

## CHAPTER II



### DYNAMICS OF NATIONALISM IN THAILAND

#### 1. Concept of Nationalism

Roger Brubaker defines nation as “a category of practice; the practical uses of the category ‘nation’ are the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, and to organize discourse and political action.”<sup>1</sup> Nationalism, on the other hand, is described as belief in and above a specific historical phenomenon, to be distinguished as such from the much more general sense of patriotism or national consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Eugene Kumenka has defined nationalism as that which “encourages people to love and be honest with their nation [through a shared] experience and historical people”.<sup>3</sup> Carlos P. Romulo states that nationalism is “the cult that encourages the people to love a common soil, language, and race of historical culture.”<sup>4</sup> While Ernest Renan, in his famous politics lecture of 1882 observed the “spirit of nationalism.” Renan stated, “A nation is a large scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those one is prepared to make in the future.”<sup>5</sup> The Encyclopedia Britannica has also identified Nationalism as “the highest honesty of each person to devote to their nation.” And Charles P. Schlicher has defined nationalism as a modern phenomenon of consciousness, feeling, or corporate sentiment among a group of people...<sup>6</sup> Thus, on the whole, scholars have tended to define nationalism as the feeling and consciousness that one be loyal to the same race, culture, and historical people.

Benedict Anderson, a famous scholar who wrote “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism” gives his definition of the nation as an “imagined community,” he takes a “spiritual” view of nation in that “nationality, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meaning

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<sup>1</sup> David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism*. (London : Routledge), 1998, p.3

<sup>2</sup> E. Kamenka, *Nationalism: The nature and evolution of an idea*. ( Canberra : Australian National University Press), 1975 [c1973]. p.3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Carlos P. Romulo, *Contemporary Nationalism and World Order*, (Asia publishing house, 1964) , p.14

<sup>5</sup> David McCrone, *Ibid* , p.5

<sup>6</sup> Charles P. Schlicher, *International Relations* , ( Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1962), p.51

have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, according to Anderson it is understandable that the important foundation of nationalism in each place is the historical being and the development of changes that create a sense of consciousness to the people in that group. This is linked to Renan's explanation, in which he describes nationalism based on two foundations.

- First, it must have a **sense of common history**, particularly a memory of common sufferings which seem more important than the conflicts and divisions also to be found within that history.
- Second, the people concerned must have a **will to live together**; "To have done great things together, and the will to do more, these are the essential conditions for a people... The existence of a nation is... a daily plebiscite."<sup>8</sup>

We can therefore conclude that the concept of nationalism must, in the first place, be constituted by the mutually positive feelings of the people towards their land or countries.

## 2. Emergence of nationalism

Concerning the concept of nationalism over time and throughout history, it can be said that concepts of nationalism have been changed over historical time and depend on the situation of a very particular moment. Kohn suggests that the meaning of "nationalism has changed over time and continues to change, like that of many other words."<sup>9</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of nationalism was not popular. As Patrick Geary, author of "The Myth of Nations," indicated, nationalism was not the most significant concept of that period. Minogue goes on to compare nationalism with the following metaphor, "the story of nationalism warms up, never to grow cold again."<sup>10</sup> It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the concept of nationalism became more popular, as evidenced in the writings of Kemilainen, a scholar of social science. He states, "Nationalism did not come into wide general use until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>11</sup> The reason for this growing popularity of the

<sup>7</sup> David McCrone, Ibid, pp.6-7

<sup>8</sup> E. Kamenka, Ibid, p.12

<sup>9</sup> Tarling Nicholas, Nationalism in Southeast Asia : if the people are with us, (London : Routledge, 2004), p.5

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> E. Kamenka, Ibid, p.12

Nationalism concept was because nationalism could be used as the crucial methodology to mobilize people. As seen in the European states during 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was a very industrialized period. Economics became crucial in order to defend their frontiers, beat their neighbors, seize colonies or prevent their seizing yours, and damage their trade. Each needed to be more efficient, to use resources, including human resources, and to mobilize more effectively.<sup>12</sup> These demands subsequently produced nationalism as a tool to mobilize people. This period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is largely considered to be the time when concepts of nationalism first emerged.

Tools inherent in the process of developing a concept of nationalism included a pattern of memories, values, symbols, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations.

