

Thai Globalization through Postcolonial Lens

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Abstract

Thailand's passionate obsession with European signs of modernity is well documented. There are several questions I want to ask about this. Is there a consistency in the Thai quest for civilization and modernity in the past with contemporary forms and patterns of marketing and consumption? More specifically, is the current popularity of skin whitening lotions and cosmetic surgery among Thai women a symptom of something deeper, revealing a colonial economy of desire? How have scholars in Thai studies responded to these challenges? This article is situated within the field of cultural and postcolonial studies. It investigates the above issues in terms of what Foucault calls social technologies of the self. To that extent, it analyzes the power/knowledge nexus in production, circulation and consumption of gendered and racialized identities in the everyday discourse and practices of advertising in Thailand.

Keywords: postcolonialism, globalization, racism, skin whitening, advertising, Reynolds, Thailand

1. Globalization, Modernity and Whiteness

Thailand's passionate obsession with European signs of modernity is well documented. There are several questions I want to ask about this. Is there a consistency in the Thai quest for civilization and modernity in the past with contemporary forms and patterns of marketing and consumption? More specifically, is the current popularity of skin whitening lotions and cosmetic surgery among Thai women a symptom of something deeper, revealing a colonial economy of desire? How have scholars in Thai studies responded to these challenges? This article is situated within the field of cultural and postcolonial studies. It investigates the above issues in terms of what Foucault calls social technologies of the self. To that extent, it analyzes the power/knowledge nexus in production, circulation and consumption of gendered and racialized identities in the everyday discourse and practices of advertising in Thailand.

This cultural will to modernity is encased within the colonial discourse of civilization versus backwardness and structured by the cultural hierarchy with the West at the apex. For most urban Thais, therefore, modernity has come to reside in certain stereotypical notions of Westernization, and in the corporeal, material and symbolic signs one displays. What has made this discourse so palatable at the level of civil society is its articulation in terms of internationalness while at the level of the state, it is the necessary national cultural adjustments to benefit from globalization.

Increasingly, we find the appearance of Western cultural forms at the level of social life, in pursuit of a spurious 'internationalness.' Integral to this desire and dash for 'internationalness,' is a flight from rural backwardness and blackness, evidenced in the popularity and acceptance of skin whitening lotions, cosmetic surgery clinics specializing in eyelids and noses, intermarriage between Western men and Thai women for questionable reasons, etc. At the level of the body then, this will to modernity expresses itself in terms of a desire for literal whitening, a phenomena which has led to the repositioning of *luk krueng*s as embodying the virtues of a beautiful modernity in a world where whiteness is *naa lak* (lovely).

The other side of this happy, hybrid modernity is the unleashing of the massive armory of colonial modernity's fears against the darker peoples of Isan (Northeast) and Southern Thailand and South Asians in Thailand as witnessed in the flight from rural backwardness and blackness, and by extension, from the nation's historical/cultural past of Indian influence. It is not lost on the former groups that their incessant battles against food scarcity, low agricultural prices, indebtedness, alternating seasons of water shortages and floods, loss of control over natural resources, etc. are structurally linked to the middle class' pursuit of the contemporary colonial fantasy of a *luk krueng* modernity. It has become clear that while they build the ultramodern roads, homes, shopping malls and office towers, the objective fruits of their labor are beyond their reach as wages are kept to survival levels and workers' organizations capable of agitating for improvement in their conditions are discouraged and even destroyed by the state in the name of growth and national competitiveness, often with the complicity of the majority of the urban middle class.

1.1 Neo-colonial Hybridity?

It must be noted that the Thai reverential attitude and racially structured desires vis-a-vis white Westerners alluded to above go far beyond the constructive transgression of cultural borders celebrated in the work of cultural, postcolonial and globalization theorists in concepts such as hybridity and cosmopolitanism. While hybrid and cosmopolitan identities may have some potential to unsettle and displace the grand narratives of Western modernity and thus open new spaces for the articulation of post-racist/ post-sexist identities in the West, in

Southeast Asia, the Western-Thai partnership in modernity/globalization is structured by a common and extensive sexist and racist regime. Thailand enthusiastically participates in and funds its self-Orientalization, inviting and profiting from this global economy of racist and sexist attitudes, feelings, fantasy and reference.

