

# The Ambiguous Allure of the West

Traces of the Colonial in Thailand

edited by **Rachel V. Harrison**  
and **Peter A. Jackson**



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## Foreword

### The Names and Repetitions of Postcolonial History

*Dipesh Chakrabarty*

For quite some time now, the history of modern Thailand has remained a surprisingly closed book for most students of *modern* South Asia. Surprising, because Thai history provides an obvious, and almost text-book, study in contrast to South Asian history of the modern period. Thailand is another and proximate Asian country that has experienced the gravitational pull of Europe over all its questions and agitations to do with becoming "modern". Yet, unlike India, it was never formally colonized, Thai and Indian nationalisms, while showing some shared tensions over cultural domination by the West, have some significant differences that should engage social scientists. Thailand has had a royal family and a military elite play a critical role in its modernity; India, on the other hand, has depended on a colonial middle class, colonial administrative apparatus, and eventually an anti-colonial mass-based nationalist movement to usher the country into the age of what I have elsewhere called "political modernity" (Chakrabarty 2007 [2000]).<sup>1</sup> Conversations between Thai and South Asia specialists are long overdue. The following prefatory remarks to this volume are penned in the spirit of such a possible conversation. Needless to say, I speak as a complete outsider to Thai or Southeast Asian history, and in response to the kind and generous invitation I received from Rachel Harrison and Peter Jackson to initiate such a dialogue. I felt honoured by their invitation.

#### I

The essays in this volume help us to understand why such conversation did not happen before, and why cross-national intellectual traffic may in fact be easier to carry on today. While most contributors here cogitate on the question of whether or not colonial models and hence postcolonial theory could be applied to understanding problems of the "Thai modern", it seems significant in retrospect that a similar collection on problems of Thai identity published in 1991 felt no need to look beyond the borders of the country or its history for possible frames of analysis (Reynolds 1993 [1991]). What has changed in the intervening years, clearly, is the degree of influence, at least in the global academe, of nationalism and nationalist obsessions. This influence has waned at the same time as

Press. Chusak's insights into aspects of literary theory and Thai cultural studies have been integral to the development of many ideas expressed in the Introduction. The concerns of *The Ambiguous Allure of the West* and the relevance of postcolonial thought to the Thai context were discussed on several occasions with Chusak, Chartree Tingsabadh and the late Nopphorn Prachakul, who sadly passed away in November 2007.

More formally, the AHRC funding for the project furnished us with research assistance. For three years we were aided by the rigorous and methodical research assistance of Sud Chonchirdsin based in London, and from the data assiduously attained for us in Thailand by Farung Srikhaw. Their findings were supplemented by the further support of Janit Feangfu in the latter stages of the project. Samanluk Bunrak's detailed local knowledge of the Thai bureaucracy, banking system, Bangkok traffic and quality cuisine, both Thai and Western, was invaluable in helping us negotiate the logistical intricacies of in-country research.

The poster for the Cornell workshop was designed by Jonah Foran, who carried his precision and flair over into the book project, producing the jacket design of the current volume. A big thanks to him for reading several of the chapters and giving careful thought to how their themes might be represented graphically.

Rachel Harrison and Peter Jackson  
London and Canberra  
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The very practicality of which Peleggi writes, and of which he says that it played as important a role in planning as cosmology, was itself an ideological as well as a material feature of the new mode of thinking. By treating utility as a virtue, the colonial powers and their imitators also foreshadowed the present-day exaltation of productive efficiency manifested in, for example, the OTOP ("one *tambon*, one product") economic policy, with its mostly English-language acronym. The old market at Pak Khlong Talat, ironically the original point of entry on the Chao Phraya River for many of the European trade goods that set new fashions in Siam, has now been earmarked for partial conversion into an exhibit centre for OTOP. The erasure of markets by "the market"—perfectly paralleled in the shift of the term *agora* in ancient Greek to its modern economic significance—is under way. Is this Western influence? Or is this a Thai cooptation and reformulation of Western models, reworked for new uses in the local context?<sup>26</sup> It would seem that, here again, it is both, a merging of influence and ingenuity.

Within the power structures thus articulated, the allure of easily managed information entails high risks to its weaker consumers. They are ineluctably drawn into a market, not so much of ideas, as of factoids. They are nevertheless not without agency in managing these dangerous signifiers; slum residents in particular are painfully aware that "data" can be used against them, and are astute in using that weapon in their struggle for improved conditions and the right to resist eviction. But that same logic also traps them in a discourse, the terms of which they cannot control. They are thus often reluctant to hand over any information to the authorities, knowing that the game of statistical data collection forcefully locks them into a system of self-surveillance. On the other hand, refusal to share data deprives them of the sole symbolic capital that has sufficient allure—whether "Western" or simply "modern"—to count in the eyes of officialdom. Such is the spider trap set by the official conversion of intimate knowledge into public data.

This is not a particularly Thai dilemma; nor is it uniquely Western. But the forms of Western-derived authoritarianism reinforce the invocation of a hierarchical Thai past to explain why a genuinely self-critical participatory democracy often seems frustratingly hard to attain. These explanations, which allow for both the repressiveness of unsympathetic bureaucrats and the "under-the-table" (*tai toh*) corruption that offers the only means of tempering it, invite complicity in the crypto-colonial representation of Thailand as forever struggling to emulate an ultimately unattainable Western modernity but also forever free to manage the fate to which it has been consigned. They do not constitute an invitation to critical analysis.

## Afterword: Postcolonial Theories and Thai Semicolonial Hybridities

Peter A. Jackson<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

While Siamese/Thai culture, both historically and today, is widely recognized, at times even eulogized, for its pervasive syncretism, theories of cultural hybridity have rarely been used to analyse the patterns of cultural borrowing and fusion in the country. This is largely because accounts of cultural hybridity have emerged from and remain closely identified with postcolonial studies. As Marwan Kraidy notes, "Standing on the shoulders of the disciplines that debated syncretism, *mestizaje*, and creolization, postcolonial theory repopularized the term 'hybridity' to explicate cultural fusion" (Kraidy 2005, 57). As I noted in my earlier chapter, Siam/Thailand's lack of a colonial history means that ideas developed to reflect on the histories and present conditions of former colonies have not been taken up widely in Thai studies. Nonetheless, an increasing number of studies from a range of disciplines have shown, as Craig Reynolds observes, that "Thai society was subjected to similar if not comparable forces of change as the rest of colonized Southeast Asia" (Reynolds 1999, 265). In light of this work Reynolds suggests that, "[t]he notion of hybridity may also prove useful in articulating what is happening to the current Thai social formation. In turn, the insights gained may be fed back through the historical record to facilitate contrast with other colonized and semicolonized societies" (Reynolds 1999, 266). Pattana Kitiarsa (2005) has argued that the notion of hybridity provides a "conceptual tool to make sense of the changing landscape of contemporary Thai religion" (Pattana 2005, 466). The different forms of knowledge, culture, identity and power considered in the preceding chapters reflect the diverse processes at work in Thai-Western relations over the past two centuries. These studies show that there has been no single Thai response to Western dominance, but rather a multiplicity of appropriations, accommodations and resistances by diverse royal, elite, middle class and subaltern groups and individuals. Yet amidst this diversity certain patterns are nonetheless apparent and in this closing reflection on the ambiguous allure of the West in Siam/Thailand I draw on postcolonial theories of cultural hybridity to delineate some of the main forms of Siamese/Thai responses to the West.

