

THE URBAN CULTURE OF CHINESE SOCIETY  
IN BANGKOK: CINEMAS, BROADCAST AND  
LITERATURE, 1950S-1970S

KORNPANAT TUNGKEUNKUNT

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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KORNPANAT TUNGKEUNKUNT

*B.A. (Chulalongkorn University)*

*M.A. (Nanjing University)*

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## Summary

The shift of scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese from the early postwar to the late postwar decades shows a significant trend of the overseas Chinese study in Thailand. In fact, it is a response to the transformation of the nation-state era into the multi-culturalism era. In the early postwar years, G. William Skinner proposed the thesis of complete assimilation of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand by the fourth generation. His assimilation thesis had strong influence among scholars working on the subject of overseas Chinese at that time. However, from the 1980s on Skinner's thesis has been questioned and criticized for shortcomings that reflect the historical biases of his era. Therefore, modern scholarship is inclined to work in the light of the idea of multi-culturalism, rather than to follow the assimilation thesis, and aims to re-examine Chinese identities, Chinese practices, Chinese literacy and so forth.

Despite the growing attention to multiculturalism, modern scholarship tends to view Chinese culture in Thailand as traditionally homogeneous and to neglect the diversity of Chinese cultures that seems to be a departure from Chinese traditions. To engage in these dialogues, this dissertation examines the urban culture of the Chinese in Bangkok, with particular focus on cinemas, broadcast and literature. These forms of cultural expression appear in the social sphere—in the streets, on the air and in the texts, which constitute important parts of the urban culture in the Chinese society in Bangkok.

It will be argued that Chinese community in Bangkok is not a culturally and ethnically isolated community. Rather, it seems to be open and exposed to foreign cultures, which made it a multicultural community, and not simply a unilateral and monolithic Chinese race-based community. Under the pressure of the Cold War as well as American influences in Thailand when connections to the PRC was discouraged, the Chinese cultural expression in Chinese society in Bangkok, seen in Chinese cinema and broadcast, was transformed to absorb cultures from a wider Chinese-speaking world than just the Chinese mainland. In other words, the absence of the PRC was partially substituted for by other Chinese communities, mostly from Hong Kong, whose materials helped to fulfill a need of the Chinese in Thailand left behind by the Cold War.

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## Notes on Transliteration and Abbreviation

This dissertation is largely based on materials in the Chinese and Thai languages. It follows the common standard of the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS) and Hanyu Pinyin system for Thai and Chinese names and terms respectively. However, there are a few exceptions from the rules of the above systems as follows: (1) some particular names and terms that have become common in English-Language texts, e.g. Teochiu (Chaozhou), Cantonese (Guangdong), Hokkien (Fujian) and Hakka (Kejia); (2) some proper names that were locally known in their dialects, e.g. *Hoitianlao* (instead of Haitianlou); and (3) persons who have made their own spelling, e.g. Trisilpa instead of Trisin.

In addition to transliteration, works that are frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations, seen in note citations.

NA	National Archive, Bangkok
OPM	Office of Prime Minister
MI	Ministry of Interior
MC	Ministry of Commerce
CRF	Company Registration File at Department of Commercial Registration
DNYHRZLHB	Dongnanya Huaren Ziliao Huibian [Comprehensive Collection of Materials on the Chinese in Southeast Asia]

## **Introduction**

### **1. Research question**

When we discuss Chinese society in Bangkok during the decades following the Second World War, specifically between the 1950's and 1970's, what first comes to mind? Some may consider the Chinese shrines and temples that the Chinese often visited to pray for luck and wealth. At the same time, some may consider the associations in which the Chinese gathered together. On a secondary level, some may further consider the political pressure from the Thai government on Chinese presses and Chinese education. These are all accurate depictions of Chinese life in postwar Bangkok. But if we look into novels depicting Chinese society in Bangkok during this postwar era, we find some interpretations that depart from these ideas. An example can be read as follows:

Yaowarat Road starts from the New Odeon Cinema in the east side, and ends at Samyot District in the west side. Despite being only around one kilometer in length, Yaowarat is, in fact, the most typical Chinese community, where live our Chinese fellows from the lower class to the higher class. As we can see, from the external appearance, that big companies as well as big stores are located along the road. In the small streets and alleys on the side of the road, however, live a huge number of the poor. Here, there are Teochiu opera troupes that still survive, Chinese bookstores that cannot be found anywhere else,

first run Mandarin/Cantonese/Teochiu cinemas, authentic Chinese associations, Chinese restaurants, and Chinese teahouses. In a greater variety, there are cinemas that screen movies in several languages such as English, Thai and Japanese, striptease clubs, night clubs and hotels, with small vendors constantly shouting “on sale, on sale!”<sup>1</sup>

The above passage is taken from the preface of the Chinese-language novel, *Fengyu Yaohuali* (Yaowarat in Rainstorm), first serialized during 1963–64 in the Chinese weekly newspaper, *Huafeng Zhoubao*,<sup>2</sup> by a group of nine writers who intended to make the Chinese community the focal point of their writing. The Chinese community portrayed in this novel is based in Yaowarat, which has long been known as one of the oldest Chinese areas in the Thai capital, Bangkok. However, the Chinese community in Yaowarat is not limited to Yaowarat Road, the center of the area. In fact, it covers many other roads nearby, such as Chareonkrung Road. To emphasize the focus on the Chinese community in Yaowarat, the nine writers, therefore, begin the title of their novel with *Yaohuali*, Yaowarat.

According to the passage, the novel *Fengyu Yaohuali*, depicts Yaowarat—a typical Chinese society, as being culturally diverse. It shows that Chinese society was not limited to the expression of Chinese culture in such arenas as Chinese bookstores, Chinese associations, Chinese cinemas, and Chinese teahouses. This can further be

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<sup>1</sup> Li Hong et al, *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm] (Hong Kong: Dipingxian Chubanshe, 1983), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Although first serialized between 1963–64 in Chinese newspaper, *Huafeng Weekly*, *Fengyu Yaohuali* was only in 1983 printed in book form by a publisher in Hong Kong.

seen from the incorporation into Yaowarat of foreign-language cinemas, nightclubs and, surprisingly, striptease clubs, which are clearly distinct from traditional, Chinese cultural expression.

The notion of 1960's Chinese society as being a multicultural community can also be found in another famous novel, *Letters from Thailand*, although not to the same extent as in *Fengyu Yaohuali*. *Letters from Thailand*, by Botan, was first published in 1969 and has become the most authoritative Thai-language novel depicting Chinese life in Thailand. *Letters from Thailand* portrays a Chinese society, like Yaowarat as a bustling and thriving area known for modern business and entertainment, despite the fact that it was in Bangkok's old town This is described as follows:

The part of Bangkok where we live is considered an old town, or what some people may call "Chinatown."<sup>3</sup> In the present, there are a large number of gold shops, Chinese restaurants, high-class restaurants, and many buildings that are seven, eight stories, and even nine stories, that used to be the tallest building in Thailand . . . Where we live today, there is modern entertainment such as radio, television, cinemas, theaters, teahouses, nightly opera, massage parlors and dance halls. If one wants to be obsessed with all vices, then he can get everything: all vices—drinking, gambling and prostitution.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, trans. Susan Kepner (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 261.

<sup>4</sup> Botan, *Chodmai Chak Mueangthai* [Letters from Thailand] (Bangkok: Chomromdek Publishing House, 1999), 421–23.

Although there could be more interpretations, these two novels have provided us with another point of view on Chinese society in Bangkok, one beyond Chinese temples, Chinese schools, and Chinese associations. As we can see from the novels, Chinese society in Bangkok, such as that in *Yaowarat*, was also known as being commercially oriented and culturally diverse. Although it was one of the oldest Chinese-concentrated areas, it was demonstrated that an urban culture seemed to have developed in this old Chinese society, through, for example, modern radio and foreign movies, as well as in nighttime entertainment. Nevertheless, the notion of urban culture in the Chinese society in Bangkok is quite poorly documented in modern scholarship on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. Could this be a signal that we will have to reconsider the study of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand?

In order to better comprehend our understanding of Chinese society in Thailand, several questions will have to be addressed. What did Chinese society in Bangkok look like in the postwar decades? Was there an “urban culture” within Chinese society in Bangkok, as some literary works have suggested? If there was, then what created this urban culture? Moreover, the Cold War was ongoing during the decades following the Second World War, making this period politically volatile. Thus, it is worth exploring how the Cold War made a political and social impact on the making of urban culture in Chinese society in Bangkok.

This dissertation, therefore, will begin with an attempt to answer the above questions and expand some related ideas. The purpose of this dissertation, however, is not simply to explore the urban culture of Chinese society in Bangkok. It also attempts to develop a new perspective in order to understand the cultural life of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok during the postwar decades. That is, to examine in detail



the ways in which urban culture presented itself in the cultural production and consumption of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok, from an historical approach. Moreover, it aims to engage in dialogues of scholarship on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, on questions relating to the issue of assimilation, which have been long discussed. In doing this, I shall refer to existing studies of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, published since the postwar era.

## **2. Literature Review**

The study of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia began long before World War Two.<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese, however, seems scarce when compared to studies of those in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Dr. Kenneth Perry Landon's work, *The Chinese in Thailand*,<sup>6</sup> is the only major book on the Chinese in Thailand during the prewar era, and aims to examine the social and economic conditions and the legal status of the Chinese in Thailand. Despite its careful analysis of abundant Thai primary sources, *The Chinese in Thailand* did not include any Chinese-language sources or publications from within the overseas Chinese community in Thailand. More importantly, this groundbreaking work reflected much of the Thai ruling classes' views of the overseas Chinese community, rather than views from the overseas Chinese themselves. For instance, Landon demonstrates that the Chinese in Thailand had a certain affiliation with undesirable

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<sup>5</sup> Leo Suryadinata, ed. *The Ethnic Chinese in Asean States: Bibliographical Essays* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Perry Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1973).

forms of recreation and activities that were poor for their health (i.e., gambling, opium, smoking, and prostitution) that continue to be addressed by the Thai government's suppression policy.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the emergence of new Southeast Asian nation-states, as well as because of the growing prevalence of the social science disciplines, during the postwar era the study of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia underwent a transformation.<sup>8</sup> It became regarded as a newly important subject for several reasons. One important contributing factor was that Western scholars, eager to learn more about China, were unable to conduct fieldwork in China after the CCP took over. Therefore, they resorted to studying the overseas Chinese in order to give them some idea of the Chinese in China.<sup>9</sup> This transformation reflected changes implicit and explicit in the plentiful research of this study. Consequently, contributing to these phenomena, since the prewar era the research framework on Thailand's ethnic Chinese has been developed, and such development is reflected in both the quality and quantity of written work.

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<sup>7</sup> Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand*, 88–98.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer W. Cushman, "The Chinese in Thailand," in *The Ethnic Chinese in the Asean States: Bibliographical Essays*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 221–22.

<sup>9</sup> Suryadinata, ed. *The Ethnic Chinese in Asean States: Bibliographical Essays*, 8.

## 2.1 Visiting Skinner: studies in the early postwar decades

Among the literature on Thailand's ethnic Chinese, G. William Skinner's publications come first to mind for their valuable contribution to the field. In his classic work, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*,<sup>10</sup> Skinner records a solid historical framework of the Chinese society in Thailand, and makes the challenging prediction that, in the future, within four generations, the Chinese would be fully assimilated into Thai society. He states that access to elite status, intermarriage, and the state's pro-assimilationist policies would encourage the Chinese to completely assimilate. In addition to *Chinese Society in Thailand*, in the article "Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas: A comparison of Thailand and Java," Skinner again attributes the success of Chinese assimilation in Thailand to the role of politics, since those Chinese in Java still considered themselves Chinese, while in Thailand they had been completely assimilated into Thai society. Relevant to this discussion, he focuses on differences in the assimilation of the overseas Chinese in Thailand and Java in the light of the receiving societies, rather than between different Chinese speech-groups. Skinner here concludes that, "In the long run, the only future of the local born Chinese in most of Southeast Asia is to assimilate completely to indigenous society."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957).

<sup>11</sup> G. William Skinner, "Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas: Comparison of Thailand and Java," in *Southeast Asia: The Politics of National Integration* ed. Jr. John T. McAlister (New York: Random House, 1973), 412.

This assimilation thesis, or as Jennifer W. Cushman calls it, “the Skinnerian assimilation paradigm,”<sup>12</sup> has had a very strong influence on the study of the Chinese in Thailand, as well as on other related fields. A large amount of scholarship, from different fields, seems to follow the Skinnerian paradigm in order to interpret the Chinese experience in Thailand. For example, Boonsanong Punyodyana draws attention to the six channels of social interaction: education, interpersonal association, language, occupation, religion, and family and marriage, which influence the pattern and rate of assimilation.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, although some dissertations examine specific aspects of the overseas Chinese, rather than the assimilation pattern, they all tend to admit the extent of Chinese assimilation in Thailand. For example, Thavi Theerawongseri’s “The legal status of the Chinese in Thailand”<sup>14</sup> demonstrates how Thai nationality laws have increased Chinese integration. Also, Phuwadol Songprasert’s “The Thai Government’s Policies towards the Chinese in Thailand 1932–1957”<sup>15</sup> reviews how the Thai government’s policies towards the Chinese have affected the Chinese in Thailand.

Some studies on the interaction between China(s) and the overseas Chinese support the assimilation thesis. In the early twentieth century, the Qing government, and later the Republic of China, claimed the overseas Chinese to be loyal citizens. During the Cold War, the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan tried to seek

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<sup>12</sup> Cushman, “The Chinese in Thailand,” 222.

<sup>13</sup> Boonsanong Punyodyana, “The Chinese in Thailand: A Synopsis of Research Approaches,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 24(Jan.–Oct.1976): 57-61.

<sup>14</sup> Thavi Theerawongseri, “Sathannaphap Thang Kotmai Khong Chaochin Nai Prathetthai” [the Legal Status of the Chinese in Thailand] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> Phuwadol Songprasert, “Nayobai Khong Rattaban Thimito Chaochin Nai Prathetthai BE 2475–2500” [the Thai Government’s Policies Towards the Chinese in Thailand, 1932–1957] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1976).

support from and expand its influence on the overseas Chinese, at the same time as the interference of the US to prevent “Red China” communism in the countries where the overseas Chinese resided. David A. Wilson notices that the Chinese in Thailand became the focus of political controversy and were beset by a triple pull on political loyalties from Peking, Taiwan, and Bangkok, while Anuson Chinvano’s *Thailand’s Policies Towards China 1949–54* discusses the Thai government’s foreign policy and its influence on the Chinese community in Thailand. Therefore, it can be considered necessary for national security that the Thai government pursued pro-assimilationist policies to confirm both Chinese integration into the Thai society and Chinese loyalty to Thailand.

## **2.2 Revisiting Skinner: studies in the late postwar period**

Despite having a strong influence on the study of the Chinese in Thailand during the early postwar decades, the Skinnerian assimilation paradigm began to be challenged by questions and criticisms for its shortcomings, in various ways. First, despite conducting research at almost the same time as Skinner, Richard J. Coughlin’s *Double Identities: The Chinese in Modern Thailand*,<sup>16</sup> is opposed to Skinner’s assimilation view. Coughlin argues that the Chinese in Thailand seem to possess double identities: they identify themselves as Thai when with the Thai, and identify themselves as Chinese when with fellow Chinese. He finds that perhaps both the Thai and the Chinese are equally attracted by the technology and material culture of the West. In fact, the situation of the Chinese in Thailand will be influenced in the future

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<sup>16</sup> Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 1960).

by events occurring in the world beyond Thailand, mostly by the rise of strong Asian governments (such as Japan, India, and PRC), and the decline of direct Western power.<sup>17</sup>

Another work by Cristina Blanc Szanton also gives a fresh perspective on the assimilation thesis that somewhat differs from Skinner's. Szanton's article, *Thai and Sino-Thai in Small Town Thailand: Changing Patterns of Interethnic Relations*, on the Chinese and their descendants in Sri Racha (a growing industrial town in central Thailand), examines intermarriage, the correlation between self-identification and occupation, and the Sino-Thai middle class. Szanton argues that there was a much higher rate of intra-marriage in Sri Racha, since the Sino-Thai in Sri Racha tended to marry other Sino-Thai. Moreover, both the Thai and the Sino-Thai in Sri Racha tended to define a person's Chineseness in terms of their degree of commercial orientation and business success. Surprisingly, many Sino-Thai with small-scale stalls or shops wanted to send their children to Chinese schools in Taiwan in order to learn to run small businesses more successfully in Thailand. This situation showed that the Chinese, the Sino-Thai, and their children have become important components of the Thai middle class. In fact, the Sino-Thai came to dominate the flourishing "new" middle bourgeoisie in Sri Racha during the 1970's. Therefore, she suggested that the Chinese in central Thailand are conceptualized, in terms of class, as an economic middle class.

Besides the assimilation controversy, a prominent Sino-Thai scholar, Kasian Tejapira, has criticized the Skinnerian paradigm as being the product of racialized

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<sup>17</sup> Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand*, 199.

Thai discourse during the nation-state era.<sup>18</sup> Kasian argues that the Chinese's integration into Siam was not determined by their cultural assimilation into Thai society, but by their political assimilation into the *phrai*, the (serf)-based kingly state. Stimulated by Benedict Anderson's discourse on the imagined community, Kasian strongly emphasizes the role of politics in explaining the political assimilation of the Chinese into the Thai state in order to prevent the Chinese from transforming their economic power into political, and thence state power.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to Kasian, who attributes Chinese assimilation to political assimilation, a Japanese scholar from Kyoto University, Koizumi Junko, argues that the assimilation was a response to a "political" need during the Cold War era and emergent nationalism in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the study of overseas Chinese society in Thailand and Southeast Asia was created as an integral part of the area studies advocated by the US since the 1950's.<sup>20</sup>

A collection of articles on the Chinese of Thailand, *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*,<sup>21</sup> is another publication that aims to question the Skinnerian assimilation paradigm, although some of its arguments are debatable. In the first chapter, Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun's *Rethinking Assimilation*

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<sup>18</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Pigtail: A Pre-History of Chineseness in Siam," *Sojourn: Social Issues in South Asia* 7, no. 1 (1992).

<sup>19</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Imagined Uncommunity: The Lookjin Middle Class and Thai Official Nationalism," in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Junko Koizumi, "Reappraisal of Studies of Overseas Chinese in Thailand in Historical and Geo-Political Contexts," *Center for Southeast Asian Studies Journal* 43, no. 4 (Mar., 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun, eds., *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001).

*and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand*,<sup>22</sup> examines the research literature on assimilation in general, and of the Chinese in Thailand in particular. Critical of the Skinnerian thesis for its one-sidedness, Chan and Tong argue that assimilation is, ultimately, a two-way process, which will leave the Chinese with something Thai and the Thai with something Chinese. Factors are presented to suggest that, for example: (1) Most Chinese in Thailand are not monolingual. In fact, they are bilingual and different languages are used in different social situations; (2) Chinese education persists. Nowadays Chinese has become an important language with which to do business in Thailand; (3) Chinese associations continue to exist; (4) There is a strong class awareness, according to occupation. The Sino-Thai tend to comprise the middle class in Thai society. Moreover, intra-marriage among the Sino-Thai appears to be along class preferences; (5) Chinese traditions are widely practiced, such as ancestor worship, and Chinese New Year celebrations; and (6) There are many Chinese newspapers, and many young people read them.

However, some of the proposed evidence, such as Chinese bilingualism and the growing circulation of Chinese newspapers, is easily debatable by those familiar with the Chinese in Thailand. The article also did not account for the influence of the Thai among the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. For these outstanding shortcomings, Disaphol Chansiri's *The Chinese Émigrés of Thailand in the Twentieth Century*,<sup>23</sup> chiefly counters Chan and Tong's arguments and fully supports the Skinnerian paradigm. Disaphol's work finds that in today's Thailand, the notion of the fourth

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<sup>22</sup> Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun, "Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand," in *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun (Singapore: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Disaphol Chansiri, *The Chinese émigrés of Thailand in the Twentieth Century* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).



generation does not exist, due both to the Chinese's ability and willingness to adapt, and the Thai government's assimilationist policies.<sup>24</sup> However, Disaphol's argument also has various shortcomings. First, most of the evidence comes from secondary sources, while few primary sources were used. Moreover, like Landon's work in the prewar period, Disaphol's work includes neither Chinese-language sources nor publications from within the overseas Chinese community in Thailand. Finally, Disaphol overemphasizes the findings from the interviews that were conducted. For example, he asserts the role of Chinese-language newspapers and publications in helping assimilation, based on interviews with just a few senior Chinese newspapermen and through monographs on the history of the Chinese newspaper in Thailand. This lack of solid evidence casts doubt upon his work.

In summary, studies in the late postwar period, especially those of Cristina Blanc Szanton, give a fresh perspective to the consolidation of the Chinese. The Chinese are not simply viewed as an isolated ethnic minority. Rather, they have become one group among many of the players in modern Thai society. For example, in terms of their class, they are portrayed as being in the middle class and oriented to commerce. This marks a significant shift in the study of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand that attempts to move beyond the Skinnerian assimilation paradigm.

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<sup>24</sup> Chansiri, *The Chinese énigrés of Thailand in the Twentieth Century*, 11–12.

### 2.3 Multiculturalism direction

It has been demonstrated that the study of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand shifted between the early postwar and the late postwar periods. But what does this shift in scholarship mean? In other words, how can we understand this shift, and what is the future direction of the study of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand? According to Ruth McVey, in the early postwar period Southeast Asia was a “new” subject, due to the coincidence of Southeast Asia’s birth, as a concept, and the triumph of American world power. The birth of Southeast Asia, in fact, was the emergence of a new “nation-state” era that became the dominant framework for Southeast Asian Studies. As a result, the study of smaller communities was aimed, in this context, at furthering the cause of national integration and modernization, identifying the problems and opportunities presented by particular cultural variants.<sup>25</sup> In view of growing attention on this “nation-state” framework, the Chinese integration to Thai society became a major concern of national integration. Therefore, most scholars at that time took the assimilationist approach to studying Chinese integration into local society.

However, from the early 1980’s to the present-day, the normalization of relations between Thailand and China, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the emergence of PR China as the world power, and the start of globalization all began to offer a fresh and more relaxed environment than during the nation-state era. This new environment offered the Chinese more choices of survival than just their complete assimilation to the local society. In recent trends, Jennifer W. Cushman proposes that the future

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<sup>25</sup> Ruth McVey, “Change and Continuity of Southeast Asian Studies,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (Mar., 1995): 1–9.

direction of the study of the overseas Chinese in Thailand should be done in light of a multicultural framework. She elaborates:

Multiculturalism is often recognized today as a more feasible goal than assimilation for multiethnic society. The expectation no longer exists that all minorities within a society will become like the dominant group and be absorbed into the host society. Instead, proponents of multiculturalism argue that although legal and constitutional requirements must be conformed to by all to ensure the harmonious ordering of society, minority groups should be given scope to express their ethnicity. That is to say, minority groups should be allowed to follow norms of their own cultures insofar as these do not contravene the host society's legal and constitutional structure.<sup>26</sup>

In this sense, it can be said that scholarship on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand since the 1980's, and especially post-2000, has undergone a significant transformation towards the multiculturalism idea that Cushman suggests. Multiculturalism helps to refresh our understanding of subjects around the Chinese in Thailand that many scholars have previously treated. In so doing, the essays in *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand* show that even though the Chinese are now fully integrated into Thai society, some Chinese elements and practices still remain. For example, Bao Jiemin's "Sino-Thai Ethnic Identity: Married

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<sup>26</sup> Cushman, "The Chinese in Thailand," 249-50.

Daughters of China and Daughters-in-Law of Thailand”<sup>27</sup> examines the Sino-Thai identity that is demonstrated in wedding rituals. Bao argues that the Sino-Thai, as married daughters of China and daughters-in-law of Thailand, are neither Chinese living outside of China, nor overseas Chinese in Thailand. “Preservation of ethnic identity and acculturation”<sup>28</sup> by Supang Chantavanich and Somkiat Sikharaksakul shows that although the YM Hainanese School instills in students Thai culture and knowledge, the school encourages students to be aware of Chinese culture. Pranee Chokkajitsumpun’s “Chinese Literacy in a Bangkok Chinese Family,” a concise version of her well researched PhD dissertation,<sup>29</sup> demonstrates that the practices of Chinese literacy in the family function symbolically in preserving and reinforcing Chinese culture and identity among family members, with or without a Mandarin education.

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<sup>27</sup> Jiemin Bao, “Sino-Thai Ethnic Identity: Married Daughters of China and Daughters-in-Law of Thailand,” in *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Tong Chee Kiong & Chan Kwok Bun (2001). Bao also reaffirms her arguments in her later monograph, see Jiemin Bao, *Marital Acts: Gender, Sexuality, and Identity Among the Chinese Thai Diaspora* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Supang Chantavanich and Somkiat Sikharaksakul, “Preservation of Ethnic Identity and Acculturation,” in *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Tong Chee Kiong & Chan Kwok Bun (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Pranee Chokkajitsumpun, “Chinese Literacy Maintenance and Shift in Bangkok: Individual and Family Cases” (PhD diss. University of Hawaii, 1998).

### 3. Purpose of dissertation

With regard to the development of scholarship on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, it can be concluded that recent literature rejects the thesis of the complete assimilation of the ethnic Chinese after the fourth generation, as proposed by Skinner in the 1950's. In fact, it accounts for the maintenance of Chinese elements among the Chinese in the Thai society. Specifically, most of the Chinese elements examined in recent literature are embedded in the domains of Chinese language, Chinese education, and Chinese traditions, such as their ritual practices. Despite a growing awareness of multiculturalism, most accounts tend to view such domains (of Chinese language, Chinese education, and Chinese traditions) as an expression of Chinese culture that is both traditional and homogeneous. In addition, it may be said that they tend to emphasize the continuity of traditional Chinese culture among the ethnic Chinese, from past to present, rather than noticing a variation in Chinese culture.

In view of this, G. William Skinner notes that the Chinese middle class in Bangkok was interested in the maintenance of commercial wealth and the Chinese way of life. Interestingly, he takes upper- and middle-class Hong Kong society as a model, as it is “thoroughly Chinese and yet oriented to the modern world.”<sup>30</sup> To some extent, the Chinese middle class in Bangkok was greatly influenced by Hong Kong's cultural production, reflecting Chinese cultural expression of the Chinese middle class—thoroughly Chinese and yet still modern. This is also a crucial aspect in examining the development of urban culture in Bangkok's Chinese society, one

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<sup>30</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 308.

important social and cultural phenomenon that Skinner did notice, while other scholars, critical of him, did not.

Based on the limitations already mentioned, i.e., the influence of the Skinnerian assimilation paradigm and the monolithic view of Chinese culture in Thailand, this dissertation attempts to both examine Chinese society in Bangkok, as an urban area that became commercially oriented and culturally diverse during the postwar decades, and also to examine urban culture, which has been neglected by recent scholarship. This dissertation particularly focuses on cinemas, broadcast, and literature. These forms of cultural expression appear in the social sphere—in the streets, on the air, and in text, as important parts of the urban culture of Chinese society in Bangkok.

With the rapid expansion of the cinema business, which screened a great variety of movies (in several languages: English, Chinese, Thai, and Japanese), the advent of a newly established Chinese radio station, and the popular press in its various forms (newspapers, magazines, and fiction), the Chinese in urban Bangkok were exposed to an influx of information, ideas, and images both from inside and outside where they lived. At the same time, these mass technologies enabled a variety of new popular forms of cultural expression to develop.

In view of the growing attention given to multiculturalism, this dissertation will argue that, although the ethnic Chinese in Thailand are fully integrated into Thai society, their Chinese culture remains, and appears to be more complicated than recent scholarship has acknowledged. In fact, unlike this present research, earlier scholarship with a multiculturalist approach has not been historical. This dissertation

argues that the urban culture of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok was not limited to Chinese traditions. In fact, it may be said that the making of urban culture in Chinese society was shaped by political factors, such as the Thai government's policies and the influence of the Cold War. It could be further asserted that the absence of the People's Republic of China was partially compensated for by other Chinese communities, such as those in Hong Kong and Taiwan, whose cultural production helped to fulfill a need of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand left behind by the Cold War. Therefore, the emergence of the urban culture as reflected in cinemas, broadcast, and literature in the Chinese society in Bangkok may in fact be a result of these political factors.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. Structure of dissertation**

This dissertation is structured into four chapters and a conclusion, as described below:

##### **Chapter One: The Background of the Chinese Society in Bangkok**

This chapter provides an historical and cultural background of Chinese society in Bangkok. It begins with an exploration of the Chinese experience in Thailand. Because of external and internal factors there has been a shift in the Chinese

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<sup>31</sup> Recently, scholarship on the Cold War has paid attention to the study of the Cold War in a cultural dimension. That is to say, in order to fully understand the Cold War, it should be explored not just in its political and diplomatic aspects but also as a social phenomenon. See Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat, eds., *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2008); Tony Day and Maya H. T. Liem, eds., *Cultures At War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications 2010); And Zheng Yangwen, Liu Hong, and Michael Szonyi, eds., *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle For Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill University Press, 2010).

experience, which has been divided into two parts within this chapter: Sojourners: the Chinese experience I, and Settlers: the Chinese experience II. The ethnic Chinese in Bangkok discussed in this dissertation will be those in the context of the latter. Moreover, it aims to map the Chinese society in Bangkok in relation to its geographical setting and construction. In contrast to earlier scholarship on the conceptualization of Chinatown, this chapter finds that the Chinese community in Bangkok, such as in Yaowarat, seemed to be open and exposed to foreign (e.g., Thai and Western) cultures. This, to some extent, made Yaowarat a multicultural community, rather than a race-based community.

## **Chapter Two: Chinese Cinemas in Urban Bangkok**

Given the historical background of the Chinese in Thailand detailed in chapter 1, this chapter explores Chinese cinema within the context of Bangkok. It attempts to examine postwar Chinese cinema—a significant aspect of urban culture within Chinese society in Bangkok—with particular focus on Chinese cultural production and consumption during the postwar decades. It first examines what happened to Chinese cinema in Thailand after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and how world political and economic factors affected Chinese cinema in Thailand. Consequently, this chapter identifies that Hong Kong-produced Chinese films were largely released in urban cinemas in Bangkok, especially noncommunist Chinese film productions, primarily represented by the Shaw Brothers. Finally, it argues that the success of Shaw Brothers' Mandarin cinema in Bangkok can be attributed to the expansion of distribution networks, the construction of the “Chinese dream,” and the popularity of *wuxia* novels. Shaw was able to strengthen its distribution and promotion networks. Its productions, especially historic/romantic films conveying the



“Chinese dream,” proved attractive to Chinese audiences. At the same time, Shaw’s *wuxia* films benefited from the popularity of *wuxia* novels in Bangkok during the 1970’s.

### **Chapter Three: A Chinese Radio Called Rediffusion**

This chapter examines a Chinese radio station based in Bangkok by the name of Rediffusion. It is examined because radio was more trusted by the Chinese community and reached a larger audience than any other mass medium. This chapter probes into such issues as what Rediffusion was, how it came to Thailand, and how Rediffusion transformed itself to fit the context of the Chinese society in Thailand. Moreover, it analyzes what kind of role Rediffusion played—culturally, commercially, and politically. In a broader perspective, the chapter discusses the intricate and multifaceted relationships between Thai Rediffusion, the Chinese society in Bangkok, and the Thai government. When all other Chinese broadcasts were banned in order to accelerate the assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society, it can be argued that Thai Rediffusion was politically used by the Thai government to fill the void in Chinese broadcasting. Despite the state’s control, Thai Rediffusion performed a vital role by connecting the Chinese community in Bangkok to the Chinese-speaking world while a relationship with PRC was discouraged, with its broadcasts that incorporated modern Chinese entertainment culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

## **Chapter Four: In the narratives of literature on Chinese society in Bangkok**

This chapter revisits, from the perspective of ethnic Chinese writers, the urban culture in the narratives of literature on the Chinese society in Bangkok, and examines differences and similarities in both Thai- and Chinese-medium works. This chapter demonstrates that postwar Thai- and Chinese-medium literature envisaged different approaches on the issue of assimilation or, as referred to in modern scholarship, “integration.” It is shown that Thai-medium literature by Chinese writers educated in the Thai language, supported full assimilation. This literature was subsequently assigned to all Thai secondary school students as supplementary reading to promote integration ideology, although the notions presented in their narratives may not conform to present-day reality. Chinese-medium/Sino-Thai literature by Chinese writers educated in the Chinese language, on the other hand, depicts the Chinese as being firmly loyal to Thailand, while determined to preserve their Chinese cultural identity. However, Thai-medium literature is in agreement with Chinese-medium literature on the issue of Western influence. As seen in both Thai- and Chinese-medium works, there is the feeling of concern that both the Thai and Chinese cultures were being contaminated by Western (specifically American) influence.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter highlights outstanding findings and arguments, indicated in this dissertation, to draw a conclusion. In addition, it identifies and elaborates upon opportunities for further study.

## 5. Note on Definitions

The terms that will be used throughout this dissertation are defined as follows:

### **The overseas Chinese, the ethnic Chinese, the Chinese and the Sino-Thai**

The term, “overseas Chinese,” refers to all Chinese migrants who live outside mainland China and still maintain their Chinese citizenship. They are also known as *Huaqiao*, which literally means, Chinese sojourners.<sup>32</sup> According to Suryadinata, the term, “overseas Chinese,” implies that the Chinese immigrants are sojourners who may eventually return to mainland China.<sup>33</sup> The “ethnic Chinese,” as well as the “Chinese,” refers to people of Chinese origin or Chinese extraction regardless of their birthplace and citizenship, including the overseas Chinese. The “Sino-Thai” particularly refers to the ethnic Chinese/ Chinese born in Thailand with Thai citizenship. In some scholarship, this group is referred to in Thai vernacular as *lookjin/lukjin*, which means people of Chinese descent.<sup>34</sup>

### **The postwar decades/era and the Cold War decades/era**

The “postwar decades/era” refers to the period between 1950’s and 1970’s, which were marked by the end of the Cold War. The “Cold War” decades/era refers to the period when the world was ideologically divided into two: The US, as the major power of the free world, and the USSR and PRC as the dominant communist powers.

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<sup>32</sup> Wang Gungwu, *China and Overseas Chinese* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991), 6–7.

<sup>33</sup> Suryadinata, ed. *The Ethnic Chinese in Asean States: Bibliographical Essays*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Kasian Tejapira and Bao Jiemin often use this term, but its spelling may vary.