In the global flows of languages, images, ideas and people, what we are witnessing in Southeast Asia today is indeed various forms of biological and cultural mixing as noted by several writers under the signs of hybridity and cosmopolitanism. But in the reception and indigenization of much of these flows, the content of the hybrid and cosmopolitan identities which they engender in Thailand reinforces and extends old colonial hierarchies structured by the ideology of Western/ white supremacy, notwithstanding important differences between the colonial and postcolonial periods. In the latter period, Southeast Asians not only encourage and actively make the flows possible, but they also translate their meanings locally into old colonial stereotypes such as “white is beautiful,” and “white is right,” the title of two newspaper articles appearing in 2003 and 2004 (Rowse, 2003; Wong, 2004).

1.2 *Technologies of the Whitening Self*

A 2001 article noted that according to a study by Thai Farmers Bank Research Center, “in 1998, whitening products represented the single biggest sector among skin-care products – 49% of a market worth about 880 million baht. By 2004, the whitening trend had exploded as in that year, “the whitening lotion segment account for 60 percent of the country’s annual US\$100 (3.9 billion baht) *facial* skincare market” (Bangkok Post, 2004, 2001). This growth was spurred by a high level of advertising by major global corporations. In 2000, for example, Unilever spent 2,824,400,000 baht (approx. US 80 million dollars) while Proctor & Gamble spent 933,300,000 baht (approx. US 26.5 million dollars) on advertising in Thailand. Unilever’s Ponds, and Proctor & Gamble’s Olay were ranked seventh and thirty-third in terms of advertising brands (*The Advertising Book: Thailand Advertising, Marketing, and Media Guide*, 2001, 13, pp. 71, 73).

Over the last decade there has been a gradual deepening and normalizing of this highly gendered pigment-based modernizing of the nation as an obsession with white skin colonizes entire regions in the nation’s cultural-economic landscape. A plethora of specialized global cosmetic corporations such as Estee Lauder, Christian Dior, L’Oreal, Shiseido, The Body Shop, etc. produce a discourse of skin pigmentation hierarchy through attractive billboards and in-store media distributed in hypermodern department stores. Meanwhile, other major transnational corporations such as Beiersdorf, Kao, Proctor & Gamble, and Unilever, in alliance with global advertising companies such as Leo Burnett, Ogilvy & Mather, J. Walter Thompson, Saatchi & Saatchi, among others, deepen and disseminate the discourse through mass media advertising campaigns (*The Advertising Book*, 2001, p.13). Taken together their effort has been responsible for the emergence of a discourse which disseminates and normalizes an ideology of modernity based on a hierarchy of skin color, with “whiteness” at the top and “darkness” at the bottom. Significantly, though not surprisingly, this discourse also offers “corrective,” “curative” and “purifying” “skin whitening technology” for “dark” skin in various “whitening body” creams such as Biore (Kao), Nivea (Beiersdorf), Olay (Proctor & Gamble), Ponds, Vaseline, and Citra (Unilever). That these companies are also among the top advertisers in Thailand, with Unilever holding the number one spot for several years while Proctor and Gamble alternates between second and third, points to the concerted work of global (especially western) corporations in fashioning racialized and sexualized identities in Asia around “whiteness” and “beauty.”

1.3 *White Skin Technologies*

These companies promote the “latest in skin whitening technologies” under names and slogans such as “SK-II Intensive Whitening Mask” (Proctor & Gamble), “Perfect White EX (Guerlain), “Intensively White” (Chanel), “Moisture White” (The Body Shop), “Double White Power” (Dior), “MID Whitening Technology” (Clinique), “New White Detox” (Biotherm) “WhiteLight” (Estee Lauder), among several others. In pursuit of this white modernity, increasingly Thais and other Asians of all “stripes” and ages spend hundreds of millions of dollars desperately seeking *peau khao* (white skin) for themselves and/or their daughters. According to one report, Thais spend more than US\$60 million dollars annually on facial whitening lotions while Japanese cosmetic giant, Shiseido, reported a twenty per cent yearly increase in sales of skin-whitening products in Asia between 1997 and 2003. More perniciously, locally companies have joined the production and marketing cant for soaps, facial creams and lotions under the Orientalist sign of “Herbal Whitening.” These include from such nationally known brands as Oriental Princess (“Advanced Whitening Complex”), Cute Press (“White Beauty Body lotion”), the largest domestic manufacturer of cosmetics, to scores of smaller home-based manufacturers.

