

Reversed Realities: National Pride and Visual Coding

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The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2016
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper examines the historicity of Siam/Thailand and shows that the contacts that took place between Siam and the European other in the mid-nineteenth century, which has been seen as the start of the modernization period, paved way to for the synthetic notion of what it meant to embody Thainess. This paper also focuses on the power relations affecting how the conception of Thainess was engendered. In order to tackle this history, we must study the counter history of the remnants that were *selectively* left for us, the new generation. Following Thongchai Winichakul's (1994) analysis of the historical Siam map, the geopolitical framing that was introduced from the West itself, we can see that it signifies a code that interpellates numerous sentiments relating to patriotism, pride, and nation building. This particular notion of visual code is transcribed once again on the body of the 1965 Miss Universe. From these two cases, I argue that what it is to be Thai (with a special focus on Thai woman) is a conceptualization that is symbolically constituted and enunciated, forming a synthesis of contacts with both the real and the imagined West.

Keywords: Thainess, farang, siwilai, femininity, performativity

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Introduction

How do visual representations play a part in determining our identity or the sense of belonging to a nation? How is the notion of Thainess constructed and embedded in the representations that are glorified by the state? Following the analysis of Thongchai (1994)'s exemplary work on the historical Siam map that constitutes the geo-body of Siam,¹ I look at the constitution of Thainess that Abhasra, in the beauty pageant, had to perform through her embodiment of Thai femininity. Her title, 1965 Miss Universe, centers on the body of a woman and specifically how she performs that embodiment. Both the geo-body of Siam and the Thai woman's body analyzed here signify and interpellate the discourses of nation building, modernity, anti-colonialism, and unique Thainess.

Through the analysis, I conclude that the ruling elites play an integral part in determining the norm to define Thainess. I also argue that the preoccupation with the images projected both for the West and against it result from the need to keep up with the new world order and to ensure the state's independence in the face of Western imperialism and its asymmetrical power relations with Siam. While the people of Siam/Thailand² may or may not know what these constructed images and codes of Thainess signify to a global audience, the elites nonetheless have always determined the sense of unique Thainess. Western influence is carefully incorporated in the constitution of Thainess, but only to the extent that the elites see fit. In other words, the construction of national cultural identity is a process that Chatterjee (2010) calls "selective appropriation" (as cited in Winichakul, 2010, p. 138). This paper overall reveals that inexorably both the imagined and the real West assist the establishment of the national cultural identity that is Thainess.

The paper consists of four sections. It touches briefly on the dawn of the modernization period, before analyzing the transculturation process as symbolically represented respectively in the geo-body of Siam and the body of the Miss Universe, and concluding with an explanation of how the constitution of Thainess largely exists as a cultural response to the Western other. My emphasis is to reject its acclaimed authenticity and instead focus on how such a synthesis reveals the performative nature of Thainess.

Disavowed Transculturation

During the period European imperialism starting in mid nineteenth century, the kingdom of Siam adapted and adjusted to the new world ethos that was European civilization. In response, Siam which had been immediately affected by European imperialism both politically and economically, later developed the cultural concept of *siwilai* or civilization as described by Winichakul (2000). The discourse of *siwilai* comprises solely the element the Siamese ruling class or the elites had championed in order to keep up with the "New World Order" (Winichakul, 2000, p. 532). In the following analyses, we will be able to recognize that Siam/Thailand determined to uphold the unique sense of Thainess yet discerningly adjusted to the new world order.

¹ The historical atlas map was disseminated within the country during Field Marshal Phibun's regime (1939-1944).

² "Siam" is used to refer to the period up to 1939 and "Thailand" from 1939 onward.

The adjustment was conducted in the form of the conceptualization of the discourse of *siwilai*, which truly was (and plausibly is) an ambivalent one. Thongchai Winichakul (2010), Peter A. Jackson (2010), and Rachel V. Harrison (2010), to name only a few, conclude that the knowledge and practices reflecting *siwilai* discourse were already part of a transculturation process despite the elite's claims regarding Thai uniqueness.