According to Corrine Phuangkasem<sup>35</sup> and M. R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra<sup>36</sup>, the Cold War in Thailand covered the period from 1950's to 1970's when the Thai government allied with the US and pursued a hostile policy towards PRC for more than two decades. In this dissertation, the postwar decades/era and the Cold War decades/era can be interchangeably used, but the Cold War decades/era will be used in the contexts that need to emphasize these political factors.

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<sup>35</sup> Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations 1964–80* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1984).

<sup>36</sup> Sukhumbhand Paribatra, *From Enmity to Alignment: Thailand's Evolving Relations with China* (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1987).

## Chapter One

### The Background of Chinese Society in Bangkok

Thailand, or as it was previously known, Siam<sup>1</sup> is situated in the heart of Southeast Asia. It has an area of about 200,000 square miles<sup>2</sup> and a population that, in 1957, was estimated to be around 22.8 million.<sup>3</sup> Since the late eighteenth century, the capital of Thailand has been Bangkok, which literally means the “City of Angels.” Bangkok is the great city of the Chao Phraya River Plain, known as the heart of the country—economically, politically, and culturally. Interestingly, half of Bangkok’s population is ethnically Chinese, a group which form the largest and, arguably, most important ethnic minority.<sup>4</sup> It can be said that the Chinese community in Bangkok has become the heart and the nucleus, the hub and the crux of Chinese society in Thailand.<sup>5</sup> This chapter, therefore, attempts to trace the historical background of Chinese society in Bangkok from the prewar period to the postwar period. First, it begins with an exploration of the Chinese experience in Thailand, addressing such issues as why and how the overseas Chinese migrated to Thailand and settled down in

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<sup>1</sup> Thailand was known as Siam until June 23, 1939, when it was officially named as, Thailand. It was renamed Siam from 1945 until 11 May 1949. After that it was again renamed Thailand, and has remained so until the present. See David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Bangkok: O.S. Printing House, 1984), 253.

<sup>2</sup> John William Henderson and American University (Washington DC) Foreign Area Studies, *Area Handbook for Thailand*, third revision. ed. (Washington: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., 1971), 7.

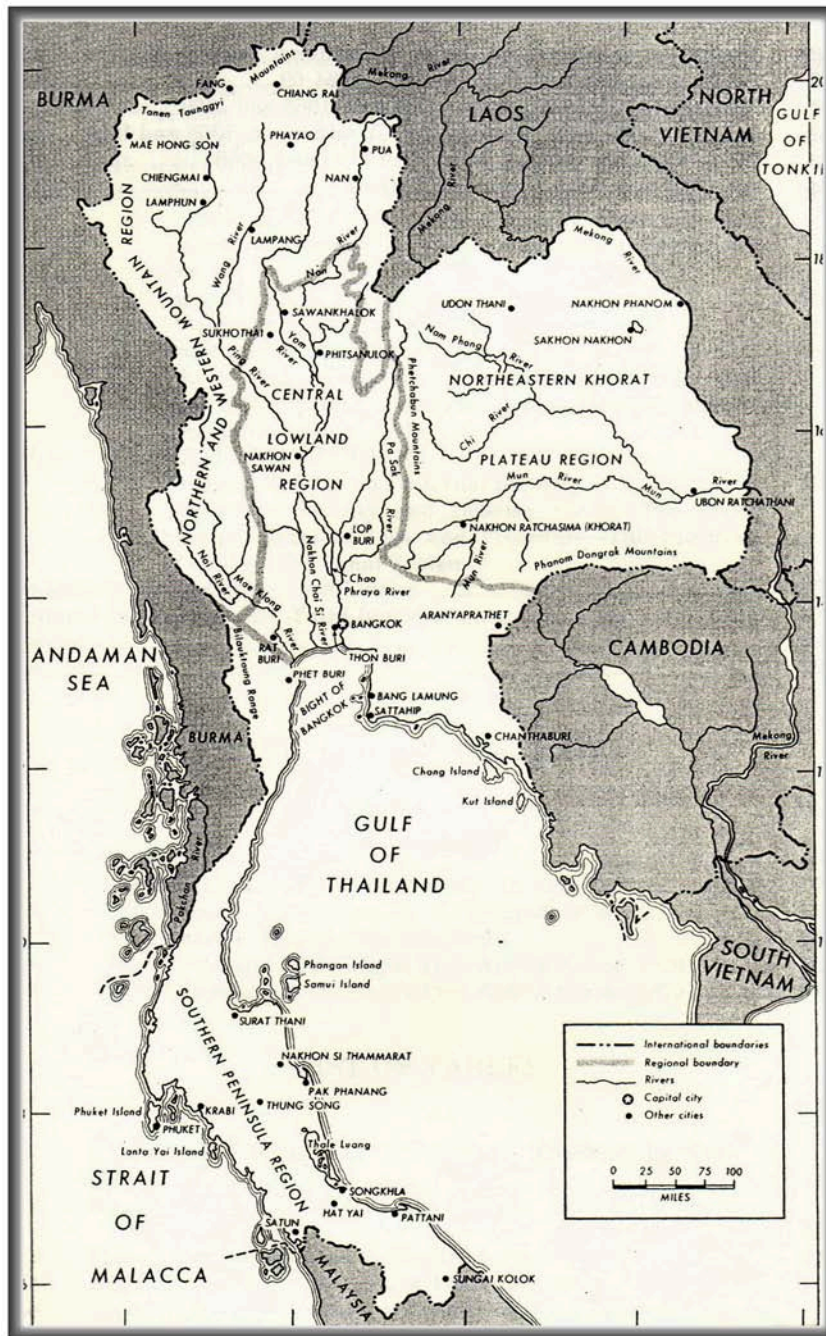
<sup>3</sup> Wendell Blanchard, *Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, Country Survey Series (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1958), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by Cornell University Press, 1958), 17.

Bangkok, and how the Chinese community in Bangkok formed and operated. Furthermore, it attempts to (re)map the Chinese community in Bangkok, in terms of its geographical setting and its construction. The purpose of (re)mapping the Chinese community in Bangkok is to lay the foundation for a case study of a Chinatown that appears to be unlike the concept of Chinatown that earlier scholarship has suggested. That is to say, Yaowarat, as Bangkok's Chinatown, is not a culturally and ethnically isolated community. Rather, it seems to be open and exposed to foreign cultures. Therefore, becoming a multicultural community with interethnic relations.

Figure 1.1 Thailand and Neighboring Countries



Source: Henderson, *Area Handbook for Thailand*, xiv.

## 1. Sojourners: the Chinese experience in the pre-war era

When did the Chinese start migrating to Thailand? There is evidence that the Chinese who reside in Siam can generally be traced back to the period prior to the Tang dynasty (618 AD).<sup>6</sup> In the early fifteenth century, the relationship between the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya and the Ming dynasty of China was believed to become even closer, especially during the era of Ming maritime expeditions carried out by Zheng He (1371–1433). In the records, *Yingyashenglan* (1416), and *Xingchashenglan* (1436), written by Ma Huan and Fei Xin respectively, on their expeditions with Zheng He, Siam's preference for the Chinese is demonstrated as follows: "When [a Siamese woman] comes across our Chinese man, she seems to like him very much, then welcomes him with wine, showing respect to him, happily singing and keeping him stay overnight."<sup>7</sup>

This account, despite seeming exotic in this modern age, appears to show that the Chinese had other reasons than trade for resorting in Siam.<sup>8</sup> In fact, G. William Skinner notes that such idyllic stories told by the expeditionaries after their return to China strongly encouraged trade and emigration to Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> In addition, such preference for the Chinese was also reflected in the residential zoning in the kingdom of Ayutthaya. There were a huge number of foreign residents in the kingdom, including the British, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese, and the Chinese.

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<sup>6</sup> "Zhu Xianluoguo Dashiguan Chengsong Xianluozhi Huaqiao Yiwen Jingqing Beiyong" [Chinese Embassy in Siam Presented One Dispatch of the Overseas Chinese in Siam] in *DNYHQZLHB (1)* (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 2003), 478.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Xie Yourong, *Xianluo Guozhi* [Siam Gazetteer] (Bangkok: Hanhai Tongxunshe, 1949) 275.

<sup>8</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



However, only the Chinese could choose to live and work freely both within and outside the city, while others were not permitted to do so.<sup>10</sup>

After the fall of Ayutthaya, King Taksin of Siam made a new capital at Thonburi,<sup>11</sup> located on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. The Thonburi dynasty (1767–82) coincided with the period of the Qing dynasty of China. At that time, the status of the ethnic Chinese in Siam, especially those from Teochiu-speaking areas of southern China, was said to be greatly improved, and the Teochiu dialect was also known as “Royal Chinese Language.”<sup>12</sup> It is said that King Taksin of the Thonburi Kingdom was half Chinese, since he was the descendant of a Teochiu merchant in Siam.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it can be understood that King Taksin adopted benevolent policies towards the ethnic Chinese, especially the Teochiu. Consequently, these benevolent policies stimulated a large number of Teochiu immigrants to Bangkok, where they were able to enjoy special treatment.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the Chinese also made important contributions to Siam in many ways. According to a report to the Nationalist Government of China in 1948, the first Chinese ambassador to Thailand, Li Tiezheng laid out:

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<sup>10</sup> Phuwadol Songprasert, “Nayobai Khong Ratthaban Thimito Chaochin Nai Prathetthai BE 2475–2500” [the Thai Government’s Policies Towards the Chinese in Thailand, 1932–1957] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1976), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Thonburi, located opposite Bangkok on the east bank of Chao Phraya River, was later included in the metropolitan area of Bangkok in 1972.

<sup>12</sup> Thavi Theerawongseri, “Sathannaphap Thang Kotmai Khong Chaochin Nai Prathetthai” [the Legal Status of the Chinese in Thailand] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1973), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Gao Shiheng, *Nanyong Lun* (Shanghai: Nanyang Jingjisuo Chubanshe, 1948), 37–39. It is said that King Taksin was named Zheng Zhao, in Chinese. His father was an overseas Chinese from Chenghai district, and his mother was a local Thai.

<sup>14</sup> “Zhu Xianluoguo Dashiguan Chengsong Xianluozhi Huaqiao Yiwen Jingqing Beiyong [Chinese Embassy in Siam Presented One Dispatch of the Overseas Chinese in Siam],” 489–90.

So to speak politically, the overseas Chinese in Siam had been unable to directly engage in political regime. However, 180 years earlier Zheng Zhao [King Taksin], a son of Zheng Haifeng—an overseas Chinese, led the army to overcome Burma, and then crowned himself as a king. Until now, descendants of overseas Chinese have served in the Siamese government and army. They receive high ranking positions, and are constantly replaced by their successive generations. History is full of such instances.<sup>15</sup>

After the death of King Taksin, Siam stepped into a new era. King Rama I, the founder of the Chakkri dynasty (1782–present), moved the capital across the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok, on the east bank. Bangkok soon developed into a bustling city that would observe the massive waves of Chinese immigration to Thailand that began from the late nineteenth century.

Wang Gungwu points out that the reasons behind the large number of Chinese migrants could be attributed to “push” factors within China on one hand, and “pull” factors of the outside world, i.e., the host country of the Chinese immigration, on the other hand—economically, politically, and culturally.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Philip A. Kuhn notes that Chinese migrants were indispensable to the resulting commercial system.

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<sup>15</sup> “Zhu Xianluoguo Dashiguan Chengsong Xianluozhi Huaqiao Yiwen Jingqing Beiyong [Chinese Embassy in Siam Presented One Dispatch of the Overseas Chinese in Siam],” 489–90.

<sup>16</sup> Wang Gungwu, “Introduction,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* ed. Lynn Pan (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 12.

When China's internal economic growth was disrupted, migration, whether within the country or overseas, became a final adaptive strategy.<sup>17</sup>

The first great wave of Chinese immigration to Thailand began from the late nineteenth century. Since the mid-nineteenth century, China's defeat in the Opium Wars brought the signing of unequal treaties that had significant consequences on emigration. First of all, Western control of many ports in China, as well as the military supremacy of the imperial powers, provided the "legal framework" for the recruitment of Chinese laborers and the shipping of them overseas.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the wars and the opium trade severely disrupted Chinese society in the southern coastal provinces, such as Guangdong and Fujian. A large number of the Chinese population was displaced from their livelihoods, which led to mass impoverishment and starvation. As Philip Kuhn points out, the "opening of China" by the Western powers "not only produced the mechanisms for recruiting labor but also uprooted that labor socially and economically."<sup>19</sup> Finally, other factors such as natural disasters, famines, population pressure, and rebellions also drove the Chinese to leave their homeland and to seek better opportunities overseas.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, Siam appeared to maintain social stability. The Bowring Treaty of 1855 which was concluded between the British and Siamese governments,

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<sup>17</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration In Modern Times* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Meng Tat Jack Chia, "Sacred Ties across the Seas: The Cult of Guangze Zunwang and Its Religious Network in the Chinese Diaspora, 19th Century–2009" (MA thesis, National University of Singapore, 2009), 24.

<sup>19</sup> Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*, 111.

<sup>20</sup> Yen Ching Hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800–1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1–3. Cited in Chia, "Sacred Ties across the Seas: The Cult of Guangze Zunwang and Its Religious Network in the Chinese Diaspora, 19th Century–2009," 24.

marked a new era for the Thai economy.<sup>21</sup> It initiated the integration of Siam into global free trade and, therefore, brought international trade expansion and the new development in specialization and concentration of exportable commodities.<sup>22</sup> This rapid growth of the economy required a large number of laborers to promote commercial trade and increase the production of Siam's exports. As a result, the Siamese government encouraged Chinese immigration to Siam in order to support economic development.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, after the establishment of shipping companies in both Siam and China during the late nineteenth century, a British firm, the Bangkok Passenger Steamer Company, began to operate direct routes between Bangkok and Shantou, as well as to other ports in southern China. It can be seen that modern steamers, which replaced outdated Chinese junks, became an important means of sea transport, as they made traveling by sea safer and faster. Many Chinese immigrants traveled to Siam by such modern steamers from the port in Shantou. This convenient transportation was another important "pull" factor that facilitated emigration. Therefore, it was understandable that, among China's southern coastal provinces, Chinese immigrants to Siam were mostly from Shantou.<sup>24</sup>

Historically, Chinese migrants had shared compatriot affinities (dialect and hometown) more consistently than they had shared national affinities as Chinese.<sup>25</sup> This kind of mentality was helpful in the formation of Chinese communities during

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<sup>21</sup> Akira Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855–1985* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1989), 16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 21–25. The three largest export industries were rice, teak, and tin.

<sup>23</sup> NA OP(2)sor-ror.0201.76/1

<sup>24</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 43–44.

<sup>25</sup> Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*, 29.

the late nineteenth century, as language or, more specifically, dialect was an important basis on which to distinguish the Chinese, especially those who had gone overseas. Many Chinese sojourners were unable to communicate in local languages, and therefore, they were forced to rely on those from their home districts who had migrated before them. The persistence of this reliance on those sharing a dialect finally formed distinct groups of Chinese based along dialect lines, or, what G. William Skinner calls, speech group.

According to Skinner, there were five significant speech groups in Thailand: the Teochiu, the Cantonese, the Hokkien, the Hakka, and the Hainanese.<sup>26</sup> It is certain that the Teochiu was the largest Chinese population in Thailand, although there is uncertainty in the ranking of the other speech groups according to size. Gao Shiheng, the author of *Nanyang Lun* (On Nanyang), published by China's Nanyang Institute of Economics in 1948, noted that the Hokkien took second place, the Hainanese took third, the Cantonese took fourth, and the Hakka took fifth,<sup>27</sup> while Skinner's survey in 1950 was slightly different. According to him, the Hakka formed the second largest speech group, while the Hokkien formed the fifth.<sup>28</sup>

Speech group and regional associations can legitimately demonstrate that Chinese society was complete, as the groups were founded to meet many needs of their members.<sup>29</sup> For example, they protected the special occupational interests of members; they helped new immigrants from a particular home district or emigrant area to find employment and become established; they built and maintained temples

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<sup>26</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 212.

<sup>27</sup> Gao Shiheng, *Nanyong Lun*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 212.

<sup>29</sup> G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, 167.

with gods peculiar to an individual home district, and built cemeteries for the use of those who could not afford shipment of their deceased to China for burial; they provided the locale and occasions for social gatherings of those from the same district or emigrant area, and a number of other activities.

Despite the great number of Chinese immigrants in Thailand, it is, however, difficult to determine the exact number of ethnic Chinese in Thailand. This is because the definition of Chinese is not clearly documented. Many scholars who studied the Chinese in Thailand until 1917 offered some statistics, but the results varied widely.<sup>30</sup> In fact, in addition to Chinese immigrants, there were also many Thailand-born Chinese that were deemed as being of undefined origin. In 1947, the Nationalist Government of China took the official Chinese census in each area of Southeast Asia, including Bangkok. The consulate in Bangkok reported that the total population of the overseas Chinese in Bangkok was 527,062, of whom 335,524 were men, and 188,538 were women.<sup>31</sup>

However, the report conceded that this number was likely to be incorrect because of the unclear definition of the Chinese according Thai law. According to the Thai Nationality Act of 1913, all ethnic Chinese born in Thailand were regarded as Thai, unless they were registered by their parents with the legations and embassies of those nations with whom Thailand had treaty relations.<sup>32</sup> However, after the last tribute to China in 1854, Thailand and China had no official relations until they signed the Sino-Siamese amity treaty in 1946, when both countries finally

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<sup>30</sup> The estimates of the Chinese population were sharply different, see G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 68–69.

<sup>31</sup> “Zhu Xianluoguo Dashiguan Chengsong Xianluozhi Huaqiao Yiwen Jingqing Beiyong [Chinese Embassy in Siam Presented One Dispatch of the Overseas Chinese in Siam],” 497.

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Perry Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1973), 22.

reestablished official diplomatic relations.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the population of Thailand-born Chinese was excluded from the census. Moreover, if Thailand-born Chinese were recognized as Chinese citizens, it would be difficult for the Thai government to govern them legitimately. It was estimated that, at that time, the population of the overseas Chinese in Thailand, including the Chinese with local or dual nationality, was above 3.4 million.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Settlers: the Chinese experience in the postwar era

In the Chinese language, the overseas Chinese are known as *Huaqiao*. To some extent, they are regarded as sojourners, since *Huaqiao* literally means the “Chinese living abroad.” Their descendants may not be called the overseas Chinese, because some may adopt local citizenship or have dual nationality. Yet, the term “overseas Chinese” presumably implies that they wish to return home some day when they are ready. However, after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (the PRC) in 1949, it soon became clear that there would be very little migration between China and Thailand.<sup>35</sup> This change has brought a new perception of the Chinese on living abroad. Jennifer W. Cushman elaborates:

The Chinese were no longer regarded simply as sojourners whose stay in their adopted homeland was predicated upon the length of

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<sup>33</sup> Zhongguo Di'er Lishi Dang'anguan [The Second Historical Archives of China], *Zhonghua Minguoshi Dang'an Ziliao Huibian* [Comprehensive Collection of Archival Papers on History of Republic of China], vol. 5 (Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1994), 773–74.

<sup>34</sup> “Zhu Xianluoguo Dashiguan Chengsong Xianluozhi Huaqiao Yiwen Jingqing Beiyong [Chinese Embassy in Siam Presented One Dispatch of the Overseas Chinese in Siam],” p. 497.

<sup>35</sup> The annual quota for foreign immigrants including those from the PRC was decreased to 200 persons since 1949. In 1953, the Thai Immigration Act further stated that any Chinese person with Chinese nationality who left the country would not be allowed to return. NA OP sor.ror. (2)0201.76/1

time required to make their fortunes. Instead, their status as permanent settlers was recognized and the question of how they were to be integrated into the political, social and cultural life of their Southeast Asian homes took on a new urgency.<sup>36</sup>

According to Cushman, the ethnic Chinese, especially the overseas Chinese, were forced to adapt to a new political, social, and cultural life. Their loyalty to their host countries was particularly questioned after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. This had a huge impact on Southeast Asian countries, as the communist influence among the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia had been growing since the early postwar decades. Edwin F. Stanton, an American diplomat haunted by China's defeat at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), believed that the most powerful weapon with which communism could spread its ideology was the overseas Chinese who resided in their host countries, including Thailand.<sup>37</sup> The United States, therefore, paid special attention to the Southeast Asian region as it was a target of communist expansion, and then enthusiastically sponsored the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization or SEATO in 1954. SEATO was, thus, created to oppose communist influence in Southeast Asia, including within Thailand, which became one of SEATO's founding members.

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<sup>36</sup> Jennifer W. Cushman, "The Chinese in Thailand," in *The Ethnic Chinese in the Asean States: Bibliographical Essays*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 222.

<sup>37</sup> Edwin F. Stanton, "The Communist Pressure in Thailand," *Rattaphirak*, 1 (Jan. 1961): 5. Stanton was a former US ambassador to Thailand in 1947. He was also the author of the book entitled *Brief Authority*. Embedded in his experience in China, Stanton seriously addressed the importance of anti-communism in Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia. See Edwin F. Stanton, *Brief Authority: Excursions of a Common Man in an Uncommon World* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1957).



An ally of the US, the Thai government expressed concern that communist influence had also developed in Thailand. P. Phibunsongkhram, or Phibun, the prime minister of Thailand at that time (April 1948–September 1967), initiated an anti-Chinese campaign which was given added impetus by the prominence of Chinese members in the minuscule Communist Party of Thailand, and by the growing depiction of the overseas Chinese as a possible fifth column of subversion on behalf of communist China.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the Thai police, under the direction of Police Director-General Phao Siyanon, launched an aggressive anti-Communist campaign in November 1952, which profoundly affected the Chinese community. An anti-Communist bill<sup>39</sup> was submitted to the National Assembly by General Phao. Consequently, many ethnic Chinese leaders and newspapermen were arrested, while others fled to China. The total number of enrollments to Chinese schools in Thailand decreased considerably, as did the number of schools themselves, as a growing number of Chinese parents sent their children to Thai schools. It was estimated that more than 150 Chinese associations ceased to function.<sup>40</sup> The *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the CCP, condemned the Thai government for these outrageous attacks on Chinese residents in Thailand.<sup>41</sup>

Benedict Anderson, an authoritative scholar of Thai politics, has noted that what made the Thai government different in the postwar decades, as opposed to the decades before the war, in one fundamental respect, was that the Thai government

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<sup>38</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 267.

<sup>39</sup> Also known as the Un-Thai Activities Act of 1952.

<sup>40</sup> Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, 285–88.

<sup>41</sup> “*People's Daily* commentary on the persecution of Chinese residents in Thailand, 19 January 1953” in R. K. Jain, ed. *China and Thailand, 1949–1983* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1984), 18.

relied heavily on the support of an outside power, “the United States.”<sup>42</sup> In view of this, Daniel Fineman further elaborates that Thailand was a small, weak, and underdeveloped country, which was susceptible to outside pressure during the late 1940’s and 1950’s. The United States knew this and therefore pushed the Thai government to set domestic policy in line with its own interests. This interdependence was increasingly apparent when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat established the military absolutist regime in Thailand in 1958, after overthrowing the Phibun government in 1957. Fineman argues that such a military regime, lacking a broad political base, drastically needed support from any source possible.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, both parties—the Thai military regime and the US government—had to develop a “special relationship,” Fineman concludes:

Because of the relative lack of anti-Western sentiments in Thailand, they sought such political support from outside power. When working in unison, the military leadership looked to foreign help to strengthen the military institutionally; individually, military leaders sought outside aid for their personal interests. Thus at once confronting the inevitability of foreign intervention in internal affairs while also seeking it, Thais of the late 1940’s and 1950’s treated domestic politics and foreign policy not as separate, but as highly interdependent.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Benedict R. O’G Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, eds., *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the Modern Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1985), 17–18.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 4–5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

This “special relationship,” as Fineman suggests, reached its peak when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat established the absolutist regime in 1958. The years of his dictatorship, as well as that of his associates and successors, Thanom Kittikhachorn and Praphat Charusathian, can justifiably be called the “American Era” in modern Thai history.<sup>45</sup> There is ample evidence that Thailand, under the absolutist military regimes, developed more intimate relationships with the United States than under the Phibun government.<sup>46</sup> For instance, this cooperation with the US to fight against communism can be seen in the promulgation of the declaration of Martial Law in October 1959, by Sarit Thanarat. The Martial Law declaration of 1959 included a ban on all possible political activities and the demolition of all the opponents of his government, communist and apolitical critics alike.<sup>47</sup> A number of other anti-communist policies were also intensified by the Thai military government, resulting in the arrest of a large number of overseas Chinese, the searching of Chinese stores and schools, and the closing down of Chinese newspaper offices. In addition to the persecution of the Chinese in Thailand, the Thai military government actively supported the US troops stationed in Thailand’s participation in the Vietnam War. Newspapers from the PRC, such as the *People’s Daily* and *Peking Review*, warned

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson and Mendiones, eds., *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the Modern Era*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, there was an informal relationship between Thailand and the PRC, as Phibun later dropped his hostile attitude towards to the PRC. It became evident that in 1955 Phibun sent a secret group of official delegates to visit the PRC. One interesting story after the visit to the PRC was that Phibun sent his close friend (Sang Phathanothai)’s two children to China—living as adopted children of Zhou Enlai—to maintain this secret relationship. One of these children, namely, Sirin Phathanothai wrote her childhood memoir about hostage life in China in a book titled *The Dragon’s Pearl*. See Karuna Kusarasai, *Khanathut Taidin Su Pakking* [Underground Envoys to Peking] (Bangkok: Sukkhaphapchai 1992). And Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon’s Pearl* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 280.

that the US was making increased use of Thailand as a tool for intervention in Southeast Asia, and that it would push Thailand into difficult situation sooner or later.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, the PRC's policies towards the overseas Chinese began to change in the late 1950's. During the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, in 1955, the PRC representative, Zhou Enlai, made an historic declaration regarding the policies that had a huge impact on the overseas Chinese. He stated that the PRC government was ready to solve the problem of the dual nationality of overseas Chinese—something not addressed by the old China.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the PRC government and the Indonesian government concluded a treaty on the issue of Chinese nationality, with an attempt to encourage the ethnic Chinese who possessed dual nationality to choose only one nationality, either Chinese or their host country's. Also, the PRC government stated that this declaration would be applied to other countries that faced the same problem. This revolutionary decision sprouted in the Chinese a sense of belonging (*guishugan*), a desire to root themselves in the host country (*luodi shenggen*), which was to be perceived as an eventual home.<sup>50</sup>

At the height of the Cold War, under the repressive political environment, the ethnic Chinese in Thailand were inevitably forced to choose to be either Thai or

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<sup>48</sup> "Thailand on a dangerous road," article by Ko Hsien-wei in *People's Daily*, 5 April 1962 and "Base for special warfare in Southeast Asia: US-Thai military collaboration," article by Kung Ping in *Peking Review*, 13 April 1962" in Jain, ed. *China and Thailand, 1949-1983*, 71–73.

<sup>49</sup> "Supplementary speech by Chou En-lai at the Bandung conference" in *ibid.*, 31–32.

<sup>50</sup> *Luodi shenggen* means "settle down" or "sink roots" in a foreign land and to accommodate to the host society. This term is used in Wang Ling-Chi's essay, "Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States," to identify one of the different types of Chinese identity, in terms of the varying orientations of overseas Chinese to China. See Chan Kwok-Bun, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 125.

Chinese. At the same time, the Thai government's many policies were aimed at encouraging the ethnic Chinese in Thailand to take Thai citizenship.<sup>51</sup> This brought about a shift for the ethnic Chinese in their perception of living in Thailand. Local citizens of Chinese descent would no longer be called overseas Chinese, or *Huaqiao*, as they were no longer sojourners.<sup>52</sup> Rather, they became "settlers" who had rooted themselves in Thai society. After the Thai and Chinese rapprochement in 1975, many ethnic Chinese acquired Thai citizenship,<sup>53</sup> and should have therefore politically been called "Thai." But did this mean in practice that the Thais of Chinese descent became culturally Thai? The answer to this question is arguable, as it depends on the varying degrees of Chineseness to which the Chinese were exposed. The exposure to Chineseness involved experiences of Chinese cultural activity and expression made by cultural production in their everyday lives. Such a complicated identity will be further discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

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<sup>51</sup> For more discussion on policies, see Songprasert, "Nayobai Khong Rattaban Thimito Chaochin Nai Prathetthai BE 2475–2500" [the Thai Government's Policies Towards the Chinese in Thailand, 1932–1957].

<sup>52</sup> Leo Suryadinata, ed. *The Ethnic Chinese in Asean States: Bibliographical Essays* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 2.

<sup>53</sup> "Guihua Taiji Wenti, Qiaobao Pubian Guanxin" [Problem Obtaining Thai Citizenship Concerned Overseas Chinese], *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, July 7, 1975.

### 3. (Re) Mapping the Chinese community in Bangkok

#### 3.1 The urbanization of Bangkok and its Chinese community

Since the late eighteenth century, Bangkok has been the political, economic and cultural capital of Thailand that has attracted massive waves of Chinese immigration, although it is possible that a Chinese settlement in Bangkok can be traced back as early as the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>54</sup> Bangkok's success can be attributed to the fact that it was located on the banks of Chao Phraya River. At the time, rivers were important means of transportation that facilitated commercial development.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, communities on the banks of rivers became the center of trade and commerce. This can be seen during King Taksin's reign, when a larger Chinese settlement and market serving the capital grew on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, centered at a pier called Thatian.<sup>56</sup>

When the royal palace was built on the east bank of Chao Phraya River during the reign of Rama I, in 1782, the Chinese who originally resided at the Thatian pier and nearby were forced to move outside the city wall to a new settlement. They were relocated to a new area further south, namely, Sampheng (*Sanpin* in Chinese),<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 21.

<sup>55</sup> The Chao Phraya River was an important river in Bangkok, as it was main traffic channel. Goods were carried along the Chao Phraya River and its canal to Bangkok. People in Bangkok usually travelled along canals to reach their destination. Westerners, who were impressed by this phenomenon had named Bangkok "Venice of the East".

<sup>56</sup> Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> For more discussion on the early development of Sampheng, see Edward Van Roy, "Sampheng: From Ethnic Isolation to National Integration," *Sojourn: Social Issues in South Asia* 23, no. 1 (2008). See also Sawitree Dabhasuta, "Kwamsamphan Rawang Chumchon Chaothai Chin Lae Tawantok Nai Krungthep, BE 2398–2453" [The Relations Between Thai, Chinese and Western Communities in Bangkok, 1855–1910] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1984).

which originally stretched between the Wat Sampluem Canal and the Wat Sampheng Canal.<sup>58</sup> After the arrival of the Chinese from the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, Sampheng became a booming and bustling area. It can be said that Sampheng was an important commercial center, as most of Chinese merchants who managed to run businesses in Sampheng became men of means, operating gold shops, silk shops, and smith shops.<sup>59</sup>

The commercial development in Sampheng also gave rise to the emergence of a variety of entertainment businesses, including prostitution and gambling.<sup>60</sup> Sampheng had long been infamous for prostitution. The prostitutes found in Sampheng were not only the Chinese, but also the Thai who disguised themselves as Chinese. Sunthorn Phu, a distinguished poet of the Chakkri era, depicted both the scenery of Sampheng located along Chao Phraya River and the Sampheng women in his travelogue poem: “When arriving in Sampheng, [I] see the Chinese pavilions along the riverside as well as the boathouses juxtaposed side by side. In the small streets and small alleys, [I] also see prostitutes keep singing happily overnight. This made me unable to fall asleep.”<sup>61</sup> In addition to prostitution, another popular entertainment was gambling, especially among Chinese merchants. Many Chinese

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<sup>58</sup> Note that nowadays Wat Sampluem is known as Chrakkawat Rachawat Temple and Wat Sampheng is known as Pathunkhongkha Temple.

<sup>59</sup> Ya Dang, “Wushi Nian Mangu Hua Cangsang” [Fifty Year Vicissitudes of Bangkok ], *Sin Sian Yit Pao* November 30, 1972.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Sunthorn Phu, “Nirat Mueangklaeng” [Nirat Literature to Klaeng city], accessed November 26, 2011, <http://th.wikisource.org/wiki/%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A8%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%B7%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%87%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%87>.

gathered in stores after they had closed at night to engage in such activities as playing cards. This was an everyday life pleasure and form of entertainment.<sup>62</sup>

When the massive waves of southern Chinese immigrants arrived in Thailand, Sampheng attracted a large number of these migrants as a place in which to settle down, as it was close to the pier of Ratchawong—the only pier in Bangkok from which vessels from overseas travelled at that time. Because of an influx of Chinese migrants, the population in Sampheng expanded at an accelerated pace over the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> The flourishing of Sampheng's economy led the Chinese settlement in Sampheng to become overcrowded and it began to need expansion to alleviate population pressure. In the reign of King Rama IV, Sampheng was expanded into its surrounding areas. Meanwhile, several new roads such as Chareonkrung, Bamrungmeung, Fuengnakhon, Silom, and Rama IV, were also built to facilitate Bangkok's urbanization. Many new communities were formed along the newly constructed roads and the people who moved to reside in these new communities were mostly Chinese.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, in the reign of King Rama V (1851–68), more new roads were constructed in many areas, including Sampheng. Some of these newly built roads included Yaowarat, Ratchawong, Anuwong, and Songwat roads. These new roads, again, facilitated the rapid expansion of the Chinese settlement in Sampheng to nearby new communities that the new roads passed. The enlargement of the Chinese

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<sup>62</sup> Ya Dang, “Wushi Nian Mangu Hua Cangsang” [Fifty Year Vicissitudes of Bangkok ].

<sup>63</sup> Van Roy, “Sampheng: From Ethnic Isolation to National Integration,” 10.

<sup>64</sup> Dabbhasuta, “Kwamsamphan Rawang Chumchon Chaothai Chin Lae Tawantok Nai Krungthep, BE 2398–2453” [the Relations between Thai, Chinese and Western Communities in Bangkok, 1855–1910], 38-39.



community greatly stimulated the urbanization of Bangkok, as the commercial center that originally developed in Sampheng had come to expand to other areas nearby, like Yaowarat.<sup>65</sup> Thus, it manifested that Yaowarat became one of the most flourishing Chinese communities in Bangkok; its outstanding status soon overshadowing Sampheng. Interestingly, the Chinese community in Yaowarat, originally a commercial market for the wholesale and retail business, aspired to be the center of new, burgeoning businesses during the postwar decades, especially in the entertainment industry and particularly in opera and cinema, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Therefore, when dealing with the urbanization of Bangkok, urban studies show that it is impossible to avoid discussing the role of the Chinese, who constituted a sizable minority and were economically powerful, especially in the urban areas in which they tended to be concentrated.<sup>66</sup> It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that the process of urbanization has been influenced and shaped by the ethnic Chinese, who were a huge minority.<sup>67</sup> From the process of urbanization, it can be demonstrated that the large proportion of ethnic Chinese residing in Bangkok reflected the economic nature of the city, as Bangkok was the preeminent manufacturing, financial, and

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<sup>65</sup> Ya Dang, "Wushi Nian Mangu Hua Cangsang" [Fifty Year Vicissitudes of Bangkok ].