That such advertising are fashioning a racist social technology of the self in their products and advertising in Thailand is no secret. One commercial aired during prime time on Thai television by Unilever for Ponds face cream is particularly telling. The advertisement not only stages a putative indigenous desire by Thai women to have white skin by having them enter the “Ponds Institute” to consult a “beauty instructor,” but also graphically presents their transformation to whiteness after using the cream. The transformation is shown through a moving image of the right side of a face evolving from dark to light reminiscent of natural history images of human evolution from ape to human. Unilever has been running this advertisement continuously from 1998 to 2004,

suggesting that it has had persuasive power in escaping any ethical responsibilities for the racist images being promoted. The company, whose 19th century slogan was “Soap is Civilization,” is one of the pioneers in this form of racist advertising in Thailand and around the world.⁴

1.4 Sexism in Cosmetic Whitening

The profound sexism in this global flow of images is readily transparent as the advertisements are not aimed at Thai males. In fact, Thai males participate from the side of power by reducing women to the color of their skin while gazing, evaluating and commenting on it. For example, in one skin whitening cream television commercial, two young males nonchalantly carry on a spirited conversation comparing the skin color of two young women. One is referred to as “*nong dam dot com*” (Ms. dark/black skin dot com) and dismissed as she fades out of view. Immediately after using a popular brand body lotion, *nong dam* reappears “white.” Her “*peau khao*” (white skin) makes her “*nalaak*” (lovely, appealing) and both men are attracted to her.

An even more obviously sexist and racist television commercial shows women under the defining gaze of two male photographers at a Miss Universe beauty contest. The two photographers stopped shooting abruptly as their camera turned on Miss Thailand. They seemed to be in a dilemma because next to Miss Thailand was a “black” contestant from an African country. Her “blackness,” it seemed, threaten to make the photograph of Miss Thailand ugly. To the photographers relief, white-skinned Miss Thailand turned towards her “black” neighbor, sending off rays of light instantly whitening and “beautifying” her, allowing the photographers to gleefully continue shooting. The product, a capsule (Blink) which is to be orally consumed and is supposedly responsible for supplying Miss Thailand with such luminosity, is then presented to the viewers. Here, under the gaze of two juvenile looking males, an equally juvenile looking Miss Thailand performs the power of her beautiful white modernity for the world and benevolently “rescues” her “black” counterpart from Africa and from “blackness.”

1.4 Cosmetic Surgery: Hardware of the Self

While manufacturers and advertisers have been reaping profits from this global traffic in sexism and racism over the last decade, local hospitals and clinics have more recently joined the Asian “gold rush” in whitening technologies. Scores of clinics and hospitals have been cashing in on the flight from Asian darkness by offering various services in cosmetic “beautification” surgery. For example, Yan Hee hospital in Thornburi offers an extensive range of services for the production of new, more modern kinds of subjects and selves. According to journalist Mukdawan Sakboon, Yan Hee’s 384-page manual “covers forty-five cosmetic surgery services provided by the hospital, with comprehensive details of the costs” (Mukdawan, 2002). These include blepharoplasty (eyelids) costing over US200 dollars, nose enlargement, costing nearly US250 dollars, and face-lift, costing over US2,000 dollars. At Yan Hee hospital, which has eighty-one full-time and one hundred and thirty-one part-time doctors, most of the nurses have themselves undergone “beautification” surgery and therefore make “perfect” advisors.

The hospital is widely known in Thailand and is seeking to become the “regional hub” for cosmetic surgery. It is “considering arranging package deals for foreign tourists that will include travel expenses, surgery and hospital accommodation.” Just who these “foreign tourists” are can be easily deduced from the seven new employees Yan Hee hired to provide language services in English, Chinese, Cambodian, Burmese, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese. In addition to hiring a presenter to advertise its services, it has joined forces with local taxi drivers in a sticker promotion campaign, and with the credit company, Easy Buy, to make loans available for its clients. Mukdawan refers to a 1992 report from *Life and Health* magazine which stated that “about 98 percent of clients at beauty clinics were women and half of them went for eye jobs.” Significantly, customers usually go to the hospital with pictures of well-known *luk Krueng* beauties and movie stars such as Cathaleeya McIntosh.