### **3. Nationalism and Films**

Hayward is credited with having first introduced the idea that “film functions as a cultural articulation of a nation.” Schlesinger, who wrote about “national cinema,” thought that “films serve to represent the nation to itself as a nation; films will construct imaginary bonds which work to hold the peoples of a nation together as a community by dramatizing their current fears, anxieties, pleasures and aspirations. A diverse and often antagonistic group of peoples are thus invited to recognize themselves as a regular body with a common culture, and to oppose themselves to other cultures and communities.”<sup>13</sup>

### **4. Nationalism in Southeast Asia**

Nationalism in Southeast Asia primarily occurred during the colonial period in the region. Among various factors affecting nationalism in Thailand colonialism has been a significant one. Colonialism began to enter and expand in Southeast Asia because Europe was seeking a path to Yunnan, the region in Southern China that Europe believed to be plentiful with resources and people that would help to greatly expand the economies of Europe. As a result, England occupied Burma, and France confiscated Annam (Vietnam) and Khmer (Cambodia).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup>Sungsri Patsorn, Thai cinema as Nation Cinema An Evaluative History, (Doctor of philosophy Murdoch University,2004), pp. 25-26

Chalong Soonthornwanit summarized reasons that colonialism reached its peak in Southeast Asia in the following points:

- 1) Economic reasons. Colonialism wanted primary products like rice, tin and rubber, to benefit their manufacturing industry. They wanted the path to release industrial products as well.
- 2) Colonialism wanted stability and sought not only an important base for economics but also a protective base to benefit of powerful nations from the West..<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, it is a question of what the reaction was of the Southeast Asian countries to the west. According to Kamenka, the reactions against the West in that particular period can be summed up in the following sentence, "There were **numerous battles** pitting Asian armies and navies against sea-borne European forces, especially in South and Southeast Asia."<sup>16</sup> Numerous battles occurred during that period, and this helped to bring about for the first time a real sense of unity and nationalism in Southeast Asian countries.

*"Nationalism in Southeast Asia was organized from political movements which had as their goal in the restoration of their country's independence. In fact, Southeast Asia used to divide herself in the kingdom that depend on each of her leader's power. However, when she lost her independence, she was exploited from the colonizer. It caused many nationalist movements to develop to restore her independence."*<sup>17</sup>

As the sense of restoration of a country's independence expanded widely through Southeast Asia during that particular period, groups of people emerged in order to battle the invaders. This can be defined as the nationalist movement in Southeast Asia. For example, in Indonesia, Muslims were the first to organize a nationalist political party, the Sarekat Islam in 1912. Sarekat Islam sought to bring all Indonesian Muslims together under its banner of reformist Muslim ideas. It was the first mass political party to appear in Southeast Asia.

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<sup>14</sup> Chalong Soontharawanit, "King Rama V versus Colonialism and Siam" in *King Rama V: Siam versus Southeast Asia and India* in *King Chulalongkorn : Siam-Southeast Asia-Jambudvipa*, (Bangkok :Toyota Thailand Foundation: Humanities & Social Sciences Text Foundation, 2547)., pp.269-270

<sup>15</sup>E. Kamenka, Ibid, p.84

<sup>16</sup>Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

Burma's movement was led by Buddhist monks who established the Young Man's Buddhist Association in 1906. They wanted to revitalize Buddhism in Burma, thereby reducing Western influence. In 1935 students at the University of Rangoon formed the Dobayma Asiyone, the "We Burman" society. Members of the Dobayma Asiyone called themselves "Thakins" (Master). Many Thakins, Aung San, U Nu, and Ne Win, would later go on to become political leaders in an independent Burma.

## 5. Dynamics of Thai Nationalism

Scholars agree that nationalism in Thailand is unlike that of any other country. It did not derive its motivation from the people, but rather, was organized by the ruling classes. For example, the following scholars have concluded that Thai nationalism is an ideology that was created by monarchs and the elite: Thongchai Winichakul, Nidhi Aeusivongse, Chai-anan Samudavanija, Kasian Tejapira and Thirayut Boonmee. All have concluded in the same way that Thai nationalism is an ideology created by monarchs and the elite.<sup>18</sup> This concept is supported by Anderson when he states that "the monarchy is essential to Thai nationalism."<sup>19</sup>

The following effects of European imperialism in Southeast Asia were identified as key factors in the creation of the modern nation.<sup>20</sup>