Postcolonial analysis is a richly complex field, reflecting the fact imperialism took different forms in different societies and has left widely varying postcolonial residues

While united by a concern with the ambiguous effects of racialized power imbalances in former colonial settings, each regional variety of postcolonial analysis has its own focuses that emerge from the distinctive forms of imperial power in those locations. This diversity among theories of cultural hybridity is helpful in mapping the broad range of Siamese/Thai responses to the West. The different local/autonomous and international/subordinate dimensions of power in semicolonial Siam/Thailand that I outlined in my earlier chapter are reflected in different responses to the West, which in turn can be understood in terms of different theories of cultural hybridity. The two most influential postcolonial theories of cultural hybridity, presented by Homi Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini, each respectively emphasizes one dimension of the complex of semicolonial powers that have operated in Siam/Thailand. Bhabha has studied forms of hybridity in contexts of actual colonial subordination to the West, while García Canclini has outlined patterns of cultural hybridity in a postcolonial setting of relative political autonomy. At the local level of autonomous royal and elite power, I here compare García Canclini's account of the hybrid *mestizaje* discourse of Latin American Hispanic elites as a mode of hegemonic rule to the nineteenth century Siamese elite discourse of *siwilai* ("civilized"). In contrast, at the international level in which Siam's rulers were subordinate to the West, I draw on Bhabha to read *siwilai* as a hybrid discourse manifesting Thai elites' subaltern resistance to Western imperialism. I also draw on Bhabha to read the richly hybridized popular culture of Siam/Thailand's ruled classes as forms of subaltern resistance to *siwilai*, which was a discourse that bolstered the internal colonization of Siam by Bangkok's ruling elites. Both Bhabha's and García Canclini's different accounts of postcolonial cultural hybridity are needed to explain all these patterns of Thai-Western cultural mixing.

Bhabha's and García Canclini's separate analyses capture different moments of the multivalent processes of cultural mixing in the intersecting autonomous and subordinate dimensions of semicolonial power in Siam/Thailand. Their local histories of cultural hybridity in South Asia and Latin America, respectively, are *both* needed to understand the complex cultural impact of semicolonialism in Siam/Thailand. These two authors' distinctive accounts provide insights into the different patterns of Thai-Western cultural fusion that have taken place in each of the intersecting international and domestic dimensions of Siam/Thailand's semicolonial regime of modern power. In brief, García Canclini provides a framework for understanding aspects of elite responses to the West, while Bhabha provides concepts for interpreting subaltern responses to both the West and to Siam/Thailand's own self-colonizing elites. My focus here on Bhabha and García Canclini does not mean that other analysts are irrelevant to postcolonial or semicolonial studies of Thai cultural hybridity. In the limited space here I concentrate on these two well-known theorists of cultural hybridity to show that their studies, while emerging from separate regions that experienced different forms of British and Iberian domination, respectively, nonetheless provide insights into aspects of modern Siamese/Thai cultural history. Other streams of postcolonial analysis may equally enlighten us on Siamese/Thai cultural hybridity. Edouard Glissant's (1981) notions of *créolité* and *créolisation* in his studies of multi-ethnic Caribbean societies, and Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) idea

of "transculturation" as a form of agency within the asymmetrical power relations of colonialism (in this regard see Thongchai 2000a, 2000b) are also relevant, as is Partha Chatterjee's (1993, 1995) work on elite versus subaltern forms of cultural hybridity in South Asia.

### Mapping the "Discursive Sprawl" of Hybridity Theory

To realize the potential of postcolonial analysis to elucidate the patterns of Thai-Western cultural fusion we first need to negotiate what Kraidy calls "the discursive sprawl that is hybridity" (Kraidy 2005, 3). As noted above, competing schools of thought on cultural hybridity centre on the work of Bhabha and García Canclini.<sup>2</sup> These two schools emerge from reflections on the historical experiences of different world regions, South Asia and Latin America; take different disciplinary perspectives that emphasize different bodies of data, namely, literature and anthropology/sociology; and focus on different networks of power in the global system over the past two centuries. Bhabha's analyses have served as the crucible of much Anglophone postcolonial scholarship and while García Canclini has not been as influential in Australian, British, or East Asian cultural studies his work has led to the notion of hybridity becoming a master concept in Latin American social analysis. While roughly contemporaneous—García Canclini's and Bhabha's first major studies were published within a few years of each other in the 1980s—each author appears to have written independently of the other. This has provided hybridity theory with two distinctive idioms and frameworks. While both authors draw on post-Marxist and poststructuralist thought, their respective accounts emerge from different positions in the contemporary world system and reflect the complex forms of intersection and differentiation that mark the thought-scapes of globalization. For Bhabha hybridity is a form of resistance to and engagement with dominating power, while for García Canclini it is related to projects of political and cultural hegemony in multi-ethnic postcolonial societies. This key difference means that while hybridity is one of the most widely used ideas in postcolonial studies, it is also one of the most disputed concepts in contemporary critical thought, with a divide between "dominance" and "pluralism" perspectives in which the notion is alternatively presented "as a sign of empowerment or as a symptom of dominance" (Kraidy 2005, 5). The analyses of Siamese/Thai responses to the West detailed in the preceding chapters provide case studies of the diverse forms of postcolonial cultural hybridity and in the next section I summarize key elements of Bhabha's and García Canclini's accounts that help elucidate the patterns of cultural blending traced by the contributors to this volume.