Siamese *siwilai* discourse was engendered because of two main reasons. The first was the coming into contact (in what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) calls the "contact zone", as cited in Winichakul, 2000, p. 529) with the West since the mid nineteenth century, most evidently in the form of the extraterritorial rights given to the British in the Bowring Treaty of 1855. Another evidence of the transculturation process results from the insecurity or threats felt by Siam during Western imperialism because of its dominant power and its modernized status. As a consequence of the contact and encounters with the Europeans, the Siamese elite felt it necessary to protect the independent Siamese state and maintain the sovereign rule. Or what Winichakul (2000) terms "royal dignity" (p. 539), of the Chakri monarchs. The ruling class also needed to keep up with the west that was the new world order at the time as expressed in *The Quest for Siwilai* that the elites had the "anxiety to keep up with the world" (p. 534).

Both the apprehension to maintain Siam's independence against the colonial threat and the eagerness to keep up with the new world order result in the strategic response by the Siamese elites. They selectively incorporated Western elements into Siamese ways of life and culture during the modernization period or administrative reformation,³ which began in the mid nineteenth century during King Mongkut's reign (Rama IV, 1851-1868). The King recognized the superiority of the Europeans yet disavowed the Siamese status. Such mentality indicates another justification that was similarly experienced by postcolonial countries when we considered Bhabha's strategic recognition and disavowal process. Other consequences resulting from this line of mentality pave the way for the emergence of the epistemological demarcation to which Winichakul (2010) gives the term "Material/Spiritual Bifurcation" (p. 140). This closed intellectual regime refers to how the ruling class of Siam/Thailand chose elements from the West that assisted them to represent Siam as a modern state. Specifically, it refers to how the Occidentalist perspective was performed by the Siamese elites (Kitiarsa, 2010) to justify its rule over and action towards the Siamese subjects.

Mapping and Constructing National Cultural Identity

Arguably, the most evident way Siam portrayed the modern state was through the historical Siam map. Thongchai Winichakul (1994) finely delineates the work of the map as a construction aimed at interpellating various kinds of nationalist sentiments and stabilizing the opposition between us and them (or *farang*).⁴ The map defines a

³ In *The ambiguous allure of the West*, various authors describe in detail the discourse of modernization in the mid nineteenth century as a process where the elements from the West had been localized so much that it was "always the Thai-ized West" (as cited in Harrison, 2010, p. 36).

⁴ The term *farang* can disclose negative connotations, a disdainful attitude, as it is "a usually ill-defined" Thai "reference to otherness", an adjective and noun referring to

clear political body and represents a progress away from the pattern of overlord and tributary state. However, in practicality, “Siam had its first geo-body and its representation made, filled, and shaped, at least in part, by Western powers” (1994, p. 128) since the late nineteenth century.

The constructed historical Siam map and the emergence of the modern geo-body then are products of the transcultural process which was first constituted by a Westerner and was later widely circulated during the military regime of Field Marshal Phibun (Winichakul, 1994). The map symbolizes and visually represents the modern polity. It was not created through the orthodox meaning of representing something that already existed: Winichakul (1994) eloquently points out that “Siam was bounded. Its geo-body emerged. Mapping created a new Siam—a new entity whose geo-body had never existed before” (p. 130). The new geo-body of Siam and the map bring discourses of nationalism, anti-colonialism, and interpellation of Thainess to the forefront. Most importantly, it spurred the anxiety for the territories lost to France in the 1893 annexation.⁵

The dissemination of nationalism and the grief over the lost territories were espoused by the ruling elites. This “negative identification” (1994, p. 5) is fundamental and considered an integral strategy by the state that allows us to define ourselves. Consequently, it is the other that is often a crucial element that makes us recognize who we are. Through the visual code of the map, sentimental feelings of grief and mourning over the lost territories, as well as the positive politics of belonging, can be achieved when the Thais identify themselves with such a code.

Along with the mapping process, the constitution of the self versus the external other—*farang*—is evidently manifested. Such binary opposition not only points out the way in which Siam was colonized consciously, i.e., by incorporating Western elements into its polity, way of life, culture, and so on, but also, how the Siamese ruling class colonized its own subjects.⁶ Winichakul (1994; 2010) points out that the strategic responses that include epistemological demarcation, the “enunciation” (1994, p. 130) of the modern geo-body of Siam, and the centralized governmental administration are similar to that of colonial rule. In a way, the self versus the external other does not constitute binary opposition alone. At this point, various scholars, in particular, Thongchai Winichakul (1994; 2000; 2010), Peter A. Jackson (2004; 2010), Rachel V. Harrison (2010), have concluded that Siam was a semi-colonial state where the discourse of the distinct Thainess could never be originated without the western other against whom it was defined. Likewise, the map is a transcultural product created to elicit the discourses that conserve its independence and a response to the new world order.