### 5.1. Colonialism: The origin of creation of a sense of contemporary Thai nationalism

The origin of contemporary Thai nationalism can be traced back to the period after 1957 during which country leaders faced political changes and forces of Western powerful nations' battering to secure strongholds and/or colonize Southeast Asia.<sup>21</sup> It was the invasion of France at this time which led to Thailand forfeiting several land rights in the regions below:

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<sup>18</sup>Sturm Andreas, King's nation : a study of the emergence and development of nation and nationalism in Thailand (Master's thesis University of London. London School of Economics and Political Science,2006). pp.22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson Benedict, "Studies of Thai State", p.226

<sup>20</sup>Sturm Andreas, Ibid, p.14

<sup>21</sup> Sunait Chutintaranond, Burma Battling Thailand:The War Between Thailand and Burma, (Bangkok: Matichon, 2004) , p.63

1. Most of mainland Khmer (Cambodia) and six islands (about 124,000 sq.km)
2. Sipsong Cuthai Region (about 87,000 sq.km.) (Vietnam Region)
3. Regions on the left bank of Mekhong River (about 143,000 sq.km.)
4. Regions on the right bank of Mekhong River (about 62,500 sq.km)
5. Battambang, Siem Reab and Sisophon (about 53,000 sq.km)<sup>22</sup>  
(Cambodia Region)

### 5.2. *King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and Nationalism*

Thailand was struggling to survive among the European colonial powers, and many countries in Southeast Asia were colonized by the West. King Chulalongkorn realized the threat to his reign and the independence of Thailand. He modernized and civilized the nation to save it from a colonial take-over.<sup>23</sup> King Chulalongkorn created the modern Thai state. Reforming government was the key to his success. He was able to achieve this by transforming the fundamentals of society by abolishing slavery and replacing it with per capita tax.<sup>24</sup> He emphasized the ideology of “Thai Nation” in that the king is the highest of the nation, and had the most power of the kingdom (including all outlying areas). It was the ideology that the king was the center of the nation<sup>25</sup> which led King Chulalongkorn and his elite to create a symbol for promoting love of the monarchy and “Thai Nation.”

In mobilizing people with a sense of nationalism, King Chulalongkorn showed a work of art that consisted of 92 glass-framed scenes from Thai history at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok in 1887. With these paintings, Chulalongkorn attached poems to the pictures. One poem in particular describes the filling of a river by the Burmese in order to move their troops to Ayutthaya ahead of their first conquest in 1856. The entire poem spoke of how ordinary people started to fight on their own to protect the city.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Luang Wichitwathakarn, *Speech on colonial takeover by France*, (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University, 1939), p.5

<sup>23</sup> Sturm Andreas, *Ibid*, p.115

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> Sunait Chutintaranond, *From Fact to Fiction: History of Thai-Myanmar Relations in cultural Context* (Bangkok : Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Sturm Andreas, *Ibid*, p.128

*“The people who lived around the city  
Shoot fire arrows  
To kill the Burmese  
Many of them were lying dead”<sup>27</sup>*

Nationalism in this period used the “us” versus “them” tool which was portrayed in the literature and writing of the time. This feeling was used to mobilize people and bring them together under the umbrella of nationalism by helping to create a sense of “we need to fight our enemy.”

### *5.3. King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) and nationalism*

In the period after the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Thailand’s situation was not yet settled. There were both external and internal factors leading to the ongoing use of nationalism. King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), who is also known as “the father of Thai nationalism,”<sup>28</sup> developed a nationalistic ideology through a variety of ways in hopes of further was strengthening Thailand.

King Vajiravudh emphasized it was his duty as a King to bring happiness and prosperity to the nation. He said, “I realize deeply at the moment that I was given a big and most important burden. I have the happiness and Thainess of the nation in my hands. We [members of the royal family] were born as Thai and in the royal dynasty, and our ancestors helped to build the Thai nation and to preserve it. This demands a sacrifice of blood and flesh from everybody to maintain the Thainess of the nation.” Vajiravudh called on every Thai to feel loyalty “as one who protects the territory according to [their respect for] the monarchy, their love for the nation and their belief in a common religion [Buddhism]. Only unity between groups and the avoidance of conflict will create stability necessary to make the nation free.”<sup>29</sup>

An important alternation is that Vajiravudh promoted nationalism through a new national flag which was unveiled in 1917. The design of the new flag paid homage to the three

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.137

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.139

institutions of nation, religion, and king. This meant that nation and religion carried the same importance as that of the monarch.<sup>30</sup>