2. The Response of Thai Scholarship

In the “The Postmodernization of Thainess,” a similar aversion is to be witnessed in the marxian deconstruction of Thai identity by Kasian Tejapira. While Kasian is alert to the capitalist-exploitation-commodity logic in Thai identity, he misses its entire colonial-exclusion/subjection moment constituted around race and gender as much as

⁴ Unilever has been operating in Thailand for over sixty years. It produces several brands which traffic in such “whitening technology,” as such body and face lotions are called in East Asia. These include “Citra White” and “Vaseline Intensive Care Whitening UV Protection Lotion.” According to Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 207-231, in the nineteenth century, Unilever was one of the pioneers in marketing and promoting its products through advertising, “the central cultural form of commodity capitalism.” It marketed and promoted soap as a technology of hygiene and cleanliness through similar racist images and slogans which it employs today. In the nineteenth century its slogan was “Soap is Civilization.” In Thailand, Unilever’s main competitor is an American transnational corporation, Proctor and Gamble, whose Asian headquarter and manufacturing base was moved from the Philippines to Thailand in 1995. It built a one billion baht (\$25 million at 1995 exchange rate) plant thirty-six kilometers east of Bangkok in the Wellgrow Industrial Estate in 1995-96 and produces Olay for the mass market and SKII for the affluent. The latter is sold for over \$100 US and is promoted by a close relative of one of a senior Minister in the present TRT government of Thailand.

nation and class. It is in the works of one of Khan's contributors, Craig J. Reynolds, that we find some of the most sustained and original development and application of postcolonial and postmodern perspectives in Southeast Asian cultural studies.

2.1 *Craig Reynolds, Postcolonialism and Thai studies*

In two essays published in 1998 and 1999, Craig Reynolds broadens his postmodern approach to incorporate postcolonialism, a move that signals an awareness of the limitations of the former. In the second of these essays, published in the Jackson and Cook volume, Reynolds makes explicit use of postmodernism and postcolonialism in framing his reading of gender and sexuality in contemporary nationalism in Thailand. After noting "the resistance of Thai studies to poststructural, postmodern, and especially postcolonial theory," and explaining why this has been so, Reynolds goes on to suggest that in spite of the resistance ... he believes that

exempting Thailand from theories of postcoloniality and postmodernity will reinforce the mythology of uniqueness that has sometimes bedeviled the field and seriously limit comparative work. ... Some aspects of postmodern and postcolonial theory have recently proven themselves flexible. If "theory" can tolerate Thailand's particular historical, social, economic and cultural circumstances and yield interesting, provocative hypothesis, why not try it?

In fact, recent postcolonial writing no longer presumes the sharp oppositions and dichotomies typical of the earlier period when movements of national liberation had to go to war to wrest colonies from colonial rule (Reynolds, 1999, pp. 264-265).

Reynolds' concern is to analyze the way in which "Thai nationalism is engendered" by paying attention not only to how "'woman' became essential to the nationalist project but also to the issue of sexual hybridity" (Reynolds, 1999, 2667-67). He argues that there were two ways in which gender figured in "the nationalist project." The first was in regard to women's social position. At this level, both their private position and their more public role as contributors to nation building were important in Thai nationalist discourse in the early twentieth century. In the former, women were criticized for prostitution and polygamy as these practices were seen as uncivilized and therefore threatening to the nation's aspiration to become modern and civilized. In the public role, women's positive contribution to the nation were put into nationalistic discourse. In this instance, outstanding deeds by individual women were selected and represented as heroic, this being understood as important in the life of the nation.