### Reading Bhabha and García Canclini in Dialogue

Bhabha's account of hybridity draws on deconstructionist ideas of mutually defining West/non-West interactions and emphasizes the "mutualities and negotiations across the colonial divide" (Kraidy 2005, 165 n. 6). He responds to the limitations of the binary colonizer/colonized model that underpinned earlier postcolonial accounts by Frantz

Fanon, who emphasized the situation of the colonized, and by Edward Said, whose foundational text *Orientalism* (1978) focused on the power of the colonizer. Bhabha argues that hybridity provides a discursive politics to negotiate the persistent traces of imperialist power on the thought of the formerly colonized. He contends that the mimicry involved in the appropriation of the language and culture of the colonizer is not a capitulation to but rather a means of evading colonial control. As Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes put it,

Bhabha's argument turns on the idea that because colonial culture can never faithfully reproduce itself in its own image, each replication (act of mimesis) necessarily involves a slippage or gap wherein the colonial subject inevitably produces a hybridized version of the 'original'. In other words, hybridity is intrinsic to colonial discourse itself, and consequently colonial discourse potentially undoes itself. (Brah and Coombes 2000, 11)

John Krasniauskas describes Bhabha's notion of postcolonial hybridity as working like the Freudian unconscious, with its basic dynamic being the return of the repressed in response to disavowal, "[W]hat returns to modernity to make 'its presence felt' is precisely its colonial unconscious" (Krasniauskas 2000, 240). This leads to the idea that a colonial past "haunts and hybridizes" (Krasniauskas 2000, 245) the present of postcolonial modernity. Bhabha's Lacanian grounding and his focus on semiotic and textual analysis have made him a target for neo-Marxist critics (see for example Alberto Moreiras 1999) who contend that hybridity theory is "neocolonial" because it reflects the logic of transnational capitalism.

The contrasting positions of Bhabha and his critics reveal tensions between what Kraidy labels hybridity's "progressive and hegemonic aspects" (Kraidy 2005, 67), and while García Canclini does not refer to Bhabha in his major work, some have interpreted his analysis as responding to the limits of Bhabha's approach. While for Bhabha hybridity is a site of subaltern cultural and epistemological resistance to colonialism, for Canclini it is a mode of Hispanic elite hegemony over the indigenous and Black populations of postcolonial Latin America. As Krasniauskas observes, García Canclini's socio-anthropological study of Latin American modernity provides an account of cultural hybridizations that, "may also be read as a counterpoint to Bhabha's psychoanalytic one" (Krasniauskas 2000, 245).<sup>3</sup>

García Canclini opens his study with a critique of the view that Latin American modernity is "a belated and deficient echo of the countries of the center", (García Canclini 1995, 44) and he dismisses the idea that modernity is a superficial foreign transplant in the region. What García Canclini calls the "multitemporal heterogeneity" of Latin American culture, "is a consequence of a history in which modernization rarely operated through the substitution of the traditional and the ancient" (García Canclini 1995, 47). As Krasniauskas notes, in this account the dynamic of Latin American cultural hybridity results from the fact that the "modern" has not replaced the "traditional" but rather has, "tended to reproduce and rearticulate 'tradition'" (Krasniauskas 2000, 247). Furthermore, as Moreiras observes, for García Canclini self-conscious modernizing

hybridity is the "'means by which the elites take charge of the intersection of different historical temporalities and try to elaborate a global project with them' (García Canclini 1995: 46), . . . Hybridity thus abandons its heuristic specificity as a mere concept to become an entire political programme" (Moreiras 1999, 375). García Canclini supports his claim that hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of dominant societal sectors through an analysis of the Latin American ideology of *mestizaje*, which Kraidy summarizes as follows,

By displacing mixture from race to culture and selectively appropriating native traditions, Latin American ideologists of *mestizaje* integrated precolonial cultures in the dominant society. This process allowed nonthreatening arts, crafts, and rituals but imposed the Spanish language, the Catholic faith, and colonial political and social organization. As a discourse that recognizes, even celebrates, cultural difference, *mestizaje* in effect is a tool for 'bleaching' all but the most benign practices that gave pre-Hispanic natives their identities. In the name of cultural mixture within the emerging nation-states, the pre-Hispanic life world was reordered by the descendants of the Conquistadores according to a residual colonial logic. (Kraidy 2005, 67)

Moreiras (1999) sees the two accounts of hybridity, alternatively a form of resistance to colonialism and neocolonialism and of co-optation to the hegemony of global capital, as reflecting the dialectically structured world of globalizing capital. In my earlier chapter I similarly argued that Thai semicoloniality is dialectically constructed, and that its analysis requires a double-pronged critical method to bring about a double decolonization of both the foreign Euro-American and local royal-centric forms of hegemony that imperialism imposed on the country. Both Bhabha's and García Canclini's approaches to hybridity have value in understanding the patterns of Thai-Western blending because each provides tools to critically assess one of the dimensions of the double foreign and local burdens of Thai semicolonialism. In the next section I argue that García Canclini provides concepts for understanding the way that Western imperialism strengthened rather than undermined the domestic power of Siam's ruling elites. Drawing on Thongchai's earlier (2000b) study of the hybrid discourse of *siwilai* (from "civilized"), I also trace how the absolute monarchy used this notion as an ideology of rule in ways that parallel the discourse of *mestizaje* deployed by Latin American Hispanic elites. I then argue that Bhabha provides concepts for understanding *siwilai* as a form of subaltern resistance to Western domination. I conclude by showing how Bhabha also helps us understand popular cultural hybridity in Thailand as a form of subaltern resistance, not to a foreign colonial power but rather to the internally colonizing power of Siam's elites.

Central to all these analyses is the argument that hybridity is a defining feature of Siamese/Thai cultural history and of contemporary Thai culture, both elite and popular, because appropriating from geopolitically powerful and prestigious Others has been central to the legitimation of local political rule. This ideological pattern of legitimating rule by symbolic appropriation of the prestige of the great power of the day is by no means unique to Siam/Thailand and was common across premodern Southeast Asia, having been set in place in the early era of "Indianization". This pattern has proved

remarkably adaptable and resilient, not merely surviving but being intensified in the era of nineteenth century imperialism, twentieth century neocolonialism, and twenty-first century globalization.

### Unmasking Thailand's "Magic of Tolerance": Cultural Assimilation as a Project of Power

There are striking similarities between the Siamese and Latin American responses to metropolitan modernity. During the era of high imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the countries of Latin America had already won independence from Spain and Portugal. Like Siam, these countries engaged first the British- and subsequently the American-dominated world orders as politically independent but economically and culturally subordinated societies led by elites who used associations with the new metropolitan powers to bolster domestic rule over ethnically diverse populations. Garcia Canclini's argument that modernization has reproduced and rearticulated rather than replaced "tradition" in Latin America is just as relevant to Siam/Thailand, where the "tradition" that the coming of Western modernity has perpetuated includes premodern patterns of rule.<sup>4</sup> As in much of Southeast Asia, the foreign has historically provided the idiom of rule in Siam/Thailand, and in the colonial era selective Westernization reinforced the established status hierarchy. As Loos shows in her chapter here, Siam's self-modernizing absolute monarchs also borrowed the techniques and technologies of imperial rule. This pattern of hybridity is not one of subaltern resistance to foreign domination but rather constitutes an elite strategy of self-empowerment by means of cultural borrowing. Accounts of this pattern have been a central theme in Thai, and Southeast Asian, historiography and anthropology for many decades and pre-date postcolonial and other recent critical approaches. David Streckfuss quotes one of the first ethnographers of Indo-China, Léon de Rosny, describing the Thai as "*le résultat de toutes sortes de métissages*" (the result of every sort of hybridity) (de Rosny 1885: 20–22, cited by Streckfuss 1993, 127). Writing before World War II, the French orientalist Georges Coedès observed,