<sup>66</sup> Pratyva Vesarach, "Urbanization in Thailand: A Bibliographical Essay," in *Urbanization in Thailand*, ed. Dr. M. Ladd Thomas (Dekalb: Center for governmental studies, Northern Illinois University, 1974), 67.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

service center of this resource-based economy and, more so than the Thai, the Chinese had traditionally specialized in these activities.<sup>68</sup>

### **3.2 Encountering Bangkok's Chinatown: inter-ethnic, cross-cultural experience**

In the present, postwar era, Bangkok's size is around 1,568.74 square kilometers. It is an urban city with a population of approximately 5.3 million and half of the population is Chinese.<sup>69</sup> In fact, it is estimated that at least one-fifth of all the Chinese in Thailand lived within the limits of Bangkok's two municipalities.<sup>70</sup> This means that a very large number of Chinese resided and earned a living in Bangkok and it can justifiably be said that the Chinese community in Bangkok was the heart and the nucleus of Chinese society in Thailand.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the center of Chinese life in Thailand was the Chinese community in Bangkok.<sup>72</sup> Although it is debatable whether the Chinese community in Bangkok is static (confined to Yaowarat) or dynamic (expansively scattered throughout Bangkok, beyond

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<sup>68</sup> Tawanchai N. Xoomsai, *Bangkok, Thailand: The Quality of Life and Environment in a Primate City* (Toronto: Joint Centre on Modern East Asia, university of Toronto-York University, 1987), 8.

<sup>69</sup> Blanchard, *Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 1960), 32.

Yaowarat's spatial boundaries),<sup>73</sup> it is certainly undeniable that the Chinese community in Yaowarat has long been the center of Chinese society in Bangkok.

For clarity of discussion, it is necessary to understand both the location and scope of Yaowarat. Generally speaking, the Chinese community in Yaowarat has two definitions: a narrow definition and a broad definition (See Figure 1.3). By the narrow definition, as the name implies, the Chinese community in Yaowarat refers the community located on Yaowarat Road only. Broadly defined, the Chinese community in Yaowarat is thought of as not only being located on Yaowarat Road, but also on other main roads nearby, such as Chareonkrung, Anuwong, Ratchawong, and Songwat, and also on small streets that link to main roads such as Pleangnam, Mangkon, and Phatsai. It also covers Sampheng, the former Chinese settlement. In this dissertation, the Chinese community in Yaowarat, or just “Yaowarat,” is based on the broad definition, which can also be called “Greater Yaowarat,” or Bangkok’s “Chinatown.”

Some literature discussed in the introduction suggests that Yaowarat has long been known as one of the oldest Chinese areas in Bangkok. It is Bangkok’s most typical Chinese community, and is sometimes referred to as “Chinatown.”<sup>74</sup> Yaowarat, today is still widely regarded as the Chinatown of Bangkok. But one may wonder what Chinatown actually means? A distinguished scholar on the study of

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<sup>73</sup> See Sittithee Eaksittipong, “Chiwit Samanchonchin Nai Krungthep Rawang 2500–2517” [Life of Ordinary Chinese in Bangkok During 1957–1964] (MA thesis, Chiangmai University, 2010), chapter 2. This kind of debate also happens in other Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. In Singapore, it may be argued that the Chinese community simply refers to the present Chinatown (or known as *Niucheshui*) or largely covers residential zones around the island that the Chinese have lived, such as Geylang. See Zhao Wanyi, “Yalong Caishi Zhenzhengde Tangrenjie?” [Geylang Is a Real Chinatown?], *Lianhe Zaobao* September 21, 2009

<sup>74</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, trans. Susan Kepner (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 261.

overseas Chinese, Zhou Nanjing, an overseas Chinese born in Indonesia during the prewar era, considers that Chinatowns should all have some particular characteristics in common. Examining the historical development of Chinatowns—the creation of Chinatowns and their characteristics—from a macro perspective, Zhou has identified that Chinatowns all over the world are different in particular details, e.g., the Chinese in Thailand are predominantly Teochiu, while those in the Philippines are predominantly Hokkien. However, there were several common characteristics in Chinatowns all over the world. That is to say:

The overseas Chinese usually bring their traditional Chinese culture to Chinatowns around the world in an intact manner. This can be seen from architecture styles, shop sign languages, lifestyles, customs and habits that are all Chinese. . . . It can be said that Chinatown is a closed, isolated and exclusive society. It is “a small community in a larger society,” where residents, unless having administrative and commercial needs, rarely make contact with the outside world, let alone get involved with local political struggles. In fact, the closedness, isolation, and exclusiveness of Chinatown did not derive from the overseas Chinese’s own wish, but from the legacy of Western colonialism’s “Divide and Rule” policy, racist discrimination or anti-Chinese policy.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Zhou Nanjing, “Luelun Tangrenjie De Lishi Yanbian” [On the Historical Changes of Chinatown], in *Fengyu Tongzhou: Dongnanya Yu Huaren Wenti* [In the Same Storm-Tossed Boats: Southeast Asia and Chinese Problem] (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 1995), 389.

The conceptualization of Chinatowns by Zhou Nanjing may be useful to understand the Chinese community in general. However, it becomes very problematic to apply this concept to a case study of Yaowarat, the Chinatown of Bangkok. In studying Yaowarat—its setting and surroundings—there seems to be a departure from the concept of Chinatown given by Zhou Nanjing. In fact, it can be further argued that Yaowarat, as Bangkok’s Chinatown, is not a culturally and ethnically isolated community. Rather, this chapter finds that Yaowarat seems to be open and exposed to foreign cultures. It is a multicultural community that involves interethnic relations.

Zhou Nanjing’s perception of Chinatown as being closed, isolated, and exclusive seems to be established on the grounds of concepts reflecting Western colonialism, i.e., the “plural society” of J. S. Furnivall.<sup>76</sup> According to his experience in Southeast Asia, Furnivall believed that the particular characteristics of a tropical, colonial country like Burma, which significantly differed from its Western suzerain, is that the latter’s society consists of culturally homogenous people, while the former society consists of people of different races, languages, and cultures. In a colonial country, people live separately in their own communities based on their race. Therefore, Furnivall succinctly concluded: “They mix but do not combine, they live side by side but separately.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> J. S. Furnivall was a British official who was sent to work in Burma for twenty years and conduct fieldwork research throughout Southeast Asia. He published a book to shed light on the concept of the “plural society.” See J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Kasian Tejapira, *Lae Lod Lai Mangkon: Ruam Khokhian Waduay Khampenchin Nai Siam* [Looking Through the Dragon Design: Selected Writings on Chineseness in Siam] (Bangkok: Kopfai, 1994), 45. Much of this analysis is based on Kasian’s thought-provoking discussion on the concepts of plural society and Thai official nationalism.

A prominent Sino-Thai political scientist, Kasian Tejapira, notices the irony in the coincidence that Western colonialism's concept of a "plural society" is established on the same ground as the concept of Thailand's "official nationalism," although Thailand is an independent country.<sup>78</sup> According to Kasian's research on "Thai official nationalism," the Thai elites believed that Thailand consisted of people of different races. This made Thailand lack unity, as each race would live in its own separate community: for example in the Thai community, Chinese community, Indian community, and Laotian community. It is not possible that there could be any combination of different races or communities.<sup>79</sup> The origin of these two concepts was established on the same grounds, but the conclusion of the two concepts seems to be significantly different. Whereas Furnivall inferred from the "plural society" assumption that a colonial country like Burma was incapable of nationalism, Thai elites considered that nationalism could arise only by letting the Thai race dominate Thailand both politically and culturally, so as to hold each community together. Thus, this resulted in a "Thai official nationalism" that was also a race-based nationalism.<sup>80</sup>

Whether the concept of the "plural society" that J. S. Furnivall inferred from colonial Burma, or the concept of the "Thai official nationalism" that Kasian Tejapira noticed from the Thai elites, both perceive a community of a particular race as an isolated, standalone unit. This perception seems to be similar to Zhou Nanjing's view

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<sup>78</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Chatniyom Siam Naiyuk Lokaphiwat" [Siamese Nationalism in the Age of Globalization], in *Lae Lod Lai Mangkon: Ruam Khokhian Waduay Khampenchin Nai Siam* [Looking Through the Dragon Design: Selected Writings on Chineseness in Siam] (Bangkok: Kopfai, 1994), 59–60.

<sup>79</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Imagined Uncommunity: The Lookjin Middle Class and Thai Official Nationalism," in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 77–78.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 78.

on Chinese community. Conceptualizing this notion, it is demonstrated that an ethnic community such as Chinatown, which represents the Chinese community, is closed, isolated, exclusive, and limited to one race. Perhaps, this kind of ethnic community might have in fact existed somewhere at some time. However, this chapter argues that this notion, whether based on the concepts of “plural society” and “Thai official nationalism,” or the conceptualization of Chinatown by Zhou Nanjing (all of which shared the same basis), fails to apply to Yaowarat, Bangkok’s Chinatown. According to empirical data, it can be further argued that Yaowarat is not a closed, isolated, and exclusive, small community, in which only the ethnic Chinese are allowed to settle. Instead, it is sizable and open to the outside world, for economic exchange as well as social and cultural interaction. This empirical data can be seen from the collective memory of those people who lived in Yaowarat during the postwar decades.

One example of this is the childhood memoir of political scientist, Kasian Tejepira, who noted the multifaceted interethnic relations within Bangkok’s Chinatown. As a Sino-Thai boy growing up in Yaowarat during the 1950’s and 1960’s, Kasian keenly observed that there was an American-named movie theatre, called Texas, located in the middle of Chinatown on a small alley in-between Yaowarat Road and Chareonkrung Road. This cinema usually screened Indian films dubbed in the Thai language with Chinese subtitles. More interestingly, most of Texas’ moviegoers were Chinese and Indian. Therefore, Kasian Tejepira confirms that the existence of Texas Cinema implies that both the concept of the “plural

society” and the “Thai official nationalism” were inadequate for understanding the Chinese community in Bangkok.<sup>81</sup>

The exposure of the Chinese to Indian movies in the center of Chinatown, together with Indians, was not a rare occurrence. Not only Kasian Tejapira, but also some Chinese novelists, observed the communality of interethnic relations and therefore put it into their writing. When looking at Yaowarat from a broader perspective (see Figure 1.2), it can be noticed that Greater Yaowarat (including Yaowarat and Sampheng) is situated next to Phahurat—an area in which Indians, another important Bangkok ethnic minority, have historically congregated.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the locations of Sampheng and Phahurat are so close that there is an overlap between the two areas. This overlapped intersection becomes an inter-community venue for economic activities as well as social and cultural interactions. The interethnic, cross-cultural experience is usual and natural. Many Chinese writers take this experience for granted in their works, as can be seen in a Thai novel, *Letters from Thailand*, by Botan, which portrays a Chinese family living in Yaowarat who occasionally go to Phahurat to buy fabrics:

At last we arrived at Phahurat . . . Most of Phahurat’s cloth merchants are Indians in turbans, and though it is said that if a shopkeeper in Bangkok isn’t Chinese he must be an Indian, that isn’t so, for the Indian merchants are only interested in textiles and sewing supplies.

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<sup>81</sup> Tejapira, “Sangkhomchin Miruamai Nai Mueangthai?” [Did Chinese Society Exist in Thailand?], 45–46.

<sup>82</sup> Phahurat is sometimes recognized as the “Little India” of Bangkok.



Of course, not all the Indians in Bangkok are prosperous.<sup>83</sup> Some Indians raise cows on the outskirts of the city and peddle milk on the streets, while some work nights as watchmen at warehouses and stores. It has long been customary in Bangkok to employ Indians as guards. They have a reputation for giant strength and honesty.<sup>84</sup>

Another account of the interethnic, cross-cultural experience in Chinatown can also be found in a short story, *A-han-da-jia*, by Li Hong.<sup>85</sup> This short story noted the presence of Indians in the Chinese community. It depicts the life of A-han-da-jia—the short story’s protagonist—as an “A-Bang”<sup>86</sup> who had worked as a security guard in Bangkok’s Chinatown, described as follows:

The place that A-han-da-jia guards every night is on Bangkok’s C Road,<sup>87</sup> where there are stores and houses of the middle class. Most of his employers are the Chinese, therefore, he learns a bit about Chinese customs. When it comes to the Chinese Lunar New Year—the most ceremonious event of every year, he always goes to flower stalls in a market to buy ten garlands, and calls on each of his

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<sup>83</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 213.

<sup>84</sup> Botan, *Chotmai Chak Mueangthai* [Letters from Thailand] (Bangkok: Chomromdek Publishing House, 1999), 342.

<sup>85</sup> Li Hong is a distinguished female writer of Sino-Thai literature in the twentieth century. She is one of the authors of a Chinese novel *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm].

<sup>86</sup> A-Bang originally means “brother.” In Thailand, it is used to refer to the Indians, the Malays and the Indonesians.

<sup>87</sup> From the context given, it can be assumed that C stands for Chareonkrung .

employers from house to house, asking for money in the Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve.<sup>88</sup>

Although this short story ends in tragedy, as A-han-da-jia dies while on duty in order to protect the Chinese neighborhood from arson, it appears to show the practices of cultural contact between people of different races in Bangkok's Chinatown, as such, an Indian such as A-han-da-jia joined in with the celebration of the Chinese New Year. During this important festival, the ethnic Chinese usually invited their Thai neighbors to have Chinese New Year dinner together with them.<sup>89</sup>

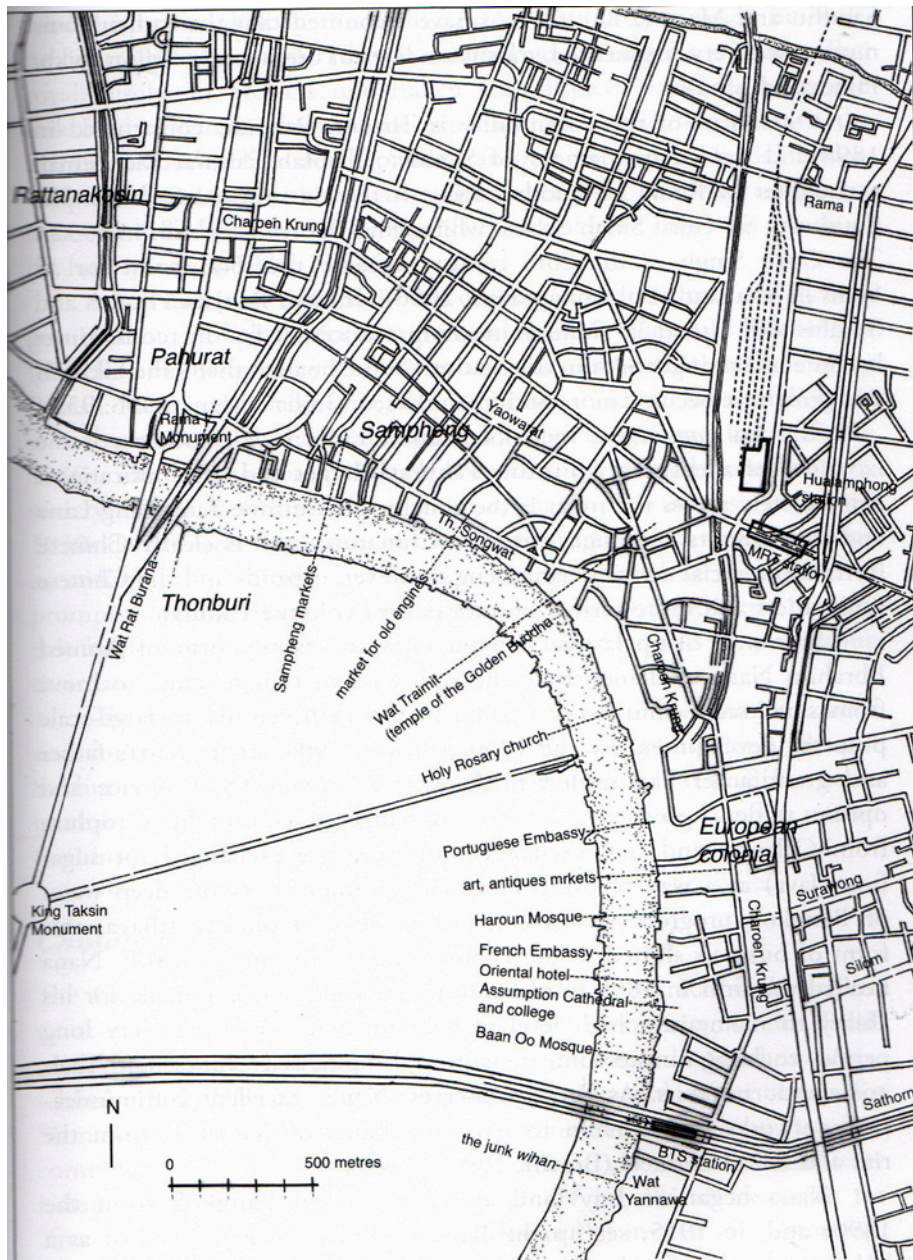
These examples, based on empirical data, can be seen as an unorthodox approach to challenge the conceptualization of Chinatown or any ethnic community that scholars holding the notion of race-based community may have neglected.

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<sup>88</sup> Nianlamei (Li Hong), "A-Han-Da-Jia," in *Huajie* [Flower Street] (Bangkok: Dapeng Chubanshe, 1980), 116.

<sup>89</sup> Ya Dang, "Banshiji Qian Taiguo Huaqiao De Guoxinzheng" [Overseas Chinese in Thailand Celebrating the First Month of the Lunar Year Half a Century Ago], *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, January 22, 1974.

Figure 1.2 Phranakhon and Thonburi



Source: Ross King, *Reading Bangkok*, 47.

### **3.3 Beyond Chinese tradition: urban culture in Bangkok's Chinese community**

Originally a commercially-based market, Yaowarat gradually developed to cultivate new burgeoning businesses in Bangkok, such as those within the recreation and entertainment industry, to become a center of all commercial recreation and public entertainment during the postwar era. In view of this, Richard J. Coughlin describes the flourishing of Bangkok's Chinatown:

This is not simply an exotic "Chinatown" set off from the main stream of urban life, such as one finds in New York or San Francisco. Rather, with their extraordinary concentration of retail and wholesale business houses, shops, banks, markets, factories, these Chinese districts constitute the economic nucleus of the city and indeed, of the nation. At the hub of a great population concentration, the Chinese community has become the locus of all commercial recreation and public entertainment. Here are located the largest and best Chinese restaurants, theatres, and movie houses, gambling halls, opium dens, brothels, and public dance halls.<sup>90</sup>

It can be said that the observation Coughlin made seems to be useful in understanding the Chinese community in Yaowarat which had moved beyond "an exotic Chinatown." Yet, Coughlin tends to focus mainly on traditional aspects of Chinese society, such as Chinese associations (e.g., surname associations, regional or dialect associations, and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce). Unfortunately, other

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<sup>90</sup> Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand*, 32.

domains that may not have been traditional aspects of Chinese society, such as restaurants, theaters, and movie houses, were still ignored.

Therefore, in order to better comprehend the development of Chinese society in Bangkok, it is crucial to shed light on the non-traditional aspects of Chinese society that have been neglected until the present. In this sense, this chapter finds that studies of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand should have focused on urban culture. According to Leo Ou-fan Lee, the term “urban culture” is itself the result of a process of both production and consumption, while obviously being determined by economic forces.<sup>91</sup> Lee notes that: “In the case of Shanghai, the process involved the growth of both socioeconomic institutions and new forms of cultural activity and expression made possible by the appearance of new public structures and spaces for urban cultural production and consumption, mostly in the concession.”<sup>92</sup> Although Lee was referring to Shanghai in the 1930’s, this chapter suggests that the manifestations that Leo Ou-fan Lee considered to be urban culture can also be applied to the study of urban culture in Bangkok’s Chinese society during the postwar era.<sup>93</sup> In other words, Lee’s approach to urban culture can be used as an attempt to search for a new perspective with which to examine Chinese society in Bangkok. In so doing, the cultural map of the Chinese community in Yaowarat will be examined through its

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<sup>91</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Admittedly, any term combined with culture is very ambiguous. There are so many theories about urban culture (and cultural forms) that scholars use in referring to the condition of urban life today. In my dissertation, I do not challenge any theoretical framework on the studies of urban culture. Therefore, I use Leo Lee’s model in approaching urban culture.

concrete manifestations of urban culture, including, for example, department stores, financial institutions, hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, night clubs, and cinemas.

Figure 1.3 Greater Yaowarat

Source: *Sin Sian Yit Pao* 1960

## Department stores

Before 1957, most retail businesses were operated in small grocery stores in markets. It is estimated that between 1952 and 1957, Chinese merchants learned and adopted a new concept of modern trade in retail business into Bangkok, for example, through employing shop assistants and having fixed prices. Therefore, new public places for retail business, such as department stores, were established to implement this new concept of modern trade.<sup>94</sup> The early department stores in Bangkok were located in Yaowarat, and include the Black Cat Union (D1), and the World Department Store or *Taiifa* (D2).<sup>95</sup>

In these early days, department stores sold a few categories of commodities such as garments, accessories, electrical appliances, and daily necessities. The price of commodities in department stores was comparatively expensive, as most of them were imported from overseas.<sup>96</sup> After the success of the department stores in Yaowarat, the growth of interest in the retail business was increasing. After 1957, several modern department stores were established in other areas of Bangkok, including Central—one of the biggest retail business enterprises in Thailand today.

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<sup>94</sup> Chatchai Tuangratanaphan, “Wiwathanakan Khaplik: Yukbukberk Khaplik Samaimai” (1) [Retail Evolution: Modern Retail in the Pioneer Era (1)], *Marketeer*, December 22, 2001, accessed September 19, 2011, [http://www.marketeer.co.th/inside\\_detail.php?inside\\_id=952](http://www.marketeer.co.th/inside_detail.php?inside_id=952).

<sup>95</sup> Chawan Sirilaowatthanatham, *Yon Yaowarat* [Back to Yaowarat] (Bangkok: Thuat-a Group, 2010), 15.

<sup>96</sup> Chatchai Tuangratanaphan, “Wiwathanakan Khaplik: Yukbukberk Khaplik Samaimai (1) [Retail Evolution: Modern Retail in the pioneer era (1)],” *Marketeer*, December 22, 2001, accessed September 19, 2011, [http://www.marketeer.co.th/inside\\_detail.php?inside\\_id=952](http://www.marketeer.co.th/inside_detail.php?inside_id=952).

## Financial institutions

After the Second World War there were changes in the structure of the economic activity of Chinese capital.<sup>97</sup> Suehiro's survey in 1952 shows the relative decline of the rice millers/exporters compared with the rise of the financial and industrial groups. The financial sector was becoming an independent and more influential business base for a rising new merchant class. In 1952, there were nineteen commercial banks and thirty-three insurance companies in Thailand, many of which were Chinese controlled.<sup>98</sup> Several commercial banks had their first main branches located in Yaowarat, such as Bangkok Bank (Thanakan Krungthep) (B1) and Bangkok Metropolitan Bank (Thanakan Srinakhon) (B2) on Ratchawong Raod, Union Bank of Bangkok (Sahathanakan Krungthep) (B3) at Ratchawong intersection, Agricultural Bank (Thanakan Kaset)<sup>99</sup> (B4), and Thai Dhanu Bank (Thanakan Thaithanu) (B5) on Yaowarat Road. Other commercial banks also had their branches located in this area, such as the Siam Commercial Bank (Thanakan Thaipanit) (B6) at the Suaepa intersection.

In addition to commercial banks, other financial institutions such as trusts and pawnshops could be found easily in Yaowarat, as they were more reachable. For capital accumulation, it is known that trusts tended to manage assets with the claim of being "high risk" but "high return" and, therefore, became ubiquitous in Bangkok for a period of time. However, many trusts eventually went bankrupt. It is believed that a

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<sup>97</sup> Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855–1985*, 155.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> The Agricultural Bank was founded by a Sino-Thai entrepreneur, Suriyon Raiwa. See chapter 3 of this dissertation for more information on Suriyon Raiwa.



trust opposite Thianfha (*Tianhua*) Hospital (T1) was the first to go bankrupt. The second one to go bankrupt was at the intersection of Chalermburi.<sup>100</sup> For capital loans, pawnshops were known as quick and easy places to pawn personal items in exchange for quick cash. A personal item was pawned for a loan for a certain period of time; the owner could, within that time, purchase it back with interest. Thus, pawnshops were popular among ordinary people because of their convenience.

### **Hotels, gambling halls, brothels, and night clubs**

There were three buildings in Yaowarat that, during the 1950's, were the tallest buildings in Bangkok: a nine-story building (A1), a seven-story building (A2), and a six-story building (A3). These three buildings were all used for much the same business. The nine-story building and the seven-story building had a limited amount of space, despite their height. Two or three floors were made into a hotel, while other floors were made into small rooms for rent. Space on the lower floors were divided into small stalls for rent: such as a small restaurant, a coffee shop, a fortune telling shop, and a Chinese medicine clinic. The ninth floor of nine-story building was said to operate a mahjong club, a gambling den, and a night club. On the other hand, the six-story building seemed to be more spacious and colorful. The second floor was a mahjong club, the third floor a gambling den, the fourth floor a restaurant, the fifth floor a brothel, and the sixth floor a coffee shop.<sup>101</sup> Because of the manifold business operation, they attracted many people from across the class spectrum, although some of their businesses were known to be illegal.

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<sup>100</sup> Sirilaowatthanatham, *Yon Yaowarat* [Back to Yaowarat], 21–22.

<sup>101</sup> Chen Bowen, *Fodu Jiuyi* [Old Memory About Buddhist Kingdom] (Bangkok: Bayin Chubanshe, 2000), 15–16.

In addition to the nine-story building, night clubs could be easily found in other places in and outside Yaowarat (such as Silom, Suriwong, and Ratchaprasong districts) The business of dance halls, therefore, was highly competitive. In order to attract more customers, many dance halls had to improve their stage performances to make them more inviting. Some night clubs hired famous singers, some hired stripteases from overseas, such as those from Hong Kong and America.<sup>102</sup> This can be seen from the advertisement of one night club as having “the hottest stripteases, the most exciting performance.”<sup>103</sup>

### **Restaurants, teahouses, and coffee shops**

Yaowarat had a reputation for the quality of its restaurants. As it was a commercial center, Chinese merchants often had “business talks” during lunch or dinner outside of their office. There was a great demand for restaurants to provide these public spaces, and therefore many good Chinese restaurants were operated in Yaowarat for the facilitation of such business talk. One of the most highly regarded restaurants in Yaowarat was *Hoitianlao*. *Hoitianlao* (*Haitianlao*) (E1) was located on the intersection between Suepa and Chareonkrung roads. It had European architecture with elegant interior decoration, said to be the most fashionable at that time. *Hoitianlao* was also known as one of the most exclusive reception halls for events held by prominent Chinese merchants and Thai politicians and officials.<sup>104</sup> This could be one of the signs of the cooperation between the Chinese leaders and Thai officials.

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<sup>102</sup> “Di Ba Bu: Yule Zhinan” [Part 8 the Entertainment Guide], in *Taiguo Huaqiao Dacidian* [Encyclopedia on the overseas Chinese in Thailand] (Bangkok: Witthayakon, 1966), K11–K12.

<sup>103</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*. May 9, 1968.

<sup>104</sup> Chen Bowen, *Fodu Jiuyi* [Old Memory About Buddhist Kingdom], 17–18.

This can also be seen in the protest against the alien registration fee in 1952, held near *Hoitianlao*. The protest reached its climax, when “over ten thousand poor Chinese along with some of their Thai relatives gathered in the heavy rain near *Hoitianlao* restaurant, where leader Chou on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce was entertaining over three hundreds Thai officials at an elaborate banquet.”<sup>105</sup>

While the high-quality restaurants were reserved for the wealthy, the street hawkers were designed for ordinary people. Street hawkers could be found everywhere in Yaowarat. The most famous street food was labor noodles, a special local product of Yaowarat. Labor noodles (E2) literally meant noodles sold to laborers, as they were sizable and cheap, and therefore, became popular among low-income labors as well as ordinary people.<sup>106</sup> In addition to street hawkers, teahouses and coffee shops were also public places prevalent throughout Yaowarat, and also designed for ordinary people. People usually came to coffee shops, read newspapers, discussed important social issues, or simply exchanged information relevant to their lives. This made coffee shops function not only as a simple dining place, but also as a significant venue for information exchange; coffee shops were also known as “the coffee parliament” (Sapha Kafee in Thai). Moreover, some particular coffee shops such as *Si-sia* (E3), which was located near Sriratchawong Cinema, provided a space for the gathering of Chinese writers, newspapermen, and readers.<sup>107</sup> Many Sino-Thai

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<sup>105</sup> Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, 152.

<sup>106</sup> Bangkok Bank, *Im Aroi Tamrai Chaosuo* [Enjoying Delicious Gourmet Like Chinese Millionaires] (Bangkok: Siam R&B Publishing, 2004), 32.

<sup>107</sup> Chen Bowen, *Fodu Jiuyi* [Old Memory About Buddhist Kingdom], 72–74.

writers<sup>108</sup> had come to know each other, produce, and discuss their works at *Si-sia*. It was said the some writers were made famous from here.

### **Opera houses**

Chinese opera was one of the most important and popular forms of entertainment within Chinese society in Bangkok. Generally speaking, the Chinese tended to attend Chinese operas by their speech group, especially the Teochiu who were predominantly concentrated in Bangkok. The “big four” Teochiu operas, or *Chaoju*, were housed in Yaowarat. They were *Meizheng* (G1), *Saibao* (G2), *Yilai* (G3), and *Zhongyi* (G4) on Phadungdao Street.<sup>109</sup> Each house had its own characteristics. In addition to Teochiu opera, there were also Chinese operas for other speech groups, such as Cantonese opera [*Yueju*], Amoy opera [*Xiaju*], and *Qiongju* for the Cantonese, the Hokkien, and the Hainanese respectively. However, in the 1950’s<sup>110</sup> the popularity of Chinese operas began to decline gradually in comparison with the rise of modern entertainment, like cinemas. Nevertheless, Chinese operas were revived again during the 1960’s, when modern Chinese operas were imported from Hong Kong.<sup>112</sup>

### **Cinemas**

In the prewar era, the cinema industry in Bangkok was small in size. However, the rapid growth of the economy in the postwar decades, especially from the 1960’s,

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<sup>108</sup> On Sino-Thai writers, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>109</sup> “Di Ba Bu: Yule Zhinan” [Part 8 the Entertainment Guide], K8–K9.

<sup>110</sup> See the rise and decline of Teochiu-dialect cinema in Bangkok in the 1950’s in chapter 2.

<sup>112</sup> See modern Chinese entertainment culture section in chapter 3 for more discussion on modern Chinese opera from Hong Kong.

stimulated the rapid expansion of urban cinemas. As a result, cinemas became the main venue of recreation and entertainment for Bangkok's urban populace. In 1966, it is estimated that there were around fifty cinemas in Bangkok, most of which were located in Yaowarat. As demonstrated in Figure 1.4, Yaowarat housed a number of cinemas, from first class to third class. Films shown in these cinemas varied between Chinese (Mandarin and dialect), Thai, Western (predominantly American), Indian, and Japanese. Some cinemas only screened productions from a particular studio that had signed a contract to be its selected distributor. For example, the New Odeon cinema was a distributor of Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers (SB) films. Additionally, Chalermkrung, founded by the Thai government to support the local film industry, screened only Thai films.

Figure 1.4 List of urban cinemas in Greater Yaowarat in 1960's<sup>113</sup>

Name in Thai		Name in Chinese	Classes	Location Figure 1.3	film/distributor
New Odeon	新高亭	<i>Xin Gaoting</i>	1	C1	Mandarin/SB
Chalermburi	月宫	<i>Yuegong</i>	1	C2	Mandarin/Cathay, Thai
Texas	新南星	<i>Xinnanxing</i>	1	C3	Indian
Chalermrat	新杭州	<i>Xinhangzhou</i>	2	C4	Teochiu, Cantonese
Srimuang	西河	<i>Xihe</i>	2	C5	Teochiu, Cantonese
Thiankuothian	天外天	<i>Tianwaitian</i>	1	C6	Mandarin
Sinfa	新华	<i>Xinhua</i>	2-3	C7	Teochiu, Cantonese
Cathay	国泰	<i>Guotai</i>	1	C8	Thai
???	京华	<i>Jinghua</i>	2-3	C9	Mandarin
Lukouchiao	卢沟桥	<i>Lugouqiao</i>	2-3	C10	Mandarin, and Chinese operas

<sup>113</sup> Because source materials are scattered in both the Thai and Chinese languages, it is necessary to cross-reference different names appearing in these materials. Therefore, Thai and Chinese names have been given to avoid confusion.

Sriratchawong	西舞台	<i>Xiwutai</i>	1	C11	Mandarin/MP&GI, Western, Cantonese
Sriyaowarat	东舞台	<i>Dongwutai</i>	2	C12	Mandarin
Nakhonkhasem	水晶宫	<i>Shuijingong</i>	3	C13	Thai, Mandarin
King	帝国	<i>Diguo</i>	1	C14	Western
Grand	大光华	<i>Daguanghua</i>	1	C15	Western
Queen	皇后	<i>Huanghou</i>	1	C16	Indian
Chalermnakhon	瑶宫	<i>Yaogong</i>	2	C17	Western
Capital/Kyoto	京都	<i>Jingdu</i>	2-3	C18	Japanese
Phatanakon/ Sirirama	振南	<i>Zhennai</i>	2-3	C19	Thai, Mandarin
Broadway	百乐汇	<i>Bailehui</i>	2-3	C20	Western
Krungkasem	乐宫	<i>Legong</i>	1	C21	Western, Mandarin
Around Greater Yaowarat					
Chalermkhet	豪华	<i>Haohua</i>	1	C22	Western
Empire	金舞台	<i>Jinwutai</i>	1	C23	Thai
Chalermkrung	旋宫	<i>Xuangong</i>	1	C24	Thai

Source: *Taiguo Huaqiao Dacidian* 1966 and *Sin Sian Yit Pao* 1960

Despite a variety of sources, the majority of films shown in Bangkok's cinemas were American, whereas local Thai films equalled only a small percentage of the films that were shown.<sup>114</sup> This meant that American films largely dominated the film industry in Bangkok, while Chinese films from Hong Kong ranked second. The significance of Chinese cinemas will be substantively discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>114</sup> United States Information Service, *Communication Fact Book Thailand* (USIS Research and Reference Service, 1963), 25.

