

## Reversed Realities: National Pride and Visual Coding

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### Abstract

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

**Keywords:** Thainess, *farang*, *siwilai*, femininity, performativity

## Introduction

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

Through this analysis, I will show that the ruling elites played an integral part in determining the norm to define Thainess. I argue that the preoccupation with images projected both for the West and against it resulted from the need to keep up with the new world order. These images also ensured the state's independence in the face of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century and its asymmetrical power relations with Siam. As the historical paradigm shifted to the enhancement of Western (American) influence in the 1960s, we can see a similar maneuver used to construct the national cultural identity through the victory and the body of 1965 Miss Universe.

While the people of Siam/Thailand<sup>2</sup> may or may not know what these constructed images and codes of Thainess signify to a global audience, the elites nonetheless have always determined the sense of unique Thainess. Western influence was carefully incorporated in the constitution of Thainess, but only to the extent that the elites saw fit. In other words, the construction of national cultural identity was a process that Chatterjee (2010) called "selective appropriation" (as cited in Winichakul, 2010, p. 138). This paper overall reveals that inexorably both the imagined and the real West assist the establishment of the national cultural identity that is Thainess.

By collecting and analyzing the data from Thongchai's *Siam Mapped* and the articles from *The Bangkok Post*<sup>3</sup> on Abhasra's win, I will elaborate how the two symbolize the codes for the nation and modern subjects of Siam/Thailand. Once the visual representation of the map and the beauty queen is created and disseminated, it forms manifold discourses, the most significant of which is the construction of national identity. The visual representations justify the dominant discourse to work and to actualize what needs to be propagated with regards to national identity, gender identity, and its uniqueness.

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

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<sup>1</sup> The historical atlas map was disseminated within the country during Field Marshal Phibun's regime (1939–1944).

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

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to my friend, Appipar Norapoompipat, features writer at the *Bangkok Post* newspaper, for her kind help in providing me with the data and news articles on the 1965 Miss Universe.

## Disavowed Transculturation

During the European imperialism of the mid nineteenth century, the kingdom of Siam adapted and adjusted to the new world ethos that was European civilization. In response, Siam, which had been immediately affected by European imperialism both politically and economically, later developed the cultural concept of *siwilai* or civilization as described by Winichakul (2000). The discourse of *siwilai* comprised solely of the elements the Siamese ruling class or the elites had championed in order to keep up with the “New World Order” (Winichakul, 2000, p. 532). In the following analyses, we will be able to recognize that Siam/Thailand was determined to uphold the unique sense of Thainess, yet discerningly adjusted to the new world order. This adjustment took place through the conceptualization of *siwilai* discourse, which truly was (and plausibly is) an ambivalent one. Thongchai Winichakul (2010), Peter A. Jackson (2010), and Rachel V. Harrison (2010), to name only a few, concluded that the knowledge and practices reflecting *siwilai* discourse were already part of a transculturation process despite the elite’s claims regarding Thai uniqueness.

Siamese *siwilai* discourse was born for two main reasons. The first was coming into contact (in what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) called the “contact zone”, as cited in Winichakul, 2000, p. 529) with the West since the mid-nineteenth century, most evidently in the form of the extraterritorial rights given to the British in the Bowring Treaty of 1855. Another was the insecurity and threats felt by Siam during Western imperialism because of its dominant power and its modernized status. As a consequence of their contact and encounters with the Europeans, the Siamese elites felt it necessary to protect the independent Siamese state and maintain the sovereign rule. This rule was what Winichakul (2000) terms “royal dignity” (p. 539), of the Chakrimonarchs. The ruling class felt compelled to uphold Western values as expressed in *The Quest for Siwilai* that the elites had the “anxiety to keep up with the world” (p. 534).