[T]he Thai have always been remarkable assimilators: they have never hesitated to appropriate for themselves whatever in the civilization of their neighbours and masters might place them in a position to fight victoriously against them. (Coedès 1968 [1944], 191)

O. W. Wolters' (1982) concept of "localization" in regard to the influence of Indic culture on the region from the first millennium CE describes this same phenomenon, which Maurizio Peleggi summarizes as, "the process whereby themes and motifs from Indic mythology, religion, poetry, and the visual and performing arts were appropriated and transformed into constituents of the cultural identity of the indigenous elites in Southeast Asia" (Peleggi 2002, 28). Peleggi describes the "yearning for association with the dominant world civilization of the day as the leitmotif in the history of Thai society since early times" (Peleggi 2007, 9), and he emphasizes the political import of earlier

processes of Indianization and cultural localization. O'Connor describes Indianization as a civilizing idiom "that carried the aura of refinement, elegance, and honor" (O'Connor 2003, 254), and constituted a foreign idiom of local rule.

A deep pre-Western history prefigured and informed the dialectic of semicolonial power exhibited by Siam's nineteenth century rulers, who had occupied a nodal position between international and domestic domains of power since the origins of Thai authority in mainland Southeast Asia. For the rulers of Siam—situated at the crossroads of economic, political and cultural influences emanating from older and larger regional powers—selective cultural assimilation proved to be an effective long-term strategy of local political domination. Thai monarchs repeatedly refashioned themselves in the images of the powers that had preceded them historically in Siam (Mon, Khmer) and which geographically encircled them (India, China, Europe, USA). It is in this context we can appreciate O'Connor's observation that, "Foreignness validates and is an integral part of the construction of Thai identity . . . Where India abhorred the outside as polluting and China disdained it as barbaric, Southeast Asia appropriated foreign borrowings as the idiom of urban rule" (O'Connor 1995a, 35, cited in Van Esterik 2000, 230). India and China abhorred outside influences as polluting and barbaric because their status as premodern great powers permitted them to imagine themselves as originating centres of universal cultures, even when those cultures were constituted from diverse (but representationally suppressed) foreign influences. In contrast, the aura of foreignness bolstered local power and validated Thai identity because Siam/Thailand's middle-power status and its geographical location positioned it as external to the great powers of the day. In the Siamese/Thai imagination the acquisition of signs of that foreign greatness has been seen as enhancing rather than detracting from local power.

We can here understand the political project that has historically underpinned the so-called Thai "genius" for appropriation and "miracle of tolerance". Pattana notes, "In mainland Southeast Asia during the 'Age of Commerce', cultural and religious hybridities were made possible by what Anthony Reid calls the 'miracle of tolerance', whereby people found it was 'natural that different peoples should have different beliefs'" (Reid 1993, 193, cited in Pattana 2005, 468). This tolerance was not a "miracle" but reflected the strategy of power outlined above. Thai "syncretism" and "tolerance" are cultural expressions of a premodern project of political power, and self-conscious assimilation of the foreign became a defining element of modern Thai national identity because of its centrality to historical strategies of elite rule. Kraidy's observation that "discourses of cultural mixture have historically served ideologies of integration and control—not pluralism and empowerment" (Kraidy 2005, vii) permits us to see the Siamese/Thai strategy comparatively as one instance of a widespread international pattern through history. Kraidy's account of Latin American ideas of *mestizaje* resonates strongly with the Siamese/Thai case,

Across Latin America, states adopted *mestizaje* as the official ideology of nation building in their bids to forge national identities distinct from mere provincial status in the Spanish empire. As a Latin American 'foundation theme' . . . *mestizaje* was an attempt to mitigate tensions between the

indigenous populations and the descendants of Spanish colonists by positing the new nations as hybrids of both worlds . . . (Kraidy 2005, 51)<sup>5</sup>

Siam/Thailand's lack of a colonial history means that the premodern system of political legitimation was never destroyed by an occupying imperial power and has persisted into the era of twenty-first century globalization, being deployed as a central element of elite strategies of dealing with the West throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The symbols that clothe this pattern of legitimation have changed. As Thongchai and Pattana show in their chapters here, while Western forms have augmented older symbolisms adapted from India and China, the historical pattern persists. And as I have described elsewhere (Jackson 2004a, 2004b), the arrival of European imperialism and the symbolic Westernization of Thai power permitted this premodern pattern of performative power to be both extended and intensified over the formerly semi-autonomous regions of Siam. The continuities between premodern Siam and modern Thailand do not represent residual cultural hangovers but exist precisely because the country's semicolonial positioning in Western-dominated global networks supported the existing patterns of elite rule, augmented, as Loos shows, with nineteenth century techniques of imperial administration. Siam's semicolonial incorporation into the Western-dominated global order in the second half of the nineteenth century involved a partial hybridization with Western cultural forms and modes of rule that in turn buttressed the position of the absolute monarchy.

Despite continuities, there are also differences between the geopolitical contexts of earlier Indic and Sinic cultural blending and colonial and postcolonial era hybridizations with Western forms. India and China were never militarily invasive or economically hegemonic in Southeast Asia, while in the nineteenth century Britain and France both directly threatened Siamese autonomy and used armed force in their competition for economic control of the region. Future research on the history of cultural hybridity in Siam/Thailand will need to tease out the implications of these geopolitical differences for the distinctiveness of different historical patterns of Indic, Sinic, and Western cultural blending.

### ***Siwilai*: A Hybrid Discourse of Semicolonial Rule**

Historical patterns of cultural hybridization in Siam/Thailand relate closely to changes in the geopolitical status of different great powers in Southeast Asia and correspond to shifts in the place of these powers in the imagination of the country's ruling elites. This relationship is shown clearly in the dramatic change in attitudes to the West that took place in the middle of the nineteenth century. While European traders, missionaries, and ambassadors were present in Siam from the sixteenth century, the symbolic orientation towards India and China remained largely unchanged during the first two centuries of contact with the West. Peleggi notes that this was reflected in patterns of elite consumption of luxury goods. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Chinese luxury goods such as silk, silverware, and goldware were sought after avidly by

successive kings of Ayutthaya, while at that time, "Western luxury goods . . . apparently aroused no great interest at the Siamese court" (Peleggi 2002, 21). Mere contact with the West does not necessarily lead to cultural borrowing of Western cultural forms. Power relations are integral to the equation and it was only with Europe's rise as an imperial power that Western cultural items began to be sought after, first to augment and later to supplant Chinese luxury goods. Until the 1830s, the Siamese did not take much interest in European affairs or culture. This was reflected in what early nineteenth century Western visitors referred to as the "vanity" or sense of cultural superiority of the Siamese (e.g. Roberts 1972, 248). Charles Gutzlaff, a British-funded missionary in Bangkok in the late 1820s and early 1830s, complained bitterly of the lack of respect shown to Europeans,