2.2 *Reynolds, Luk kruengs and Hybridity*

According to Reynolds, the second area in which Thai nationalism was engendered in the early twentieth century was in the discourse around miscegenation. Reynolds analyses this discourse as an issue in the court of King Chulalongkorn, through the artistic and literary works of King Vajiravudh and M.C. Akat, a writer in the 1930s, and finally in the period from the 1960s and 1970 to the present. He notes that in this more recent period "interracial marriages with European blood has been vexed because Eurasian children born of American GIs and Thai women in the 1960s and 1970s have been stigmatized as 'wild rice' seedlings" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 269). However, he then goes on to note that "nowadays, in the globalized epoch of diasporic nationalism, Eurasians ... have acquired a privileged place in Thailand, especially in the worlds of advertising and entertainment where Thai notions of beauty are being transformed" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 267). Against Robert J. Young, Reynolds rightly suggests that while [h]ybridity ... can challenge the centered dominant cultural norms", ... the mass popularity of some of these hybrid forms (racial and sexual) and their avid consumption in Thailand today, ... would seem as if they have already become the dominant cultural forms. The perplexities of these hybrid forms may not be so 'unsettling' as Young suggests (Reynolds, 1999, p. 266).

Indeed. However, having noted that the *luk krueng* (mixed race) image may have already become the dominant cultural form in Thailand, one would expect Reynolds to turn his "revisionist critical theory" not only on the racial and sexual, but also on the *complex* racist and sexist economy of desire clearly at work here, for there can be no dominant cultural forms without a violent hierarchy of norms being erected and contested. The erection of such a hierarchy is an exercise of power that marginalizes and represses various contramodern others as it produces and promotes "post-national selves."

Instead of trying to make sense of how the figures of race and sexuality move within the hybrid space such that it structures and makes particular meanings and identities possible, Reynolds turns to an analysis of debates over Thai beauty contestants and analyzes these as simple cultural differences and contestations. He notes that over the last decade there has been a clash between the Euro-image and the "Thai-style" image in "performing Thai femininity" in global/ized beauty pageants and notes *that* the former has become dominant (Reynolds, 1999, pp. 270 -272) His conclusion is that "[h]ybridity is useful in understanding the way in which postnationalist selves are engendered in contemporary Thailand as Thai diasporas become more important in the national imaginary." Reynolds' avoids the difficult issue of the racist and sexist exercise of power in the making of the *luk krueng* image as culturally dominant. This *complex* operation demands close attention for it has major implications for our understanding of *how* the racist and sexist libidinal economy of desire works in international education and culture in structuring the becoming of the self and the narrative of the nation in Thailand in contemporary conditions of globalization.

2.3 *Reynold's Spurious Historiography of Postcolonialism*

In setting up an engagement between Thai studies and postcolonial thought, Reynolds constructs a spurious historiography of postcolonial theory. First, he makes a distinction between works of an "earlier period," and those he calls "recent postcolonial writing." He then claims that while it was typical for theorists of the earlier period to presume "a sharp opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, a relationship of western imperialists and then subjugated peoples," the new "revisionist critical theory" see colonial societies "as productive of new kinds of subjects and selves." Reynolds then goes on to suggest that "one way for Thai studies to take advantage of revisionist critical theory is to rethink the issue of nationalism as an exercise in demarcation that involves affiliation as well as exclusion" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 265).

There are two problems here. First, Reynolds places the work of both Fanon (the first generation) and Bhabha (the second generation) in the earlier period although Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* first appeared in 1952 and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* in 1994, a difference of more than four decades. Moreover, other than Pieterse and Parekh's 1995 book, Reynolds offers no other representative text of the recent "revisionist critical theory" he finds more suitable to Thailand. The problem is that Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Spivak, Said and most other postcolonial theorists are adamant that the colonized-colonizer relationship should not be seen in terms of a Manichean opposition with each in a zone exclusive of the other as Fanon had argued in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Partha Chatterjee's "derivative discourse", Said's idea of "overlapping territories, intertwined histories", Stuart Hall's "new ethnicities", Robert J. Young's "White Mythologies", Bhabha's "ambivalence" and "hybridity", and Spivak's consistent refusal to allow the "native informant" privileged access to a putative "native point of view" all stand in contradistinction to Reynolds' spurious historiography of postcolonial theories. By inserting Foucault into postcolonial thought to rectify a putative anachronism in the works of these second generation postcolonial theorists, Reynolds not only misrepresents their work but also assumes a problematic position in the cultural political struggle between postcolonial and postmodern traditions over the representation of colonial others on the margins of Western modernity. It is precisely this politics that inspired Bhabha to argue that postcolonial criticism is "driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity - rather than the failures of logocentrism," (Bhabha, 1994, p. 265), and Chatterjee to inform us that his "intellectual attitude towards the relation between nationalism and the universalist claims of 'science' stems from a completely different source, namely, the cultural predicament of one whose practice of science means not only a separation from his own people but also invariably the intellectual legitimation of newer and ever more insidious forms of domination of the few over the many" (Chatterjee, p.53). Here we come to the second and more serious problem with Reynolds historiography of postcolonial thought.