Both the apprehension to maintain Siam’s independence against the colonial threat and the eagerness to keep up with the new world order resulted in a strategic response by the Siamese elites. They selectively incorporated Western elements into Siamese ways of life and culture during the modernization period or administrative reformation,<sup>4</sup> which began in the mid nineteenth century during King Mongkut’s reign (Rama IV, 1851–1868). The King recognized the superiority of the Europeans yet disavowed the Siamese status. Such mentality was similar to postcolonial countries and can be considered justification for the newly created Thainess. Other consequences resulting from this line of mentality paved way for the emergence of the epistemological demarcation to which Winichakul (2010) gave the name “Material/Spiritual Bifurcation” (p. 140). This closed intellectual regime refers to how the ruling class of Siam/Thailand chose elements from the Western countries who assisted them to represent Siam as a modern state. Specifically, it refers to how the Occidental perspective was performed by the Siamese elites (Kitiarsa, 2010) to justify its rule over and action towards the Siamese subjects.

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Ambiguous Allure of the West*, various authors described in detail the discourse of modernization in the mid-nineteenth century as a process where the elements from the West had been localized so much that it was “always the Thai-ized West” (as cited in Harrison, 2010, p. 36).

## Mapping and Constructing National Cultural Identity

Arguably, the most evident way Siam portrayed the modern state was through the historical Siam map. Thongchai Winichakul (1994) finely delineated the work of the map as a construction aimed at interpellating various kinds of nationalist sentiments and stabilizing the opposition between us and them (or *farang*).<sup>5</sup> The map defined a clear political body and represented a move away from the pattern of overlord and tributary state. However, in practicality, “Siam had its first geo-body and its representation made, filled, and shaped, at least in part, by Western powers” (1994, p. 128).

The constructed historical Siam map and the emergence of the modern geo-body were products of the transcultural process which was first constituted by a Westerner and was later widely circulated during the military regime of Field Marshal Phibun (Winichakul, 1994). The map symbolized and visually represented the modern polity. It was not created through the orthodox meaning of representing something that already existed: Winichakul eloquently pointed out that “Siam was bounded. Its geo-body emerged. Mapping created a new Siam—a new entity whose geo-body had never existed before” (p. 130). The new geo-body of Siam and the map brought discourses of nationalism, anti-colonialism, and interpellation of Thainess to the forefront. Most importantly, it spurred the anxiety for the territories lost to France in the 1893 annexation.<sup>6</sup>

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

Along with the mapping process, the constitution of the self versus the external Other – *farang* – was evidently manifested. Such binary opposition not only pointed out the way in which Siam was colonized consciously, i.e., by incorporating Western elements into its polity, way of life, culture, and so on, but also, how the Siamese ruling class colonized its own subjects.<sup>7</sup> Winichakul (1994; 2010) pointed out that the strategic responses that include epistemological demarcation, the “enunciation” (1994, p. 130) of the modern geo-body of Siam, and the centralized governmental administration are similar to that of colonial rule. In a way, the self versus the external Other does not constitute binary opposition alone. At this point, various scholars, in particular, Thongchai Winichakul (1994; 2000; 2010), Peter A. Jackson (2004; 2010), and Rachel V. Harrison (2010), have concluded that Siam was a semi-colonial state where the discourse of the distinct Thainess could never have originated without the Western Other against whom it was defined. Likewise, the map was a transcultural product created to elicit the discourses that conserve its independence and a response to the new world order.

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<sup>5</sup> The term *farang* can disclose negative connotations, a disdainful attitude, as it is “a ‘usually ill-defined’ Thai ‘reference to otherness’, an adjective and noun referring to Western people without any specification of nationality, culture, ethnicity, language, or whatever” (as cited in Kitiarsa, 2010, p. 61).

<sup>6</sup> See Winichakul (1994), especially chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>7</sup> See Jackson (2010), especially the Afterword, for an elaborate discussion of the negotiation process of the colonial rule.

The visual code of the map was an instrument used to exhibit the nation's face or desired image both at the national and international levels. The exhibition of appropriate images—modern yet uniquely Thai—for the eyes of the West had always been Siam's preoccupation. Images portrayed on the world stage were not always accurate depictions, rather the images that signify codes of Thainess led us to question the engrossment of self-representation.