Europeans have always been treated there [Siam] with distrust, and even insolence, where it could be done with impunity. They have been liable to every sort of petty annoyance, which would weary-out the most patient spirit; and have been subjected to the most unheard-of oppression . . . When works for their benefit were accomplished, their value was depreciated, in order to dispense with the necessity of rewarding European industry, and thereby of acknowledging the superiority of European genius. (Gutzlaff 1835, 70)

The disregard for Westerners changed rapidly as Britain's growing military power became evident from the 1830s. In 1835, Gutzlaff noted approvingly that the more the Siamese came to fear British influence the greater was the respect accorded to Europeans in Bangkok,

[T]he national childish vanity of the Siamese in thinking themselves superior to all nations, except the Chinese and Burmans, has vanished; and the more the English are feared, the better is the treatment which is experienced during their residence in the country. (Gutzlaff 1835, 71)

A defining moment in the re-orientation towards the West was the signing of the 1855 Bowring Treaty with Great Britain, followed by similar trade and diplomatic treaties with France, the United States and other Western powers as well as Japan. Peleggi notes, "Tributary missions to China were discontinued in the mid-1850s concurrently with the establishment of regular trade relations with Europe" (Peleggi 2002, 23). The end of tributary missions to Peking in 1853 and the formalization of trade with Britain just two years later reflect a major intellectual as well as political and economic re-orientation.<sup>6</sup>

Thongchai (2000a, 2000b) argues that this reorientation was not brought about by any direct threat to Siamese autonomy but resulted from the fact that European colonial encroachments to the west and north had destabilized the politico-religious-cultural ideology by which Siam's rulers had historically justified their rule. With the British colonial takeover of India and diverse European encroachments into China, these two domains could no longer be imagined as sites of geopolitical power and cultural authority, forcing Siam's rulers to seek a new vision to justify rule over their own domain. Drawing on Bourdieu, Peleggi argues,

[T]he Siamese elite's traditional forms of cultural and symbolic capital, which enjoyed currency across the whole of Indianized Southeast Asia, were dramatically depreciated as a result of the new hegemony of the Western civilizational sphere. In this situation a 'recapitalization' was required . . . (Peleggi 2002, 30–1)

Thongchai points out that the historical pattern of legitimating rule by appropriating a foreign idiom of power permitted Siam's elites to rapidly "recapitalize" their symbolic authority in a Western form with little local disruption,

Siamese rulers seemed to find minimal difficulty in looking outward, as a strategy for surviving and prospering in the modern world . . . When the centres of the traditional [Siamese] universe, namely China and India, fell to the West, and thereby lost their hold on Thai mentality, Siamese rulers were quick to abandon them . . . (Thongchai 2000a, 53)

The re-orientation towards the West from the mid-1850s led to dramatic changes in patterns of cultural borrowing among the Siamese elites. Peleggi (2002, 24) notes the emergence of a new mode of Western-oriented prestige expenditure by the court, citing as a key example the hybrid Thai-Western architecture of the Chakri Throne Hall (Chakri Maha Prasat) built by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910) between 1876 and 1880. The shift from the Sino-Thai aesthetic of the Rama III period to the Thai-Western aesthetic of the Rama V era not only marked the rise of Western power but also the emergence of a new symbolic economy in which local prestige and authority were demonstrated by the conspicuous consumption of Western rather than Chinese cultural items.

As soon as it became clear that Western colonialists were going to dominate Asian affairs, Siam sought to become a paid up member of the new imperial world order. King Mongkut wrote to then United States president Abraham Lincoln offering to send war elephants to help him fight the American Civil War, an offer Lincoln politely declined. Towards the end of World War I, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910–1925) sent a squadron of Siamese planes to fight on the side of the Allies, a gesture that helped the country win a seat on the new League of Nations in its capacity as the then rare phenomenon of an independent Asian polity. Thongchai (2000b) notes that the intensely performative character of Siam's attempts to impress the Western powers was reflected in its participation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century World's Fairs—1867 in Paris; 1876 in Philadelphia; Paris again in 1889 and 1900; the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893; the 1904 Louisiana Purchase World's Fair at St. Louis; and in Turin in 1911. In 1897 and 1907, King Chulalongkorn went on extended grand tours of Europe, where, dressed in Western attire, he represented himself as the "civilised" ruler of an independent Asian kingdom to a succession of European monarchs, prime ministers, and presidents.

*Siwilai* (from "civilized") was the name given to the foreign idiom of "civilization" as a strategy of rule after it had been made over in the image of the West during the era of the absolute monarchy. The self-consciousness of the cultural borrowing at the

heart of the project of *siwilai* is shown in the valorization of "assimilation" (*kleun-khai*—lit. "to swallow" and "change [into oneself]") as a defining feature of Thai cultural identity. As Kasian Tejapira notes, in a much-cited 1927 lecture, King Chulalongkorn's half-brother Prince Damrong Rachanuphap, "listed as virtues in the disposition of the Thai nation 'Love of National Independence, Toleration, and Power of Assimilation'" (Kasian 2001, 23–4). Damrong's linking of national independence with the assimilation of foreign cultural forms and tolerance of ethno-cultural diversity shows the centrality of hybridity to the Siamese elite's strategy of preserving their political autonomy in a Western-dominated world. In the early twentieth century, the linking of assimilation with national independence was also an explicit theme in Siamese self-representations to the West. For example, *The Kingdom of Siam*, a text composed for the Siamese exhibition at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis, included a statement that the Siamese "alone have assimilated Western civilization and maintained an independent position among the nations of the world" (cited by Streckfuss 1993, 143).

Selective hybridization with aspects of Western culture and forms of governance to support local rule went through several phases. The immediate prelude to the discourse of *siwilai* was a crisis in the historical orientation of Siam's ruling elites towards India and China as sources of political legitimacy, provoking a rapid re-orientation towards the West. This re-orientation began in the reign of King Mongkut and intensified under his son and successor Chulalongkorn. It was under Chulalongkorn that the policy of refashioning Siamese institutions and practices along Western lines was labelled as *siwilai*. As detailed below, a subsequent phase involving questioning and critique of "excessive" Westernization began in the reign of Chulalongkorn's son, King Vajiravudh. Despite the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, debates on whether *siwilai*, and successor notions including "modernity" (*samai mai*), "development" (*kan-phatthana*) and "democracy" (*prachathipatai*), express Thai autonomy from, or subordination to, the West were a dominant theme of Thai nationalist discourse throughout the twentieth century, and persist to this day. *Siwilai* denoted more than simply cultural borrowing from the West. It was the refashioned form that the historically hybrid legitimating ideology of Siam's elites took in the colonial era. Thongchai (2000b) argues that *siwilai* constituted a double-pronged ideology with both international and local audiences. Domestically *siwilai* had a hegemonic function, while at the international level it reflected ongoing attempts to locate Siam/Thailand in a position of globally recognized symbolic prestige. As Harrison (2009) has considered in her study of the crime fiction of Crown Prince Vajiravudh in what she terms "Late Victorian" Siam and as Thongchai reveals in his analysis in this volume, the dual ideological role of *siwilai* has had a lasting impact on forms of knowledge and cultural production in the country, producing ongoing bifurcations in intellectual responses to the West to this day.