Not only did Vajiravudh declare that the king holds the main role in contributing to the nation, he also felt that loyalty to the king was the only criteria for being Thai. Vajiravudh defined those of Thai nationality as “those who are born Thai, the ones who are born among the people who call themselves Thai. The way to decide whether anyone belonged to a nation was to consider to whom he is loyal. If he is loyal to the king of Thailand, then he is a real Thai. However, if anyone proclaims that he is independent and is loyal to no one, we can consider him as a person without a nation.”<sup>31</sup>

This nationalistic view influences Thai people even today and has been reproduced through a variety of tools such as literature, Thai textbooks, monuments, and the like.<sup>32</sup>

#### 5.4. *King Prajadiphok (Rama VII) and the shift to democracy*

After to the 1932 the revolution which saw the end of the absolute monarchy, Thailand became a democracy with a constitutional monarchy. This change was the direct result of internal Thai social problems. Economic crisis became a major impetus, along with problems from inadequate infrastructure, an overburdened metropolis in Bangkok, serious pollution and ecological degradation, deplorable conditions for many workers, and widening gaps between urban and rural, and rich and poor.<sup>33</sup> People from every class, working class activists, the military, and even peasants, were increasingly bold and strident in their written criticism of the monarchy. Finally, King Prajadiphok (Rama VII) returned the power to people and Thailand and changed to a democratic system.<sup>34</sup> The new government was governed by the military.

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<sup>30</sup> Sturm Andreas, *Ibid*, p.143

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.140

<sup>32</sup> Neidhi Aeusivonde, *Thai Nation, Thailand, Thai Text Book and Monument*, (Bangkok:Matichon, March 26 2001),preface.

<sup>33</sup> Sturm Andreas, *Ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Ungpakorn Giles, *State Crime in Change Crisis*, (Bangkok: Committee on Taking information and examine witnesses on event 6 October 6 1976, 2544,p.6



Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram is known as the creator of nationalism during this period. He was the most well-known leader of the Rastadorn or the People's Party. His accomplishments include overthrowing rebel insurgencies and leading by powerful military force. This meant he was able to have a stable and effective platform from which to govern as prime minister.<sup>35</sup>

Nationalism was still a very lively ideology for Phibun because of his military background and the unstable political situation in Thailand during that period. Phibun himself was a professional soldier and educated in France, and was strongly influenced by Western political ideas. Since the coup in 1932, the new ruling group sought to legitimize their control of government.<sup>36</sup> To this end, Phibun accordingly shored up patriotism to gather the common people's awareness and support. His vivid nationalist deeds included re-claiming Thai territory from France on the grounds that the case was a bleeding wound for the Thai people. He also issued certain laws to boost the economy for the Thai people by attempting to preserve work for Thai nationals while restricting work for resident aliens by prohibiting them from living in well-off provinces.<sup>37</sup> By using nationalism to legitimize their power, Phibun appointed Luang Wichit Wathakan, who was also educated in Switzerland, to serve as the Head of the Fine Art Department; in this capacity he went on to create many artifacts in the making of a "New Siam."<sup>38</sup>

The primary change of the time was to renaming of the country from "Siam" to "Thailand" on 23 June 1939. Thailand meant "Land of the Free," and free in this sense is often thought to convey a feeling of "to get rid" and "be free" from the traditional and old system (Absolute Monarchy) as well as free from foreign powers.<sup>39</sup>

However material used in creating this new form of nationalism differed from previous material. "Ratchamanu" (soldiers with obligations to their country), Wichit's second historical musical play, appeared in January 1937 as a tool of promoting this new sense of nationalism. In this play Ratchamanu was a military commander who played a central role in

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<sup>35</sup> Chulla Ngonrot, *The Origin and Development of Nationalism in Thailand*, (Political Science Thesis Chulalongkorn University, 1970), p. 30

<sup>36</sup> Sturm Andreas, *Ibid*, pp.164-165

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p.171

suppressing Khmer attempts to throw off Thai suzerainty during the reign of King Naresuan in the sixteenth century. It is suggested in the play that Khmers and Thais were one and the same people. This reflected Wichit's concept that Thai and Khmer, who had been colonized by France, used to be the same race.