2.4 Binary opposition

Reynolds suggests that Thai studies should take advantage of these theoretical developments to analyze nationalism "as an exercise in demarcation that involves affiliation as well as exclusion" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 265). I would argue that Reynolds has set up a binary opposition of affiliation/exclusion, inside/outside that poses serious limitations to our understanding of culture, power and pedagogy in Thailand. This is especially so if, following cultural political scholars, we conceptualize cultural life as a pedagogy of the nation, as a range of practices embodying values and beliefs which work to disseminate and reproduce the imagined community. As is noted above, postcolonial theorists, following Derrida, have argued vehemently against such a binary logic, seeing in it one of the traces of western logocentrism, and have preferred instead to read cultural discourses as *complex* hierarchies working pedagogically to distribute positions of affiliations, consolidations, centers, exteriority, marginality, oppositionality, negativity etc. Given the binary framework in Reynolds analysis, it is not surprising that the *subaltern* dark skin does not appear and the recently acquired privileged position of the *luk kruengs* in Thailand is seen simply as "the exigencies of living in the Thai diaspora and the desirability of taking on the bodily and behavioral features of the American middle class" instead of a particular form of localization of global racism and sexism in Thailand and Southeast Asia (Reynolds, 1999, p. 272). Only a *complex*, non-dualistic concept of the architecture of the social terrain would allow the absent figure in the dark to be seen at work in structuring the whole sexual terrain in contemporary Thailand, will allow the subaltern to speak. One of the arguments I make in this work is that the subaltern dark-skinned figure occupies an unspeakable space in Thai culture, one which is productive of the very selves and subjectivities Reynolds analyzes here. The claim that Thailand's escape from European colonization requires a special, milder version of postcolonial criticism is therefore unsustainable.