### Siam/Thailand's Multiple Semicolonial Hybridities

Hybridity with Western cultural, technological, and governmental forms typifies all dimensions of Thai semicolonial power, among both rulers and ruled, but takes

distinctive forms in each context. In the local, autonomous dimension of Siam's semicoloniality exemplified by the discourse of *siwilai*, hybridity with Western forms bolstered elite power over the population in ways that mirror García Canclini's account of *mestizaje* as a discourse of Hispanic hegemony in Latin America. In contrast, in the subordinate, colony-like dimension of Siam/Thailand's semicoloniality, hybridity may be a form of resistance to or evasion of Western domination that can be understood in terms of Bhabha's approach to postcolonial analysis. This subordinate dimension of Siam/Thailand's semicolonial position in the world order is itself made up of two distinct components. One is at the international level where the country's rulers, while autonomous domestically, have nonetheless been subordinate to Western power. A second component is at the domestic level where the country's ruled classes have been subordinated to Bangkok elites. These subaltern groups are subject to a double domination, by Western cultural influences internationally and by the hybrid Thai-Western ideology of *siwilai* domestically. Siam/Thailand's elites have occupied the nodal point between the autonomous and subordinate dimensions of semicolonialism, simultaneously ruling over their own population while having their scope for action in the international sphere restricted by the West. This means that the hybrid culture of the country's elites needs to be subjected to a double analysis to reveal its dual character as both a form of local hegemony and an expression of international subordination. In addition to the locally hegemonic character of *siwilai* outlined above with reference to García Canclini, this hybrid ideology of rule also exhibits the mimetic resistance to Western imperial power described by Bhabha. Together, García Canclini's and Bhabha's respective accounts reveal the multiple hybridities of *siwilai* as both a discourse of local hegemony and an expression of resistance to the West. I now consider *siwilai* as a mode of elite mimetic resistance to the West before concluding with some observations on subaltern forms of hybrid resistance in contemporary Thailand.

### *Siwilai* as Hybrid Elite Resistance to the West

Thongchai observes that the meaning of *siwilai* was never precise and "ranged from etiquette to material progress, including new roads, electricity, new bureaucracy, courts and judicial system, law codes, dress codes, and white teeth" (Thongchai 2000b, 528). Given its origins in a premodern ideology of legitimating rule by symbolic reference to remote great powers, *siwilai* was more a project of constructing occidentalized images of Siamese prestige than a program of materially transforming the country into a Western-styled polity. A key feature of this project was to link phenomena labelled as *siwilai* with prestige, authority and the perception of a "legitimate" exercise of power (see Jackson 2004a). While drawing from European models, Siamese *siwilai* was never intended to replicate all features of Western "civilization". Given the Thai elites' need to create images of prestigious power for local as well as foreign consumption, performances of *siwilai* needed to resonate as much with local Thai sensibilities as with foreign Western aesthetics. Because of this double role for domestic and international audiences, *siwilai* was a constitutively multiple creation that borrowed enough from Western sources to

create a performative "effect" of modern "civilization" in the eyes of foreign observers, while also drawing sufficiently from indigenous paradigms to make it recognizable to the Siamese populace as a local form of power linked symbolically with the country's past. Literary explorations of new, Western-influenced genres of fiction by members of the Siamese elite in this period reflected this dual foreign/local dynamic (see Harrison 2009). The discourse of *siwilai* thus needed to fulfil the dual role of making Siam's rulers both similar to yet also different from the West. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies this type of ambivalence as a defining feature of postcolonial hybridity. "This is the condition of possibility of mimicry: to be different yet the same. This is the description of the hybrid: a mixture of difference and sameness" (Spivak 2000, 18).

The ambivalences of *siwilai* can be understood in terms of Bhabha's account of mimesis, in which the colonial reproduction of imperial culture always differs from the Western original, with the difference between metropolitan and colonial forms creating a "third space" for the expression of colonial agency. The space for local agency in the Siamese hybrid construct of *siwilai* was even greater than in colonial contexts because, as Penny Van Esterik notes,

With no direct colonial master, Thailand was not close enough to Europe or important enough for Europeans to attempt to control the way Thailand represented itself. No colonial office dictated or crafted Thailand's public face. Thailand learned from European texts and expositions how to represent her own past and present in a way that demonstrated her exoticism and civilized status simultaneously. (Van Esterik 2000, 119)

The expression of Siamese agency in *siwilai* is apparent even in the Thai spelling of the term, which Thongchai notes "was among the earliest transliterated words from English, dating from the middle of the nineteenth century" (Thongchai 2000b, 529). Reynolds notes the long-standing Thai penchant for coining new terms for foreign concepts in ways that indigenize them so that neologisms appear to come from within the Thai language even as they are translated, so carrying "the cachet of foreign prestige as well as the authenticity of the local" (Reynolds 1998, 124). This pattern was repeated in the Thai spelling of *siwilai* in order to make the term appear to be local while also conveying unmistakable resonances of foreign prestige. The mostly phonetic Thai script is based on an augmentation of an originally Indian writing system and has four different characters that could potentially represent the sibilant "s" sound at the beginning of *siwilai* as well as three possible symbol combinations that could represent the short diphthong "ai" at the end of the word. It is now standard to use one of the four "s" characters, called *sor so*, to transcribe the roman letter "s" in English words borrowed into Thai. This character *sor so* tends to mark these borrowed words as foreign and non-Thai. However, a different "s" character, *sor sala*, is used as the first letter of *siwilai*. *Sor sala* is typically used to transcribe words borrowed from Sanskrit in which the Hindu scriptures and the classical literatures of India were written. In using *sor sala* to write *siwilai* one can perhaps see an attempt to locate it within the Indian context that historically provided the source of so much of the high culture of the Thai royal

court. Spelling the English-derived word *siwilai* with the Indic-derived character *so* *sala* has the effect of rendering the term as an invented Siamese tradition. The attempt to invest *siwilai* with an Indic rather than a Western provenance is even clearer in the term's less common alternative spelling of *sriwilai*. Thongchai notes, "Sri is a Sanskrit term meaning blessing, prosperity, brightness, beauty" (Thongchai 2000b, 530 n.1).<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the final two syllables of the term, *-wilai*, are spelt in the same way as a Thai term meaning "beautiful", so giving *siwilai* positive aesthetic resonances. An alternative rendering of *wilai*, used to spell an exact homophone with the radically different meaning of "destruction" or "ruination", was avoided. However, the Western origins of the term are not fully erased in the Thai spelling. While not pronounced in Thai, the "s"/"z" in the last syllable of "civilise"/"civilize" is written in Thai with *so so*, the letter usually used to transcribe English sibilants. (The fact that this letter is not pronounced in Thai is indicated by adding a *karan* superscript symbol.) The chosen official spelling of *siwilai* thus reflects a strategy of micromanagement that gives the term the appearance of at least a partial ancient Indic-Thai etymology, even as the inclusion of a symbol for the unpronounced English "s"/"z" at the end of the word reveals its modern Western provenance. As Thongchai comments, the philological innovations involved in the spelling of *siwilai* are evidence of "efforts to localize the term and concept for local comprehension and consumption", yet these efforts also retain traces that show "the concept has an alien origin" (Thongchai 2000b, 530).