In addition, Wichit also had high praise King Taksin, who was not of the current Chakri dynasty, but rather was a soldier and a national hero.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that Wichit meant to emphasize the soldier played the primary role to in the survival of the nation. Moreover, he created the Ramakian epic. In this epic, Rama (which is also the official name of kings in the Chakri dynasty), was a weak and indecisive character.<sup>41</sup> Ramakian was used as a tool to further legitimize the power of Phibun, who came from the ordinary people and not any royal bloodline.

This is how government in that period tried to create a new ideology and new understanding for Thai people by creating different types of nationalism.

### *5.5. From the post-revolution period to the present-day*

After King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) accepted the change from absolute to constitutional monarch, he then surrendered the throne to his ten year old nephew, Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII). King Ananda Mahidol died in 1946 under somewhat mysterious circumstances, the official explanation being that he accidentally shot himself while cleaning his gun. He was succeeded by his brother Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), the current and very popular king. Although it was nominally a constitutional monarchy, Thailand was ruled by a series of military governments throughout the twentieth century, most prominently led by Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram and Sarit Dhanarajata interspersed with brief periods of democracy.<sup>42</sup>

Post-1973 Thailand has been marked by a struggle to define the political contours the state. The post-1973 years have seen a difficult and sometimes bloody transition from military to civilian rule, with several reversals along the way. Enormous demonstrations were

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.166

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> History of Thailand, Available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Thailand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Thailand). (2007, October 15)

held in Bangkok, demanding the end to military rule in 1973. Events in October 1973 amounted to a revolution in Thai politics. For the first time the urban middle class, led by the students, had defeated the combined forces of the old ruling class and the army, and had gained the apparent blessing of the king for a transition to full democracy, symbolized by a new constitution which provided for a fully elected unicameral legislature.<sup>43</sup> The revolution of 1973 inaugurated a brief, unstable period of democracy, with military rule later being reimposed. This was lead the bloody right-wing coup in 1976.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. Conclusion: Nationalism in Thailand

According to Neidhi Aeusivonde, the creation of Thai nationalism can be divided into the following two stages:

- 1) *The Absolute Monarchy in the colonization context*: this set the conceptual frame for the creation of the senses of nationalism through the Thai Kings' merits of gathering the land to be a sovereign country and fighting against colonialism. Such nationalism fabrication adopted the following important strategies.
  - (a) The recounting of the ancient legends and annals such as wars and battles between Thailand and her neighbors, in which the abilities of the Kings to protect and nourish the land were depicted; and,
  - (b) The clear drawing that Thailand's big enemy was Burma, as illustrated in the compilation of Thai history entitled "Siamese Fight against Burma" by His Royal Highness Damrong Rajanuphap, and by the creation of a new flag called "Tri-rong Flag" (or three-colored—red, white, and blue), as well as patriotic plays composed by King Rama VI and others.
  
- 2) *The First Era of Democracy in War Context and Anti-Communism*: The democratic era commenced after a revolution in the reign of King Rama VII, when middle class people including military tyrants, particularly Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, mobilized their strength to support him as leader

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<sup>43</sup> History of Thailand since 1973-Military rule, Available from [http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/History\\_of\\_Thailand\\_since\\_1973\\_-\\_Military\\_rule/id/5133272](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/History_of_Thailand_since_1973_-_Military_rule/id/5133272). (2007, September 5).

<sup>44</sup> History of Thailand since 1973-Military rule, Available from [http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/History\\_of\\_Thailand\\_since\\_1973\\_-\\_Revolution/id/5133271](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/History_of_Thailand_since_1973_-_Revolution/id/5133271) (2007, September 5).

under the doctrine “Believing in the Leader Shall Lead to Security.” The war within the social context and the communist required an even stronger sense of patriotic awareness among the Thai people. Following are the main conceptual spreading strategies in the second period.

- (a) The deployment of effective strategies used in the first era, such as the retelling of the past as vividly seen in the musical plays and writings of Luang Wichit Vathakarn, such as *Suphan Blood* which highlighted the talents of battle leaders instead of the King;
- (b) The linkage of the King’s image to democracy under the “Democratic Monarchy” doctrine or the King’s support of democracy, which Nidhi cited in the construction of the King Rama VII Monument in front of the Parliament viewed as concurrent admiration towards both democracy and the King; and,
- (c) The depicting that Burma was and is the enemy of the Thai. Such displays were even emphasized more strongly. In this era, the play “*Suphan Blood*” by Luang Wichit Wathakarn was one example. Such thought conveying aimed to build unity among Thai People and to counter-attack current enemies like communists, for instance.

