high rise building symbolising the city, the floating market and the hand planting of crops depicting traditional rural life. These representations of the Nation are followed by images of people offering food to a monk, representative of the Buddhist religion. Next are images of soldiers marching, a metonymy of the King.

Whereas much of the previous part of the presentation mainly centred on modern and city life, the closing montage leads audiences back towards rural life, showing smiling children in the up-country provinces, peasants' lives in the field and abundances of food and natural resources. It also shows the multicultural traditions of Thai society, depicted through performances from different regions of Thailand - the mask dance representing north-eastern culture, the group dance in the temple representing northern culture, and the dance with acrobatic skills representing southern culture.

The montage also aims to show the fusion of the old and new cultures through the juxtaposition images. The images of the old woman, an old woman's hand placing gold leaf on the Buddha statue and then of an old woman holding the hand of a little boy symbolise the old and the new walking hand in hand together through the generations into the present and onwards. The image that follows shows a portrait of the King as a further representation of togetherness, the King being the unifying force, the centre of the Thai society.

The montage also shows the recent times of hardship and crisis which Thailand has encountered: the Asian tsunami of 2004 and the continued unrest in Thailand's three southern border provinces. We see the helping hands of the countrymen, the smiling faces of hope among the wreckage of tragedy and the encouraging message of the Queen carried via broadcasting and witnessed by her people. The end shot shows Thais united in yellow T-shirts outside the palace, waving both Thai flags and flags emblazoned with the emblem of the King. And then, as a final gesture of gratitude, love and deep-felt respect for the figure who has been a stabilising, unifying and driving force behind the nation for over sixty years, the montage fades with the enduring image of the King himself, the centre of the nation, accompanied by the Queen, waving to their people. In keeping with the duality so key to this work, these closing shots of the audiovisual presentation can be regarded not as a closure, but rather as the opening sequence of the introduction to the written dissertation, demonstrating further how the creative and academic components of the work bind and compliment each other.

Conclusion

'Popular Television and the Construction of Contemporary Thai Cultural Identity' has been an attempt to explore the roles of television in the formation of Thai cultural identity. This research project has been conducted on the premise that television is a cultural form which circulates bricolage and signs of representation available for the construction of identity.

Drawing together British Cultural Studies and a study of Thai television, the research has found that television in Thailand has played a profound role in the unification of Thai cultural identity. At the same time, the compression of space and time in the age of globalisation has changed the landscape of Thai television, and these elements have together had a profound influence upon Thai cultural identity. In one aspect, we have witnessed western influence on the form and style of Thai television programmes, evident, for instance, in the Anglo-American popular game shows 'The Weakest Link' and 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' (and more recently in the new genre of reality shows exemplified in 'Big Brother' and 'Pop Idol'). On the other hand, television, as an imported cultural form, has taken on local features. In this way, Thai television has created its own style of programmes, amalgamating western genre and the Thai specificity. This fusion can be clearly seen in hybrid youth programmes such as 'Red Seed' and 'We're Za'.

As a nation, Thailand has its roots in pre-modern Siam. As an Empire, Siam was a multi-ethnic society where Thais and non-Thais (Mon, Khmer, Laos) co-existed. The Thais assimilated the traditions and culture of those living alongside them into their everyday lives, and created the culture of the populus labelled the 'little traditions'. At the same time, the ruling Monarchy instigated the court rituals known as the 'great traditions', traditions which have played a profound role in the unification of the nation. The interplay between the 'great traditions' and the 'little traditions' has long been a characteristic of Thai culture; it is an interplay still much evident on Thai television nowadays. From the mid-19th century onwards, during an era of intense globalisation, the Thai socio-economic system has increasingly tied to the world system. The shrinking world of globalisation has occurred both 'on the ground' and 'in the air'. The power of advanced communication technology, specifically, broadcasting technology, has destroyed geographical barriers. Instead, it has created what Said (1993) referred to as an 'imaginary geography'. It has also had the effect of a dislocation of identity, giving variety of possibility of identification.

Identity, as Hall has suggested, is about 'sameness' and 'differences'; it is about how we view ourselves in relation to those around us. Television has the potential to shape our sense of belonging, to fashion how people make sense of themselves and the world around them. Samuel Huntington (2002) has further claimed that identity is about who we are, who we are not and who we are against. In the globalisation age, identity is therefore altogether more complex and more politically linked. Recent years have witnessed the increased development of international conflicts such as the Iraq war and the ongoing Middle East crisis, and these have been viewed worldwide through satellite

broadcasting. It is a similar case with respect to the Thai national context, where the ongoing political problem has been relayed to the nation via television, with the medium itself being used as a political tool for both sides. This predicament is what Ang (1996) has coined as a 'living room war', a war in which the whole world participates through the electronic collapsing of time and space induced by satellite telecommunication technology.

The power of western cultural homogenisation cannot be denied. However, different countries have responded to globalisation in different ways, and in many areas there has been a rise of nationalism and regionalism, which can be regarded as a form of local resistance to globalisation. As argued earlier (in chapters one and three), globalisation cannot simply be interpreted as the domination of the global over the local; rather, the two have influenced one another. There is a lack of sufficient scenario for conceptualising globalisation. To elucidate the difficulty surrounding an attempt to understand this complex concept and process, Tomlinson (1991) has made the analogy of blind men attempting to visualise and describe an elephant through touch alone. So globalisation should therefore be read as a discourse of an articulation of the global and the local. Hannerz has postulated that if there is now a world culture, it will be one which is marked by an organisation of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity (1990, p. 237). Furthermore, Hannerz has suggested that the world culture is created through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory: increasingly, we see more 'differences' *within* society at the same time as detecting more 'sameness' *between* the societies. To cite Hannerz:

> 'When studying culture, we now have to think about the flow between places as well as that within them. Increasingly, however, we find the cultural differences within societies, rather than between them. If you look within some society for what is most uniquely distinctive, you will perhaps look among peasants rather than bank managers, in the country rather than the city, among the old rather than the young.' (1991, p. 120)

This line of argument is evident in the Thai context. The findings of this research, as well as semiotic demonstration in the accompanying audiovisual presentation, have exposed examples of the clash between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' within Thai society. This can be seen in the case of the controversial game show 'The Weakest Link', which brought much debate and heated discussion into discourse surrounding the notion of 'Thainess'. 'The Weakest Link' has shown that the traditional notion of Thainess, with the Thai characteristic of a compromising society, and possessing the specific characteristic of 'kreng-jai' (being considerate and avoidance of criticising each other), is now being challenged by the modern, competitive characteristic of Thainess. As Dr Krittika Kongsompong has suggested, 'Thai society has been changing into more of a capitalist society. Who is the best pretty much win(s).' (Kongsompong, interviewed by Thitinan Boonpap, 26 February 2004). Similarly, Andrew Biggs has insisted that the programme is plausible representation of Thainess: 'I don't believe

that the show went against Thai values. Thais are very competitive. In business, they are ruthless, which is a good thing. That's exactly in line with Thai culture. 'The Weakest Link' reflects Thai culture.' (Biggs, interviewed by Thitinan Boonpap, 23 February 2004).

Another example of this binary opposition is the tension between the 'old' and the 'new' within Thai society, which can be seen in the case of the Taiwanese boy band 'F4' and their popular television drama 'Meteor Garden'. The popularity of the band and their show has raised controversy, provoking confrontational views between the authoritative old Thais and the modern young Thais regarding the value of Thainess.

Discourse surrounding 'The Weakest Link' and the 'F4 phenomenon', a detailed analysis of which has been demonstrated in both chapter three and the audiovisual work, has exposed the discord within society.

At the same time, a convergence of life style and cultural behaviour which are the result of globalisation has created sameness between societies. Youth culture is a quintessential aspect of this phenomenon, and jeans and trainers have become a uniform of the shared characteristic of youth. This is clearly evident in the audiovisual presentation, with young Thai presenters like Map, Palm, and Ray exhibiting a western dress-code and modern look.

Globalisation is associated with a new dynamic of re-localisation and a new articulation of culture. An emergence of what is called 'the third-culture' in cosmopolitanism is further evidence of this sameness between societies. Television is a western-originated medium; however, it has taken a local form of culture. Consequently, it has produced a hybrid form of bricolage and signs of representation, apparent in the hybrid youth programmes of India, Thailand, and Taiwan, as well as in the use of localised English languages such as Hinglish and Singlish on Asian television.

In addition, television has created a shared-experience amongst its viewers, the members of its electronic community. In the present day, cultural identity is no longer tied to the nation and the physical location, but more to an electronic geography. This can be seen, for instance, in the case of 'TCKs' in Thailand; through spaces of television, they can articulate themselves not only within Thai society, but also in their imagined TCKs community and even throughout the rest of the world. As a result, they have created their own, unique cultural hybridity. The increasing number of TCKs and expatriates (such as Andrew Biggs and Lina Demon) represents another example of the growing sameness between cosmopolitan cities.

However, one does not have to be biologically mixed or even need to leave the country in order to be a hybrid agent. Television in the age of globalisation has brought the outside world to the living room, and offered viewers an opportunity to be metaphorically exposed to different cultures; it is possible, therefore, to be culturally hybrid at home.

The theory of cultural hybridity has been contested in the way that it fails to fully explain the varying levels and degrees of hybridism. Werbner (1997, p. 150) has claimed that 'hybridity is meaningless as a description of 'culture', because this 'museumises' culture as a thing.' Although this

criticism has some validity, we must concede that cultural hybridity, when regarded as an anti-essentialist perspective, has enabled us to recognise the production of identity and cultural form. As a body of knowledge, it is also a valuable device for understanding culture and capturing cultural change.

To sum up, Said maintained that 'no one today is purely one thing' (Said, 1993, p. 407). The history of all cultures, as Said further reminds us, is a history of cultural borrowing (1993, p. 261). Hybridisation, as Bhabha (1994) has claimed, is the mixing of that which is already a hybrid. Thai cultural identity has long been the result of cultural 'mixing' and 'crossovers' of the Siamese Empire. The formation of Thai cultural identity has been a subject of power struggle ever since the foundation of the Thai nation state, led by the ruling Monarchy and its successive cultural managers. Cultural identity, as a form of imaginative identification, is an ongoing process, and Thai cultural identity has been struggling to find itself within the global context. In the same way as Pupae expresses her inability to recognize and define exactly who she is at the end of the audiovisual presentation, stating 'I can't tell you who I am because I'm discovering myself everyday... I can't answer it', present day Thai cultural identity is similarly still unable to find a definitive answer of what it means to be Thai in the global and local nexus. And nowhere is this ambiguity more clearly visible than on the cover image of the accompanying audiovisual presentation. Sitting in a traditional Thai house and wearing traditional Thai costume, the two children represent the epitome of the traditional Thai cultural environment. However, a closer inspection shows us that irrespective of this stoic attempt to retain and maintain the traditional, they are nevertheless, and inevitably, also exposed to a plethora of outside cultures through the television set before them. Identity, then, can be forged by both the cultural values of the society and the intrinsic role of television in bringing an alien culture into that society. In the final analysis, and to echo the final words of the audiovisual work, television has been playing, and continues to play, a central role in the construction and re-construction of Thai cultural identity.

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