### Thai Subaltern Hybridity as Resistance to Internal Colonialism

The finely tuned management of the spelling of *siwilai* provides a model for the forms of control that Siam's nineteenth century elites exercised over the entire project of constructing hybridized Thai-Western images of "civilization". While the discourse of *siwilai* draws on Western patterns, too great a borrowing from the West that is perceived as erasing links with indigenous aesthetics and imaginings has been critiqued since the era of high imperialism. Siamese/Thai elites have sought to manage the extent of borrowing from the West, and the forms of *siwilai* have been marked by a desire for so much of the foreign but no more. The constitutive local/foreign split within *siwilai* has incited an ongoing debate about "how much" borrowed foreignness constitutes "too much". In her chapter here, Harrison shows that anxiety about where to draw the line in borrowings from the West is more than an elite concern, constituting a recurring theme in Thai cinema and popular culture across the twentieth century.

Ironically, the critique of excessive Westernization was launched by Siam's first Western-educated king, Vajiravudh, in response to the success of his father, Chulalongkorn's, policy of mass-Westernization via *siwilai*. Vajiravudh's criticism of what he called the "cult of imitation" (*latthi ao yang*) of the West reflected the fact that by the early twentieth century the state policy of *siwilai* was so successful that it had spawned a popular craze for Western culture that escaped the control of its royal authors. Matthew Copeland (1993) and Scot Barmé (2002), amongst others, have detailed the ways that Bangkok's emergent middle classes drew on Western forms to demonstrate

their own modernity in cultural and ultimately political contestation against Siam's ruling royal elites. Copeland and Barmé show the importance of new media and the urban market economy in the emergence of popular culture as a domain of Thai-Western hybridity that escaped the control of the royal and noble elites.

At the height of this commoner versus royal/noble contestation over the right to define Siamese/Thai modernity, King Vajiravudh, under the pseudonym Asvabahu, wrote a polemical pamphlet in which, in stark contrast to Prince Damrong, he repudiated the equation of Thainess with a capacity for assimilation.

Imitation in thought, speech, or deed is a characteristic of a slave (*that*) and so is antipathetic to *thai-ness* (*khwam-pen-thai*). Being free (*itsara*) or *thai*, means that we can choose to think and do as we please. The only restriction is that we cannot use this *thai-ness* [i.e. freedom or independence] in a way that produces evil consequences for our nation and country. (Asvabahu 1961, 4)

Vajiravudh here plays on the dual senses of the term *thai* as meaning "free" and as an ethno-marker for the Thai-speaking inhabitants of the central region of Siam. However, his invective had minimal impact on restraining popular fascination with the West. Such elite critiques of "excessive" popular borrowings of Western culture do not so much reflect a genuine anti-Westernness as a loss of control over the extent of Westernization resulting from plebeian challenges to the style dictates of the ruling classes. In this class struggle for control of the process of Westernization we see yet another dimension of hybridity in modern Thailand, namely, subaltern cultural assimilation of the foreign as resistance to internal colonialism. García Canclini's account of the postcolonial Latin American state as "a scheme of dissimulations" (García Canclini 1995, 7), and of hybrid *mestizaje* modernity as a discourse of hegemony over indigenous populations has many parallels to the Thai "regime of images" (Jackson 2004a),

Modernity, then, is seen as a mask. A simulacrum conjured up by the elites and the state apparatuses, above all those concerned with art and culture, but which for that very reason makes them unrepresentative and unrealistic. The liberal oligarchies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries acted as if they constituted states, but they only ordered some areas of society in order to promote a subordinate and inconsistent development; they acted as if they formed national cultures . . . leaving out enormous indigenous and peasant populations, who manifest their exclusion in . . . revolts and in the migration that is bringing 'upheaval' to the cities. (García Canclini 1995, 7)

How have Thailand's subaltern populations responded to the "scheme of dissimulations" and the "regime of images" that envelope *siwilai* as a hybrid discourse of elite rule? How have the ruled classes responded to the West when they have not been dominated by Western colonialists but by Westernized, internally colonizing Bangkok elites who have wielded hybrid discourses of *siwilai*, modernity, and development as idioms of rule? These important questions are among the least explored topics in critical Thai historiography. Most accounts of Thai subaltern hybridity have come

from theoretically engaged anthropology and cultural studies, and Pattana has been among the pioneers in using hybridity theory in studies of contemporary Thai popular culture (Pattana 2003) and religion (Pattana 2005). Pattana's account here of the Thai's growing historical fascination with the Caucasian (*farang*) extends his earlier studies in which he argued that religion in contemporary Thailand is a multi-faceted site where "[h]ybridization does not simply mean the conventional coexistence and tolerance of various religious components, but a temporal moment and site of contestation for spiritual meanings and relevance" (Pattana 2005, 475). In interpreting popular Thai religion in these terms it is helpful to rethink Bhabha's postcolonial analysis through the lens of semicolonialism. If contemporary Thai religious hybridization is a form of cultural blending involving contestation and resistance, then we need to ask what is being contested and who is being resisted. The hegemonic power here is not a foreign colonial regime but the Thai state itself, whose modernizing policies in the twentieth century centralized religious and cultural authority in an officially defined Theravada Buddhism hostile to folk animism (see Jackson 1989). The resulting state-defined Buddhism has been a productive source of contemporary religious diversities that resist and playfully negotiate the religiously mediated state project of consolidating power through hybridization (see Jackson 1999a, 1999b). Contemporary Thai religious hybridity is not, as in postcolonial settings, a cultural mixing with Western forms that challenges that originally foreign power. Rather, it is a popular mixing with a local dominant culture—itsself brought into being to defend local elite power in the face of Western influence—that resists state hegemony by making official Theravada Buddhism polyvocal. Pattana notes this when he says the hybridization of contemporary Thai religion has drawn on "the discipline technologies and the politics of body and soul in order to produce a new sense of religiosity underneath what seems to be the authority and surveillance of state-sponsored Buddhism" (Pattana 2005, 484). Thai subaltern hybridity emerges both as a consequence of and a resistance to the politico-cultural hegemony of the semicolonial state and needs to be understood as a form of resistance to internal colonization rather than a response to foreign rule.