### **6.1. Material for creating nationalism**

Kamjorn Louiyapong, lecturer for the Southeast Asian Project at Thammasart University, analyzed the change of the conceptual leaders from tyrants to the middle class, and the current globalized capitalist economy in the following table:

Period	Ruler	Social Context	Communicating	Tactic	Objectives
Absolute Monarchy	King	Colonialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Book entitled “Siamese Fight against Burma”</li> <li>- Monument Construction – Three color flag</li> <li>- Patriotic plays by King Rama VI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Retelling of ancient legends about the Kings’ land gathering.</li> <li>- Image creation of Thai’s enemy, ie. Burma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unity</li> <li>- Promotion of the power of the monarchy institution</li> </ul>
Start of democracy	Ruler (Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram)	Wars and communist doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New era of monument construction</li> <li>- Musical plays by Luang Wichit Wichitwathakan like “Suphan Blood”</li> <li>- Singing of the Thai anthem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adapting of the imaginary community built in the first era to the democratic period.</li> <li>- Burma kept as the imaginary enemy and communism added.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unity</li> <li>- Promotion of the military tyranny under the “Democratic Monarchy”</li> </ul>
Democracy	Middle Class	Globalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All kinds of communicating modes in mass communication (movies, dramas, advertisements, music, songs, newspapers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Burma still regarded as imaginary enemy and poverty-creating enemies like IMF.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unity</li> <li>- Thai economical system promoted.</li> </ul>

## 6.2. Thai Nationalism and film

Luang Wichit Watakarn once said the following:

“Novels and popular fiction are not unimportant when compared with academic writing. In fact, academic writing goes out of date easily and there are often new ones that kill the previous ones. The author died a quick death if he/she did not revise what’s contained in the book. By contrast, the author of popular writing such as a novel lives on although his/her work has been published for many years. Take Sunthorn Pu, for example, his poetry is still cherished after two hundred years. The authors and his/her work never die. This is true also in England and France where the works of Shakespeare and Mollier remain popular to this day... It should be understood that popular fiction is very useful and is an extremely powerful tool for persuasion. Look at the revolutionaries, those who wish to change the hearts and minds of the masses. They do not write books. They write novels and plays. Belgium became independent from Holland because of a single play. Therefore, novels and plays are very powerful. They conquered the hearts of the people.”<sup>45</sup>

While film did play a role as entertainment for king and people during the absolute monarchy period, during the revolution period, it grew in importance to play a crucial role in creating nationalistic material.

After the revolution of 1932, many propaganda films were introduced. These were clearly films used as tools to promote nationalistic ideas. For example, *Blood of Thai Soldiers* (Luad Thahan Thai) in 1935 and *Our Home* (Baan Rai Na Rao) in 1947.<sup>46</sup> These two films intended to promote the nationalistic ideas of Phibun Songkram.

*Blood of Thai Soldiers* was the story of a young soldier going off to war. The soldier was inspired by the idealism of protecting nation, religion, and the monarchy, as well as the new constitution. Although in this period the absolute monarchy had been overthrown

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<sup>45</sup> Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, *Cultural control and globalized culture* (Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University May 2000), p.1

<sup>46</sup> Hyunjung Yoon. *Thai films made in the 1970s as social commentary on migration-related social issues*. (Chulalongkorn University. Thai Studies. 2003), p.114

by the new government, respect for the monarchy remained an entrenched value in Thai society.<sup>47</sup>

*Our Home* presented the ideal of the modern life for Thai farmers through the use of western costume such as blue jeans and boots. Images of happy and prosperous Thai farmers under the rule of new government were shown in the film. This was done in an effort to communicate the belief that the change in government would be beneficial for the farmers.

This era clearly used films as the tool to promote the nationalistic ideas of a new regime. This was successful because the film industry was well established in Thailand and able to produce the quality of film necessary to effectively communicate these new nationalistic ideas to the people. The process also carries over into other forms of communication as well, in that they are also able to use different media to promote their ideology.

After this early period of films portraying nationalistic agendas, film has not clearly played a prominent role in promoting nationalism. There was some activity in the 1970s when producers and directors tried to represent their social view of the two political events in October 1973 and October 1976.