#### 4. Reflection and Conclusion

The historical development of the Chinese community in Bangkok was shaped by political and socioeconomic factors. The growth of the economy since the eighteenth century supported the urbanization of Bangkok, which facilitated the rapid expansion of the Chinese community, as the Chinese tended to be concentrated particularly in urban areas. In contrast to earlier scholarship on the conceptualization of Chinatowns, this chapter argues that Yaowarat, as Bangkok's Chinatown, was not a culturally and ethnically isolated community. Rather, it seemed to be an open and multicultural community that involved inter-ethnic relations and cross-cultural experiences. Also, this chapter has focused on the concrete manifestations of urban culture—non-traditional aspects of Chinese society yet understudied—that seemed to develop in Chinese community in Bangkok.

The investigation into (re)mapping the Chinese community could provide differing interpretations. This chapter argues that the Chinese community was not simply a unilateral and monolithic Chinese race-based community. Rather, the so called “Chinese” were fluid and could vary along a number of aspects, such as class, speech group, and characteristics. For example, the ethnic Chinese could be from the lower, middle, or higher classes, and this was reflected in their choices of consumption. For example, the higher class were able to have a reception at *Hoitianlao*, while the lower class may have eaten labor noodles at street hawkers. Speech groups could also be distinguished. Chinese operas had nuances in meaning, as they could be Teochiu, Cantonese, or from another dialect. Moreover, the characteristics of recreation and entertainment in the Chinese community did not

always have to revolve around Chinese traditions like Chinese operas. In fact, Bangkok's Chinese community was open and exposed to foreign cultures, which manifested themselves in the practices of urban life, such as in night clubs and cinemas and, therefore, made it a multicultural community.



## Chapter Two

### Chinese Cinemas in Urban Bangkok

In 1937, Yang Wenying, an unknown primary school principal from Shantou, in the Guangdong Province of China, published a little book entitled *Xianluo Zaji* (Notes on Siam) in Shanghai after his return from a short visit to Thailand. During his visit, he had keenly observed that cinema, as well as Teochiu opera, was one of the most important and popular forms of entertainment within Chinese society in Bangkok. He noticed that in the early 1930's there were more than ten cinema theaters in Bangkok, where there was a distinction between showing Western movies and Chinese movies. Moreover, beyond Bangkok, in cities and small districts, he had also found one or two cinema theaters. Therefore, Yang Wenying concluded: "This was evidence that the cinema industry was well developed in Southeast Asia, even more so than in China."<sup>1</sup>

A modern form of entertainment, like cinema, despite its recent arrival in Thailand only in the late nineteenth century, came to achieve the same status of popularity as a traditional form of entertainment, like Teochiu opera, that had long been performed in Thailand. It is not an exaggeration to say that during the pre-war decades the cinema soon gained wide acceptance within the social and cultural life of Thailand. Even during the postwar era, cinema never lost its popularity to any other kind of entertainment, while Teochiu opera's glamorous days gradually began to decline. In the late 1960's, it was estimated that over two-thirds of the people in

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<sup>1</sup> Yang Wenying, *Xianluo Zaji* [Notes on Siam] (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1937), 86.

Bangkok attended motion picture shows at least once a week.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it can be said that cinema was common in the masses' everyday life in Bangkok, including for the Chinese.

Films shown in Thailand's cinemas did not necessarily always have to be Thai films.<sup>3</sup> As a matter of this fact, Adadol Ingawanij, a prominent Thai scholar of cinema studies, has raised a couple of provocative questions. What if the Thai film history was not about Thai film production? Rather than writing the kind of film history that is focused on classifying the patterns of representation of domestically produced films, how would one go about constructing a film history that is attentive to the spatial and experiential dimension of cinema going? What was the cinema experience in Thailand?

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This chapter begins by addressing Adadol Ingawanij's question: What if Thai film history was not about Thai film production? Rather, what if the cinema experience in Thailand appeared to include and be permeated by foreign cinema production and consumption, including Chinese cinema that played an important role in the making of Thai film history. In this sense, this chapter will look into Chinese cinema in urban Bangkok. As previously shown in the last section of chapter 1, many urban cinemas were located and operated in Greater Yaowarat—the center of Chinese society in Bangkok—which made the ethnic Chinese, whether as cinema operators, film distributors, or moviegoers, crucial players in the cinema industry in Bangkok.

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<sup>2</sup> Wendell Blanchard, *Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, Country Survey Series (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1958), 129.

<sup>3</sup> According to USIS research in 1963, the Thai film industry accounted for only a small percentage of films shown. United States Information Service, *Communication Fact Book Thailand* (USIS Research and Reference Service, 1963), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Adadol Ingawanich, e-mail message to author, July 28, 2010.

These important issues in Chinese cinema will be addressed in the next section, where the cinema industry in Bangkok, during the postwar era, will be contextualized.

### **1. Contextualizing the cinema industry in Bangkok in the postwar era**

As seen in the introduction to this chapter, cinema was a common form of entertainment for the masses' everyday life in Bangkok. The prosperity as well as popularity of cinema was documented by many writers in their literary works and personal memoirs, as Bangkok's "collective memory," stating that cinema-going was an indispensable part of life in Bangkok. Li Yi, an overseas Chinese writer based in Bangkok, noted the popularity of cinema in the postwar decades was a result of it being affordable and enjoyable, as follows:

So to speak generally, many cinemas show two low-budget films together at one time. In an effort to attract more local audiences, especially women and children, some cinemas will show two films and, at the same time, have dialogues dubbed in Teochiu dialect. A movie ticket to appreciate two films costs only 6 baht, which one could screen from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. in the middle of the night. This is cheap and fun. . . Our house is very close to the cinemas. Furthermore, these films and these actors all are my favorites. So why not spend 6 baht to enjoy two films at the same time! <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Li Yi, "Wo Yu Lide Husheng De Yiduan Yuan" [Destiny of Me and Rediffusion], in *Wangshi Suixianglu* [Bygone Random Thoughts] (Bangkok: Bayin Chubanshe, 2000), 51.

In the postwar era, the cinema industry in Bangkok generally consisted of films categorized by their origin of production, as follows: Western films, Chinese films, Indian films, Thai films, Japanese films, and others. Among these, Western films and Chinese films were comparatively more popular than any others. In fact, Western films and Chinese films not only attracted the largest audiences, but also regularly stormed the box office in Bangkok. They, undoubtedly, became the first choice of leisure and entertainment for Bangkok's populace.

To some extent, Western films were said to be largely represented by Hollywood productions. In the 1950's–60's, there was an influx of Hollywood films to Thailand and these soon became the mainstream genre of films, dominating the cinema market in Bangkok. This phenomenon was understandable for several reasons. One reason was that the production in Hollywood was mature, both in terms of its hardware and software. Its hardware was seen in its advanced equipment and technology, and its software was seen in Hollywood's talented staff, involved, among other things, in script writing, filming, directing, and composing music. Another reason was the result of American influence, especially when Thailand entered the so called "American era" at the height of the Cold War. This American influence gave rise to young Thais' partial absorption into the orbit of "Atlantic consumer culture."<sup>6</sup> The glitziness of modern American mass culture reflected in Hollywood films, therefore, made Hollywood films more attractive to audiences in Thailand, especially in Bangkok.

Despite ranking first in terms of their quantity in the Thai market, Hollywood films found an important opponent of their American mass culture—Chinese films,

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<sup>6</sup> Benedict R.O'G Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, eds., *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the Modern Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1985), 24.

mostly those from Hong Kong. Although the success of Hong Kong cinema can be generally attributed to its production (as seen from the hardware and software in Hollywood films), exploring this success from the perspective of a particular society's consumption is also important for better understanding of Hong Kong's Chinese cinema. Therefore, this chapter will study Chinese cinema within the context of Bangkok, particularly against the backdrop of the Chinese society where a huge number of the ethnic Chinese lived. It will attempt to examine postwar Chinese cinema: a significant aspect of the urban culture in Chinese society in Bangkok. Several issues reflecting Chinese cultural production and consumption, particularly Chinese cinema in Thailand's Cold War years, are addressed: (1) What happened to Chinese cinema in Thailand after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and how did the world's political and economic factors affect Chinese cinema in Thailand?; (2) As a case study, how did Chinese cinema come from Hong Kong to Thailand, and what was the significance of Chinese cinema, from Hong Kong, to Chinese life and society in Bangkok?; (3) During the period of political pressure, when relations with the PRC were discouraged, it might be questioned as to whether Chinese cinema from Hong Kong performed an important role in the imagination of "a Greater China," which continuously kept the ethnic Chinese in Thailand living their Chinese dream; and (4) apart from the Chinese dream, what caused Chinese cinema to gain popularity in Bangkok, especially among non-Chinese audiences?

## **2. The persistence of Chinese cinema from the PRC after 1949**

The establishment of the PRC in 1949 was a turning point in relations between Thailand and China, as Thailand sided with the US and, as a result, isolated the PRC. However, this isolation was based on political and diplomatic factors, rather than cultural aspects, which were not severely affected. At least until 1958, Thailand's entertainment market still welcomed a significant number of Chinese films from the PRC. Such films, which were popular among Chinese audiences in Thailand, came from well-known production studios in the PRC, such as Changchun studio and Kunlun studio. In other words, despite the isolation of the PRC from the outside world, including Thailand, it was not before 1958 that Chinese films from the PRC or, as the Thai government at that time preferred to refer to it, communist China, were prohibited to be screened in Thailand. Although, in practice, few were actually banned from the theaters. Most Chinese films from the PRC, if examined by the Thai authorities, were permitted to be shown in Thailand.

According to the Police department responsible for movie censorship, the examination for film screening was done under the Film Act of 1930, and stated that the contents must not violate public order or public morality. Therefore, there had to be several groups of government officials for peer review, including a minimum of three policemen from the movie censorship section, at least one official from the Department of Central Intelligence, at least one public security personnel, and a Chinese translator. After passing through the peer review examination, their judgment would be forwarded to the director of the Central Investigation Bureau for approval. In the event of a controversy, the director-general of the police department would make a final decision.

It seems that examination practices for the screening of Chinese films, tended to be rigorous and bureaucratic. Nevertheless, at the same time, some Chinese films were not granted approval and a few were withdrawn from screening because of controversy after their release. As of September 1957, it was estimated that there were nineteen Chinese films from the PRC under examination for approval. Among which, fifteen were granted approval and four were banned. Yet, there were another three Chinese films from the PRC that were still in the process of examination and had not been decided upon.<sup>8</sup>

However, when anti-communist sentiment became highly intensified in the Thai government, as a result of US agitation, Chinese films from the PRC began to be examined more seriously. A telegraph from the Thai ambassador in Washington DC reported that the US government expressed concern about what had happened recently in Thailand, for example, a cultural group's visit to China,<sup>9</sup> some anti-US sentiments, as well as communist propaganda films that were too easily available to the public. With regard to such concern, the Thai ambassador in Washington DC affirmed the US government's confidence in the Thai government's policies towards communist China.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, from October 1957, the Thai government put the issue of cinematographic films and publications from communist countries under rigorous analysis. In the Ministry of the Interior meeting on 25 October 1957, Luang Atthawiphakphaisan, the vice-under-secretary of the Ministry of the Interior, proposed that his preliminary observations suggested that some films from communist

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<sup>8</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

<sup>9</sup> This cultural group's visit to China referred to a group of artists and writers led by Suwat Woradilok to visit China. According to the report of *Daily Mail* Newspaper on 3 August, 1957, Suwat stated that "The Chinese films from Red China can be shown in Thailand, why can't Thai artists have a performance in China?" NAMI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

<sup>10</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

countries, to some extent, were a kind of propaganda, which could, more or less, influence the audience. Nevertheless, General Prapat Charusatian, the minister of the interior at that time, still believed in the anti-Communist bill, also known as the Un-Thai Activities Act of 1952, as a clear guideline for the police department for film screening approval.<sup>11</sup>

A month later, the issue of cinematography film from communist China was raised again in another Ministry of the Interior meeting on 29 November 1957. The meeting noted the report from the ambassador of the ROC, Han Lih Wu, regarding his conversation with the prime minister of Thailand. According to the report, the ambassador of the ROC, Han Lih Wu, recalled his conversation with the prime minister of Thailand [Phot Sarasin] for the attention that it drew to the flooding of Chinese communist films into Bangkok, as well as the propaganda of the leftists in Thailand, which was part of the communist scheme to vie for support from Chinese residents in Thailand. Furthermore, the ambassador, Han, enclosed a list of thirty-one Chinese communist motion pictures shown in Bangkok since August 1957 to Thailand's Ministry of the Interior for reconsideration of their screening approval.<sup>12</sup>

In studying the list of the Chinese communist motion pictures shown in Bangkok since August 1957, given by the ROC Ambassador Han Lih Wu, it is apparent that the list was very repetitive. As one motion picture could have been shown in many cinemas, therefore, the real number of imported Chinese films, from the PRC into Bangkok, should have been only around twenty. Furthermore, these films were seriously examined by the Thai Police Department as they did not violate

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<sup>11</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

<sup>12</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4



the Film Act of 1930. In fact, there were five banned Chinese films and another four Chinese films withdrawn from approval already and not yet included in the list from the ROC Ambassador, as seen the following tables.

Figure 2.1 List of Chinese Communist films shown at Bangkok, 1957

	Pictures	Studios	Classification	Approved by
1	Slapping of the Princess	Chang-chun	Shansi Folkplay	head of movie censorship section
2	Liu Chiao-erh	Chang-chun	Hopei Folkplay	director of Central Investigation Bureau
3	The Exhilarant Songs and Dances	Chang-cheng	Rice-planting Dances	head of movie censorship section
4	The Boastful Frog	Chang-cheng	Cartoon	head of movie censorship section
5	The Miraculous Brush	Chang-cheng	Puppet Play	head of movie censorship section
6	The Dream of Hsiao-mei	Chang-cheng	Cartoon	head of movie censorship section
7	Why is the Crow Black?	Chang-cheng	Cartoon	head of movie censorship section
8	The Marriage of the fairy	Tuing	Chaochow Folkplay	head of movie censorship section
9	The Little White rabbits	Chang-cheng	Ballet	director of Central Investigation Bureau
10	Pai Lan-hua, the Beautiful Shrew	Kung-yi	Kwangtung Folkplay	head of movie censorship section
11	The Tempest on the Southern Island		Story	director of Central Investigation Bureau
12	Chinese People's Arts	Chang-cheng		director of Central Investigation Bureau
13	The Roaming Adventure of Sanmao	Kun-lun		head of movie censorship section
14	Between Sexes	Kun-lun		head of movie censorship section
15	Premier Chu En Lai's visit to Soviet Russia		Newsreel	director of Central Investigation Bureau
16	The Tempest	Hua-chiao	Story	police superintendent
17	Four Chin-Shih	Shanghai	Chinese Opera	director-general of Police Department

18	The 2nd March	Shanghai	Newrseel	director-general of Police Department
19	The Inspector and the Imposter	Chang-cheng	Fuchow Folkplay	head of movie censorship section
20	The Unknown Father	Chang-cheng	Story	head of movie censorship section

Source: compiled from archival materials NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

Figure 2.2 List of Chinese communist films withdrawn from approval, 1957

	Pictures	Applicants	Originally Approved by
1	Hua-kiang-cho-kui	Kongliak Sae-au	head of movie censorship section
2	Hua-kiang-ku-chia	Kongliak Sae-au	head of movie censorship section
3	Pae-mo-nueng (Bloody Sky)	Chai Chayaphon	director of Central Investigation Bureau
4	Kim-yit-chu-dong-kok	Pengsia Sae-tia	head of movie censorship section

Source: compiled from archival materials NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

Figure 2.3 List of Chinese communist films banned from screening in Bangkok, 1957

	Pictures	Banned by	Remarks
1	Zhongyi de Zhongguo	police superintendent	
2	Thep Chotnuchit's Visit to Communist China	head of movie censorship section	
3	International Bhuddist Monks' Visit to Peking	head of movie censorship section	
4	Chae-hun-hung-ti	head of movie censorship section	
5	Huai-hsiao-ang-neng-yi	head of movie censorship section	

Source: compiled from archival materials NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

According to the tables, it was problematic to consider which films should have been cleared for screening and which films should not. Approved movies could be identified by their studio and genre, while the studio of a withdrawn or banned movie was not given. No particular scenes of any movie were shown to explain the reason behind its withdrawal or ban. This absence of clarity can also be seen in the origin of the production studios. Chang-chun and Kun-lun were undoubtedly studio productions based in the PRC. However, Chang-cheng, also known as Great Wall, was not a studio from the PRC as the Thai government had labeled. In fact, it was a left-wing studio based in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, it can be noted at one point that three of the banned films in Figure 2.3 were clearly documentary or news footage that showed interactions between the PRC and political or cultural figures from the world outside.

In practice, it can be seen that all Chinese films from the PRC were seriously examined before screening. However, the report from the ROC ambassador had come to stimulate the vice-under-secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Luang Atthawiphakphaisan's previous curiosity in films from communist countries. The vice-under-secretary of the Ministry of the Interior noted that the weakness of the Thai Film Act of 1930 lay in a lack of clarity in article 4, simply stating that motion pictures must not violate moral and cultural norms.<sup>13</sup> Because the definition was too broad, it gave flexibility to the authorities in determining whether a motion picture violated the law or not. As one government official argued, communist propaganda

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<sup>13</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/4

was sometimes disguised in newsreels. It was, therefore, necessary to ponder these significant implications carefully.

As a result, the Public Relations Department finally announced on 8 October 1958, that the Thai government had decided to ban the import to Thailand of all cinematographic films and publications originating from communist China, under the Printing Act of 1941, Article 8 and 9, as follows:

Article 8: The head of the Police Department, or the acting head, is authorized to ban the import of any publications into the country with or without time limit.

Article 9: When there is or will be propagation of any publications that tend to violate public order or public morality, a provincial printing staff member (for the Bangkok Metropolis, the head of the police department for provincial staff) is authorized to ban the purchase and distribution of, or to confiscate such publications.<sup>14</sup>

In order to put this bill into effect, article 8 was designed to prevent the import of publications from abroad. In the instance that publications had already been imported into the country, article 9 would be applied. In the interests of practical operation, the Police Department should work closely with the Department of Customs and Post-Telegraph to decipher messages in any publication that broke the law.<sup>15</sup>

It is unclear why the official ban of all films and publications from the PRC began in 1958, and not earlier, in 1949. This may have been because the Thai military

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<sup>14</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/6

<sup>15</sup> NA MI (1)mor.tor.3.1.4.24/6

government, in 1958, wanted to intensify its anti-communist policies to fully show its support for the US.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, this official ban made Thailand no longer able to import any films or publications from the PRC. However, this does not mean that there were no longer any Chinese films in Thailand. As previously stated, Chinese films, mostly from Hong Kong, were an important source of the cinema industry in Bangkok, second only to Hollywood films.

Hong Kong-produced Chinese films were still largely imported into the Thai market, especially in Bangkok, although Chinese films from the PRC were totally banned by the Thai government in 1958. The influx of Chinese cinema from Hong Kong included both dialect and Mandarin films produced in Hong Kong, which could be seen in the rise of Teochiu-dialect cinema, joint-production between production studios of Thailand and those of Hong Kong, and Mandarin cinema from Hong Kong's production studios, represented by the Shaw Brothers.

### **3. The emergence of Hong Kong cinema in Bangkok**

#### **3.1 Teochiu-dialect cinema in Bangkok in the 1950's**

The emergence of Hong Kong cinema in Bangkok is important in the advent of Teochiu-dialect cinema [*Chaoyu Pian*] made in Hong Kong, during the 1950's. Although it might be suggested that the Teochiu dialect was, to some extent, the lingua franca in Chinese society in Bangkok, the Chinese from Teochiu-speaking areas of southern China had been predominant among other ethnic Chinese groups,

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<sup>16</sup> The relationship between Thailand and the US is discussed in the second section of chapter 1.

across Bangkok.<sup>17</sup> As demonstrated in chapter 1, the Chinese generally tended to attend Chinese operas based along the lines of their speech group. Many Teochiu Chinese in Bangkok were said to also have a feeling of intimacy when they witnessed their dialect in the cinema, and this also brought about the demand for Teochiu-dialect cinema.

With regard to this demand, some Chinese businessmen saw an opportunity to make a profit from Teochiu-dialect cinema. In the mid-1950's, some of them observed Hong Kong's thriving film industry, and founded a company called Tuojiang Pictures (*Tuojiang Yingye Gongsì*) to make Teochiu-dialect films. The company utilized Hong Kong's talents and facilities in film production. However, what was perhaps paradoxical about Teochiu-dialect cinema production in Hong Kong was that its market was not Hong Kong, but Teochiu-speaking Chinese communities overseas. Thus, the Teochiu-dialect cinema was ironically regarded as "Hong Kong cinema that had never been shown in Hong Kong," as it was available only in Southeast Asia, mainly in Thailand and Singapore.<sup>18</sup>

Teochiu-dialect cinema made in Hong Kong but shown in Bangkok can be found, for example, in the following films: *Wangjin Long* (19 September 1955), starring Xia Fan, a famous Teochiu cinema actress; *Shipinggui Huiku* Part I (4 January 1957); *Shipingguihuiku* Part II (14 March 1957); *Zhaoniang Henshi* (17 May 1957); *Hewenxiu Antang Huiqi* (3 August 1959) also starring Xia Fan.<sup>19</sup> These films

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<sup>17</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand : An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 212.

<sup>18</sup> *Hong Kong Filmography Vol.4 (1953–1959)*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003), xiv–xv.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 374–76.

were said to be very popular among Chinese audiences in Thailand, where Xia Fan toured and gave singing performances to promote the films in which she starred.

Because of the success of Teochiu-dialect films in Thailand, the organization of the Teochiu-dialect cinema camp was established in late 1959. Teochiu-dialect films were low budget and very profitable, and, as a result, appeared to be suitable for production studios and distributors with little capital. This attracted Chinese businessmen from Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand to import Teochiu-dialect films from Hong Kong into the Southeast Asian market.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the status of the Teochiu dialect as a lingua franca of the Chinese in Bangkok, the popularity of Teochiu-dialect cinema can also be attributed to its traditional subject—a story of the wise and the beautiful (*Caizi Jiaren*) that the ethnic Chinese were familiar with. For example, a rich gentleman, facing troubles, who is rescued by a poor lady, or the other way round, a poor gentleman who had won the imperial examination, falling in love with a lady from a noble family.<sup>21</sup> Although cliché and predictable, this kind of traditional story was very common for the Chinese, as its narrative in the form of film attracted many Chinese audiences.

Despite its success in the 1950's, in the 1960's Teochiu-dialect cinema began to decline under the twin challenges of rapid change and the expansion of modern Mandarin cinema. It was said that in 1964, Teochiu-dialect cinema's box office throughout the year grossed only 20,000 baht, while Western films and Mandarin films screening at the same time could earn around 2 million baht.<sup>22</sup> As a result,

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<sup>20</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, December 6, 1959.

<sup>21</sup> Shanren, "Mangu De Yule Shiye" [Bangkok's Entertainment Business], *Sin Sian Yit Pao* January 1, 1965.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Teochiu-dialect cinema's popularity gradually gave way to the rise of Mandarin cinema from studio moguls of Hong Kong into Bangkok.

Interestingly, the reasons behind the decline of Teochiu-dialect cinema were much the same as for its rise. The subject of of Teochiu-dialect cinema was repetitive, cliché and predictable. The story of “the wise and the beautiful” was attractive in the beginning, however, it became a tired subject matter over time, especially among young audiences. Moreover, the low-budget production made Teochiu-dialect cinema rough and unsophisticated when compared to Western, Hollywood films and modern Mandarin cinema.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the decline of Teochiu-dialect cinema inversely correlated with the resurrection of Teochiu opera in the 1960's, when opera troupes from Hong Kong were imported to give live performances in Bangkok. Because of this import of opera troupes from Hong Kong, Teochiu opera became popular again in the 1960's. The performances of modern Teochiu opera from Hong Kong was said to be better than those of Bangkok of old in several ways, such as in the quality of actors, backdrops, and dialogue. Therefore, the popularity of modern Teochiu opera comparatively affected the market of Teochiu-dialect cinema.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Di Ba Bu: Yule Zhinan ”[Part 8 the Entertainment Guide], in *Taiguo Huaqiao Dacidian* [Encyclopedia on the overseas Chinese in Thailand] (Bangkok: Witthayakon, 1966), K9.

<sup>24</sup> See modern Chinese entertainment culture section in chapter 3 for more discussion on modern Chinese opera from Hong Kong.



### 3.2 Entertaining the Thai market, Hong Kong–Thailand cooperation

In addition to Teochiu-dialect cinema, the emergence of Hong Kong cinema in Thailand can also be reflected in the joint production between studios, both in Thailand and Hong Kong. The reasons behind this Hong Kong–Thailand cooperation lie in a combination of a political line and business calculations. Stephen Teo has noted that the development of cinema in Hong Kong cannot be dissociated from the development of cinema in mainland China, especially when the Chinese civil war of 1946–49 stimulated a greater migration of Chinese filmmakers from Shanghai to Hong Kong. Consequently, Shanghai filmmakers who migrated to Hong Kong, also demonstrated the left-right divide that prevailed on the mainland.<sup>25</sup> Although the left-wing studios began to make films along their ideological lines, right-wing studios purveying anti-communist ideology, began to rise abruptly in Hong Kong’s film industry and, as a result, outshone the left-wing studios, which became less prominent during the second half of the 1950’s.<sup>26</sup> Such right-wing studios as those represented by the Shaw Brothers (*Shaoshi*) and MP&GI (*Dianmao*)<sup>27</sup> in the latter half of the 1950’s, became remarkably dominant in the film industry in Hong Kong, as well as in Southeast Asia. This transformation reflected Hong Kong’s film industry moving in the direction of a more conventional, refined, and glamorous industry, producing works that would not risk political censorship in their new markets. As a result, during

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> MP&GI (Motion Picture and General Investment), Shaw Brother’s primary competitor, was reconstructed and re-named “Cathay” [*Guotai*] in 1965 after the death of its founder—Loke Wan-tho—in a plane crash in 1964.

the 1950's, Hong Kong's film industry gained in prominence to become as we know it today, and began to flourish in Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, as much as in Hong Kong.<sup>28</sup>

It may be said that an important advocacy of the right-wing studios, represented by the Shaw Brothers and MP&GI, to expand their cinema network was in their "apolitical right" position.<sup>29</sup> In Thailand, the development of the Shaw Brothers' business, together with those of filmmaking, was not dissociated from their political line, along which they stood with the Thai government. That is to say, the right-wing studios and the Thai government shared the same non-communist ideology.<sup>30</sup> In an effort to enter and entertain the Thai market, Hong Kong studios began a process of accommodation and collaboration with Bangkok's elites, which can be seen in the co-productions between the two sides during the 1950's and 1970's.

In fact, Hong Kong filmmakers' co-productions with Thailand go as far back as the 1930's. As early as December 1933, a Cantonese film, *Love Redeemed*, shown in Hong Kong, was claimed to have been produced by the United Film Production Company of Bangkok, although it was uncertain whether the film was a Hong Kong-Thailand co-production or not.<sup>31</sup> In the 1960's-70's, the practice of cooperation between Hong Kong and Thai studios became more common. When Taiwan

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<sup>28</sup> Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, 11, 26-27.

<sup>29</sup> That is to say although within the free world line, it had no involvement with any political activities.

<sup>30</sup> Rong Wongsawan, *Chailai Penba* [Crazily Great] (Bangkok: Freeformbooks, 2009), 155. Rong, a veteran Thai journalist, interviewed Run Run Shaw in Hong Kong in the 1970's. He noted that the Shaw Brothers was non-communist Chinese film industry that served people of all classes across the globe—in the name of Shaw Brothers.

<sup>31</sup> Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, Md. : Scarecrow Press, 2004), 215.

announced new currency controls in 1955, it drastically limited funds for Hong Kong films. As a result of this currency reform, Hong Kong's Mandarin cinema went into crisis, independent production shrank, and filmmakers despaired. The only resource was to open up for itself paths of co-production in the Philippines, Korea, and Thailand, a favored destination for those in the film industry seeking work outside Hong Kong.<sup>32</sup> In addition to a large promising market in the Chinese community, Thailand had many businessmen active in the film trade and a government eager to assist foreign filmmakers in nurturing local film production.<sup>33</sup> Hong Kong–Thailand's co-production can be demonstrated in the presence of Thai stars in Hong Kong's films and in Hong Kong's actors starring in Thai films.<sup>34</sup> This cooperation can be particularly noticed in the co-production between Aswin Pictures of Thailand and Hong Kong production studios.

Aswin Pictures of Thailand was established by His Royal Highness Prince Bhanubandhu Yugala, a great producer and director in the Thai film history and a half-cousin of His Majesty King Bhumibol of Thailand. It was not unusual that such a royal elite as H.R.H Prince Bhanubandhu would become involved with and make a contribution to Thai filmmaking. In fact, the advent of cinema in Thailand was initiated by a small number of commercially-oriented playhouses established by Thai elites since the late nineteenth century. Members of the royal elite, therefore, have historically played a significant initiating role in the creation of the local film industry

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<sup>32</sup> Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 202–4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 207–8.

<sup>34</sup> This may be different from “going internationally” in the present day, as the films were dubbed in the indigenous languages of regions they were shown.

and, at various points, were actively involved in the running of the cinema business itself.<sup>35</sup>

In December, 1961, Aswin Pictures of Thailand, jointly with the China United Film Company of Hong Kong (*Zhongguo Lianhe Yingye Gongsi*) produced a Thai language film, “The Boat House,” or *Ruen Phae* in Thai, directed by H.R.H Prince Bhanubandhu.<sup>36</sup> Although not a Shaw production, most Thai audiences believed that, in fact, it was, as Chinese actors in “The Boat House” later played in Shaw’s films, such as “Chin Feng.”<sup>37</sup>

The story of “The Boat House” was dramatic, universal, and apolitical, as three best friends, Chen (So Asanachinda), Kaew (Chaiya Suriyan), and Rin (Chin Feng) fell in love with the same girl, Phen (Maria Chang or Ye Kwong). They lived together at a boat house which was rented from Phen’s father. As time passed, the three friends grew up and began to choose their own way. Soon, Chen graduated with honors and became a police officer, while Rin became a singer, and Kaew, a boxer. Phen’s father intended to have Phen marry Chen, although Kaew was the one whom Phen loved. On a night in the pouring rain, Phen belonged to Kaew. Unfortunately, life’s twists and turns found Phen forced to marry another wealthy man. The best

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<sup>35</sup> Scot Barmé *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex and Popular Culture in Thailand* (Maryland: Roman&Littlefield, inc., 2002), 43–44.

<sup>36</sup> *Hong Kong Filmography Vol.5 (1960–1964)*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005), 163.

<sup>37</sup> Jirawat Saengthong, e-mail message to author, November 22, 2011.

friends found themselves together again when Chen, a new police officer, was ordered to arrest Kaew, whose bandit fellow had killed their best friend, Rin.<sup>38</sup>

After the movie was released, local newspapers expressed the great popularity of “The Boat House.” Some moviegoers wrote film reviews, which were then published in *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, a popular commercially-oriented Chinese paper in Bangkok, endorsing “The Boat House”’s accomplishments. A sample message can be read as follows: “To Thai film artists, please cherish your achievements, by seeking a lot of meaningful subjects, just like what “The Boat House” did to receive a tremendous honor in the celluloid world.”<sup>39</sup> This review is not an exaggerated representation of popular opinion. At the fifth Golden Doll awards<sup>40</sup> of Thailand, in 1962, “The Boat House” won five awards, including best picture, best actor, and best supporting actor. This success enabled “The Boat House” to become a legendary Thai film, remade several times in the form of both movies and TV series. Furthermore, the theme song of the same title, sung by Rin, a character played by Chin Feng, became a classic, as a song sung by Charin Nanthanakorn.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The synopsis was adapted from the program booklet in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Singapore international film festival. See Singapore international Film Festival, accessed May 10, 2011, [http://www.filmfest.org.sg/2009/press/programme\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.filmfest.org.sg/2009/press/programme_booklet.pdf) .

<sup>39</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, January 19, 1962.

<sup>40</sup> The Golden Doll Award was also known as *Phra Suratsawadi*, one of the most prestigious awards in Thai film circles.

<sup>41</sup> Translation of the “The Boat House” theme song is courtesy of Ms. Kruekhae Pothong. Kruekhae Pothong, in an e-mail message to the author, June 26, 2011.

. . . Boat House, afloat, is blessed with true happiness,  
humming crickets and light breeze, music alike,  
that charm all the greenery to sweet dreamy love and joy so potently eternal.  
. . .The seductive scents of flowers linger, alluringly beyond description.  
Boat House, afloat, everlastingly awaits love,

The success of “The Boat House” confirmed Aswin Pictures of Thailand’s confidence in its cooperation with the Hong Kong production studios. A few years later, in 1964, Aswin Pictures co-produced a new film with the Shaw Brothers, titled “The Crocodile River” (*E-yu He*) for the Chinese version, and for the Thai version entitled “Champhoon.” The two versions of the film were slightly different in terms of both their narratives and their actors. For the Thai version of “Champhoon,” the lead character was played by Thai actor, Maen Thiraphon, in replacement of Chaiya Suriyan, who was famous for “The Boat House.” While the lead actress was played by a Shaw star, Julie Shih Yen. But for the Chinese version of “The Crocodile River,” all of the characters were played by Shaw stars, such as Paul Chang Chong, Liu Liang-hua, and Li Ting. The cast was chosen by H.R.H Prince Bhanubandhu, a director of the Thai version, and the Shaw Brothers’ Lo Wei, a director of the Chinese version.<sup>42</sup>

The story of “The Crocodile River” was adapted from a short novel with the same title, “Champhoon,” by a prominent modern Thai literature writer, Thep Mahapaoraya, who unfortunately died from Tuberculosis at the age of thirty-eight.<sup>43</sup> The tragic story began when a girl, Champhoon (Julie Shih Yen), from a Chinese family in southern Thailand, falls in love with Amnoey, a Thai man from Bangkok. Champhoon’s father dislikes Amnoey because he is Thai. Although Champhoon insists

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at the mercy of the divine dewes dropping from the heavenly source.

. . .The little floating heaven, though so lonesome no words can capture.

Whether in hunger or fulfilled, brings on a smile all the same.

Life afloat is a blissful blessing ... Oh heavenly Boat House.

<sup>42</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, October 19, 1963.