The same way the historical Siam map defined the political body of the state and represented the progress of the nation, that strategy was used to create and enunciate the gendered body of an exemplary Thai womanhood through the 1965 Miss Universe Contest. Despite the time difference of over 70 years, the way in which the state and/or the elites selectively chose elements to represent the nation on the world stage was uncannily identical. Visual codes and their signification were historically contingent yet once they were created, they became the justification for the elites to impose upon Thainess and at the same time they reified the national identity and roles Thai subjects should embody and uphold.

### **Thai Femininity and Its Mobility**

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

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

Thai women's mobility was perhaps most notable during the early twentieth century. During this period, women's education, concerns regarding women's dress, socialization etiquettes, values of beauty standards, and even hairstyles became Western oriented.<sup>8</sup> Women were a major instrument for self-representation and were the public image of the country during the post-absolutist period, amid the intensified relationship between Thailand and the US. It was undeniable that since Miss Thailand competition first originated in the 1930s, the beauty pageants were incorporated into the social responsibility of representing the country as being modern and progressive, a move away from the absolutist reign.<sup>9</sup> Still they were to present values from the Thai tradition which, I suggest, was a realm where Thai femininity and the separation of private and public spheres were upheld to the standards of Thai patriarchal (and, at the time, militaristic) society (Callahan, 1998, p. 48).

<sup>8</sup> See Kopkitsuksakul (1993) for a thorough explanation of the factors causing the change in Thai women's roles and the effects that emerge from the Miss Thailand competitions.

<sup>9</sup> Field Marshal Phibun stated specifically that Miss Thailand ought to employ and utilize her title to benefit the country (Kopkitsuksakul, 1993, p. 17) and to manifest the modern Thai self.

The discursive knowledge concerning gender, sexuality, and the sexes was governed by the patriarchal ideology of Thai society at the time. This internal factor was paired with the external influence (or sometimes threat) coming from the West, so that both were accepted and clashed with each another. This contact certainly represented another transcultural product and one significant attribute for the beauty pageants where values from the West were both endorsed and rejected at the same time. Parallel to the influences and novel conceptions from the West, some normative gender expectations, roles, and ideal Thai femininity were kept and exerted by the state through the woman's body. Examples are female virtues in preserving one's purity, mastering domestic tasks and duties, and becoming decent daughters, wives, and mothers, to name only a few.

Suphatra (1993), Van Esterik (1995; 1999; 2000), and Karim (1995) claimed that in agricultural society, differences in genders and sexes in the Southeast Asian region are of their own distinct character. In the case of Siam/Thailand, the modernization period during King Mongkut's reign onward was considered the period where Western influences started to flow into the state. Since then, Siam entered into economic expansion and gave away extraterritorial rights to the British. This milestone marks the beginning of change in Thai women's roles and social status that would measure up to other countries' expectations and especially Western ideals. The Siamese needed to represent an appropriate image to uphold Western standards of gender relations and the modern state, and to redeem itself from the contemptuousness exhibited towards Thai women (Kopkitsuksakul, 1993, p. 32). This mentality showed deep enmeshed relations between the governing of women's bodies with the representation of the state. Gender performance was crucial because in the time of politico-economic affiliation with the West in the 1960s, women played an important role in visually representing the modern nation and its unique national identity, something that will be delineated further in the next section.

### **The Sixties: Thailand's Promotion**

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

Indeed, in the 1960s under the rule of the militaristic reign of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963–1973) Thailand espoused the values concerning the country's reputational promotion (Kopkitsuksakul, 1993; Callahan, 1998). It was inevitable that Thailand had to promote itself during this crucial time of world politics. The well-established relationship between Thailand and the US had existed since the predecessor of Field Marshal Thanom -

Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963). Thailand was preoccupied with the conceptualization of free trade, capitalism, and Western-oriented tourism promotion. Furthermore, the profound tie between Thailand and the US was enhanced throughout the militaristic regimes in which Thailand received support socially, militaristically, educationally, and so on. Altogether, such affiliation was to keep Thailand as an ally for the anti-communist bloc. With the political bond in the picture, the ruling elites were more conscious than ever regarding what images would appropriately portray Thailand to be both Thai and modern despite the silences forced on many groups as they attempted to make political statements.