The visual code of the map is an instrument used to exhibit the nation’s face or desired image both at the national and international levels. The exhibition of appropriate images—modern yet uniquely Thai—for the eyes of the west had always

Western people without any specification of nationality, culture, ethnicity, language, or whatever” (as cited in Kitiarsa, 2010, p. 61).

⁵ See Winichakul (1994), especially chapters 7 and 8.

⁶ See Jackson (2010), especially the Afterward, for an elaborate discussion of the negotiation process of the colonial rule.

been Siam's preoccupation. Images portrayed on the world stage can be performed but this does not mean that the images are not true in themselves, rather the images that signify codes of Thainess lead us to question the engrossment of self-representation.

Thai Femininity and Its Mobility

Another code that the ruling elites project on the world stage is through the body of the 1965 Miss Universe, Abhasra Hongsakul (nicknamed Pook). Abhasra comes to signify something similar to the code of the historical Siam map. The point is that the ruling elite's preoccupation with the images is presented along the discourses of nationalism, unique Thainess, modern self, and Thai femininity through Abhasra's embodiment and performance. People could identify this victory, especially, Thai women and indeed all the Thai people as a whole, with Abhasra. *The Bangkok Post* (1965) wrote on the day of her success that it was "a great day for the women of Thailand" ("Miss Universe Supplement," 1965, "A Great Day").

Suphatra (1993) writes in *Sen thaay naay naam* that the changes in socio-political and economical determinants all contribute to the social mobility of Thai women (p. 2). Diachronic study shows that since the period of modernization (at its full force during the reigns of King Rama V until King Rama VII) was comprised of encounters with the West which was present in Siam both physically and ideologically. Unavoidably, Western values and ideologies were introduced into the state via mass media such as prints, advertisements, and moving pictures (Barmé, 2002, p. 2).

Thai women's mobility was perhaps most notable during the early twentieth century. During this period, the women's education, concerns regarding women's garments, socialization etiquettes, values of beauty standards, and even hairstyles became Western oriented.⁷ Woman can be a major instrument for self-representation and a public image of the country during post-absolutist period and amid the intensified relationship between Thailand and the US. It was undeniable that since Miss Thailand competition first originated in the 1930's, the beauty pageants were incorporated into the social responsibility of representing the country as being modern and progressive, a move away from the absolutist reign.⁸ Still they were to present values from the Thai tradition which, I suggest, was a realm where Thai femininity and the separation of private and public spheres were upheld to the standards of Thai patriarchal (and at the time militaristic) society (Callahan, 1998, p. 48).

The discursive knowledge concerning gender, sexuality, and the sexes was governed by the patriarchal ideology of Thai society at the time. This internal factor was paired with the external influence (or sometimes threat) coming from the West, so that both were accepted and clashed against one another. This coming into contact certainly represents another transcultural product and one significant attribute for the beauty

⁷ See Kopkitsuksakul (1993) for a thorough explanation of the factors causing the change in Thai women's roles and the effects that emerge from the Miss Thailand competitions.

⁸ Field Marshal Phibun stated specifically that Miss Thailand ought to employ and utilize her title to benefit the country (Kopkitsuksakul, 1993, p. 17) and to manifest the modern Thai self.

pageants where values from the West are both endorsed and rejected at the same time. Parallel to the influences and novel conceptions from the West, some normative gender expectations, roles, and ideal Thai femininity are kept and exerted by the state through the woman's body. Examples are female virtues in preserving one's purity, mastering domestic tasks and duties, and becoming decent daughters, wives, and mothers, to name only a few.

Suphatra (1993), Van Esterik (1995; 1999; 2000), and Karim (1995) claim that in agricultural society, differences in genders and sexes in Southeast Asian region are of their own distinct character. In the case of Siam/Thailand, the modernization period during King Mongkut's reign onward was considered the period where Western influences started to flow into the state. Since then, Siam entered into economic expansion and gave away extraterritorial rights to the British. This certainly formed a milestone and originated the alteration for Thai women's roles and social status to keep up with the rest of the world and to represent itself against the overwhelming imperial power. The Siamese needed to represent an appropriate image to uphold Western standards of gender relations, and the modern state, and to redeem itself from the contemptuousness exhibited towards Thai women (Kopkitsuksakul, 1993, p. 32).