<sup>43</sup> “Prawat Nakkhian: Thep Mahapaoraya” [Biography of writer: Thep Mahapaoraya], accessed June 26, 2011, [http://www.praphansarn.com/new/c\\_writer/detail.asp?ID=242](http://www.praphansarn.com/new/c_writer/detail.asp?ID=242).

that she has never had sexual intercourse with Amnoey, her father does not believe her. Therefore, Champoon's father ties Champoon up with iron chain on the second floor of their house. Adding to this, her stepmother takes Champoon's clothes and leaves her naked, so that she feels embarrassed and cannot run away. Nevertheless, Champoon finally manages to escape from her capture to see Amnoey. However, when Champoon arrives at Amnoey's house, she sees him making love to a Filipino girl. While heartbroken, Champoon turns away from Amnoey. Eventually, she ends her life, walking into the river to be swallowed by crocodiles.<sup>44</sup>

After three months on location, shooting "The Crocodile River" and the Thai-language version, "Champoon," Julie Shih Yen returned to Hong Kong from Bangkok.<sup>45</sup> When the Thai version of "The Crocodile River" was first shown to the public in Bangkok on 18 August, 1964, Run Run Shaw, head of the Shaw organization, flew to Bangkok for the gala premier at Chalermket Theater. Their Majesties King Bhumipol and Queen Sirikit attended the performance, a joint production of Shaw studio's and Thailand's Aswin Pictures, starring Julie Shih Yen.<sup>46</sup> *Southern Screen*, a movie magazine published by the Shaw Brothers to promote the company's projects, recorded that Shaw star, Julie Shih Yen, was thrilled that the Thai king and queen came to watch the production and congratulated her on her performance.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Synopsis was adapted from an article by aj.Saharot.

<sup>45</sup> "Shih Yen Visits River Kwai Bridge," *Southern Screen* 78 August 1964, 45.

<sup>46</sup> "King Bhumibol Receives Shaw," *Southern Screen* 81 November 1964, 13.

<sup>47</sup> "Off Screen," *Southern Screen* 80, October 1964, 13–14.

Figure 2.4 Julie Shih Yen met King Bhumibol of Thailand



Source: *Southern Screen* 80, October 1964, 13.

At the same time, *Southern Screen* further stated that His Majesty the King Bhumipol invited Run Run Shaw, the well-known Hong Kong film magnate, for an audience the next day, and had a cordial talk about the cinema industry. His Majesty King Bhumipol enjoyed “The Crocodile River” immensely and expressed hope that cooperation between the Hong Kong and Thai movie industries would be strengthened. After staying for several days in Bangkok, during which time he met local film distributors, Run Run Shaw returned to Hong Kong.<sup>48</sup> His Majesty the King Bhumipol’s reception for Run Run Shaw may not have been made possible without a reference from H.R.H Prince Bhanubandhu, whom the king respected, being an elder

<sup>48</sup> “King Bhumibol Receives Shaw,” 13.



cousin. It is said that H.R.H Prince Bhanubandhu had a long established good relationship with Run Run Shaw, as well as Shaw Brothers' distributors in Bangkok.<sup>49</sup>

Figure 2.5 King Bhumibol receiving Run Run Shaw



Source: *Southern Screen* 81, November 1964, 13.

The collaboration between Thailand and Hong Kong could also be seen in many other Hong Kong–Thailand co-productions. Many Thai movie stars featured in Hong Kong-produced films in order to attract more local Thai audiences. For example,

<sup>49</sup> Rong Wongsawan, *Chailai Penba* [Crazily Great], 22-23.

Mit Chaibancha and Petchara Chaowarat, a Thai couple, starred in the Thai version of martial arts film, *Feixia Shendao* (Flyer and Magic Sword), shown in 1971, and together with a Chinese leading actress, Fan Lin, for the Chinese version. Another Thai actress who was cast in Hong Kong films was Phanawa Chanachit, or Wang Ping, who was also known as “the pearl of Asia.” Phanawa was from a Chinese family in Bangkok and was able to communicate in Chinese, thus making a career in Hong Kong’s film industry possible. She acted in many Hong Kong films, such as *Quanji* (Duel of Fists), in 1971, with a Shaw star, David Chiang. Concurrently, Thai filmmakers sought to internationalize their films through the inclusion of foreign movie stars into Thai films. Hong Kong stars that featured in Thai films include: Ku Mi in “Iron Fist” (*Mat Lek*) and Yu Chien in “The Treasure of the River Kwai” (*Sombat Maenam Kwae*).<sup>50</sup> Some Thai film critics noted that leading actresses from Hong Kong were good in action films and dared to participate in nude scenes, to some extent.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it was attractive for Thai audiences to have Hong Kong female stars featured in Thai films.

### 3.3. The rise of Mandarin cinema

Hong Kong cinema reached its pinnacle in Bangkok with the rise of Mandarin cinema, which was immensely popular among Bangkok’s populace. Although the rise of Mandarin cinema began in the early 1960’s, its popularity in Bangkok can be

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<sup>50</sup> Liu Zhenting, “Taiguó Diánying Meili Xuanfeng Guāqǐ” [The rise of Thai films], *Yazhou Zhoukan* [Asiaweek], June 20, 2004, accessed November 30, 2011, <http://express.cetin.net.cn:8080/cetin2/servlet/cetin/action/HtmlDocumentAction?baseid=1&docno=170395>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

traced to the pre-1950's. In 1947, *Yi Jiang Dong Shui Xiang Dong Liu* (A Spring River Flows East), a film from the Kunlun Studio of Shanghai, stormed the box office in Bangkok.<sup>52</sup> However, after the influx of Western films, mostly from the Hollywood, in the 1950's, Mandarin cinema became profane and unattractive to audiences in Bangkok. This continued until the 1960's, when Mandarin cinema began to rise again thanks to the impetus given by Hong Kong filmmakers, especially the Shaw Brothers,<sup>53</sup> who produced the most influential and successful films in the Mandarin cinema market in Bangkok.

It can be noted that during the 1960's, the Shaw Brothers made great achievements in the Mandarin cinema market in Bangkok. In 1962, the Shaw Brothers cooperated with Bangkok's Juntun Pictures for the distribution of Shaw films in Bangkok. It is said that at that time it was very risky for Juntun Pictures to distribute Mandarin films, since Western films were dominating the cinema market in Bangkok. In fact, it soon became rewarding for Juntun Pictures, as Shaw's Mandarin films were consistently successful. For example, *Baishe Zhuan* (Madam White Snake) was first released at Chalermburi cinema in Bangkok in 1962. Adapted from a Chinese legend, *Baishe Zhuan* was a great success. Within just a couple of months, the box office had grossed a record 800,000 baht, which was a striking number. More importantly, the success of *Baishe Zhuan* helped the Shaw Brothers to open up a bigger market in

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<sup>52</sup> Li Yuching, "Guopian Zai Mangu: Jiantao Yu Zhanwang" [Mandarin Cinema in Bangkok: Review and Outlook], *Sin Sian Yit Pao* January 1, 1965.

<sup>53</sup> Poshek Fu noted that the Shaw Brothers changed its strategies of business production in 1960's. The most obvious change was the privileges afforded to Mandarin productions. Fu pointed out the studio's ambitions to build a global cinema. Therefore, Mandarin clearly became the official language for the studio to facilitate expanding its entertainment empire globally. See Poshek Fu, "Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema," in *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, ed. Poshek Fu (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6-7.

Bangkok, as some film distributors reevaluated the Mandarin film market. Consequently, cinemas increasingly began to screen Mandarin films.<sup>54</sup>

In 1963, a number of Mandarin films from the Shaw Brothers premiered in Bangkok embracing the new era of color film. For example, *Jiangshan Meiren* (The Kingdom and The Beauty)—a new color version re-released,<sup>55</sup> *Honglou Meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber), and *Wu Zetian* (Empress Wu Tse-tien) were three great box office successes. These films were adapted from classic and historical Chinese tales. In the middle of May, *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (The Love Enterne), otherwise known as *Liang-Zhu*, also adapted from a Chinese legend, was released and made more than 700,000 baht.<sup>56</sup> Its takings were only second to *Baishe Zhuan* among Mandarin films at that time. In 1964, when its distribution lease with Chalermburi cinema was finished, Juntun Pictures signed a new distribution lease with New Odeon cinema to shift from screening Western films to Shaw films. From then, New Odeon became the principal cinema that released Shaw's productions. Despite a new distribution network, Shaw films still broke box office records in Bangkok. For example, *Hua Mulan* (General Hua Mulan) made 1,000,000 baht, and *Shan Lian Ge* (The Shepherd Girl) grossed more than 1,200,000 baht.<sup>57</sup> The popularity of *Shan Lian Ge* was mentioned in a Chinese fiction novel, *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*, as the male protagonist was pick-pocketed after watching *Shan Lian Ge* in the New Odeon cinema, because it was very crowded.<sup>58</sup> As well as the success of the film itself, songs

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<sup>54</sup> Shanren, "Mangu De Yule Shiye" [Bangkok's Entertainment Business].

<sup>55</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, June 28, 1963.

<sup>56</sup> Shanren, "Mangu De Yule Shiye" [Bangkok's Entertainment Business].

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Li Hong et al, *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm] (Hong Kong: Dipingxian Chubanshe, 1983), 3.

from *Shan Lian Ge* were popular among young audiences in Bangkok. In addition to *Hua Mulan* and *Shan Lian Ge*, *Danji* (The Last Woman of Shang) became a box office hit during the second half of the year, exceeding 800,000 Thai baht.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it can be said that Mandarin cinema from Hong Kong, especially historic and romantic films by the Shaw Brothers, had laid a solid foundation in the Mandarin cinema market in Bangkok, beginning in the early 1960's.

Between the mid-1960's and mid-1970's there was a turning point in Hong Kong cinema, as there was a significant change in emphasis from historic or romantic films to *Wuxia*<sup>60</sup> productions.<sup>61</sup> In 1965, the Shaw brothers began to release *Wuxia* films, as did other production studios in Hong Kong. The shift in interest of Hong Kong filmmakers to the *Wuxia* genre was said to be a reaction to an increasing sense of self-confidence in China's newly acquired superpower status, and in Hong Kong becoming an Asian tiger; it was also inspired by the popularity of imported Japanese samurai movies.<sup>62</sup> As a result, a rash of Hong Kong's *Wuxia* films appeared, and soon achieved unprecedented box office success. In 1968, Bangkok's box office-hit films included Shaw's *Wuxia* films, such as *Du Bi Dao* (One Armed Swordsman), *Jin Yanzi* (The Golden Swallow), *Zhui Hunbiao* (Killer Darts), *Longmen Kezhan* (Dragon Inn), and *Jindao Guaike* (The Golden Sword).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Shanren, "Mangu De Yule Shiye" [Bangkok's Entertainment Business].

<sup>60</sup> *Wuxia* means martial fighting, swordsman or knight errant. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, 109.

<sup>61</sup> *Hong Kong Filmography Vol.6 (1965–1969)*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive 2007), xvi.

<sup>62</sup> Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, 97–98.

<sup>63</sup> Qingyu, "Guopian Zai Mangu Qiantu Simian" [Mandarin Cinema Promising in Bangkok] *Sin Sian Yit Pao* January 1, 1969.

Since the mid-1960's, although sometimes affected by the development of romantic melodramas (*Wenyi Pian*), for a period of time,<sup>64</sup> *Wuxia* films were still a favorite genre among audiences in Bangkok. The films, *Xin Dubi Dao* (The New One Armed Swordsman), released in 1971 and *Cima* (The Blood Brothers), released in 1973 were both big successes, thus, making David Chiang and Ti Lung, who starred in the films, recognized as international stars throughout Thai audiences. Their every move was reported on in Bangkok's Chinese press. *Sin Sian Yit Pao* published an article called "Jiang Dawei fangwen Di Long" (David Chiang Interviewed Di Lung), in which both stars expressed New Year's greetings to readers in Thailand.<sup>65</sup> Even in the late 1970's, *Wuxia* films had not lost their popularity in Bangkok. For example, in 1977, a number of Shaw's *Wuxia* films earned millions when they were released in Bangkok. These include *Shediao Yingxiong Zhuan* (The Brave Archer) exceeding 3 million baht, *Chuliuxiang* (Clans of Intrigue), *Liuxing Hudiejian* (Killer Clans), *Hongxiguan* (Executioners from Shaolin), and *Baiyu Laohu* (The Jade Tiger), *Shaxiaozi* (The New Shaolin Boxers), and *Qi Zhuangshi* all grossing 2 million baht.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, film critics concluded, Bangkok's cinema market in 1978 would have still belonged to Mandarin cinema, especially *Wuxia* films.<sup>67</sup>

It can be seen that, from 1965, Shaw's *Wuxia* films were controlled by director, Chang Cheh, who worked on a series of *Wuxia* films depicting rebellious, young male

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<sup>64</sup> Qingyu, "Guopian Zai Mangu Qiantu Simian" [Mandarin Cinema Promising in Bangkok]. Such romantic melodramas were *Shanshan* (Susanna), *Lanyi* (Auntie Lan) and *Chunnuan Huakai* (Spring Blossoms) for example.

<sup>65</sup> "Jiang Dawei Fangwen Di Long" [David Jiang Interviewed Di Lung], *Sin Sian Yit Pao* February 15, 1973.

<sup>66</sup> Lin Guanghui, "Huigu 1977 Zhanwang 1978 Yuleye" [Looking Back 1977, Looking into 1978: Entertainment Business] *Sin Sian Yit Pao* January 1, 1978.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

protagonists going against the establishment with realistic action and graphic violence.<sup>68</sup> One such film, *Du Bi Dao* (One Armed Swordsman), depicted the male protagonist, Fang Gang, a one-armed swordsman, who saved his master and his whole family's lives from their enemies, despite the fact that his master's daughter was the one who cut off his arm. In *Cima* (The Blood Brothers), three sworn brothers killed each other for love, power, and revenge. *Du Bi Dao* and *Ci Ma* were remade into *Wu Xia* and *Touming Zhuang* (The Warlords) movies more recently by a brilliant Hong Kong-based director, Peter Chan (*Chen Kexin*), as a tribute.<sup>69</sup> It is interesting that, although born in Hong Kong, Peter Chan grew up in Bangkok's Chinatown during the 1970's, as his father Chan Tong-man (*Chen Tongmin*), an overseas Chinese living in Bangkok, used to work in the cinema industry for both Bangkok and Hong Kong.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps Chan cultivated his deep interest in filming from his father, and by the *Wuxia* phenomena that was present at the time he was growing up, both in Hong Kong and Bangkok.

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<sup>68</sup> Law Kar and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 169.

<sup>69</sup> "Chen Kexin: Wu Xia xiang ouxiang Du Bi Dao Wang Yu zhijing" [Peter Chan's Wu Xia making a salute to his idol director Wang Yu's One Armed Swordsman], [15 July 2011], video clip, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://v.ifeng.com/ent/movie/201107/a9ba6002-2f19-471e-9a3f-ea4bba3dcbcd.shtml>. And "Touming Zhuang xiang Ci Ma zhijing [The Warlords making a salute to the Blood Brothers]," accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.thefirst.cn/264/2007-11-23/152464.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> Liu Zhenting, "Taiguo Dianying Meili Xuanfeng Guaqi" [The rise of Thai films], *Yazhou Zhoukan* [Asiaweek], June 20, 2004, accessed November 30, 2011, <http://express.cetin.net.cn:8080/cetin2/servlet/cetin/action/HtmlDocumentAction?baseid=1&docno=170395>.

## 4. The success of Shaw Brothers in Bangkok

### 4.1 Distribution and promotion networks

Rong Wongsawan, the late National Artist for modern Thai literature, an influential literary and cultural figure, and also a veteran journalist, used to work on advertising the Chinese films for the New Odeon cinema—a principal distributor of Shaw's productions. The great success of Shaw's films in Bangkok, especially in the *Wuxia* genre in the 1970's, encouraged him to visit Shaw's movie studio in Hong Kong and interview Run Run Shaw in 1976.<sup>71</sup> Rong noted that what made the Shaw Brothers become the most influential and successful studio in the entertainment business in Hong Kong was that it had 141 cinema theaters contracted to play only Shaw's distributed films, while other studios would have around one hundred contracted cinemas.<sup>72</sup> According to this figure, it can be said that distribution network was crucial to the dominant status of Shaw Brothers in the market.

The success of the Shaw Brothers in Bangkok in one fundamental aspect also lay in the perfect mixture of the distribution and promotional networks. As an important film market in Southeast Asia during the postwar era, Bangkok attracted film distributors around the world, such as those from America, India, China, and Japan. These film distributors attempted to expand their distribution networks and cinema lines in Bangkok, where there was an obvious advantage in various films being

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<sup>71</sup> His interview with Run Run Shaw, titled "Run Run Shaw—Mountain that winds can't blow out," was published with his witty signature writing style, see Rong Wongsawan, *Chailai Penba* [Crazily Great], 153–81.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.,155.



screened in each cinema theater independently. Generally speaking, in the late 1950's, Sriyaowarat was the strongest location for Teochiu-dialect cinema. Chalermburi and Chalermklakhon mainly showed Mandarin cinema. In fact, during the 1950's, when Western films seemed to dominate the Thai market, Chalermklakhon was the only cinema that insisted on screening Mandarin films. Texas can be said to be the headquarters of Indian films. Capital or Tokyo was the principal cinema for Japanese films. Nevertheless, Western films were the favorite, with good records of box office success, as they were shown in many cinemas in Greater Yaowarat, such as King, Sinfra, Chalermkhet, and Grand.<sup>73</sup>

However, this situation of film distribution in Bangkok began to change from the 1960's, when a new distribution system was implemented. As a film distributor signed up with a production studio and a cinema, when a film was released it would be shown in first-run cinemas, second-run cinemas, and then third-run cinemas respectively. In so doing, first-run cinemas, second-run cinemas, and third-run cinemas formed a line to take turns in releasing films from a studio that their line's distributor had only signed up with.<sup>74</sup> For example, Miramar and Phetrama formed a cinema line that alternately screened films from the United Artists Corporation (UA).<sup>75</sup> It was said that the implementation of this new distribution system brought harsh competition to cinema lines to acquire resources.

Despite the harsh competition, the new distribution system also gave rise to Mandarin cinema, when Juntun pictures signed up the Shaw Brothers in 1964 to

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<sup>73</sup> Shanren, "Mangu De Yule Shiye" [Bangkok's Entertainment Business].

<sup>74</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, January 22, 1961.

<sup>75</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, July 24, 1969.

develop the Mandarin cinema market in Thailand. At that time, the Shaw Brothers was entering a new era of color films and aspired to enter the global market, its productions became ten times more expensive.<sup>76</sup>

As previously stated, at first it was very risky for Juntun Pictures to distribute Hong Kong-produced films, because Western films were dominating the market in Thailand and color film made Shaw's productions quite costly. However, it was rewarding for Juntun Pictures in that the import of Shaw's films helped the establishment and expansion of its cinema lines. In the late 1960's, a cinema line that was with Juntun Pictures' distribution system included New Odeon (a principal cinema), Thiankuothian, Krungkasem, Broadway, Chalermrat, *Jinghua*, and Sinfa, thus enabling Juntun Pictures to be the biggest distributor of Hong Kong's Mandarin cinema in Thailand. Another distributor of Hong Kong's Mandarin cinema, second to Juntun Pictures, was Yaowarat Pictures. Its cinema line included Sriyaowarat and Sriratchawong, which mainly distributed Cathay's productions. The third distributor of Hong Kong's Mandarin cinema in Thailand was Siam Rama Pictures. Siam Rama Pictures first cooperated with Juntun Pictures in showing Shaw's films, but shifted to Yaowarat Pictures to show Cathay's films, and finally operated independently. Siam Rama put an advertisement in magazines in Hong Kong to call for cooperation with Mandarin cinema production and distribution.<sup>77</sup> During the time when Mandarin cinema was enormously popular, Capital/Kyoto, a studio that used to show Japanese films and Queen Indian films, expanded to screen Mandarin films as well.

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<sup>76</sup> Song Hailing, "Jiantao Yu Zhanwang: Mangude Xipianyuan Yu Guopianyuan" [Review and Outlook: Western Cinema and Mandarin Cinema in Bangkok], *Sin Sian Yit Pao* January 1, 1969.

<sup>77</sup> Qingyu, "Guopian Zai Mangu Qiantu Simian" [Mandarin Cinema Promising in Bangkok].

Among a number of cinema theaters, New Odeon was the domain of the Shaw Brothers in Bangkok, as it was also a sole agent of Shaw's movie magazine, *Southern Screen* (Nanguo Dianying) which promoted Shaw's productions. *Southern Screen* was a monthly English-Chinese magazine published by the Shaw Brothers, from 1957 to the mid-1980's, to share upcoming films, movie star profiles, gossip, and news originating from the Shaw Brothers studio, with Shaw's fans around the world. Between 1970–1974, *Southern Screen* magazine began also to be written in the Thai language, from volume 153 (November 1970) to volume 192 (February 1974).<sup>78</sup> The inclusion of the Thai language in *Southern Screen* was said to be a calculated business move for the Shaw Brothers to expand its market in Bangkok to a non-Chinese audience. *Southern Screen*, as a Thai language publication, was a strategic attempt of the Shaw Brothers to do what Yung Sai-shing calls, thinking and going global, acting and selling local,<sup>79</sup> which made Shaw an outstanding choice for consumption in the local market.

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<sup>78</sup> A complete collection of *Southern Screen* Magazine can be found in the Hong Kong Film Archive

<sup>79</sup> Yung Sai-shing, "Territorialization and the Entertainment Industry of the Shaw Brothers in Southeast Asia," in *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, ed. Poshek Fu (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 133.

Figure 2.6 Southern Screen Magazine in the Thai language

จาก: เซ ไซเงินถึง 2,500,000.- เหยียดูได้อย่างไร ?

โดย ศรดาวของเรา

การสร้างภาพยนตร์เรื่อง "เดอะ ฮีโรอิก วันส" ไซเงินถึง 2,500,000.- เหยียดู ซึ่งไม่ได้นับรวมค่าโฆษณา งานแสดงเกี่ยวกับภาพยนตร์เรื่องดังๆ ได้เกิดขึ้นที่โรงแรมมิสแกรนด์เมื่อวันที่ 12 ถึง 16 สิงหาคม โดยจัดแสดงเครื่องใช้ต่างๆ รวมทั้งโต๊ะ, แขนงาตอม, ภูเขา และอุปกรณ์ใช้ในการสร้างสงคราม ตลอดจนบรรณประวัติความเป็นมาของเรื่องนี้และเบื้องหลังการถ่ายทำ

งานแสดงนี้ระดมศรัทธาจากผู้ชมจำนวนมาก รวมทั้ง เซวีก เจียง, เป่ ลุง, ลี ลี และอื่นๆ จาก เซ ไซเงินได้สร้างความสนใจจากคุณเป็นอย่างมาก



● 展品中的「十三太保」服裝，吸引不少觀眾。  
A big crowd views the costumes of the Heroic Ones in the exhibition hall.  
ผู้ชมสนใจ เครื่องแต่งกายของ เดอะฮีโรอิกวันส



● 武器的陳列吸引了不少觀眾。  
The display of the weapons attracts many.



● 這座城堡在新界新田鄉大生圍蓋建，曾引起風水事件。  
The wall and castle that aroused the "Fung Shui" dispute in the New Territories.  
กำแพงและปราสาทของฉาก "หง จูย" ที่นิวเทร์ริทอรี



● 會場上，有「十三太保」的全部製作過程，圖文並茂。  
Literature explaining the process in the filming of "THE HEROIC ONES."  
คำบรรยายเกี่ยวกับขั้นตอนการสร้าง "เดอะฮีโรอิกวันส"




● 太平橋的佈景在露天場地蓋搭，甚為雄偉。  
The grand spectacle presented from the Tai Ping Bridge.  
ภาพจากสถานใหม่

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Source: Southern Screen 152, October 1970, 61.

## 4.2 “Chinese dream”

In addition to a perfect combination of distribution and promotional networks, the success of the Shaw Brothers can be considered a strategy to construct a pan-Chinese culture.<sup>80</sup> In this sense, Poshek Fu noticed that the Shaw Brothers brought together the Chinese community across the globe through “constructing the consciousness of cultural China in its films—an imagined homeland expressed by principally an invented tradition, a shared past, and a common language—that appealed to the nostalgia and nationalism of Chinese audiences around the world.”<sup>81</sup> Generally speaking, the overseas Chinese, when isolated from Mainland China, sometimes had a lingering nostalgia for their Chinese culture. When connections to the Chinese Mainland were discouraged, Hong Kong cinema reproduced Chinese culture and reflected it in its production, as Stephen Teo pointed out:

Investment from overseas Chinese communities and businessmen stimulated the [Hong Kong] territory’s economy into becoming a source of supply for all overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. The demand was for Mandarin films, which stimulated the overseas Chinese’s sense of kinship and nostalgia for Chinese culture by utilizing stories from Chinese legend, myth, and history. At the same time, contemporary feel-good films encouraged audiences to have a positive attitude towards the modern world and enable them to

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<sup>80</sup> Fu, “Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema,” 12.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

partake, in their imagination at least, of prosperous lifestyles beyond their dreams.<sup>82</sup>

Fundamentally, Chinese legend, myth, and history constructed a “Chinese dream,” related to the overseas Chinese sense of kinship and nostalgia for Chinese culture. The Chinese dream can be clearly seen in Shaw’s historical and romance films that hit Thailand’s box office, such as *Baishe Zhuan* and *Liang-Zhu*. The story of *Baishe Zhuan* was adapted from a Chinese legend. A man rescued a white snake in his past life and the snake was grateful for his help. A thousand years later, the white snake transformed herself into a beautiful lady. She fell in love with that man, who was a young scholar in this life. Unfortunately, they were torn apart by a monk, for their love, between a human and a snake, violated taboos.<sup>83</sup>

*Liang-Zhu* was also adapted from a Chinese legend of a tragic love story between a pair of young lovers. Zhu Yingtai was a girl from a wealthy family. In ancient times, women were discouraged from education. Therefore, Zhu disguised herself as a young man to study in Hangzhou. There, she met Liang Shanbo, a young scholar who was her classmate. During their time at school, Zhu fell in love with Liang who also fell in love with her, but failed to recognize that Zhu was, in fact, a girl. When Zhu had to leave school, she hinted to Liang her secret identity. When Liang visited Zhu at her hometown, he discovered that Zhu was a girl, and they promised they would be together. But soon Zhu’s father forced her to marry someone else. Upon hearing this, Liang was heartbroken. He became severely ill and died later.

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<sup>82</sup> Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, 74.

<sup>83</sup> *Hong Kong Filmography Vol.5 (1960-1964)*, 200.

When Zhu stopped by Liang's grave, the sky falling down opened the grave. Zhu jumped into the grave, and she and Liang became a couple of butterflies in the sky.<sup>84</sup>

Chinese audiences in Bangkok said that when watching Shaw's historic and romantic films, they felt close to the story. It also reminded them that China was great and so were the Chinese people.<sup>85</sup> One Chinese mother commented that she liked to bring her children to see such films so that they could learn about Chinese culture.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, one article in the Chinese press spoke highly of the magnificent production of Shaw's historic films, and made a remarkable statement that this was the pride of the overseas Chinese.<sup>87</sup> Thus, Fu concluded that the Shaw Brothers put all the Chinese outside China into a cultural community in which images of a mythical China reigned.<sup>88</sup>

### 4.3 The popularity of *Wuxia* novels

The rise of *Wuxia* films cannot be dissociated with the popularity of *Wuxia* novels. In fact, *Wuxia* novels provided rich subjects for *Wuxia* film productions and, at the same time, *Wuxia* novel readers were also potential audiences for *Wuxia* films. It can be noted that the 1960's–70's were the decades of *Wuxia* novels in Bangkok. Many newspapers had serialized works from famous *Wuxia* fiction writers, both in

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<sup>84</sup> *Hong Kong Filmography Vol.5 (1960-1964)*, 238.

<sup>85</sup> Bang-orn Aphachaemsai, interview by author, 24 January 2000, Samut Prakan, Thailand; Phornthip Lertkeunkunt, interview by author, 24 January 2000, Samut Prakan, Thailand.

<sup>86</sup> Hua Saetung, interview by author, 24 January 2000, Samut Prakan, Thailand.

<sup>87</sup> "Guopian wei Huaqiao zhengguang" [Mandarin cinema winning glory for the overseas Chinese], *Sian Sian Yit Pao*, August 27, 1963.

<sup>88</sup> Fu, "Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema," 15.

Hong Kong and Taiwan, including Jinyong, Gulong, Liang Yusheng, Wen Rui'an, and Wo Longsheng. Interestingly, Thai translations of *Wuxia* fiction novels were also in great demand, reaching a larger number of readers, rather than just those who were literate in Chinese. Chinese *Wuxia* novels translated into the Thai language were serialized in Thai newspapers and also printed in book form. Works by Jinyong were translated by a noted *Wuxia* novel translator, Chamlong Phitnakha. These included such works as *Shedian Yingxiong Zhuan* for Mangkhon Yok (The Jade Dragon), which became a phenomenal hit among Bangkok readers. In addition to Chamlong, another renowned *Wuxia* novel translator was Wo Na Muenglung, who chose to translate works of Taiwanese authors like Gulong and Wo Longsheng in order to avoid repetition of Chamlong's works: his senior who worked with Hong Kong's authors.<sup>89</sup> Translated works of Wo Na Muenglung include *Chu Liuxiang* for Cho Liuhiang and *Juedai Shuangjiao* for Siao Hueyi, in Thai, for example. It was estimated that hundreds of *Wuxia* novels were translated into the Thai language between the 1950's and 1960's.<sup>90</sup> This figure could suggest the overwhelming preference for *Wuxia* novels in Bangkok.

At the same time, the fascination of *Wuxia* novels was extended to their dramatic presentation in cinemas, as many of Shaw's *Wuxia* films were based on *Wuxia* novels that were widely read in Bangkok, such as *Shediao Yingxiong Zhuan*, *Chu Liuxiang*, and *Juedai Shuangjiao*. This made *Wuxia* readers excited for well-executed productions, as it was demonstrated that a combination of plot, set design, music, and actors, as well as featured actors had reached a high standard, which appealed to the

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<sup>89</sup> Khana Thamngan Prawat Kanphim nai Prathetthai [Research group on the history of printing in Thailand], *Siam Phimpakan: Prawatsat Kanphim Nai Prathetthai* [The History of Printing in Thailand] (Bangkok: Matichon, 1996), 415–46.

<sup>90</sup> Kanokporn Numtong, interview by author, 14 December 2011, Nonthaburi, Thailand.



audiences that were not necessarily just Chinese.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, one ethnic Chinese in Bangkok noted that Shaw's production of *Wuxia* films was at such a high standard that anyone, regardless of races, could appreciate it. In other words, another ethnic Chinese elaborated, "You don't need to be Chinese or understand Chinese to enjoy Shaw's films. Just like when watching Cowboy films, you also enjoy the thrill, even though you are not American."<sup>92</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Cinema was part of life in urban Bangkok. In fact, Bangkok cinema appeared to include and be permeated by foreign cinema production and consumption, including Chinese cinema, that played an important role in the making of Thai film history. Therefore, this chapter has looked into Chinese cinema in urban Bangkok, as many urban cinemas were located and operated in Greater Yaowarat—the center of Chinese society in Bangkok. Under the pressure of the Cold War, as well as due to American influence in Thailand, and because connections to the PRC were discouraged, it was not before 1958 that Chinese films from the PRC were completely banned from being screened in Thailand. However, this chapter finds that Hong Kong-produced Chinese films were still largely imported into the Thai market, especially in Bangkok, since many of them were regarded as non-communist Chinese film productions. The influx of Chinese cinema from Hong Kong included both dialect and Mandarin films produced in Hong Kong, which can be demonstrated in the rise of Teochiu-dialect cinema, joint production between production studios of Thailand and

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<sup>91</sup> Qingyu, "Guopian Zai Mangu Qiantu Simian" [Mandarin Cinema Promising in Bangkok] .

<sup>92</sup> Boonruang Chunsuvimol, interview by author, 2 February 2000, Bangkok, Thailand.

those of Hong Kong, and Mandarin cinema from Hong Kong's production studios, predominantly represented by the Shaw Brothers.

The success of Shaw Brothers' Mandarin cinema in Bangkok can be attributed to the expansion of the distribution and promotional networks, the construction of the "Chinese dream," and the popularity of *Wuxia* novels. First, Shaw could sign up with a large number of cinemas within the same line to distribute only its productions. Moreover, Shaw's historic films were attractive to Chinese audiences, as they were related to the overseas Chinese sense of kinship and a sense of nostalgia for Chinese culture. In this sense, some of the Shaw films were based on stories from Chinese legend, myth, and history, such as *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* and *Baishe Zhuan*, which became box-office hits. Finally, the popularity of *Wuxia* novels among readers in Bangkok also provided potential audiences for *Wuxia* films. Shaw's *Wuxia* films, such as *Du Bi Dao*, also became a phenomenal success among a larger audience, rather than just the ethnic Chinese, as people appreciated *Wuxia* films' fantastic production and cinematic experience.

## Chapter Three

### A Chinese Radio Station called Rediffusion

I would like to turn on the radio of an evening and listen to the Chinese songs, which, for a while, were becoming popular. But they have suddenly vanished for reasons I do not understand. One Chinese entrepreneur leases a radio attachment that permits reception of a private station which plays Chinese music, but I have heard that all its broadcasts are in mandarin.<sup>1</sup> ... Our children learn Mandarin, and therefore, enjoy this new radio receiver, while their mother Mui Eng listens to radio dramas during the day. ... This receiver is very cheap, unlike a usual radio receiver, let alone a television. So I think it is very reasonable.<sup>2</sup>

According to the above passage from a Thai novel, *Letters from Thailand*, it can be seen that radio was common in Bangkok's everyday life. Not just novelists, but also Western agencies observed the popularity of radio in Bangkok. For example, a communication report, made by USIS' research division in 1963, showed that radio was more trusted and able to reach a larger audience than any other mass medium, despite the fact that all stations were more or less government controlled.<sup>3</sup> Another

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<sup>1</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, trans. Susan Kepner (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 261.

<sup>2</sup> Botan, *Chotmai Chak Mueangthai* [Letters from Thailand] (Bangkok: Chomromdek Publishing House, 1999), 420–21. Note that this part is my own translation.

<sup>3</sup> United States Information Service, *Communication Fact Book Thailand* (USIS Research and Reference Service, 1963), 23.

report, also written by USIS in 1964, indicated that 95 percent of Bangkok respondents listened to radio (of which 76 percent listened everyday or almost every day).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that broadcast radio was immensely popular with people in Bangkok, as part of their urban culture.