How then have forms of subaltern hybrid mimicry engaged elite Thai-Western discourses of *siwilai*, "modernity", "development", "globalization" and so on, when these discourses have been marked by the double sign of elite autonomy vis-à-vis the West, on the one hand, and of dominance over the local population, on the other? When the modern language of elite rule already valorizes Thai-Western hybridity how has subaltern opposition, resistance, or evasion of this rule been operationalized? Has it taken the form of a popular discourse of local purity that resists hybridity as an idiom of domination? Or has it taken the alternative form of an excessive hybridity that overflows the polite boundaries of state-defined borrowings? Elite critiques of the "cult of imitation" noted above and recent ethnographic and cultural studies research suggest the latter pattern has been the dominant popular response. Pattana's study here of the intensifying popular fascination with the image of the Caucasian (*farang*) provides evidence that the most common subaltern response to the elite discourse of *siwilai* is "excessive" Westernization—"excessive", that is, in the eyes of elite culture managers.

He reveals that the elite project of *siwilai* has spawned a popular culture increasingly marked by desires for blending the Asian Thai self with Caucasian features. Discourses of preserving Thai cultural "purity" by resisting Western and other foreign influences have been important in Thai intellectual history since the early twentieth century. However, these movements have typically been based among conservative bureaucrats perpetuating the ethno-nationalist policies of King Vajiravudh and wartime Prime Minister Pibul Songkhram (see Michael Connors 2005) or, more recently, among critical intellectuals, such as Prawet Wasi, who have championed notions of Thai local wisdom (*phum-panya Thai*). Anti-Western discourses of Thai "purity" have not emerged from either the urban or rural working classes as expressions of contemporary popular culture.

Nonetheless, as Harrison shows in her study here of representations of *farang* in twentieth century popular literature and cinema, this subaltern fascination with the West is neither unreserved nor unbounded. It is marked by anxieties of loss of self and identity into the alien foreignness of the West. These ambivalences are also reflected in the Thai academy where, as Thongchai and Thanet show in their respective chapters, critical thought is divided on the value of Western theoretical models in understanding Thai history and culture. On the one hand, Thanet traces the way that adaptations of Foucault's accounts of power and discourse (*wathakam*) have influenced one stream of post-Marxist analysis. In contrast, Thongchai notes that other schools of thought have looked more to Thailand's Buddhist tradition as an intellectual resource for developing a corpus of locally nuanced critical concepts. The contemporary Thai academy is divided between scholars who draw on Western-derived concepts in critical Thai studies and others who rely on reinterpretations of Buddhism as platforms for asserting intellectual autonomy from the West. The West figures in both these schools, alternatively as a critical resource and as a reviled Other.

May Adadol and MacDonald's study of cinema auteur Apichatpong Weerasethakul suggests that in some situations "excessive" Westernization may be a self-conscious strategy deployed by subaltern intellectuals and artists in resisting elite power. This is a strategy of out-westernizing Siam/Thailand's self-westernizing power elites by using those elites' valorization of the West as a means of counter-attack against their hegemonic domination. "Excessive" Westernization by subaltern groups and individuals challenges the ruling elites' monopolization of Western cultural borrowing as a source of legitimation, and official resistance to this "excessive" westernization, such as King Vajiravudh's critique of what he called the "cult of imitation", then needs to be seen as an attempt to limit the advantages of symbolic links with the West to one particular group. Apichatpong uses the cultural capital acquired from international recognition of his art against conservative culture managers in order to carve out an autonomous creative space in the Thai cultural scene. While he may be "too Western" for Thai culture managers, his international (Western) recognition nonetheless gives him a voice that he might otherwise be denied in local culture wars.

In some contexts hybridity with Western forms reflects a deployment of symbolic association with the prestige of the West as cultural capital in local contests. The West's global dominance confers an imagined prestige on its cultural forms, but that global

dominance itself may at times be peripheral to the issues at stake in contests between local players. In such situations it is not the West's intrusive power that is key to understanding cultural hybridity, but rather the West's capacity to provide symbolic and other resources for competing classes, groups, or individuals within Thailand. Power is central to all forms of Thai cultural hybridity with the West, but in some contexts this blending is more comprehensible in terms of power hierarchies within Thailand itself rather than in terms of power differentials between Thailand and the West. Despite its global dominance, the West may nonetheless at times be little more than a bit player in a Thai drama, not the converse.

### Conclusion: The Fading Allure of the West?

Thai political and cultural history has equipped the society with an elite culture of rule and popular cultures of subaltern resistance that are equally open to borrowing selectively from foreign models. The elite and subaltern forms that make up the complex of contemporary Thai cultures are both constitutively hybridized, but each of these hybridities operates by different principles. Understanding these deeply blended elite and popular cultures in terms of both García Canclini's and Bhabha's respective theories of cultural hybridity reveals that none reflects an essential "genius" of the Thai race or any "miracle of tolerance". They emerge variously as projects of power and forms of resistance to power in a distinctive geopolitical setting. It is Siam/Thailand's geopolitical history that has equipped both its ruling elites and its subaltern masses with cultures based on the appropriation and negotiation of Otherness. The country's rulers have long been concerned to locate themselves in a privileged position within the foreign-determined symbolic universes in which they have found themselves. The expression of this desire through Thailand's locally moderated process of semicolonial modernization has produced a symbolic regime that permits Thais of all social strata to imagine themselves as members of the Western-dominated world order, rather than as outsiders.

The structuring principles of power, subordination, autonomy and resistance that underlie the diverse processes of Siam/Thailand's elite and subaltern cultural hybridities emerge from a politico-cultural system founded upon an historical strategy of changing surface forms to mimic, but never fully reproduce, the external patterns of the superpower of the day. It is here that we begin to understand the often-noted paradox of Thai culture as constantly changing yet always remaining Thai. The forms of Thainess may be in continual flux, but the processes by which these forms have been constituted and managed have changed little over time. The desired symbol of internationally defined prestige has changed with the shifting winds of geopolitics—Indic and Sinic symbolisms in one era; *siwilai* in another; "globalization" in yet another period. Yet the pattern of acquiring prestigious foreign symbols as a strategy of legitimating elite rule *within* the nation has been one of the most resilient features of Siamese/Thai political culture, surviving from the founding of the earliest Thai kingdoms to today. If this historical pattern persists into the future, then should the West's geopolitical influence decline

significantly there is likely to be a parallel decline in Thai interest in appropriating things Western. With the economic and political rise of China and East Asia we can perhaps already detect signs of the Thai cultural gaze shifting once again, this time back to the more immediate north and east. If this trend should continue then in coming decades the West may cease to have the allure, ambiguous or otherwise, that has it has had in the Thai imagination for the past century and a half.