Certainly, the beauty pageant could be read as a code for national promotion, or rather, the body of the beauty pageant functions as a code that signifies the whole nation. She is an expedient instrument that signifies the type of image considered appropriate by the state and deemed as the ideal Thai woman.<sup>10</sup> First, hers is an image constructed through the embodiment of Thai femininity as was traditional to Thainess. Secondly, it was what the ruling elites considered apposite for the West to see i.e., a Thai woman representing the modern Thai state when in fact at the time the internal politics were quite chaotic (Callahan, 1998). Suphatra (1993) wrote that internally, there were outbursts from emerging political groups such as the Students' group who opposed and lambasted the Western materiality overflowing into the country because of the political ties. The feminist group also chastised the purpose of beauty competitions as mere objectification of female bodies, engendering the standardization of beauty, and the idealization of normative femininity.

So far, just as the historical Siam map was a model for what the state determined to represent, the Thai Miss Universe's victory was also a model for national identity and Thai femininity. Their visual representations on the world stage reified the state's agenda to appear modern and unique Thai. The proliferation of the visible allowed Thais to identify their national identity and gender expectations with respect to said codes. Once this circulation took place, its repetitiveness concerning the visibility of the map and the news of Abhasra's win generated a terrain of discourses that call for sentiments regarding the modern Thai nation or in the case of Abhasra, gender roles. Both the map and the beauty queen's function was immense given the fact that sentimental feelings can be called upon from the Thai subjects. The function of such visual representation was once "created and expected" (Winichakul, 1994, p. 130) and most importantly served as instrument for the elites and the state to justify their drive for the modern state. In the next section, I will elaborate how Abhasra performed gender expectation through the text analysis in the data collected from news articles, published in *The Bangkok Post* regarding her victory in July 1965.

### **Mapping National Pride on the Female Body**

In this section, I propose that Judith Butler's (1988) concept of performative acts is fitting here to be employed in analyzing the embodiment of ideal femininity embedded in beauty pageants. Butler argued that performing gender can be compared to performance or acting in a theatrical sense. She emphasized one of the speech gestures—illocutionary speech act—that is characterized by speech filled with effects on the deeds at the precise moment when the speech

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<sup>10</sup>Suphatra (1993) wrote that Abhasra's victory signifies two things which were: first, respectability for Thai women and their beauty; and second, Abhasra, as a visual code, was presented to the Western Other to demonstrate recognition for and create a revered image for Thailand internationally. Lt. Gen. Chalermchai commented on the fact that the Miss Universe could enhance international relations better than sending diplomatic delegates abroad as follows: Miss Universe "has done the work of ten goodwill missions... [the Americans] are now all interested in Thailand" ("Miss Universe Supplement," 1965, "Pook's win", para. 3).

was performed. Butler wrote that not only do John Searle's 'speech acts,' "refer to speaking relationships, but [they also] constitute a moral bond between speakers" (1988, p. 519). With speech act theory as her foundation, Butler extended her concept to explain how "social reality" (p. 519) can be constituted when least expected by simple speeches, etiquettes, or manners that govern ourselves.