As seen in the passage, there was a Chinese radio station that continued broadcasting during the period when many Chinese broadcasts became unavailable. In fact, this radio station served the Chinese community in Thailand for more than twenty years. It finally ended its broadcasts in August 1982. This Chinese radio station, once popular among the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok in the postwar era, was called “Rediffusion.” This chapter focuses on the Chinese radio station, Rediffusion, from a historical perspective. It aims to examine the content and nature of Rediffusion, and probes into issues such as: what Rediffusion was; how it came to Thailand and how it transformed itself to fit the context of the Chinese community in Thailand; how Rediffusion reflected the Chinese in Thailand; and the kind of roles that Rediffusion played: culturally, commercially, and politically. In a broader perspective, this chapter discusses the intricate and multifaceted relationships between the Thai Rediffusion Company, the Chinese community in Thailand, and the Thai government. By exploring Rediffusion, this chapter aims to enhance our understanding of Chinese society in Bangkok during the Cold War decades, and find that Rediffusion helped Chinese society in Bangkok to maintain ties with the Chinese-speaking world, in the form of modern entertainment culture.

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<sup>4</sup> United States Information Service, *Cross-Section Survey of Communications in Thailand* (Bangkok: USIS Research Division Office, 1964), 6–8.

## 1. Historical background of broadcasting in Thailand

The history of broadcasting in Thailand began just a few years after radio broadcasting became a success in the UK.<sup>5</sup> In 1927, Prince Purachatra Jayagara,<sup>6</sup> a minister of communications who had interests in broadcasting and inventions, ordered the Department of Posts and Telegraphs to experiment with broadcasting.<sup>7</sup> Shortly afterwards, in 1929, broadcasting became more open to the public when the Thai government allowed people to possess radio receivers. During the following year, King Rama VII of Thailand officially opened a radio station called Radio Bangkok at Phayathai. As part of the opening, the king made a remarkable inauguration speech about broadcasting, stating that broadcasting would attempt to “give merchants and ordinary people support in education, commerce, and entertainment.”<sup>8</sup>

After the 1932 revolution, the right-wing element of the government took a stronger stance on broadcasting. They firmly believed in the radio’s power to influence and direct public opinion. Hence, the Thai government paid more attention to broadcasting as a means of propaganda. As a result, the Thai government

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<sup>5</sup> In the UK, radio broadcasting began in 1920 when Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian inventor, successfully established a station to transmit programs to another station. Two years later, in 1922, the experimental stations, 2MT and 2LO were created and then transformed into the “British Broadcasting Company,” and known as the BBC—a notable and influential media company today. BBC, “The BBC History,” accessed April 4, 2009, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/story/index.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> Prince Purachatra Jayagara (official rank: Kromphrakamphaengphet Akarayothin) is recognized as the father of broadcasting in Thailand. Signals that his experimental station transmitted were called “PJ,” as it was abbreviated from the Prince’s name. Sa-ngiam Phaothongsuk, “Prawat Wittayu Krachaisiang Nai Prathetthai” [the History of Broadcasting in Thailand], in *The 60th Anniversary of Broadcasting Day* (Bangkok: Public Relations Department, 1990), 22–23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>8</sup> Amporn Samosorn, “Wiwattakan Khong Borikan Wittayu Krachaisiang Haeng Prathetthai” [the Evolution of Thailand’s Broadcasting Radio Service], in *The 68th Anniversary of Broadcasting Day* (Bangkok: Public Relations Department, 1998), 2.

established the Propaganda Department<sup>9</sup> in 1933 to replace the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, which was previously in charge of radio broadcasting.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, both the Propaganda Department and the Posts and Telegraphs Department still continued their own broadcasts. In addition to these two departments, other government organizations also established their own radio stations, both military and civil. Therefore, in the postwar period, there were a large number of state-owned broadcasting radio stations, making it a very competitive industry.<sup>11</sup>

In order to earn more profits, many of state-owned broadcasting radios, such as the Army Radio, leased part of their airtime to Chinese merchants in Bangkok for them to produce programs. The Chinese merchants who obtained the leases could use the airtime to offer local broadcasts to Chinese audiences in urban Bangkok. The most popular programs among the Chinese audiences were music and drama, particularly in the Teochiu dialect.<sup>12</sup> The reason that programs in the Teochiu dialect were so popular was simply because the Chinese from Teochiu-speaking areas of southern China were predominant all over Thailand, in comparison other ethnic Chinese groups.<sup>13</sup> In the 1950's, Chinese programs were so popular that they were attracting a huge number of advertisements. It was said that one could hear any kind of advertisement in a Teochiu

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<sup>9</sup> The Propaganda Department was later renamed the "Public Relations Department" in 1952. See Phaothongsuk, "Prawat Wittayu Krachaisiang Nai Prathetthai" [the History of Broadcasting in Thailand], 21–23.

<sup>10</sup> The Propaganda Department aimed at publishing announcements, speeches, and news to promote and legitimate the new political order, see Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, "Radio Broadcasting in Thailand: The Structure and Dynamics of Political Ownership and Economic Control," *Media Asia* 19 (1992): 92.

<sup>11</sup> Phaothongsuk, "Prawat Wittayu Krachaisiang Nai Prathetthai" [the History of Broadcasting in Thailand], 22–23.

<sup>12</sup> Li Yi, "Wo Yu Lide Husheng De Yiduan Yuan [Destiny of Me and Rediffusion]," in *Wangshi Suixianglu* [Bygone Random Thoughts] (Bangkok: Bayin Chubanshe, 2000), 47.

<sup>13</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 212.

dialect anywhere, whether on wide roads or narrow streets. This phenomenon was so exaggerated that Yaowarat and Sampheng, heavily Chinese-concentrated areas in urban Bangkok, appeared to become part of the Teochiu district of China.<sup>14</sup>

Despite their immense popularity, Chinese broadcasts suddenly disappeared when the Thai government banned all Chinese programs from being broadcast during the late 1950's. As a result, all the leases on the operations of the Chinese broadcasts became useless pieces of paper almost overnight.<sup>15</sup> A newspaper article explained the shift of government policy on Chinese broadcasts as a further step to assimilate the ethnic Chinese into Thai society. The article described as follows:

It has been claimed that the termination of Chinese programs from radio stations throughout the nation is “a calculated move” by the government to accelerate the assimilation of local Chinese residents. For the best national interests, the decision to eliminate the Chinese language from the radio programs was not totally unexpected in view of rising nationalistic sentiments during the past two decades. In addition to speeding up the assimilation process of the Chinese, the ban was also considered as a move to save government officials' embarrassment when foreign visitors asked why so many radio programs seemed to be broadcasted in non-Thai languages.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Li Yi, “Wo Yu Lide Husheng De Yiduan Yuan” [Destiny of Me and Rediffusion], 47.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>16</sup> Manit Jeer, “On the Air,” *Bangkok Post* November 15, 1970.

Despite the termination of Chinese programs, the Chinese broadcast, Rediffusion, still prevailed. Rediffusion was also known as *Lide Husheng* (beautiful voices) in Chinese and *Songsiang Thangsai* (transmitting voices by wire) in Thai. As its name implied, Rediffusion was a transmitted, wired radio broadcast. Rediffusion's listeners required a receiving box, since broadcasts were transmitted by wire to the homes of listeners, where a receiving box was installed for programs to be heard. Rediffusion's service was first set up in the UK during the early twentieth century, because of the BBC's poor signal in some remote areas.<sup>17</sup> Rediffusion was a private corporation organized in 1928 to relay broadcasts from BBC London to Clacton, a town where signals were poorly received.<sup>18</sup> Established in the UK and known as Broadcast Relay Services, Rediffusion had begun its service in many regions of former British colonies including Hong Kong, Malaya, and Singapore in 1949. Several years later in the mid-1950s, Rediffusion came to Thailand and functioned for more than twenty-years, providing a service to the Chinese society in Thailand, until its end in 1982.

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<sup>17</sup> Drew O McDaniel, *Broadcasting in the Malay World* (Norwood NJ: Ablex Pub, 1994), 136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



## 2. The Making of Rediffusion

### 2.1 The Making of Rediffusion: Round One

Despite the inauguration of broadcast services in 1956, the attempt to establish Rediffusion in Thailand can be traced back seven years earlier, to late 1949. In 1949, Mr. Phayom Rotchanawiphat, a representative from the Broadcast Relay Service (Overseas) Ltd.,<sup>19</sup> began to propose the Rediffusion project to the Thai government. Mr. Phayom, representing Broadcast Relay Service Ltd., attended a government-held conference on the establishment of Rediffusion, together with Thai government officials relevant to broadcasting, on 17 December 1949. The conference agreed, in principle, that conditions and shareholders would depend on Government considerations, and that the company should be the mouthpiece of the government. Therefore, it should be operated by the Propaganda Department, as it was the body in charge of broadcasting at the time.<sup>20</sup>

However, the Propaganda Department replied to the Office of the Prime Minister in following year that it wanted to object to Rediffusion's broadcasting service. The report claimed that there were many disadvantages involved in Rediffusion: for example (1) the service could broadcast from any radio station, therefore, it was difficult for the government to have complete control over its activities. On the other hand, the government should allow the Propaganda Department to freely operate such a service; (2) the company was much inclined to secure huge capital to make its service acceptable, or even better than state-run radios.

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<sup>19</sup> Broadcast Relay Service (Overseas) Ltd. was located in London. It expanded its operations to British colonies, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaya in the late 1940's. However, the biography of Mr. Phayom Rotchanawiphat was poorly documented.

<sup>20</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

This could distract listeners from state-run radios to a more attractive private one; (3) Rediffusion seemed to compete with national radio, according to (2); and (4) Rediffusion could affect state income. According to Thai law, a wired radio receiver required no tax, unlike a wireless radio receiver. If Rediffusion attracted a greater audience for its cheap receiver, the state would lose a large amount of income.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, Mr. Phayom gave the Propaganda Department further explanation on what the department was concerned about. He argued that Rediffusion would not decrease state income. On the contrary, it would increase state income by allowing the Thai government to tax Rediffusion's receivers. Furthermore, although a foreign firm, the Rediffusion Company was willing to be controlled by the Thai government. Finally, Rediffusion would broadcast only when there was not any other program being broadcast, that is to say when most people were working outside. However, the Propaganda Department still concluded that the Rediffusion broadcasting service should not be permitted, since they believed it could damage the department's affairs. Unless the government had a policy of establishing the Rediffusion service, the Propaganda Department would have been responsible both for its operation and management.<sup>22</sup>

Discontented with the Propaganda Department's conclusion, a few months later, M. L. Khap Kunchon, the Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister, personally appealed on behalf of Rediffusion to Phibun, the prime minister of Thailand at that time. He reiterated the importance of having Rediffusion's service. In his appeal, he emphasized: "I have constantly tried to inquire about advantages and

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<sup>21</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

<sup>22</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

disadvantages from foreigners who used to have such a service. They say it will be very useful, especially for the current situation. Rediffusion can be a tool to effectively counter communist propaganda. Moreover, the Thai government would need to invest nothing. And you are in a position that can directly order the Propaganda Department to do so without the cabinet's decision."<sup>23</sup> With regard to Khap's appeal, Phibun seemed to agree with Khap on this point. Therefore, Phibun gave approval to Rediffusion in March of 1950, and ordered the Propaganda Department to take charge.

The establishment of Rediffusion was not either easy or smooth, however. In fact, it faced many problems involving laws and regulations as assessed by the Juridical Counsel at that time. For instance, Rediffusion broadcasting could be considered a sort of telephone, since it transmitted through electrical wire and required wire equipment in public. Therefore, it needed to be legal under the laws of telegraph-telephone. In addition, Rediffusion's service broadcast from a radio station to its equipped receivers through wires. Hence, it should also be controlled by laws of radio-communication. Moreover, although under the two said laws, Rediffusion, to some extent, possessed business characteristics that could be regulated for the purpose of public safety and wellness. Another important issue was that advertisements using amplifiers in languages other than Thai, was prohibited. If Rediffusion wanted to advertise in Chinese, there would have to be an amendment to the law on advertisements in foreign languages.<sup>24</sup> Due to this difficulty, on 26 June, 1950 the cabinet decided to postpone the Rediffusion project.

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<sup>23</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

<sup>24</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

After the decision was postponed, Mr. Phayom clarified some misunderstood points and encouraged the Thai government to consider two new proposals as follows:

The first proposal was that if the government required that no foreign firms could operate Rediffusion broadcasting service, the broadcast relay service could offer the establishment of a new Thai company to run the business. Such a company would register in Thailand and sign a contract with the government. Hence, its capital would partially belong to the Thais, while the Broadcast Relay Service Company would be a shareholder, which would benefit the government. Nevertheless, since the Broadcast Relay Service was in charge of operations and technical management, it should be a majority shareholder in such a newly established company.

The second proposal was that if the government insisted that no foreign firm could be a majority shareholder, the Broadcast Relay Service was still willing to accept this decision by becoming a small shareholder. In this case, the government should make it clear that the division in management and service between the newly established company and the Broadcast Relay Service would be well defined. Critical to facilitate the government in controlling the program's features, Phayom made the offer that all Chinese-language personnel at Rediffusion should receive recommendation and introduction from the Chinese section of the Police Department, and must receive approval from the government.

His new proposals, however, seemed insufficient to the Propaganda Department, who considered it impossible because of the cabinet's postponed decision and Rediffusion's disadvantages, as well as due to other complexities.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Rediffusion project was not mentioned again until it was revisited three

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<sup>25</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

years later, in 1953, when there was a shift of the parties involved with the making of Rediffusion.

It is questionable as to why the Broadcast Relay Service Company was unable to further its expansion in Thailand. There could be a few explanations of this failure. First, it is known that economic nationalism was an important theme in promoting a “Thai economy for the Thai people,” under Phibun’s government during the 1950’s.<sup>26</sup> His economic policy aimed at Thai participation in economic activity, including the expansion of the state’s role in industry and the encouragement of semi-government controlled Thai enterprises in commerce and finance.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, it undertook serious economic restrictions and tightened regulations on foreign capitalists, including those of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand.<sup>28</sup> This may have resulted in the failure of the Broadcast Relay Service Company to enter the Thai market, since it was fundamentally a foreign company. In addition to economic nationalism, the radio broadcasting service was a lucrative business in Thailand. Therefore, it possibly brought a conflict of interest among the Thai government officials who saw an opportunity in such a business. It may be assumed that Broadcast Relay Service Company could not make a satisfactory deal with Thai government officials behind closed doors.

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<sup>26</sup> Akira Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855–1985* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1989), 138.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> However, rather than a limited Chinese retreat, the government’s economic nationalist program resulted in the establishment of an alliance between Chinese merchants who sought security and the Thai ruling class who would offer protection. In Sino-Thai alliance development, therefore, the political patronage showed that Chinese merchants profited from the political protection and special privileges offered by the Thai ruling class, while the Thai ruling class gained wealth and economic power from the Chinese in return. See Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, chapter 5 and 302–5.

## 2.2 The Making of Rediffusion: Round Two

Due to the atmosphere of the Cold War and the fear of communism, a revival of the Rediffusion project began in 1953. Given all the factors involved in this second round, the making of Rediffusion involved new parties and the resolving of the Thai government's concerns.

As seen in M. L. Khap Kunchon's appeal that Rediffusion be used to counter communist propaganda, the Thai government expressed its own concern that a communist influence had also developed in Thailand. Phibun, the prime minister of Thailand at that time, initiated an anti-Chinese campaign, which was given added impetus by the prominence of Chinese members in the minuscule Communist Party of Thailand, and by the growing depiction of the overseas Chinese as a possible fifth column of subversion on behalf of Communist China.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the Thai police, under the direction of Police Director-General Phao Siyanon, launched an aggressive anti-communist campaign in November of 1952, which profoundly affected the Chinese community. An anti-Communist bill, known as the Un-Thai Activities Act of 1952, was submitted to the National Assembly by General Phao.<sup>30</sup>

Police Director-General Phao Siyanon was concerned that Chinese-broadcast programs could possibly engage in spreading the communist ideology. While the Thai government did not have its own radio designed for the Chinese, this would have been an obvious disadvantage, as it may have left a crucial communication gap between the Thai government and the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. Therefore, in order to remove this disadvantage, the Thai government would need a channel to fill the gap between

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<sup>29</sup> David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Bangkok: O.S. Printing House, 1984), 267.

<sup>30</sup> G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by Cornell University Press, 1958), 285–88.

the government and the people. More importantly, it would limit any leaning of the Chinese towards programs that conveyed undesirable political ideologies. At this point, General Phao made it clear that Rediffusion's service would be useful in the police's work, such as in helping the police in command and in defense, since it was a communication channel that had to conform to the government's policies.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, in October 1953, General Phao strongly recommended that S. R. Brother Company propose the Rediffusion broadcasting service to the Thai TV Company, of which General Phao was also a chairperson at that time. In accordance with Phao's endorsement, the Thai TV Company agreed to accept S. R. Brother's proposal. The Thai TV Company, as an organization under the Public Relations Department,<sup>32</sup> became a major party in the creation of Rediffusion, in place of the Broadcast Relay Service that was no longer involved in the project. As a result, General Phao, representing the Thai TV company, together with the S. R. Brother Company, finally established Thai Rediffusion Company to organize Rediffusion's broadcast.

Although Thai Rediffusion Company was successfully established, there were many questions relating to its establishment. First, why was the Broadcast Relay Service Company completely erased from its establishment? Second, if the Broadcast Relay Service Company was no longer involved with the establishment, why could Thai Rediffusion Company still use the name, Rediffusion? Third, using the same

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<sup>31</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

<sup>32</sup> The Thai TV Company was a government agency founded for commercial purpose by Police-Director General Phao Siyanon. Its founding fund was from the Public Relations Department, Ministry of Finance, the Royal Army, Navy, Air Force, Police Department, and several state agencies such as the Lottery Office, Tobacco Factory and Bangyeekhan Brewery Factory. Among which, Public Relations Department holds the biggest shares, therefore, in charge of the company's management. See U-ran Nuengchamnon, *Mass Media: Radio-Tv*, second ed. (Bangkok: Aksonbanthit, 1977), 8.

broadcasting technique as the Broadcast Relay Service Company, did Thai Rediffusion Company actually buy the license to learn any technical know-how from the Broadcast Relay Service Company? The answers to these significant questions remain unclear, since material on Thai Rediffusion Company is fragmentary and poorly documented

In accumulating the capital to establish the company, General Phao further indicated that the founding fund of Thai Rediffusion Company 6,000,000 baht, would come 60 percent from the Thai TV Company, 30 percent from a foreign firm,<sup>33</sup> and 10 percent from the S. R Brother Company. The operation would be part of Thai TV Company, as a result, and under the direct control of the Department of Public Relations. Meanwhile, he admitted that they lacked 60 percent of the funds necessary, around 3,600,000 baht, and requested that the cabinet approve such a fund to establish Thai Rediffusion Company. Without any objection, the Thai government ordered the Ministry of Finance to grant 3,600,000 Baht to Thai TV Company,<sup>34</sup> and moreover, to facilitate the import of broadcasting equipment from The General Electric co. (Malaya) totally 43,960 pounds sterling.<sup>35</sup>

Following this, in October 1953, the Thai Rediffusion Company was successfully established to organize Rediffusion's broadcasts. The fourth floor of the Agricultural Bank (*Thanakan Kaset*) office on Yaowarat Road, as a business and

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<sup>33</sup> A foreign firm referred to a Chinese merchant from Singapore Lim Joo Jit. Lim considered Rediffusion in Singapore to be a good model of broadcasting radio. Therefore, he took Singapore Rediffusion as a model to establish a Chinese radio station in Thailand. Zheng stated that Mr.Lim Joo Jit was assassinated for unknown reasons; later his named was removed from the Rediffusion board. Zheng Yingnian, interview by author, 26 May 2009, Bangkok, Thailand; MC CRF Thai Rediffusion Company 2774/2496, No.1854/2500

<sup>34</sup> NA OPM (2)sor.ror.0201.93/51

<sup>35</sup> NA OPM (3)sor.ror.0201.4.5/52



entertainment center, was chosen to be the company's headquarters. After the location was determined, the construction work began, for example, in setting up broadcasting equipment and devices, recruiting technicians, surveying and installing the wires, processing applications to equip Rediffusion's receiving boxes, and testing network sound. Finally, Rediffusion officially broadcast for the first time on 1 August 1956.<sup>36</sup>

As demonstrated in Chart 1, below, the Thai Rediffusion Company consisted of eight sections:

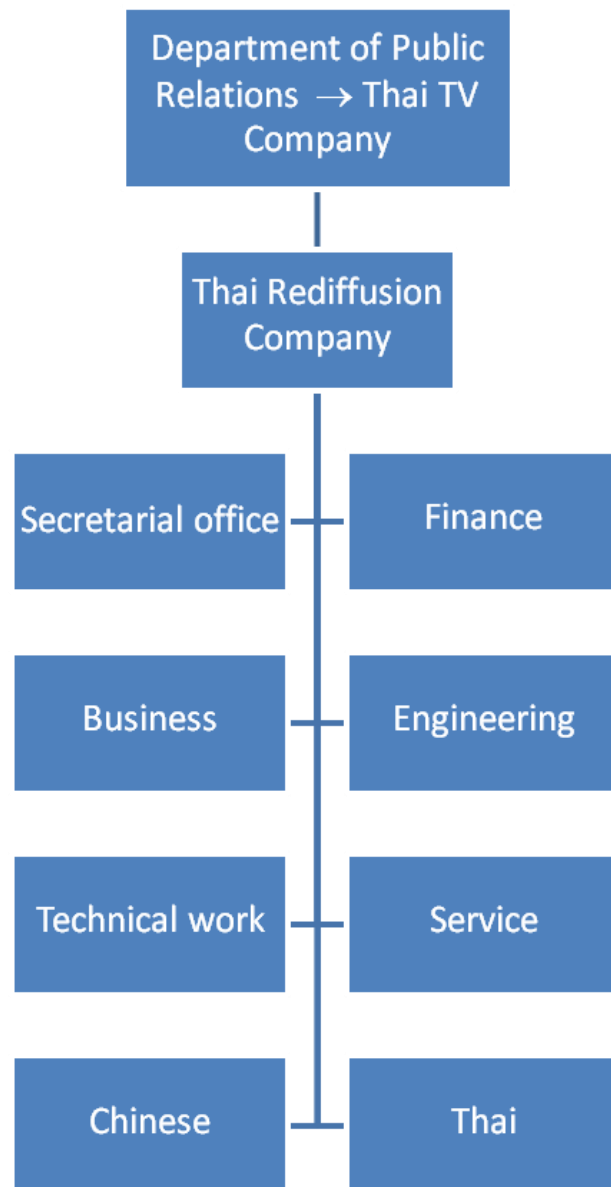
- (1) The secretarial office was in charge of company business.
- (2) The finance section was mainly in charge of accounting and finance.
- (3) The business section was responsible for advertisement, application processing, receiving box installation, and monthly fee collection.
- (4) The engineering section was mainly responsible for the wires and broadcasting equipments' installation and maintenance.
- (5) The technical work section dealt with supervising and repairing broadcasting equipment, controlling broadcasting sound. The majority of the approximately two hundred employees in this company, were technicians and field workers.
- (6) The service section took charge of inquiry and customer service.
- (7) The Chinese section managed, produced, and organized Chinese programs.

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<sup>36</sup> "Taiguo Lide Husheng Jianjie" [Brief Introduction to Thai Rediffusion], *Lide Husheng Zazhi (chuangkan hao)* [Rediffusion Magazine (first issue)] 1966, 12.

(8) The Thai section managed, produce, and organized Thai programs.<sup>37</sup>

Figure 3.1 Organization of Thai Rediffusion Company



<sup>37</sup> "Taiguo Lide Husheng Jianjie" [Brief Introduction to Thai Rediffusion], 12.

According to the structure of Thai Rediffusion Company's organization, as seen in the chart, Rediffusion in Thailand was a state-controlled semi-private enterprise. This made it different from Rediffusion broadcasts in Singapore, Malaya, and Hong Kong that were purely private. In the second round of establishing Rediffusion, there are two aspects that contributed to its success: the connection between the Thai government and the Thai Rediffusion company, and the relationship between Thai officials and Rediffusion's Chinese workers.

The structure of the organization evidently showed that the Thai Rediffusion Company was under the direct control of the Thai TV Company, which belonged to the Department of Public Relations. This connection can be more clearly seen in the founding board of Thai Rediffusion Company, in that most of its board members were government officials, as evidenced by the list of the full board of directors, detailed below:<sup>38</sup>

(1) Police-Director General Phao Siyanon, also a chairman of Thai TV Company) became a chairman of the board

(2) M. L. Khap Kunchon, the Secretary of the Office of Prime Minister, who strongly advocated the Rediffusion project, was rewarded with a board member position for his efforts.

(3) Mr. Prasong Hongsanan, a deputy-director of the Public Relations Department and Thai TV Company board member, was a deputy chairman of the board

(4) Police Brigadier General Pichai Kunlawanit, a deputy-director of the Police Department. He used to be a director of Phapphlachai Police Station where Thai

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<sup>38</sup> MC CRF Thai Rediffusion Company 2925/2496

Rediffusion Company was located, was a board member. He was also Suriyon's boss at the time when Suriyon was a policeman stationed in the Phapphlachai District of Bangkok.

(5) Police Lieutenant Suriyon Raiwa, a former policeman, was the S. R. Brother Company founder and a board member.

(6) Mr. Saman Watcharasiritham, a Chinese merchant based in Bangkok, was a board member.

(7) Mr. Lim Joo Jit, a Chinese merchant based in Malaya, was a board member.

Although there were occasionally changes in board members, government officials from the Department of Public Relations still dominated the company board, and the director of the Department of Public Relations usually became the chairman of the board of Thai Rediffusion. One such chairman was Lieutenant General Krit Punnakan, who had long been the director of the Department of Public Relations as well as of Thai Rediffusion Company for several consecutive sessions.

In addition to the board members who were government officials, Police Lieutenant Suriyon Raiwa, the founder of the S. R. Brother Company whose Rediffusion proposal was endorsed by General Phao Siyanon, was another important board member in the Thai Rediffusion Company. Suriyon was first a policeman and then became an entrepreneur. He ran a number of businesses including the S. R. Brother Company.<sup>39</sup> His businesses included the Agricultural Bank, the third floor of its Yaowarat branch becoming an office for Thai Rediffusion Company.

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<sup>39</sup> In fact, the "S. R." in S.R. Brother was an abbreviation of his adoptive father's full name, Sing Raiwa who, in fact, was a younger brother of Suriyon's mother. Suriyon liked it very much,

With regard to his connection with Phao, Suriyon was a big financial supporter of Phao's faction in the Manangkhasila Party. Suriyon's advocacy for Phao was so exaggerated that anyone in Phao's faction could get what he wanted by simply asking Suriyon. It is said that even members of Parliament making uniforms needed to claim expenses from Suriyon. With regard to the structure of the Manangkhasila party, it may be concluded that Phibun was a party head, Phao was a party secretary, and Suriyon was a party host. This cooperation suggests that Suriyon and Phao had a very strong, special connection.<sup>40</sup>

The special connection between Suriyon Raiwa and Phao Sriyanon can be explained in the term of G. William Skinner's "leaders from the periphery." In fact, "leaders from the periphery" referred to Chinese leaders from the periphery of Chinese society and culture—men whose ethnic orientation and loyalties were mixed.<sup>41</sup> That is to say, Chinese leaders who were more assimilated into Thailand became influential within the Chinese community because of their connections with Thai elites and officials. The reason was that leaders who could speak Thai well, used a Thai name, and had served on official or semiofficial government committees would be able to more directly negotiate with the Thai officials.<sup>42</sup> Such leaders seemed to be also more attractive and acceptable for the Thai elites who looked into business cooperation in search of wealth.<sup>43</sup>

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therefore, borrowed this abbreviation for the name of his company. S. R. Brother was first known as one of the biggest rice export companies.

<sup>40</sup> The relationship between Phao and Suriyon was excellent. Even when Phao fled overseas due to political reasons, Suriyon, himself, took him at the airport. See Somchai Wiriya-banditkun, "Suriyon Raiwa: The First Tycoon," *Manager Magazine* October 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, 239.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 244.

Despite being a man of Chinese extraction, Suriyon seemed to be more Thai assimilated. Before becoming an entrepreneur, Suriyon was better known as a policeman and a Member of Parliament from Narathiwat, a remote province in southern Thailand. It can be said that his position as a Thai official appeared more impressive than being a Chinese businessman. Suriyon had his own business on Yaowarat Road in Bangkok, the Agricultural Bank, which was also supported by the Thai government. From the viewpoint of the Thai government, “leaders from the periphery,” like Suriyon Raiwa, seemed to be the proper agents with which to deal with the Chinese community. That is to say, S. R. Brother Company, represented by Suriyon Raiwa—a Thai-ified leader—was working with the Thai government in the operation of Chinese broadcasts within a Chinese society of which Suriyon was on the margins.

In the second aspect, the second round of establishing Rediffusion emphasized a special relationship between Thai officials and their Thai Rediffusion colleagues who were Chinese. Because 95 percent of Rediffusion’s audience were listeners to Chinese programs, the company’s performance greatly depended on its Chinese section. Therefore, the Chinese section and those who were responsible for this section played a crucial role in Thai Rediffusion Company. From the beginning of Rediffusion’s broadcast, Hu Yi (*Ake O-charoen* in Thai) was the head of Chinese section, and Zheng Yingnian (*Phat Taechakraichana* in Thai) was the deputy head.

While the Thai government was concerned about Chinese broadcasts being used to spread undesirable political ideologies, Hu Yi and Zheng Yingnian gained the government’s trust in their management of the Rediffusion service. Suspicion of these people was likely to be assuaged after studying their backgrounds and finding the special relationship between them and Thai government officials.

Hu Yi was born in Chonburi Province in eastern Thailand, in 1921. His ancestors came from Puning District in the Guangdong Province of China. Hu Yi was the nephew of a prominent local merchant, Hu Zhaoyu. Hu received a Chinese education from Xinmin School and Zhonghua secondary school in Bangkok. When the Anti-Japanese war began, he devoted his life to serve the “motherland,” China.

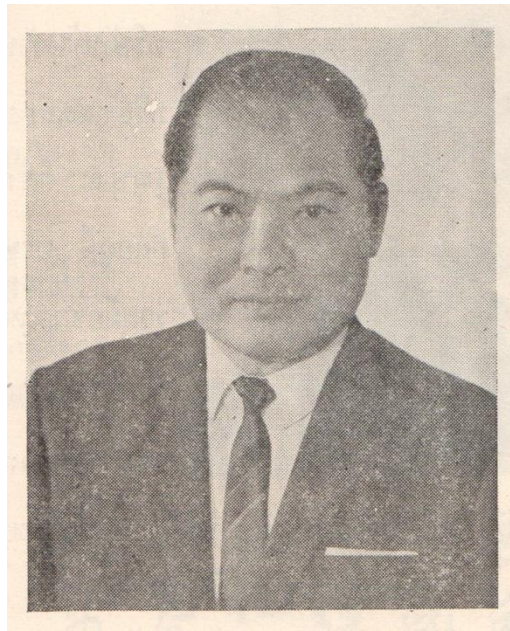
Therefore, Hu went to China and enrolled in Central Military School. During his training, he fought against the Japanese in Southern Guilin (*Guilin Huizhan*). After graduating in 1941, Hu joined Nanyang’s special training class of the Military Commission Committee, and later joined KMT’s Special Military Committee in charge of Overseas Chinese Affairs. As a result, he came to Thailand and completed his mission in 1944. When the Second World War ended, as an official of KMT’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee, he took the position of Overseas Commissioner Office Controller, and member of the Central Standing Committee for the Bangkok branch. After fulfilling his service commitments within the army of the Nationalist Government, Hu Yi began to work for the Chinese section of Radio Thailand as deputy director.

When the Thai government decided to establish the Thai Rediffusion company, which was broadcast in the Chinese language, Hu Yi was invited to be a head at this company due to his experience in Chinese broadcasts. Thus, Hu Yi became a head of Chinese section of the Thai Rediffusion Company, and was in charge of producing Chinese programs.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Hu Yi,” in *Taiguo Huaqiao Dacidian* (Bangkok: Witthayakon, 1966), 115.

Figure 3.2 Picture of Hu Yi



Source: *Lide Husheng Zazhi Henian Kan* [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)], 4.

From Hu's biography, it is obvious that Hu Yi demonstrated that he had been heavily involved with the Kuomintang (the KMT). In fact, it can be seen from his biography that he had no connection with the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP). Whether he was pro KMT or neutral, it can be further asserted that Hu was non-communist. This position perfectly matched the government's requirements for those people with responsibility in Chinese broadcasting. In addition to government-controlled Chinese radio, he also worked for the government's Chinese newspaper, *Jinghuabao* (Sirinakhon) as a deputy director position,<sup>45</sup> while his ex-colleagues from the Chinese section of Radio Thailand became editors.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Hu Yi," 115. Hu was from Chinese sector of Thai Rediffusion Company. This and the Thai TV Company under direct control of Public Relations department together established a Chinese newspaper named *Jinghuabao*. Founded on 29 January 1959, *Jinghuabao* soon became one of the "big four" Chinese dailies. Its position was particularly aimed at helping the government to disseminate policies and principles concerning the Chinese, and became a channel reflecting socio-commercial



According to Zheng Yingnian, a deputy of the Chinese section of Thai Rediffusion Company, Hu Yi and he had known M. L. Khap Kunchon for a number of years, since they were all working for KMT Central Military in Chongqing during the Anti-Japanese war. At that time, M. L. Khap persuaded them both to work at Radio Thailand and produce Chinese programs, and also to return to Thailand.<sup>47</sup> When the Second World War ended, Hu and Zheng came back to Thailand, and then began to work for the Chinese section of Radio Thailand. When the government established the Thai Rediffusion Company, they were trusted to be given important positions in the Company. As Zheng demonstrated, friendship between Rediffusion's colleagues (such as between him and Hu) and Thai officials (such as M. L. Khap) created mutual trust and a relationship that significantly supported the establishment of Rediffusion.<sup>48</sup>

It can be concluded from the second round of establishing Rediffusion that the Thai Rediffusion Company was politically designed by the Thai government, rather than being created based on commercial considerations. This political consideration was apparently presented by Prasong Hongsanan, a board member of the Thai Rediffusion Company, during his New Year blessing to Rediffusion's audience in 1967. Prasong stated that "Rediffusion attempted to spread news and information from the government quickly. While political problems confronting the government were enormous, it was 'unity, understanding and corporation,' from all people who

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markets. See Hong Lin, "Taiguohuawenbao Jianshi" [a Short History of Chinese Newspapers in Thailand], *Sin Sian Yit Pao* 8 March 2002.