The Sixties: Thailand's Promotion

Abhasra Hongsakul (Pook) earned the Miss Universe crown in 1965 as a delegate representing Thailand. Her victory does not mean that her beauty and intelligence certify the standard of Miss Universe alone. As Suphatra (1993) and Callahan (1998) write comprehensively in their diachronic studies, the year Abhasra won the title reflects a crucial stage in world politics—that of the Cold War. Van Esterik (1996) suggests that Abhasra's performance, as a Thai beauty delegate on the world stage, is heavily interlaced with the politics of self-representation and the appropriated image of Thai women. As *The Bangkok Post* (1965) wrote, "when our Miss Thailand, Abhasra Hongsakul, was named Miss Universe yesterday, it wasn't just a compliment paid to Pook—though it was justly deserved—it was also a compliment to Thai womanhood" ("Miss Universe Special Supplement," 1965, "For when," para. 3). Her entrance to Miss Universe was one of an obligation, a duty: both the "Miss Universe Special Supplement" (1965) and Callahan (1998) portray Pook as a dutiful daughter of the military General who complies with the family's desire for her to enter the beauty competition all "for the good of the country" (p. 44).

Indeed, in the 1960's under the rule of the militaristic reign of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-1973) Thailand espoused the values concerning the country's reputational promotion (Kopkitsuksakul, 1993; Callahan, 1998). It was inevitable that Thailand had to promote itself during this crucial time of world politics. The well-established relationship between Thailand and the US existed since the predecessor of Field Marshal Thanom—Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963). Thailand was preoccupied with the conceptualization of free trade, capitalism, and the Western-oriented tourism promotion. Furthermore, the profound tie between Thailand and the US was enhanced throughout the militaristic regimes in which Thailand received support socially, militaristically, educationally, and so on. Altogether, such affiliation was to keep Thailand ally with the anti-communist block. With the political bond in the picture, the ruling elites were more conscious than ever regarding what images

would appropriately portray Thailand to be both Thai and modern despite the silences forced on many groups as they attempted to make political statements.

Certainly, the beauty pageant could be read as a code for national promotion, or rather, the body of the beauty pageant functions as a code that signifies the whole nation. She is an expedient instrument that signifies two types of image considered appropriate by the state and deemed as the ideal Thai woman.⁹ Such an image constructed through the embodiment of Thai femininity is traditional to Thainess. The other is what the ruling elite considers apposite for the west to see i.e., a Thai woman representing the modern Thai state when in fact at the time the internal politics was quite disordered (Callahan, 1998). Suphatra (1993) writes that internally, there were outbursts from emerging political groups such as the Students' group who opposed and lambasted the Western materiality overflowing into the country because of the political ties. Another was the feminist movement that chastised the purpose of beauty competitions as mere objectification of female bodies, engendering the standardization of beauty, and the idealization of normative femininity. I will now turn to analyze the discourse of gender and the constitution of Thai femininity as a code embodied by the beauty pageant.

Mapping National Pride on the Female Body

In this section, I propose that Judith Butler's (1988) concept of performative acts is fitting to employ in analyzing the embodiment of ideal femininity embedded in the beauty pageants. Butler argues that performing gender can be compared to performance or acting in a theatrical sense. She emphasizes one of the speech gestures—illocutionary speech act—that it is the characteristic of speech filled with effects on the deeds at the precise moment when the speech is performed. Butler writes that not only John Searle's 'speech acts,' "refer to speaking relationships, but [it also] constitute[s] a moral bond between speakers" (1988, p. 519). With speech act theory as her foundation, Butler extends this to explain how "social reality" (p. 519) can be constituted when least expected by simple speeches, etiquettes, or manners that govern ourselves.