3. Towards a Postcolonial perspective

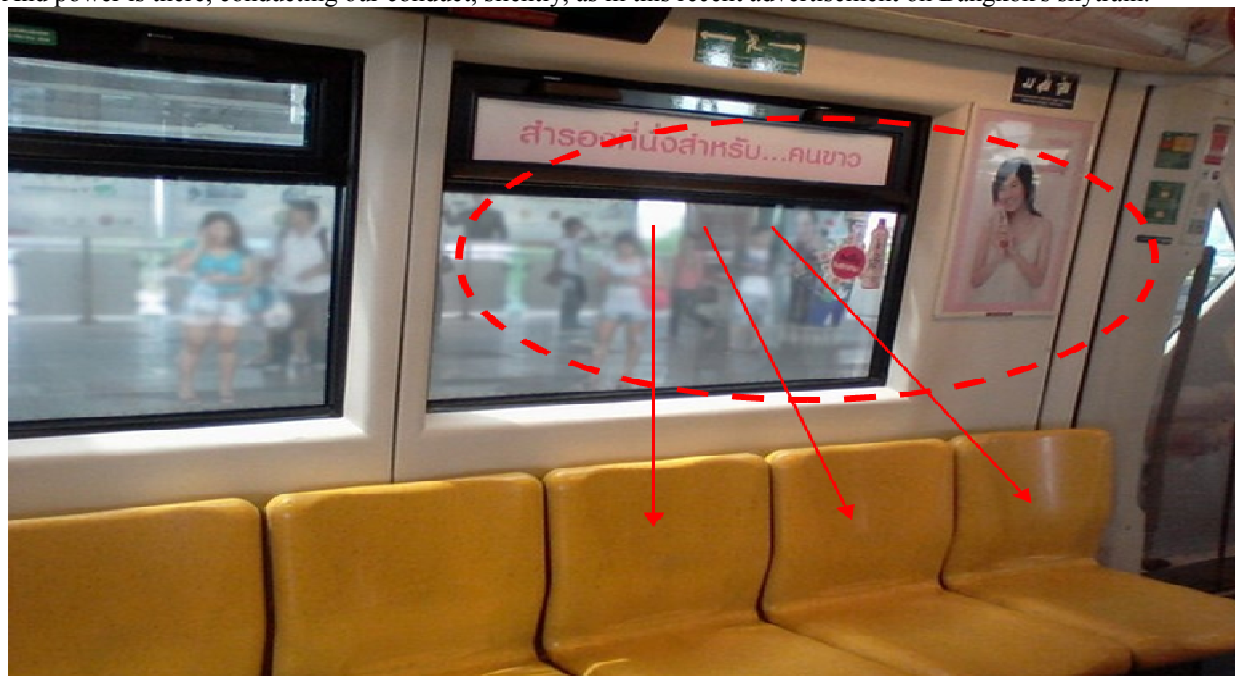
It has been suggested that the nation-space comes into being as an imagined community, "as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social *life* rather than the discipline of social *polity*", as "a *form* of cultural elaboration" erected in processes of narration (Bhabha, 1993, pp. 206, 208). Among efforts to understand the emergence of nations, the approach of Homi Bhabha is unique in that it seeks to capture not the result of nationalism, but the "nation space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in *medias res*; ... and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (Bhabha, 1993, 208). Bhabha sees such elaborations as culturally specific and sees the value of his narrative-discursive approach in its ability to display "the wide

dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life," the process through which we come to be convinced to assert: dis-a-MI-nation. Bhabha's approach to the nation as a "representation of social *life* rather than the disciplining of a social *polity*" points to the everyday elaboration of the nation-space at the level of civil life rather than the state and has tremendous productive power in terms of our attempt to understand the figures of race and gender in international education in Thailand. With Bhabha, our question is not only what has been disseminated to form "a system of cultural signification," "a field of meanings associated with national life" (Bhabha, 1993, 206, 208) such that people from all walks of life in Thailand can be convinced of a "deep, horizontal comradeship," that "makes it possible ... for so many people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for..." but more importantly, how, where, and under what conditions of possibilities such dissemination takes place (Anderson, 1983, p. 16).

3.1 Conclusion: Identities

Postcolonial theory has offered insightful ways to understand the texts of our identities. With postcolonial theory, we have been learning to recognize that we are who we are not only because of our shared feelings of belonging, but also because of our shared longings *to be*, to be in certain places, histories, classes, races, sexes, and times. More importantly, we have also been learning that we are who we are also because of *who we desire to not be*, of our desire to *not* belong to other places, histories, classes, races, sexes and times. We have now learned that our identities, our "structure of attitude and reference, raises the whole question of power" (Said, 1994). These are unsettling, new times for many of us as we continue to be 're-membered' that Black is not a color but an experience, that woman is not a sex, but an experience; that our identities are not facts of life with a simple smooth corporeality but rather an uncivil "contramodern" mark of the colonial Other (Bhabha, 1993, 173). We have learned that "partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic, and that it is only defensive, reactive, and even paranoid nationalism" for people to be continued to be "taught to venerate and celebrate the uniqueness of *their* tradition" (Said: 1992).

What is the texture of our shared belonging and longings to be, of our "imagined communities?" Where, when and how did we learn to share in those ways? What and where is the pedagogy by which we learned to share and collectively identify with certain representations of social life? At gatherings Homi Bhabha tells us. One place where the Thai nation gathers regularly is in front of the television. The pedagogy of culture and identity is at work there. The imagined community is being imagined there, all the time, and in more ways we can imagine. And power is there, conducting our conduct, silently, as in this recent advertisement on Bangkok's skytrain:



It reads: "These seats are reserved for... white people."

Source: Accessed 22 July, 2011.

<http://www.tmrcresearch.com/2011/02/what-i-learned-about-the-power-of-metaphor-framing-in-thailand>

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