I suggest that Abhasra performed and delivered the state-mediated ideal of Thai femininity on the Miss Universe stage. On the path to becoming Miss Universe, *The Bangkok Post's* special supplement section wrote, she was chaperoned by M.L. Kamala Sukhum who coached Abhasra on how she was to perform Thai femininity and visually represent Thainess "through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). The ideal of Thai femininity she was to enact through her body included physical appearance as "[t]here were plenty of ups and downs as many interested persons tried to show Thailand's representative the best way to win" ("Miss Universe Special Supplement," 1965, "It wasn't easy," para. 2). Her performance of subtlety, grace, and humility was finely executed on the world stage. The ideal Thai femininity that she embodied met the conditions of "performative accomplishment" (Butler, 1988, p. 520): when she won the title Miss Universe, *The Bangkok Post* (1965) presented the news in a section entitled "Pook's win stirs new interest for nation", suggesting that her portrayal of femininity went beyond personal grace and encompassed that of the women of Thailand as a whole. It stated that "Abhasra won mainly because of her femininity and other qualities of 'Thai women.' ... These stood out in this contest for young, modern, beautiful women" ("Miss Universe Special Supplement," 1965, "Opinions," para. 2).

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

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



It is significant for us to consider the realm of truth and falsity – constatives – as Digeser wrote in response to performativity theory. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* explains an indivisible tie between the constative type and performative type of utterances that we often "assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance" (Urmson & Sabisà, 1975, p. 9), which means that we cannot only consider the circumstance in which gender is successfully or unsuccessfully performed because the successful gender performance must be believed by the socio-cultural formation i.e., as truthful or false according to one's sex. For if with Butler we theorize the performative sequence of gender acts and expectations alone, this would lead us to believe that performativity theory manifests the neglect of gender normativity of each society at a certain time regardless of its constructedness in nature.

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

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

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

By studying performativity theory and applying the concept of constatives, we can see that Abhasra's performance was "embodied and disguised under duress" (Butler, 1988, p. 522), the duress of Thai socio-cultural discourse on gender that was closely related to Thainess. Digereser's (1994) claimed, that "constative statements are obstacles to our ability to break free from the prevailing dichotomous roles of gender and sex" (p. 663), confirmed the socio-cultural sanction of gender and what acts were deemed culturally correct and vice versa. We must remember that acceptance, judgments, and criticisms arise from the descriptive nature of constatives, for if Abhasra did not perform in line with gender expectations, she might be faced with punitive consequences. Thus, such constatives mean so much and are historically relevant.

In sum, the historical Siam map and the representation of the 1965 Miss Universe's victory functioned culturally and politically. This was brilliantly stated by Phaka: "[I]n the invention of the 'body' of the nation came the movement to raise 'consciousness' (*jit-samneuk*) of that body, one which the notion of 'woman' (*phuying*) was gradually related to 'nation' (*chat*), as mediated by various social and political provisos" (p. 181). Both visual representations of the map and beauty pageant were contingent in time; yet despite the historical period difference, I argue that in both national identity and Thainess were projected for the Other. Once the visual was constituted, it interpellated labyrinthine discourses of national pride, the modern state, and the uniqueness of being Thai. The textual analysis in this paper explains and raises questions regarding the state's justification for creating such discourses. Its representation and proliferation engenders "redundancy [that] has an important function" (Winichakul, 1994, p. 160) of causing Thai people to identify with the representation, provoking nationalistic feelings and compelling them to protect their national pride.

## Conclusion

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

Analysis of the discursive knowledge that constructed Thainess and Thai femininity shows the ambivalence and in-between space of such discourses (Thongchai, 1994). The recognition and disavowal process had a deep root in Siam/Thai mentality and epistemology. However, we cannot deny that it was the presence of the real and imaginary West that contributed to the constitution of Thainess. Both the map and the embodied Thai femininity were transcultural products. It is crucial that we do not view these cultural products as merely honest representations. Siam/Thailand's demarcation between private and public images (Jackson, 2004) is one such point that needs thorough analysis. The relationship between outward appearance and interior knowledge is part of the Thai polity's uniqueness, where the state has always acted as a strong monitor over what was deemed representable and vice versa. This was

clearly manifested in the manner in which women's bodies were restricted and connected to the nation. Thus, analyses of cultural products can reveal much about the Thai polity and its ability to conduct its performative Thainess on the world stage.

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