<sup>46</sup> His ex-colleagues were the Lin brothers. Lin Lairong was an editor in chief and his younger brother, Lin Zhiqiang, was a general manager. They also worked for the Chinese section of Radio Thailand, a radio station of the Public Relations Department. Zheng Yingnian, "Taiguode Huayu Guangbo Diantai" [Chinese Broadcasting Radio in Thailand], *Sino-Thai Studies* April (2005): p385.

<sup>47</sup> Zheng Yingnian, interview by author, 26 May 2009, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

live in Thailand, regardless of their hitherto races and languages, that became most crucially needed.”<sup>49</sup> With regard to this political need, the organization and management of the Thai Rediffusion Company showed its close connection with the Thai government. In addition, Thai Rediffusion’s colleagues, who were key people in producing Chinese broadcasts, also maintained a special relationship with some Thai officials.

### **3. Exploring Rediffusion: demographic and data interpretation**

#### **3.1 Demographic Interpretation**

As its name implied, Rediffusion’s broadcasts were transmitted by wire, linking the radio station to where the receiving sets were installed. Listeners had to subscribe to the Thai Rediffusion company in order to have a blue box installed at their homes and listen to Rediffusion’s programs. To acquire a Rediffusion box, one needed to fill in an application form, stating the type of subscribers (such as a private home, company, or shop), address, and the number of boxes required. Afterwards, an application form would be sent to Rediffusion Company representatives directly, or be mailed to the company. In some cases, subscribers could call the company, who would then send staff to collect the form. When the application was processed, the company would make an appointment to install a Rediffusion receiving box. This cost an initial installation fee of 100 baht, and a monthly fee of 30 baht, or 1 baht per day.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “San Khong Kammakan Phuchatkan Borisat Songsiang Thangsai” [Messages from a Board Director of Thai Rediffusion Company], *Lide Husheng Zazhi 3* [Rediffusion Magazine vol.3] 1967, 4.

<sup>50</sup> See Rediffusion application form in the appendices.

Figure 3.3 Picture of Rediffusion receiving box



Source: Picture by author at House of Museum, Thailand, May 31, 2009.

It has been said that when the company first went into operation in Bangkok, there were only five thousand subscribers and for the next few years its finances were always in the red. This was understandable in the view of the competition offered by many other radio stations which at the time also provided Chinese broadcasts. The big change came in early 1959, when eleven of the twelve radio stations that had Chinese broadcasts were ordered to cancel their Chinese programs. A growing number of people began to subscribe to the company during the next year, when Chinese radio programs were taken off the air; the business of the company increased enormously.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Jeer, "On the Air."

Rediffusion's service covered most of the Bangkok area. The wire network of the Bangkok-based station had extended to as far as Samut Prakan Province at one end and Bangkhae in Thonburi at the other. The company also served the suburban districts of Bangkok, including Latphrao and Saphankwai. Because of the expanded network, the company had also set up four sub-stations in the outlying areas to step up transmission power.<sup>52</sup>

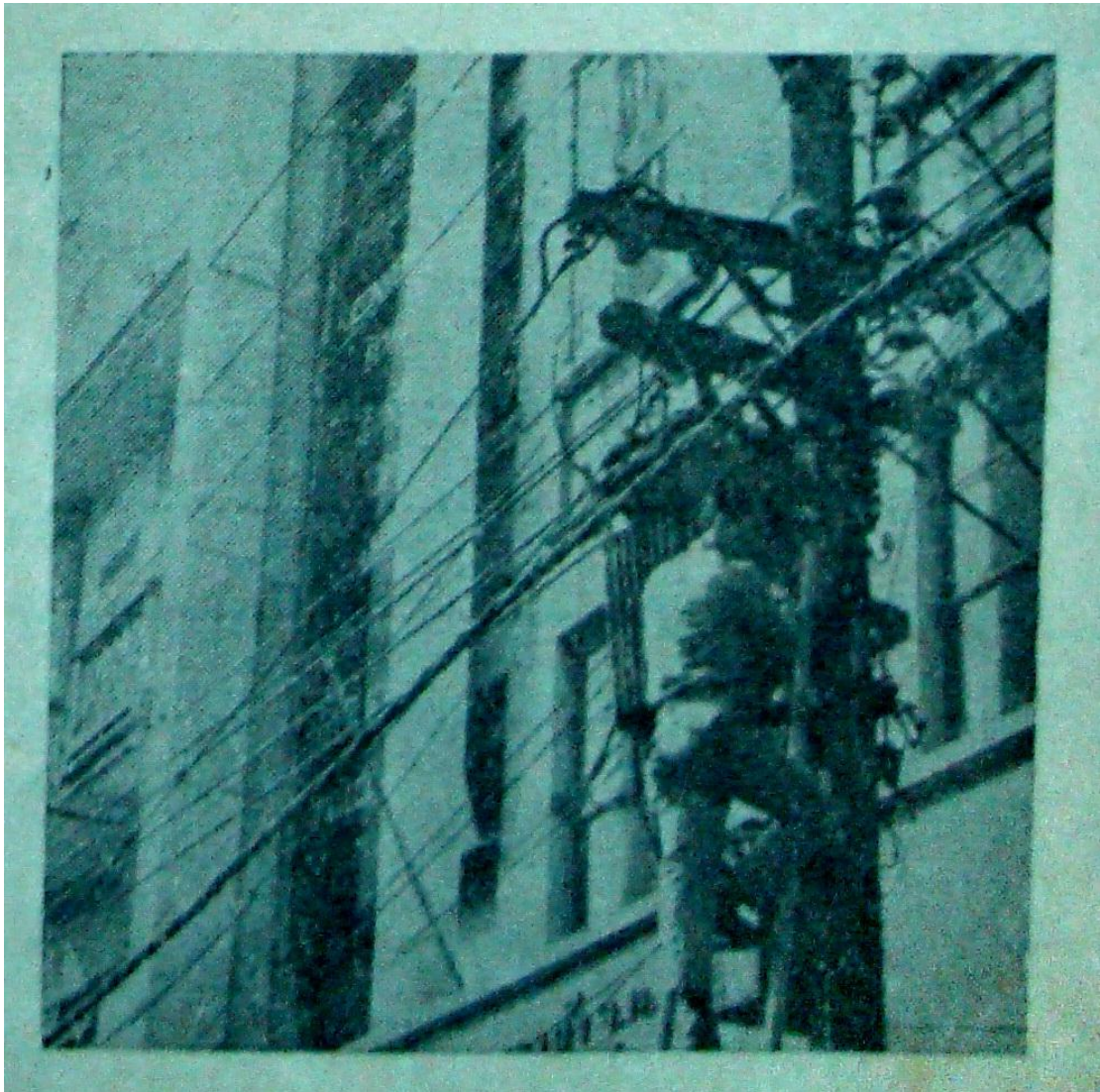
Encouraged by its success in Bangkok, the company established a branch station in Chonburi Province in 1964. Another few years later, in 1967, the company set up the second and third branch stations in Chiang Mai and Nakhon Sawan respectively to expand its business. Building branch stations cost little, since branch station personnel were appointed by and directed from the main station in Bangkok. At the same time, almost all of the programs were duplicates of those from the main station in Bangkok.<sup>53</sup> It can be noticed that where Rediffusion was most available was in the areas with heavy Chinese concentration. In other words, Thai Rediffusion Company established branch stations in areas where there was a particularly high number of the ethnic Chinese, in areas such as Chonburi, Chiangmai, and Nakhon Sawan.

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<sup>52</sup> Jeer, "On the Air."

<sup>53</sup> "Taiguo Lide Husheng Jianjie" [Brief Introduction to Thai Rediffusion], 12.

Figure 3.4 Picture of a Rediffusion technician working on Rediffusion wiring



Source: *Lide Husheng Zazhi (chuangkan hao)* [Rediffusion Magazine (first issue)], 8.

In the late 1960's, there were approximately 28,000 receiving sets in Bangkok, including both Phranakhon and Thonburi, with an estimated 200,000 or more listeners. For the three branch stations, there were altogether roughly 5,000 receiving sets with an estimated 50,000 listeners. In total, across the country the audience was around

300,000 daily, 95 percent of whom were Chinese-program listeners.<sup>54</sup> In fact, it had been estimated that approximately 89 percent of the Chinese listened to broadcasts regularly.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the number of subscribers tended to increase when the Chinese New Year was approaching. The underlying reason for the phenomenon was that many Chinese liked to listen to live broadcasts of Chinese Teochiu operas from Hong Kong during this time of year.<sup>56</sup>

Rediffusion broadcast for seventeen hours daily, from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., although this varied slightly for branch stations in the upcountry provinces. While the Thai Rediffusion Company operated two channels, one in Thai and one in various Chinese dialects at the same time, 95 percent of the audience listened to Chinese programs. Thai listeners shared a minimal proportion, understandably, because they had a number of other choices for Thai-language programs.<sup>57</sup>

Rediffusion's programs were in many Chinese dialects. This dialect arrangement indirectly reflected the Chinese demographic distribution in the areas that Rediffusion served in Thailand. The principle dialect used was Teochiu, followed by Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, and Hainanese. As G. William Skinner's survey in 1955 presented, the Teochiu Chinese dominated the Chinese population. Overall, the Teochiu comprised 56 percent of total Chinese population, while the

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<sup>54</sup> "Taiguolide Husheng Jianjie" [Brief Introduction to Thai Rediffusion], 12.

<sup>55</sup> Harvey Henry Smith and American University (Washington DC) Foreign Areas Studies Division., *Area Handbook for Thailand*, 2d rev. ed. (Washington: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., US Govt. Print. Off., 1968), 293.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. And it has been claimed that local Teochiu opera troupes in Thailand were strongly affected by the popularity of Hong Kong opera, see Kasemchai Nitiwanakun, "Chinese Opera," *Bangkok Post* November 15, 1970.

<sup>57</sup> There were around eighty radio stations broadcast in Thai in the early 1960's, see United States Information Service, *Communication Fact Book Thailand*, 23.

Hakka, Hainanese and Cantonese were 16 percent, 12 percent, and 7 percent of the total Chinese population, respectively.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.2 Data Interpretation

*“For only one baht a day every month, you can enjoy news, drama, music, stories, and education.”*

—Advertisement for Thai Rediffusion

It can be seen from this slogan that Rediffusion produced a variety of programs. As the slogan suggests, Rediffusion’s programs can be grouped as follows:<sup>59</sup>

First, News reports: every day, Rediffusion collected news from big news agencies and compiled them into international and local news relayed in the morning, noon, and evening. Sometimes, urgent news was immediately relayed, for example, government emergency decrees, fire alarms, and international or local emergencies. In addition, there were also programs of “weekly current affairs,” “news from Hong Kong” and “news from US” every weekend.

Second, Storytelling: there were several storytellers broadcasting on Rediffusion. Most content was about religion, history, *Wuxia* and folktales which appealed to a large segment of a varying age group of listeners.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 212.

<sup>59</sup> See Rediffusion’s broadcasting programs in appendices.

<sup>60</sup> Jeer, “On the Air.”

Third, Education: there were several educational programs, such as Chinese and English classes, family and housewife guides, guides to Thailand, and a sort of Chinese Buddhist sermon. English classes were known as “Global English” programs, with English textbooks being sold for 5 baht to Rediffusion’s English learners.<sup>61</sup>

Fourth, Dramas: one of the favorite types of programs for the Bangkok populace.<sup>62</sup> There were three drama troupes on Thai Rediffusion, Namtiang, Bangkok and Liyi. (1) The Namtiang (Southern sky) drama troupe usually broadcast modern radio plays. Zheng Yingnian, Thai Rediffusion’s Chinese section deputy-head, was a head and a playwright for this troupe. (2) The Bangkok drama troupe was managed by Hu Yi, one of Thai Rediffusion’s Chinese section’s heads, and regularly broadcast Teochiu operas and dramas adapted from Chinese classics. (3) The Liyi (Beautiful art) drama troupe’s programs stressed folktales, martial arts, and thrilling stories. This troupe was managed by a storyteller of Thai Rediffusion, Chen Jingyan.

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<sup>61</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, March 29, 1969.

<sup>62</sup> “Kongzhong Huaju Yu Kongzhong Peiyue Gushi” [the Story of on Air Drama and on Air Soundtrack], *Lide Husheng Zazhi (chuangkan hao)* [Rediffusion Magazine (first issue)] 1966, 15.



Figure 3.5 How to make on air drama



Source: *Lide Husheng Zazhi (henian kan)* [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)], 1969.

Finally, Music: the Chinese in Thailand longed for arts and music from their hometowns. Thus, Rediffusion provided a variety of music programs, such as Teochiu music, Cantonese music, Peking opera, *Huangmei* Opera, *Yue* opera, Hakka folk song, Hainan music, Taiwanese opera, and pop music. Moreover, Rediffusion held “White Lion Cup,” Chinese singing contests of Chinese pop songs every Sunday for many years, between 1966 and 1969.<sup>63</sup> This singing contest attracted a large number of young Chinese participants.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the variety of programs, Thai Rediffusion, however, depended largely on drama and music. The sources of drama and music programs, perhaps including storytelling, can be divided into two types: traditional and modern.

Traditional sources refer to stories from Chinese history: particularly ancient Chinese literature, a variety of Chinese operas, Chinese fairy tales, and folktales. These traditional materials have been widely known in China since the distant past, and some of them have become popular in Thailand. Thai Rediffusion used these materials to produce drama on air, for example, *San Guo* (the Romance of three Kingdoms), *Xishi yu Fanli* (the beauty Xishi), *Chang-e ben yue* (Chang-e flying to the moon), *Xixiang Ji* (the Romance of the West Chamber), *Mudan Ting* (the Peony Pavilion), and *Yangjia Jiang* (Yang warrior family).<sup>65</sup> Such materials implicitly or explicitly reflected traditional Chinese perceptions, notions, or values that the Chinese, whether in China or overseas, adored. For example the notion of “the wit and the

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<sup>63</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, June 13, 1966.

<sup>64</sup> Xie Zengtai, “Lide Husheng Gechang Bisai Zongjie” [a Summary of Rediffusion Singing Contest], *Lide Husheng Zazhi (henian kan)* [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)] 1969, 39–43.

<sup>65</sup> These dramas appear in lists of dramas in Zheng Yingnian, “Taiguode Huayu Guangbo Diantai” [Chinese Broadcasting Radio in Thailand], 388. And Li Yi, “Wo Yu Lide Husheng De Yiduan Yuan” [Destiny of Me and Rediffusion], 51.

beauty” in *Xishi yu Fanli*, *Mudan Ting*, and *Xixiang Ji* depicts love between a young, beautiful woman and a wise, handsome scholar. *San Guo* demonstrates brotherhood’s friendship, between Liu Bei, Guan Yu ,and Zhang Fei, especially that of Guan Yu who becomes a warrior god in traditional Chinese culture worshiped by the ethnic Chinese. *Yangjia Jiang* demonstrates the value of loyalty through emphasizing the great warriors’ sacrifice for their leaders and kingdoms. And a folktale like *Chang-e ben yue* shows a popular Chinese myth that the moon was occupied by a woman named *Chang-e* and her rabbit.

Moreover, traditional sources also include the folk culture of ethnic Chinese speech groups. For example, music programs in the Teochiu dialect, *Guochae* (*Gece* in Mandarin), featured Teochiu folk culture. *Guochae* was a traditional rhyme-verse singing popular among the Teochiu people. Having a fixed rhyme based on Teochiu’s fifteen sounds, each sentence of *Guochae* had five or seven words, and sometimes three words connecting four words. Singing *Guochae* sounded like reading poetry.<sup>66</sup> Teochiu *Guochae* was a form of storytelling. Some stories were derived from ancient romantic fiction, such as *Zaishengyuan* (Patch of Blue); and some were Teochiu-created stories, such as *Shuangbaiyan* (Pair of White Swallows).<sup>67</sup> To some extent, most stories were about joys and sorrows, partings and reunions, or anger and grief and joy and happiness. This is why *Guochae* was popular among elderly Chinese women. However, *Guochae* had been criticized for its old-fashioned and outdated

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<sup>66</sup> Ba ren, “Guanyu Jingshi Chaozhou Gece” [on Warning *Guochae*], *Lide Husheng Zazhi* (*henian kan*) [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)] 1969, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Ban Xiao, “Gece Jiemu Zhuchangren Fangwenji” [a Visit to *Guochae* Lead Singers], *Lide Husheng Zazhi* (*henian kan*) [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)] 1969, 36–7.

content. Therefore, Thai Rediffusion adapted up-to-date stories to make *Guochae* more understandable.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to traditional materials, there were certain non-traditional, or modern, sources from Hong Kong and Taiwan that began to flourish during the 1960's and 1970's, including romance fiction, *Wuxia* (martial arts) films, and pop music, which became enormously popular among the overseas Chinese.

Many works of romantic fiction were adapted to Thai Rediffusion's modern drama, especially those written by Qiongyao, a famous female Taiwanese writer of romantic fiction since the 1960's, who published works including *Jidu xiyang hong*, *Caiyun*, *Tingyuan shenshen*, *Yanyu mengmeng*, *Yilian youmeng*, *Xin you qianqian jie*, *Wo shi yi pian yun*, *Zai shui yi fang*. According to Li Yi, a playwright for Thai Rediffusion, there were several reasons that many of Qiongyao's fictional works were popular in drama programs. First, Qiongyao's fiction was about love and romance, a universal theme, easy to understand, especially for women. Besides, Qiongyao's works were fascinating, especially her writing techniques. Qiongyao was an exceptional storyteller, and she could turn an ordinary story into a touching one. Moreover, the Qiongyao series was inexpensive; a volume cost only 3 baht, but could be adapted into six or seven episodes. Finally, her fiction usually contained many conversations, making it convenient to write scripts, as characters usually showed their emotions through their conversations.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to romantic fiction, *Wuxia* novels were also important materials for Rediffusion broadcasts, especially those adapted from the works of Jinyong—one of

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<sup>68</sup> Ba ren, "Guanyu Jingshi Chaozhou Gece" [on Warning Guochae], 33.

<sup>69</sup> Li Yi, "Wo Yu Lide Husheng De Yiduan Yuan" [Destiny of Me and Rediffusion], 50–51.

the greatest *Wuxia* fiction writers. First serialized in Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong, Jinyong's *Wuxia* novels soon gained popularity and were adapted into film as well as TV series that became popular worldwide. Because of their great demand, Thai Rediffusion regularly circulated advertisements and songs from *Wuxia* films that became enormously popular among Bangkok's populace. (The rise of Mandarin cinema as well as *Wuxia* films was discussed in the last section of chapter 2.) For example, one of Jinyong's classics, *Shediao Yingxiong Zhuan* (The Brave Archer)—first adapted into film in 1958 and screened in Thai cinemas a few years later, was such a success that Thai Rediffusion received letters from listeners asking for them to broadcast movie songs more regularly.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from fiction, Chinese pop music, especially from Hong Kong, gave another modern aspect to Thai Rediffusion, as Rediffusion incorporated these materials to produce many programs. This will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4. Modern Chinese entertainment culture**

That the sources of Rediffusion's programs were derived from Hong Kong and Taiwan, to some extent, presents limitations to the study of the Chinese community in Thailand during the Cold War. Earlier literature on the Chinese in Thailand seems to demonstrate that the Chinese in Thailand were discouraged from connecting with the PRC, due both to government policy and international trend. In fact, it depicts the Chinese society in Thailand as a standalone unit, and emphasizes the role of pro-assimilation policies and the influence of Western power, such as the US. In so doing, most scholarship appears to pay little attention to, or even neglect,

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<sup>70</sup> Suthi Tejawiriyataweesin, interview by author, 6 May 2009, Bangkok, Thailand.

the relationship between the Chinese in Thailand and the Chinese-speaking world, in a wider scope than just with the PRC. Moreover, it seldom questions that during the time there was an absence of material from the PRC, the Chinese in Thailand would try to bypass this route and search for other ways of accessing alternative Chinese material elsewhere. Regarding this point, G. William Skinner noticed that Hong Kong became the forefront of Chinese cultural production for the Chinese middle class in Bangkok. He further elaborated:

The backbone and exemplar of the [Chinese middle] class is, of course, the Chinese businessman, and the major class interests are commercial wealth and the maintenance of the Chinese way of life. It is this class which supports and fights for the system of private Chinese schools and which maintains the closest ties with China and Chinese communities elsewhere in Southeast Asia. To some extent, it takes upper- and middle-class Hong Kong society as a model—thoroughly Chinese and yet oriented to the modern world.<sup>71</sup>

According to Skinner, the Chinese middle class in Thailand seemed to stay connected with China and Chinese communities elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In this sense, it can be said that Thai Rediffusion did provide the alternative Chinese material for the Chinese in Thailand to be able to access the Chinese-speaking world, as many of Thai Rediffusion's programs introduced and incorporated some of the external sources from Hong Kong and Taiwan that were also circulated throughout other Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

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<sup>71</sup> Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 308.

For example, Thai Rediffusion supported the import of modern Teochiu opera troupes from Hong Kong to have live performances in Bangkok, which gave rise to the revival in the popularity of Teochiu operas in Bangkok during the mid-1960's. Teochiu opera was said to be one of the most important forms of entertainment since the prewar decades. In the 1950's, Teochiu opera was negatively affected by the rise of Teochiu-dialect cinema. As a result, no opera house would be willing to have performances of Teochiu opera year-round. However, when Hong Kong's Xintiancai opera troupe was invited to perform in Bangkok in 1966, the opera house was filled to its capacity for two months. This visit of Hong Kong's Xintiancai opera troupe were supported and promoted by Thai Rediffusion. In so doing, Thai Rediffusion made live broadcasts of Xintiancai opera troupe's performance and did talk shows for publicity.<sup>72</sup> After the success of the Xintiancai opera troupe, other opera troupes from Hong Kong were continuously invited to give performances in Bangkok, such as the Shengyi opera troupe<sup>73</sup> and the Lesheng opera troupe.<sup>74</sup> It is said that the performances of the modern Teochiu opera troupes from Hong Kong was better than those of Bangkok in the old days in several aspects, such as in the quality of the actors, the backdrops, dialogues, and costumes.<sup>75</sup>

Another instance of modern Chinese material from Hong Kong introduced by Thai Rediffusion, was Chinese pop music. It was said that Hong Kong pop music began to grow in popularity because of the flourishing of the entertainment and

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<sup>72</sup> "Xianggang Yiren Li Tai Xianyi Fangwen Lide Husheng Xiezhao" [Portraits of Hong Kong Artists Giving Performance in Thailand and Visiting Rediffusion], *Lide Husheng Zazhi (chuangkan hao)* [Rediffusion Magazine (first issue)] 1966, 10–11.

<sup>73</sup> *Lide Husheng Zazhi 3* [Rediffusion Magazine vol.3] 1967, 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, February 22, 1969.

<sup>75</sup> *Lide Husheng Zazhi 2* [Rediffusion Magazine vol.2] 1966, 37.

commercial industry.<sup>76</sup> Since Hong Kong was an open society, it attracted people of different backgrounds from different places. People, regardless of their origin, could enter into the entertainment circle in Hong Kong.<sup>77</sup> For example, pop singers such as Wong Ching Yuen (*Huang Qingyuan*)—a Singaporean Chinese, Poon Sow Keng (*Pan Xiuqiong*)—born in Macau and brought up in Malaya, Rebecca Pan (*Pan Dihua*)—born in Shanghai and moved to Hong Kong in 1949, could make great achievements in Hong Kong. Of the many pop singers who came to Hong Kong to develop their careers, it is worth pointing out one: Teresa Teng (*Deng Lijun*), who was a famous and influential icon of Chinese pop music during the 1970’s–80’s. Though Teng was born and made her debut in Taiwan, she also came to Hong Kong to expand her success to other regions, including Southeast Asia and Japan. The impact of her music has been far-reaching throughout Chinese communities across the globe. It is often said that wherever there are the Chinese, there are Teng’s songs.

Chinese pop music from Hong Kong was very popular among Thai Rediffusion’s young audience. This led the Thai Rediffusion Company to hold singing contests called the “White Lion Cup” (*Baishi Gewang Bei*) every Sunday. The singing contests were broadcast live for several years (1966–69). Music of the aforementioned pop singers was almost compulsory in the singing contests due to their immense popularity. Such songs include Wong Ching Yuen’s “Nanren de yanlei,” “Manli” and “Kujiu Manhuai,” Poon Sew Keng’s “Qingren de Yanlei” and “Suoluohe zhiwan,” and Rebecca Pan’s “Qingren Qiao” and “Meigui Meigui wo ai

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<sup>76</sup> Jum-sum James Wong, “Yueyu Liuxingqu De Fazhan Yu Xingshuai Xianggang Yinyue Yanjiu” [Development, Rise and Decline of Cantonese Pop Songs] (PhD. diss., Hong Kong University, 2003), 7.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



ni.”<sup>78</sup> In addition, songs like “Yelaixiang,” “Heri jun zilai” and “Meigui Meigui wo ai ni” were covered by Teresa Teng during the 1970’s, and she made them famous classics worldwide, including in Thailand.<sup>79</sup> A veteran Sino-Thai journalist, and also a Thai Rediffusion fan, Liu Zhenting, stated that people needed to thank Teresa Teng for her music because, as a music figure in Bangkok pointed out, without Teng, he was afraid that no one in Thailand would have inherited Chinese songs. Moreover, Liu further elaborated: “The Chinese in Thailand who can still remember their childhood, when Chinese songs gleamed in the streets, should also be grateful for Rediffusion for sharing Chinese songs with everyone.”<sup>80</sup>

The emergence of Hong Kong—“thoroughly Chinese yet oriented to the modern world”—into the urban culture within Chinese society in Bangkok, as seen in Thai Rediffusion, was a result of the fascination with Hong Kong as a hub of modern Chinese entertainment culture. It can be said that the absence of the PRC from the world—as the PRC pursued a closed-door policy in foreign affairs—made the overseas Chinese unable to have a direct contact with the PRC, on the one hand. On the other hand, the characteristics of Hong Kong that Skinner suggests—“thoroughly Chinese yet oriented to the modern world”—seemed attractive to the Chinese, as it conveyed the sort of modern entertainment culture that the Chinese overseas

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<sup>78</sup> A full list of the competition’s songs of each week can be found in Xie Zengtai, “Lide Husheng Gechang Bisai Zongjie” [a Summary of Rediffusion Singing Contest], 42–43.

<sup>79</sup> In fact, “Yelaixiang,” “Heri jun zilai,” and “Meigui Meigui wo ai ni” were first circulated in Shanghai in the 1930’s–40’s and later became well known among the Chinese in southeast Asia. Since 1970’s, Teng covered these songs and made them popular again.

<sup>80</sup> Liu Zhenting, “Taiguo Getan Gaoe Zhuinian Deng Lijun” [Music circles in Bangkok recalling Deng Lijun], *Yazhou Zhoukan* [Asiaweek], June 14, 2009, accessed November 30, 2011, [http://www.yzzk.com/cfm/Content\\_Archive.cfm?Channel=ms&Path=241276811/23ms2.cfm](http://www.yzzk.com/cfm/Content_Archive.cfm?Channel=ms&Path=241276811/23ms2.cfm).

appreciated.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, it is understandable that a Chinese radio station that focused on entertainment, such as Rediffusion, would incorporate programs from Hong Kong.

## 5. Goodbye Thai Rediffusion

Rediffusion broadcast for the final time on 31 August 1982, having served the Chinese community in Thailand since 1956. In fact, Rediffusion had been losing popularity dramatically since the late 1970's. The end of Thai Rediffusion marked the end of the Cold War era, with the world's international relations stepping into a new phase. One of the crucial moments of this new phase was when the US dramatically shifted its foreign policies towards the PRC. In 1972, the president of the USA, Richard Nixon, visited the PRC. Later, the PRC and the US announced in December of 1978, that the two governments would establish diplomatic relations on the first of January, 1979. The US and the PRC rapprochement changed the world, including changing Thailand's foreign policies. The Thai government inevitably reopened diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1975. As a result, this new relationship between Thailand and the PRC allowed the Thai media to explore the PRC.<sup>82</sup> The opening of the Thai media to the PRC, to some extent, offered more space and choices of information on China and elsewhere; it gradually replaced Thai Rediffusion, which had once functioned as a channel for the Chinese in Thailand to maintain ties with the Chinese-speaking world.

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<sup>81</sup> In fact, not only Rediffusion in Thailand, but also Rediffusion in Singapore adopted sources from Hong Kong, such as the narrations of Jinyong's *Wuxia* novels on air. June Cheong, "Redirection," *the Strait Times* February 12, 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Disaphol Chansiri, *The Chinese éniqr és of Thailand in the Twentieth Century* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 88–89.

Another important factor indirectly causing the decline of Thai Rediffusion was its audience.<sup>83</sup> As highlighted, most of Rediffusion's audience listened to Chinese programs. Therefore, listeners speaking the Chinese language, whichever dialect, were a pillar of Rediffusion's broadcasts. However, due to the Thai government's pro-assimilation policies over several decades, most descendants of the Chinese in Thailand were losing their ability in the Chinese language (especially written language).<sup>84</sup> In fact, they spoke, read, and wrote Thai and therefore, paradoxically, were re-learning Chinese culture, and reviving their ethnic consciousness through the medium of the Thai language.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the older generation literate in Chinese had gone, while the younger generation illiterate in Chinese had risen. The lack of a Chinese-speaking audience, therefore, can be considered as an indirect factor accelerating the decline of Rediffusion in Thailand and a factor in its end in 1982.

In addition to the aforementioned causes, the end of Rediffusion also lay in internal factors within Thai Rediffusion Company. The Thai TV Company, as the largest shareholder of Rediffusion, shut down on 8 April 1977.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, more exciting technology and entertainment, like the flourishing television industry in the early 1980's, outshone the outdated radio stations. Because of the lack of financial support from the largest shareholder, and the growing popularity of television, despite

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<sup>83</sup> Shortly before ending its service in 1982, Thai Rediffusion increased its monthly fee from 50 to 100 baht due to diminishing subscriptions.

<sup>84</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Imagined Uncommunity: The Lookjin Middle Class and Thai Official Nationalism," in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 86.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> MC CRF Thai TV Company 1934/2520. Thai TV Company was established in 1955 and closed in 1977. Its hitherto organization and property were transferred to the newly-established governmental company 'Mass Communication of Thailand' known as MCOT today.

Thai Rediffusion Company's insistence on broadcasting for another few years, it eventually ended its service in 1982.<sup>87</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

To some extent, Thai Rediffusion was a Chinese broadcast radio station which existed as a result of the Cold War. For the Thai government, the establishment of Rediffusion in Thailand was at first another attempt to prevent communist influence. Despite being a semi-private enterprise designed to serve the government, Rediffusion became a cultural front of entertainment for the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, especially the Chinese community in Bangkok. When a relationship with the PRC was discouraged, Thai Rediffusion performed a vital role by connecting the Chinese community in Bangkok to the Chinese-speaking world, through its broadcast programs. In so doing, Thai Rediffusion incorporated modern sources of Chinese entertainment culture, which were also circulated throughout other Chinese communities, to the Chinese society in Bangkok. It supported the import of modern Teochiu opera troupes from Hong Kong to Bangkok, which gave rise to the revival in popularity of Teochiu operas in Bangkok during the mid-1960's. Moreover, it introduced a variety of Chinese pop music from Hong Kong to young audiences in Bangkok. Therefore, it can be said that the emergence and influence of Thai Rediffusion on the development of urban culture within Chinese society in Bangkok

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<sup>87</sup> MC CRF Thai Rediffusion Company 11356/2525. Thai Rediffusion Company underwent bankruptcy in November 1982.

during the postwar decades was more than “a partisan, bigotry-inspired reason for allowing the company to expand.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Jeer, “On the Air.”



## **Chapter Four**

### **In the narratives of literature on Chinese society in Bangkok**

The previous chapters have explored the cultural expressions of Chinese society in urban Bangkok. As seen in these cultural expressions, Chinese society in Bangkok during the postwar decades was not only limited to conservative and traditional Chinese culture, such as Chinese teahouses and Chinese temples, but also incorporated a greater variety of urban culture, including Western cinemas, Indian films, and modern Chinese culture from Hong Kong (such as films and pop music). It can be said that these elements were a concrete material cultural expression. But should we also look into cultural expression that was abstract and sensational? That is to say, it is necessary to address what the Chinese in Bangkok were actually thinking about their Chinese society. In other words, how did the Chinese “see and feel” the Chinese society in which they resided? How did the Chinese learn about their society and the surrounding world? What was the Chinese perception of the urban culture in Chinese society when Chinese and foreign cultures existed concurrently? Living in the shadow of Western influences, how did the Chinese reflect on their lives and culture in such a society? These questions are crucial to understanding Chinese life and society in Bangkok.

This chapter, therefore, attempts to revisit urban culture in post-1945 Bangkok, from the perspective of the ethnic Chinese, as found in their literary works. Jennifer Cushman has noted that the medium of Chinese- and Thai-language literary publications may offer one of the most fruitful approaches for exploring how Chinese

society in Thailand functions.<sup>1</sup> As the foundation of this approach, this chapter examines Chinese views on Chinese life and society as displayed in their literary works, which have long been neglected in the study of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand.

There are a few works in the form of dissertations that study Thai literature with a particular focus on the Chinese society in Thailand. These works, for example, include Patcharee Varasrai's "Thai novels depicting Chinese society in Thailand" and Pennapa Monsa-ard's "Images of the Chinese in Thailand in Thai novels 1969–1980."<sup>2</sup> In examining Thai-medium literature, Patcharee's work adheres to a detailed view of the literary-studies approach, while Pennapa's work tends to envisage the history-studies approach. Chinese-medium literature, however, is still excluded and overlooked in these works. Although there are some master's dissertations that study Chinese-medium literature from Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, a Chinese university in Thailand, most of these works are narrative rather than analytical. Therefore, it is necessary to account for Chinese-medium literature, as it will significantly further our understandings of the Chinese experience in Thailand.