I suggest that Abhasra performs and delivers the state-mediated ideal of Thai femininity on the Miss Universe stage. On the path to becoming Miss Universe, "Miss Universe Special Supplement" (1965) writes, she was chaperoned by M.L. Kamala Sukhum who coached Abhasra on how she was to perform Thai femininity and visually represent Thainess "through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). The ideal of Thai femininity she was to enact through her body included even physical appearance as "[t]here were plenty of ups and downs as many interested persons tried to show Thailand's representative the best way to win" ("Miss Universe

⁹ Suphatra (1993) writes that Abhasra's victory signifies two things which are: first, respectability for Thai women and their beauty, and second, the fact that Abhasra as a visual code was portrayed to the Western other to display recognition and revered image for Thailand internationally. Lt. Gen. Chalermchai comments that Miss Universe could enhance international relations better than sending diplomatic delegates abroad as follows: Miss Universe "has done the work of ten goodwill missions...[the Americans] are now all interested in Thailand" ("Miss Universe Supplement," 1965, "Pook's win," para. 3).

Special Supplement,” 1965, “It wasn’t easy,” para. 2). Her performance of subtlety, grace, and humility was finely executed on the world stage. The ideal Thai femininity that she embodies meets the conditions of “performative accomplishment” (Butler, 1988, p. 520): when she won the title Miss Universe, *The Bangkok Post* (1965) presented the news in a section entitled “Pook’s win stirs new interest for nation”, suggesting that her portrayal of femininity went beyond personal grace and encompassed that of the women of Thailand as a whole. It stated that “Abhasra won mainly because of her femininity and other qualities of ‘Thai women.’ ... These stood out in this contest for young, modern, beautiful women” (“Miss Universe Special Supplement,” 1965, “Opinions,” para. 2).

Why does the body of a woman become so much more than a female body? Her performance is clearly restricted in the scope of what is expected as part of the Thai gender normativity. Her body becomes one with the nation. Abhasra’s performance can determine the face of Thailand as it is scrupulously constructed for the world audience. In this way, a woman’s body is political because it bears meanings over time in specific socio-cultural contexts. The body that performs its gender correctly and in accordance with its essentialist view of biological sex is considered natural and socio-culturally sanctioned. When Butler argued that “gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (1988, p. 520), this might suggest that the nature of gender that is socio-culturally expected by our cultures is restricted to performance alone.

Peter Digeser (1994) writes in response to the theory of performativity that Butler’s ideas raise the problem of continuity and the unity of experiences within her theory. In contesting Butler’s theory, Digeser points out one that speech acts are not only constituted by the performative effect of utterances. J. L. Austin’s speech act theory also includes the notion of the “constative” (Urmson & Sabisà, 1975, p. 3). Constative utterances deal with the qualities of being descriptive, truthful, false, and even historical at times (Urmson & Sabisà, 1975), though we tend to make the mistake of taking as “straightforward statements of fact utterances which are *either* [...] nonsensical or *else* intended as something quite different” (p. 3). Thus, Digeser’s response to performativity theory makes us question the subversion of the natural or essentialist notions of the correlation between sex and gender and whether or not we should discard the essentialist notion entirely. As he suggests, “Butler assumes that the constative elements, found in prediscursive conception of the body, can be overcome once we see that even the sexed body is merely a performative” (Digeser, 1994, p. 663). Butler’s argument that the mundane performances, manners, and actions carried out by social subjects are what make up their gender—similar to that of the performative utterance—is what Digeser finds most polemic.

It is significant for us to consider the realm of truth and falsity—constatives—as Digeser writes in response to performativity theory. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* explains an indivisible tie between the constative type and performative type of utterances that we often “assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance” (Urmson & Sabisà, 1975, p. 9), which means that we cannot only consider the characteristic in which gender is successfully or unsuccessfully performed because the successful gender performance must be believed by the socio-cultural formation i.e., as truthful or false according to one’s sex. For if with Butler

we theorize the performative sequence of gender acts and expectations alone, this would lead us to believe that performativity theory manifests the neglect of gender normativity of each society at a certain time regardless of its constructedness in nature.