### **6.3. Thai Nationalism through films (post economic crisis)**

Leading up to and during the economic crisis in 1997, there is a marked increase in so-called “period movies”<sup>48</sup> which created a sense of Thai Nationalism. This may be the cause of disappointment felt by many Thais toward foreign capitalism. This brought about concepts like “Made in Thailand for Use and Growth in Thailand” and the “Sustainable Economy” to bar foreigners’ businesses in support of Thai trade.

In film, after the “one return to the past movie” *Nang Nak* in 1999, a majority of contemporary Thai movies became caught up with “returning to the past” cinema. In fact,

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<sup>47</sup> Sungri Patsorn, *Thai cinema as Nation Cinema An Evaluative History*, (Doctor of philosophy Murdoch University.2004), pp.119-120

<sup>48</sup> Anchalee Chaiworaporn, *Nostalgia in Post Crisis Thai Cinema*, Available from: [http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays\\_03Nostalgia.asp](http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays_03Nostalgia.asp) (2002, September 18).

four out of the eight movies in 2000, seven out of the fifteen in 2001, and seven in 2002 were all “return to the past” movies.<sup>49</sup>

Examples included *Young Soldiers* (2000), the story of a group of high school students who were soldiers during the Second World War; *Satang* (2000), about a group of villagers searching for money during World War II; *Behind the Painting* (2000), the re-make of a classic tale of forbidden love between a young man and a middle-aged woman; *Jandara* (2001), an erotic movie about the haunting 1930s world of sex, lesbianism and guilt; *Kwan Riam* (2001), the tragic story of a 1930s folk couple sacrificing their lives for love; *New Born Blood* (2002), the life of 1950s Thai youngsters against the backdrop of Elvis Presley hits; and *Kunpaen* (2002), an adaptation of a famous literary classic about the life and loves of a Thai Don Juan.<sup>50</sup>

Nationalism in films really took off with the film *Bangrajan* which was released in December 2000. It rapidly became a success, and only a few months after its release, it had grossed more than 150 million baht, the largest box office earnings of any Thai film at the time. After the success of *Bangrajan*, the historical film *Suriyothai* some months later.<sup>51</sup> These two films were the main films of the time that promoted Thai nationalism, within the context that Thailand was facing the effects of the 1997 economic crisis. Both serve as a warning about the dire effects of national disunity.

Analysis of films from this post-crisis period shows important tactics used to convey nationalism which still hinged on portraying the old enemy, which was Burma. Three different approaches to presenting the enemy were adopted.<sup>52</sup>

*a. Presenting disputes between Thailand and Burma*

War scenes between Thailand and Burma were shown in newspapers, magazines, radio shows, television, TV dramas, and even advertisements to display the two nations' disputes with one another. Such media included movies like *Suriyothai*, *Bangrajan*, *Gunmen*, and *Salawin*; TV dramas such as

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> G.Lewis, *The Thai Movie Revival and Thai National Identity*, *Journal of Media&Cultural Studies*, Vol 17, No. 1, 2003, p.70

<sup>52</sup> Kamjohn Louiyapong, (Bangkok: Thammasart University), 2005, pp.68-71



"Ateeta," "Nai Kha Nom Tom," and "Jao Gam Nai Wen," advertisements like "M-100" and "M-150;" and, music such as "Bang Ra Jan" and "Phra Jao Tak Sin."

*b. Displaying battles with neighboring countries, especially Burma*

Some examples include period dramas like "Gep Phaen Din" which showed ethnic characters fighting against the Burmese government.

*c. The new yet clearly established enemy (Westerners) over the old one (Burma)*

This is a comparison of the Thai-Burmese wars to Thailand's economic battles against Western powers under the conceptual framework of "Made in Thailand for Use and Growth in Thailand" and the "Sustainable Economy." One example is a commercial for 91-octane gasoline distributed by the PTT Public Company Limited, which showed a Thai soldier seriously injured in the war driving over to a vehicle and asking the rider, "Why not use [the more fuel efficient] 91-octane gasoline?" The advertisement sought to teach Thai people to love their nation and economize by using 91-octane gasoline instead of the previously more common 95-octane. The commercial compared the old Thai versus Burma struggle (in using an injured soldier) with Thailand's current struggles against foreigners to rehabilitate the economy. This is the strategy of "tactfully creating a new enemy over an old one."<sup>53</sup> The other example was the film "The Siam Renaissance" that portrayed the westerners was rough and exploited Siam.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid , p.72