Because the construction of gender expectations relates with the historicity that is believed and upheld over time, it is then sadly inevitable that men and women are expected to perform and act out their gender a certain way where their actions are socially accepted. The implication is that both constative and performative characteristics should be acknowledged in order to recognize, criticize, and ultimately move beyond this gender constructedness. Similarly, Thai femininity incorporates certain truthful and false actions as expected by the society. Especially, at the particular chaotic time of both external and internal politics in the 1960's, women were expected to take part and play their role to bring respectable recognition to the country, as Suphatra (1993) and Callahan (1998) describe. Both constatives and performatives attest to the analysis of Abhasra's body as a site where the politics of beauty and the embodiment of gender expectations through the performance intertwine. Her Thainess that includes Thai femininity is constructed and most importantly the ideal Thai femininity is projected through her body as being both of modern and traditional Thai women.

The arbitrariness lies in the ideal Thai femininity where modern and traditional gender aspects are concerned. To what extent can a woman's body be "modern" and how much should she remain "conservative"? The Thai state at the time certainly kept up with the attraction of the world order that was the US. Abhasra's expected gender role of an obedient daughter is acutely expressed in *The Bangkok Post* (1965). Her sexuality is finely scripted within the socio-culturally accepted norm on maintaining one's virtue of virginity. *The Bangkok Post* wrote, "Pook and Akadej [her boyfriend] have never been out together alone. They usually meet at each other's house, or take along their brothers or sisters on dates." ("Miss Universe Special Supplement," 1965, "Study," para. 4). The performativity theory allows us to analyze the performance and construction of gender through the performance and embodiment of such expectations in women.

Butler writes that "because gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term '*strategy*' better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs. Hence a strategy of survival gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (1988, p. 522). The "duress" Butler explains clearly as relating to what the society accounts as "correct" performance. It puts pressure on women to perform, thus achieving their gender expectations; because Abhasra does meet such social expectations the news portrays the "reception would make the welcome home official and signify recognition of all the people of Bangkok's beautiful daughter" ("Miss Universe Special Supplement," 1965, "Big Welcome," para. 4).

All in all, by studying performativity theory and paying attention to the nature of constatives, we can see that Abhasra's performance is "embodied and disguised under duress" (Butler, 1988, p. 522), the duress of Thai socio-cultural discourse on gender that is closely related to Thainess. Digeser's (1994) claim, that "constative statements are obstacles to our ability to break free from the prevailing dichotomous roles of gender and sex" (p. 663), confirms the socio-cultural sanction of gender and what acts

are deemed culturally correct and vice versa. We must remember that acceptance, judgments, and criticisms arise from the descriptive nature of constatives, for if Abhasra was not to meet with gender expectations, she might be faced with such punitive consequences. Thus, constatives mean so much more and are historically relevant.

Conclusion

The analysis of both the historical Siam map and the 1965 Miss Universe reveal the particular relations Siam/Thailand had with the West and its preoccupation with its self-image. Such relations were time and space conditional and contingent and affect the ambivalence of Thainess. Dominant discourses such as nation-building, anti-imperialist power, and modernity can be theoretically examined from the circulation of the historical Siam map and the news of Abhasra's victory. The notion of Thainess, I suggest, is fluid, unstable, and time-space contingent. Socio-economic factors play an integral part in its construction regardless how the ruling elites' anxiety for "surface effects" (Jackson, 2004, p. 220) may intervene with the possible hybrid identity. Yet, the elites are sufficiently knowing to employ some elements in their strategic negotiation to the asymmetrical power relations with the West so as to protect their independence, royal dignity, and gain acceptance. Hence, the construction of Thainess seems valid and justified with "internal history" (Rhum, 1996, p. 351) but at the same time, representing itself as modern due to "reference to other societies" (p. 351).

The discursive knowledge that constructs Thainess and Thai femininity analyzed in this paper shows the ambivalent characteristic and in-between space of such discourse (Thongchai, 1994). The recognition and disavowal process has a deep root in Siam/Thai mentality and epistemology. However, we cannot deny that it is the presence of the real and imaginary West that contributes to the constitution of Thainess. Both the map and the embodied of Thai femininity are transcultural products. It is crucial that we do not take cultural products for what they represent. Siam/Thailand's demarcation between private and public images (Jackson, 2004) is one such point that needs thorough analysis. The relationship between outward appearance and interior knowledge is part of the Thai polity's uniqueness, where the state has always acted as such a strong monitor over what is deemed representable and vice versa. This could be clearly manifested in the woman's body that is being restricted and connected to the nation. Thus, analyses of cultural products can reveal much about the Thai polity and its ability to conduct its performative Thainess on the world stage.

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