With regard to an attempt to revisit urban culture from the perspectives of the ethnic Chinese, as found in their literary works, this chapter examines postwar literature set in the Chinese society of Bangkok, written by authors of Chinese origin. It explores the narratives on Chinese life and society in both Thai- and Chinese-medium literary works. Stories from selected novels in Thai and Chinese are

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer W. Cushman, "The Chinese in Thailand," in *The Ethnic Chinese in the Asean States: Bibliographical Essays*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 247. Cushman noted that a French scholar Claudine Salmon has shown how much novels, short stories and poems have to offer as sources about Chinese life in Indonesia and Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup> Patcharee Varasrai, "Nawaniyai Thai Thi Sanoephap Sangkhomchin Nai Mueangthai" [Thai Novels Depicting Chinese Society in Thailand] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1994). And Pennapa Monsa-ard, "Phaplak Khong Chaochin Nai Mueangthai Thi Prakot Nai Nawaniyai Thai 2512–2533" [Images of the Chinese in Thailand in Thai Novels 1969–1980] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2007).



reviewed. Furthermore, the chapter examines different narratives of Thai- and Chinese- medium literature, and then poses such questions as “How were the narratives of these novels constructed?”, “What form of ideology did they convey?”, “What were the differences between those written in Thai- and in Chinese-mediums?”, and “How were they nationalized or ignored by Thai academic institutions?” Despite different ideologies in the narratives, this chapter demonstrates that in examining both Thai-medium and Chinese-medium literature, their narratives appeared to be similar when it came to the answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, i.e., “What was the Chinese perception of the urban culture in Chinese society within Bangkok when Chinese and foreign cultures existed concurrently?”, and “living in the shadow of Western influences, how did the Chinese reflect on their life and culture in such society?”

In order to establish a clear and fair discussion, it is important to identify some crucial features of the Thai- and Chinese-medium literature that has been chosen to be analyzed. The first feature is that the works are from writers of Chinese origin or Chinese extraction, regardless of his/her nationality, as he/she had personal experience of Chinese society of Bangkok. Second, the main storyline revolves around Chinese life in Bangkok, where characters of Chinese origin played a significant role. Third, many of the stories were set in the postwar decades, or more specifically between the 1950’s and 1970’s, and fourth, the works were written or published no later than the year 1980, so as to reflect reality at the time of its publication. Finally, the works are all in the genre of the novel, that has stood the test of time regarding its popularity.

The process of selection has greatly benefited from a comprehensive database of literary works relating to the Chinese in Thailand presented in the monographs and

dissertations related to Thai-and Chinese-medium literature.<sup>3</sup> It is unfortunate, however, that some good literary works are, regrettably, not included in the discussion because they are deemed incompatible in certain ways.<sup>4</sup> The selected Thai-medium literature includes *Letters from Thailand* (Chotmai chak muengthai) (1969), *Filial Passion* (Katanyu Phitsawat) (1976). And the selected Chinese-medium literature is *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* (Fengyu Yaohuali) (mid-1960's), and *The Ugly Alley* (Louxiang) (1977). The reason for the inclusion of these works is that they have met the above criteria, meaning that the writers were of Chinese origin, the stories were set in the Chinese society in Bangkok, particularly from 1960's–70's, and that these literary works were published at much the same time as they were written. In fact, the selected Thai-medium and Chinese-medium works are very compatible. In addition, a collection of Chinese short stories are sometimes included in the discussion, as the short story (*Duanpian Xiaoshuo*) was also a popular genre among Chinese writers whose works published were first in Chinese newspapers.

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<sup>3</sup> On Thai-medium literature, see Trisilpa Boonkhachorn, *Nawaniyai Kap Sangkhom Thai 2475–2500* [Thai Novel and Thai Society 1932–1957] (Bangkok: Bangkok Printing, 1983).; Ing-on Suphanwanit, *Nawaniyai Nithat* [Thai Novel Outlook] (Bangkok: Active Print, 2005).; Varasrai, “Nawaniyai Thai Thi Sanoephap Sangkhomchin Nai Mueangthai” [Thai Novels Depicting Chinese Society in Thailand].; Monsa-ard, “Phaplak Khong Chaochin Nai Mueangthai Thi Prakot Nai Nawaniyai Thai 2512-2533” [Images of the Chinese in Thailand in Thai Novels 1969-1980].

On Chinese-medium literature, see Lin Hong, *Taiguo Huawenwenxue Shitan* [Review of Chinese Literature History in Thailand] (Shantou: Shantou University Press, 2008).; Zhang Guopei, *20 Shiji Taiguo Huawen Wenxueshi* [History of Chinese Literature in Thailand in the 20th Century] (Shantou: Shantou University Press, 2007).; Sima Gong, *Taihua Wenxue Mantan* [Talk on Sino-Thai Literature] (Bangkok: Bayin Chubanshe, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> For example, many works set their story in the pre-war period. Some focus on internal family disputes and seldom connect to external society.

## 1. Thai-medium literature

### 1.1 Thai-medium literature

Before 1969, the year that the novel *Letters from Thailand* was first published, many Thai novels had mocked the Chinese as an unimportant part of the Thai narrative.<sup>5</sup> A groundbreaking departure from typical Thai novels, *Letters from Thailand*, a novel about life in Chinese society of Thailand, was the first to use a Chinese as a main character.<sup>6</sup> The author, Botan,<sup>7</sup> was born and raised in a Chinese family. Her father was a Chinese immigrant and her mother was a Thailand-born Chinese woman. Her personal experience became the fodder for her novel, which many people have claimed relates to their families too.<sup>8</sup>

This particular story is written in the form of letters from a Chinese immigrant, Tan Suang U, to his mother in Po Leng village in China. It portrays Suang U's life from the time he arrived in Thailand in 1945 until he became middle aged in the late 1960's. Suang U left China with his friend Kim for a better life in Thailand. He met a man called Lo Yong Chua on a ship and both of them became close friends. Yong Chua decided to adopt Suang U as his son. When the ship reached Thailand, Yong

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<sup>5</sup> In her MA dissertation, Pennapa argues that the Chinese in Thailand as portrayed in the Thai novels during 1937–57 were as “the other,” criminals, enemies, mafia or influential people, communists, and unethical people. See Monsa-ard, “Phaplak Khong Chaochin Nai Mueangthai Thi Prakot Nai Nawaniyai Thai 2512-2533” [Images of the Chinese in Thailand in Thai Novels 1969–1980], 30–53.

<sup>6</sup> M. L. Boonlue Thepphayasunthon, *Waenwannakam* [Spectacles to Literature] (Bangkok: Thai Reading, 1986), 477.

<sup>7</sup> Botan is a Thai translation of Chinese flower “peony.” The maiden name of Botan is Supha Luesiri, was later changed to Supha Sirising when she was married to a fellow writer named Viriya Sirising.

<sup>8</sup> “Translator’s Introduction” in Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, trans. Susan Kepner (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 2002), v–vi.

Chua helped Suang U and Kim settle in Bangkok at his good friend Lo Nguan Thong's store. Apart from working, Suang U regularly taught the Chinese language to Nguan Thong's daughters—Mui Eng and Ang Buay.

As time went by, Suang U and Mui Eng fell in love with each other. Fortunately, Suang U was able to marry Mui Eng with the kind help of his adoptive father Yong Chua. A few months after their marriage, Mui Eng became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Suang U was delighted and named him Weng Khim. Eventually Mui Eng had two more daughters named Chui Kim and Bak Li. Mui Eng's younger sister Ang Buay, however, remained single and inherited their parents' business. However, Mui Eng had difficulty in delivering the third daughter, Meng Chu, and was unable to give birth again. This brought Suang U to despair, having not achieved his dream—having five sons and two daughters. He did not like his daughter Meng Chu. Instead, he wanted Ang Buay to take care of her.

Suang U worked very hard to operate his business and raise his family. At the same time, he was determined to retain his Chinese identity wherever he lived. He wanted his children to be Chinese, not Thai, probably because he thought that Thais were inferior to the Chinese as they drank and gambled, and were lazy. However, he was not able to control the changes that happened to his children. They were born and grew up in Thailand and, in spite of having a Chinese family, adopted Thai ways, citizenship, names, and language, and had Thai friends. Even his youngest daughter Meng Chu married a Thai friend named Winyu, an act which, at first, Suang U strongly objected to. But after getting to know Winyu, Suang U found he could deal with him amicably. Suang U finally learned to accept Winyu as well as his children's transition.

Botan's success with *Letters from Thailand* greatly influenced many later works with Chinese characters, for example, *Yu kap Kong* (Living with grandpa) and *Katanyu Phitsawat* (Filial Passion) by Yok Burapha, *Lodlai Mangkon* (Looking Through the Dragon Design) by Praphatson Sewikun, and *Kanok lai Botan* (Thai design of Peony) by Srifa Ladawan.<sup>9</sup> Although these works are fascinating, the novel *Filial Passion* by the author, Yok Burapha, will be the one that is focused on in this discussion. The obvious criterion for its inclusion is that the story in *Filial Passion* was set in the Chinese society in Bangkok in the postwar decades, while others were set and published in the 1980's–90's.

Yok Burapha was the pseudonym of the author Chaleom Rongkhaphalin.<sup>10</sup> He first published the novel *Yu kap Kong* (Living with grandpa) in 1976 under this pseudonym, which made his name well-known. The story is narrated through the eyes of Yok—a boy whose name derives from the writer's pseudonym—about his life in a small Chinese community in the Chonburi Province of eastern Thailand, the place where the author himself grew up. An orphan, Yok was adopted by Kong (meaning “grandpa” in a Chinese dialect), an old Chinese immigrant who had migrated to Thailand in the pre-war period and worked as an artisan. Though living hand-to-mouth, Kong tried to nurture Yok with his kind heart and wisdom. Nevertheless, Yok could not help feeling inferior; he kept asking Kong why he did not have parents like other children. One day Yok found an abandoned baby, and then realized that there were many unlucky children. He knew in his heart that at least he had Kong and Khru

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<sup>9</sup> See Suphanwanit, *Nawaniyai Nithat* [Thai Novel Outlook], 23. Please note that in this book Ing-orn Suphanwanit mistook Praphatson Sewikun as the author of *Kanok lai botan*, which Srifa Ladawan, in fact, is.)

<sup>10</sup> Yok Burapha literally means Jade of the East. The connotation of his pseudonym reflects Chineseness as Jade is precious jewelry in Chinese culture while the East refers to China.

Banyong, a school teacher who treated him like his own son, and so realized that this was enough for him.

Kong and Yok lived in a neighborhood with other Chinese of different backgrounds. Ngek Chu was an old Chinese lady who followed Chinese traditions so strictly that she could not accept any kind of change. She had two children—a son called Pheng and a daughter called Kiao. Whenever she had problems with them, Kong always lent a helping hand. When the children broke with Chinese tradition (as Kiao left to study and Pheng married a Thai woman), Kong persuaded Ngek Chu to understand and accept the changes taking place in her children.

In spite of his Chinese origin, it seemed that Kong was successfully integrated into Thai society. Some of his Chinese neighbors, however, were not, since many in his neighborhood disliked the Thais. It was only Kong who was willing to help the Thais, despite their humble backgrounds. These Thais included Somphon—a girl who escaped from a brothel, Chalaem and Phisan—a couple addicted to gambling, and Han and Chamrieng—a couple who had eloped. Kong wisely taught his Chinese neighbors to accept the differences between the Thai and Chinese cultures and to adapt themselves to Thai society. Although Kong was not a man of means, he was very much respected for his sophistication and moral behavior. When he reached the age of seventy, the neighborhood gave Kong a birthday party to celebrate. Thanks to his social contributions, both the Thais and Chinese then lived harmoniously and amicably in this community.

After his success with *Yu kap Kong* (Living with grandpa), Yok Burapha wrote another novel on the Chinese community in Bangkok where he had lived during his college years at Thammasat University. What he had experienced and felt in this

Chinese community became fodder for the novel *Katanyu Phitsawat* (Filial Passion),<sup>11</sup> which was published in book form in 1978.

While *Letters from Thailand* depicts the life of the upwardly mobile Chinese in Bangkok, the novel *Filial Passion*, on the contrary, portrays the life of the Chinese poor in an undefined slum in the center of Bangkok. In this slum lived a huge number of poor Chinese, such as Chiu—a man who remained single into middle age, Pae Kim—an old man who had been living there for decades, and Mong's Family, including his pregnant wife Cheng and three children. Chiu worked in a factory and Pae Kim sold mosquito nets on the streets. Despite their poverty, both of them were good friends. Mong was a butcher in a wet market, while his very young wife Cheng was a housewife taking care of their three children. Cheng was exceedingly grateful to her old husband Mong, because he bought her from a family that treated her unwell.

Chiu secretly felt in love with Cheng, but he had to keep his passion a secret, because Cheng was married to Mong, who was a good husband and father. One day, Mong was unable to pay a patronage fee to a Thai policeman, who as a result, bullied him by accusing him of cheating customers by using inaccurate scales. Chiu, Pae Kim, and Somsri—a Thai neighbor who was a seedy prostitute, managed to get Mong out of jail and helped Cheng earn a living while her husband was imprisoned. Unfortunately, Mong was deported to China at the same time as Cheng delivered their fourth baby. Cheng suffered a mental breakdown when she learned of Mong's deportation. Chiu, Pae Kim, and Somsri pitied Cheng, therefore, and tried hard to help her and her four children.

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<sup>11</sup> Yok Burapha, "The Author's Forward," in *Katanyu Phitsawat* [Filial Passion] (Bangkok: Bhannakit, 1994).

Cheng gradually learned to raise the family without Mong. She was also touched by some of her neighbors' help, especially Chiu. She sometimes thought of her husband Mong who was in China, but later learned that Mong had died from a heart attack. Nevertheless, Mong's death gave Cheng both legal and moral right to accept Chiu into her life.

Meanwhile, the landlady of the slum wanted to tear down the slum to construct a high-rise building without compensating the residents. The landlady's son Kiatthiyot—also a member of the mafia that bullied slum residents, set fire to Cheng's house. The fire demolished the slum quickly, making Cheng and her children, as well as other slum residents, destitute. Somsri clearly knew that the arsonist was Kiatthiyot, the landlady's son. She managed to exact her revenge and killed him, then mysteriously disappeared.

At the same time, the police came to investigate the arson. In order to save Cheng and Chiu, Pae Kim said that he owned the house where the fire was started. As a result, Pae Kim was jailed for a period of time. Chiu and Cheng moved to a house that Chiu bought, nearby the factory where he worked. They finally started a new life as a family, together with Pae Kim who later was proved innocent.

## **1.2 Constructing Imagined Assimilation, Nationalization of Integration Ideology**

Botan and Yok Burapha seemed to believe that there were two groups of people in Thai society: Thai and Chinese. Their writing suggests that the Chinese would inevitably become Thai and that there would be only one fully-integrated



group, sooner or later. In *Letters from Thailand*, Tan Suang U observed with his own eyes how his children were different from him; they had adopted Thai ways, citizenship, names, language, and had Thai friends. These changes made him feel desperate. Tan murmured:

The children no longer like their [Chinese] names . . . They recently asked to legally change them, and did so. I could not prevent this, but do not fear that I will follow their example, even should I remain in this land to my death . . . Their friends have begun calling them by these absurd [Thai] names, and I can never remember which name is whose.<sup>12</sup>

This shocking truth that caused Suang U's determination to remain Chinese until death, came from his Thai son-in-law, Winyu, who told him that a number of Chinese people were gradually being assimilated into Thai society and, because of intermarriage, were blending into one integrated group. No one could, apparently, stop this happening. Winyu warned Suang U:

. . . eventually the Thais and the Chinese in Bangkok, a million and a half of each of us, will intermarry in such numbers that there will be only one, integrated group . . . The Chinese people are gradually

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<sup>12</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 278–79.

being assimilated into all the societies they have entered . . . It happens in the normal course of history.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Botan's *Letters from Thailand* ends at this point, when Suang U finally surrenders to the transformation of the society in which he lived. Despite his grudging acceptance, it still pained him deep in his heart because he was unable to preserve Chinese identity for his next generation:

. . . I am sometimes ashamed of my defeat, ashamed that I failed to live here as a true Chinese, and raise a Chinese family. I could not shelter them from the thousands of daily experiences which made them another people, another race. There are so many of us Chinese here, yet the Thai have won. And it was never a contest anyway, but I pretended that it was for the sake of my selfish pride.<sup>14</sup>

This conclusion succinctly portrays the Chinese as having been assimilated, as seen in the assimilation model that Skinner proposed. Yok Burapha's *Living with Grandpa* and *Filial Passion* make the same observations. In *Living with grandpa*, the boy Yok observed that most Chinese children began to speak Thai, while his grandfather would further argue that Ngek Chu's son had become one of the Thais, since he lived in Thailand, spoke Thai, studied Thai, had Thai friends and, of course, married a Thai woman, as follows.

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<sup>13</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 363–64.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

“Nevertheless, it will last for just a few years long. As far as I see, most of Chinese children have begun to speak Thai” observed Yok. “. . . Many of us Chinese marry Thai women, so what’s the point [your son will marry a Thai girl]? Your son Pheng is now one of the Thais. He lives in Thailand, speaks Thai, studies the Thai language, and has Thai friends.” Kong told Ngek Chu.<sup>15</sup>

In *Filial Passion*, the author, Yok Burapha, also notes that the ethnic Chinese who lived in a newly-formed Chinese community tended to accept a new material culture in their everyday life. The young generations of the ethnic Chinese were deemed to have accepted Thai culture into their lives as well. Yok described:

In some Chinese communities, there is no sign showing that they were located in Thailand. It seems like a small village of Chinese ethnicity, with no other foreign languages spoken except some Chinese dialects. Their Chinese customs, rituals, as well as values were mostly preserved. The young generation of children would almost definitely become pure Chinese, if they did not study the Thai language, or go to work outside the community . . . However, in some newly-formed Chinese communities, the Chineseness seems to decline gradually, while people tend to accept new material culture into their everyday life. Radio receivers, television sets, sewing machines, electrical fans, for example, become more and more

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<sup>15</sup> Yok Burapha, *Yu Kap Kong* [Living with Grandpa] (Bangkok: Bhannakit, 1991), 57, 216–17.

widespread. In fact, people here are more open-minded in accepting Thainess, especially among the young generation. This can be seen in studying Thai language, having Thai friends and being salary men. In addition, some even marry Thai women.<sup>16</sup>

*Letters from Thailand* was awarded the SEATO literary prize<sup>17</sup> in 1969 for its outstanding writing style in the form of letters that were detailed, realistic, and down-to-earth. Also, *Living with Grandpa* and *Filial Passion* received an honorable mention from Thailand's National Book Week Award<sup>18</sup> in 1976 and 1978 respectively. It is understandable that *Letters from Thailand* has become part of a literary canon concerning the Chinese in Thailand. A few years after the novel was published, the Ministry of Education declared *Letters from Thailand*, as well as *Living with Grandpa* and *Filial Passion*, to be compulsory reading for all Thai secondary school students. This decision suggested the novels were aimed at strengthening understanding among two different groups of people in Thailand in order to achieve the ultimate goal of national integration.<sup>19</sup> These days, many Thai students of Chinese origin have come to learn about Chinese society in Thailand from the novel *Letters from Thailand*.

But, in reality, were the Chinese actually assimilated into Thailand? If they had been, there would be only one fully integrated group in Thai society, as the novels

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<sup>16</sup> Yok Burapha, *Katanyu Phitsawat* [Filial Passion] (Bangkok: Bhannakit, 1994), 2–3.

<sup>17</sup> SEATO book prize was established in 1968 in order to promote its member nations' literature. After 1972, SEATO finished the SEATO book prize award and was dissolved a few years later in 1977. Nevertheless, the SEATO book prize was replaced by the S.E.A. Write (Southeast Asian Writer) award in 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Thailand's national book week award has been going from 1973 until present-day in order to promote national reading and writing.

<sup>19</sup> Yok Burapha, "The Author's Forward," in *Yu Kap Kong* [Living with Grandpa] (Bangkok: Bhannakit, 1991).

suggested. My preliminary observations and other recent studies indicate that members of the second and third generation immigrant community were no longer as Chinese, generally speaking, as their parents; however, they did not become as Thai as their Chinese parents had imagined. Assimilation, in the long run, is a two-way process which will leave the Chinese with something Thai and the Thai with something Chinese.<sup>20</sup> Thai people of Chinese origin are, of course, politically Thai, as they are Thai citizens who were born in Thailand and abide by Thai laws. Generally speaking, they may adopt Thai names, speak the Thai language, and be educated in Thai as the novels depicted. However, some elements of Chinese culture remain, as many still practice Chinese traditions such as ancestor worship and Chinese New Year celebrations, and this separates them from the Thais, who do neither of these. This reality seems to be something of a departure from that which is imagined in Thai-medium literature like *Letters from Thailand*, i.e., the view that the Thais and the Chinese would become an integrated monolithic group. In fact, Jennifer W. Cushman has indicated that even among the Chinese in Thailand who have become fully integrated, vestiges of Chinese cultural practice have been retained.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, Supang Chantavanich, a Thai professor of sociology, has reconfirmed Cushman's findings that the position of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand is more complicated than being either Thai or Chinese. In fact, they can be Thai and Chinese at the same time,

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<sup>20</sup> Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun, "Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand," in *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun (Singapore: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 34–37.

<sup>21</sup> Cushman, "The Chinese in Thailand," 250.

as long as their Chinese cultural identity does not conflict with their Thai political identity.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Chinese-medium literature

### 2.1 Chinese-medium/ Sino-Thai literature

The postwar era, or more specifically the 1960's, saw the advent of Thai-language literature which featured a Chinese individual as the main character and a depiction of life within the Chinese community of Thailand. This same phenomenon also occurred in Chinese-medium literature in Thailand. In the postwar decades, both China-born and Thailand-born Chinese writers in Thailand became engaged in a trend of localization. They began to pay attention to local society, both Thai and Chinese, as a focal point in their writing.<sup>23</sup> The term Sino-Thai literature (*Taihua wenxue*)<sup>24</sup> has become commonly used to identify Chinese-medium work about society in Thailand by writers of Chinese origin, regardless of their birthplace. Although Claudine Salmon has noted that political pressure in the late 1950's and early 1960's gave rise

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<sup>22</sup> Supang Chantavanich, "From Siamese-Chinese to Chinese-Thai: Political Conditions and Identity Shifts among the Chinese in Thailand," in *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: ISEAS, 1997), 222–26.

<sup>23</sup> In the pre-war era, Chinese-medium literature in Thailand was recognized as part of China's literature, since most writers originally came from China. The local flavor in their works was, therefore, very limited. However, after the founding of the PRC in 1949, the People's Republic of China pursued a closed-door policy, which discouraged connections between the overseas Chinese and their motherland. Moreover, China's policies towards the overseas Chinese changed in the late 1960's; the overseas Chinese were forced to choose only one nationality, either China or their host country. This sprouted the Chinese a sense of belonging [*Guishugan*], a desire to root themselves in the host country [*Luoye shenggen* in Chinese expression]. See Sima Gong, *Taihua Wenxue Mantan* [Talk on Sino-Thai Literature], 11–12.

<sup>24</sup> As well as the term Sino-Thai writer [*Taihua zuojia*], which was used to identify a writer of Chinese origin who published Chinese-medium work about Thailand. In fact, Claudine Salmon has found that the term *Taihua* can be traced to the late 1930's. See Claudine Salmon, "Post War Fiction in Chinese as a Mirror of Political, Social and Cultural Changes in Southeast Asia," in *The Symposium on Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II* (Australian National University 14–16 June 1985), 8.

to a disengaged literature consisting of love stories and *jielong xiaoshuo*,<sup>25</sup> some Sino-Thai literature remained strongly connected to Chinese society in particular and Thai society in general. Those works that meet previously stated criteria include *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* (*Fengyu Yaohuali*) (mid-1960's) and *The Ugly Alley* (*Louxiang*) (1980), which seem surprisingly compatible with *Letters from Thailand* and *Filial Passion*—Thai-medium Chinese literature.

*Yaowarat in Rainstorm* is written in the form of *jielong xiaoshuo*, first serialized during 1963–64 in *Huafeng* Weekly and printed in book form in 1983 by a publisher in Hong Kong. The nine authors who participated in this *jielong xiaoshuo* are Yifei, Yishe, Li Xu, Shen Yiwen, Li Hong, Hong Ying, Bailing, Chen Qiong and Naifang. These authors had received Chinese education (some in China and some in Thailand) and are renowned in Sino-Thai literary circles today.<sup>26</sup> *Yaowarat* is a flourishing typical Chinatown in Bangkok, where a large number of the ethnic Chinese of every class live. Stories in *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* were definitely set in *Yaowarat*, the same place where Tan Suang U and his family—protagonists in *Letters from Thailand*—lived.

In *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*, Li Jun and Yafu, two young men of Chinese origin from southern Thailand, came to earn a living in Bangkok. Li Jun was a softhearted intellectual who dreamed of being a Chinese newspaperman, while Yafu was a funny, less-educated man who seemed to have a greater understanding of life than Li Jun.

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<sup>25</sup> Claudine Salmon, "Post War Fiction in Chinese as a Mirror of Political, Social and Cultural Changes in Southeast Asia," 9. *Jielong xiaoshuo* literally means connecting dragon novel, which was written in turns by several writers. When each author completed his chapter, he would announce the plot connecting his chapter to the next author.

<sup>26</sup> All the authors were from the lower middle class. None of them was trained in higher education or literary studies. They were workers, journalists, clerks, and petty merchants with a common interest in writing Chinese literature. Their fascinating biographies can be found in Nianlamei (Li Hong), *Taihua Xiezuoren Jianying* [a Portrait of Sino-Thai Writers] (Bangkok: Bayin Chubanshe, 1990). Nianlamei is the Thai name of Li Hong, one of *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*'s authors.

They rented a cheap room in a small apartment building on Yaowarat Road, owned by a greedy Chinese landlady. In the same apartment building, they made new friends like Jimei, the beautiful daughter of their landlady who was most unlike her mother; Heqing, a coolie who could never make ends meet, Wanshitong (Know-it-all), a fortune teller, and his lively daughter, Yufeng. Later, at his place of work, Li Jun met Shufang, the literature-loving daughter of the shop owner.

Li Jun and Yafu struggled to find jobs. In order to survive, they had no choice but to become cheap day-wage laborers. They endured many unpleasant experiences that included starvation, exploitation, cheating, and bullying. Worse, Li Jun found that a young and innocent girl from his hometown, A Ying, had become a prostitute in Yaowarat due to materialism and social injustice. Perceiving Yaowarat as a wicked area that turned good people into selfish devils, Li Jun almost gave up his dream of becoming a newspaperman. However, thanks to the friendship of the people around him, including his lover, Jimei, Li Jun finally fulfilled his dream and became a Chinese newspaperman. He began his work in Yaowarat where he could make a significant contribution to the whole society.

While *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* depicts Chinese life in Yaowarat, *The Ugly Alley* by Ba'er focuses on another Chinese district called "Saphan Lueang" or *Huangqiao* (Yellow Bridge), located in an area still undeveloped at the time *The Ugly Alley* was written.<sup>27</sup> The story is set in a small alley and describes such social crimes as bullying, gambling, and, worst of all, drug trafficking. This setting seems to be much the same as seen in *Filial Passion*—a crowded slum where the poor Chinese gathered. In *The Ugly Alley*, Zeng Xian, a teacher who had resigned from a Chinese

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<sup>27</sup> *The Ugly Alley* was written in 1977 but printed in book-form a few years later in February of 1980. See Ba'er, *Louxiang* [The Ugly Alley](Bangkok: Dapeng Chubanshe, 1980), 190.



school in northeastern Thailand, returned to Bangkok to start a new life with his father, Xibo. However, he found that his neighborhood, an ugly alley in Saphan Lueang, was a dark and dirty slum in the middle of the flourishing and prosperous city, Bangkok. The alley had a gambling den owned by a greedy Chinese merchant. It lured poor people into destitution and was a location for Chinese gangsters who coerced the teenagers living in the alley, including a boy named A Lun, into drug addiction.

Meanwhile, the Chulalongkorn University property bureau wanted to tear down the alley to construct a high-rise building, while extending very little compensation to alley residents.<sup>28</sup> Zeng Xian and other alley dwellers organized themselves to negotiate with the property bureau, to no avail. The situation became more serious when gangsters forced a drug-addicted A Lun to collaborate in setting fire to the alley. Fortunately, the fire was quickly extinguished with the help of the alley people and even A Lun himself. Zeng Xian, understanding that A Lun was not in reality a bad person, asked him to quit his drug habit. A Lun promised to do so, while the gangsters were arrested and the property bureau gave up the expropriation attempt. Eventually, the Ugly Alley of the story developed into a better place, with a brighter future for the next generations of the ethnic Chinese.

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<sup>28</sup> In reality, Chinese newspaper *Sin Sian Yit Pao* also reported this news. *Sin Sian Yit Pao*, December 2, 1973.

## 2.2 Depicting hard life of the lower class, the Othering of Sino-Thai

### literature

In *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* and *The Ugly Alley*, Sino-Thai writers, as insiders, criticize certain elements of society. In other words, the objective of their stories is to disclose and denounce the dark side of Chinese communities, examples of which include malpractice in business (such as cheating and exploitation), prostitution, and other social crimes.<sup>29</sup> However, what seems to be salient in the narratives of Sino-Thai literature, as distinguished from that of Thai-medium fiction, is that the assimilation model is not employed in their writing. In fact, it appears to focus on the hard lives of ordinary people, both Thai and Chinese, in society rather than describing the conflict of identity—on being Chinese or Thai. In fact, depicting the hard life of the lower class was a mainstream subject for Chinese writers greatly influenced by China's May Fourth literature.<sup>30</sup> Its importance can be seen in collections of short stories published in the 1960's–70's, in that many of the short stories were about the life of the lower class, as most Sino-Thai writers envisaged a realistic approach of literature writing, portraying the life of people with their own true feelings.

In both *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* and *The Ugly Alley*, the narratives describe that people have to struggle to make ends meet. Li Jun and Yafu became cheap laborers who would do anything for the little money needed to live day to day. His friend Heqing, because of poverty, was forced to work illegally and eventually went

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<sup>29</sup> A self-criticism view in Sino-Thai literature has been briefly described in Salmon's article, see Salmon, "Post War Fiction in Chinese as a Mirror of Political, Social and Cultural Changes in Southeast Asia," 22–23.

<sup>30</sup> Laotang, "Wiwatanakan Naewkhamkkhit Nakkhianchin Naithai" [Intellectual Development of Sino-Thai Writers], in *Chak Mei Tueng Phapphueng: Ruam Ruaengsan Nakkhiancin Naithai* [from Plum to Lily 2: A Collection of Short Stories by Sino-Thai Writers] (Bangkok: Wannasin, 1973), iii.

to prison. A Lun's mother in *The Ugly Alley*, despite being sixty years old, was still working as a cheap-wage sewer in order to raise her poor son who was a drug addict. In *From Plum to Lily (Chak Mei Tueng Phapphueng)*,<sup>31</sup> a collection of short stories by Sino-Thai writers that was translated into the Thai language in 1973, selected short stories depict the hard life of prostitutes, cheap-wage laborers, abused children, and poor teachers. One story, "Durian,"<sup>33</sup> one of the troubling short stories collected in *From Plum to Lily*, portrays a poor Chinese family whose father could not afford a durian for his children. When the father finally made the decision to buy a durian, he was hit by a car and the durian was destroyed. Another short story depicted in *From Plum to Lily 2*, "Mom, where did I come from?"<sup>34</sup> tells the story of a poor mother that was forced to undergo an abortion. But when she decided not to undergo the abortion, her baby was killed in an arson attack, as revenge. In the short story "Huajia"<sup>35</sup> (Flower Street), a representative work in a collection of short stories with the same title, *Huajie*,<sup>36</sup> by Li Hong—a distinguished female writer, describes the little-known real life of women who worked as prostitutes. Although they lived in a harsh environment at the bottom of society, these women still maintained their faith in the goodness of human nature.

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<sup>31</sup> *Chak Mei Tueng Phapphueng: Ruam Ruaengsan Nakkhiancin Naithai* [from Plum to Lily: A Collection of Short Stories by Sino-Thai Writers]. (Bangkok: Wannasin, 1973). And *Chak Mei Tueng Phapphueng 2: Ruam Ruaengsan Nakkhiancin Naithai* [from Plum to Lily 2: A Collection of Short Stories by Sino-Thai Writers], (Bangkok: Wannasin, 1973).

<sup>33</sup> Shen Mu, "Durian," in *Chak Mei Tueng Phapphueng: Ruam Ruaengsan Nakkhiancin Naithai* [from Plum to Lily: A Collection of Short Stories by Sino-Thai Writers] (Bangkok: Wannasin, 1973).

<sup>34</sup> Chen Ding, "Maeja, Nu Machaknai?" [Mom, Where Did I Come From?], in *Chak Mei Tueng Phapphueng 2: Ruam Ruaengsan Nakkhiancin Naithai* [from Plum to Lily 2: A Collection of Short Stories by Sino-Thai Writers] (Bangkok: Wannasin, 1973).

<sup>35</sup> Nianlamei (Li Hong), "Huajie" in *Huajie [Flower Street]* (Bangkok: Dapeng Chubanshe, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Nianlamei (Li Hong), *Huajie [Flower Street]* (Bangkok: Dapeng Chubanshe, 1980).

In addition to depicting hard lives, the narratives of Sino-Thai literature also implicitly show the role of the Chinese as a group that makes a contribution to Thai society. In fact, the Chinese are depicted as having a strong feeling of affection for Thai society and as being proud to be part of Thailand's development. In *The Ugly Alley*, when the property bureau wanted to expropriate the alley, Zeng Xian's father, Xibo, explained his grievance:

We, our children, and our grandchildren have been living in this ugly alley for many decades. Before we came, the alley was marsh and infertile. It smelt so bad that every passerby must stop breathing for a while. However, after we rented this land and made it home, the population had increased, and along came liveliness. We did not owe the rental landlord anything. How come the landlord forced us to leave?<sup>37</sup>

As seen from the above paragraph, the Chinese proclaimed their contribution to society. Their loyalties were strongly rooted in Thailand as succeeding generations have grown up there. This is unrelated to whether they had been assimilated into Thai culture or not. As Xibo, Zeng Xian's father, pointed out, they were a group that had come to live in and develop this land, where their successive generations had grown up. This land would have been no better without their significant contribution. Therefore, the sense of integration was strong and intense, although they may not have thought they had assimilated into Thai society.

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<sup>37</sup> Ba'er, *Louxiang* [the Ugly Alley], 174.

Currently, Sima Gong, the president of Thailand's Chinese literature writers association (*Taiguo Huawen Zuoji Xiehui*) and a prominent Sino-Thai writer, argues that Sino-Thai literature is no longer part of China's literature. He states that Sino-Thai literature has become part of Thailand's literature.<sup>38</sup> Yet, Thai literary circles have not acknowledged this claim. Translated works of Sino-Thai literature are still considered peripheral in Thai literary circles, let alone the original publications in Chinese. Sino-Thai literature has remained unexplored for decades, while Thai-medium literature dominates the perspective in national integration. The "othering" of Sino-Thai literature by prevailing Thai literary circles can be explained by several reasons. First of all, language is a crucial barrier for Thai scholars who want to study Chinese-language literature, as much of the Sino-Thai literature has not been translated into Thai yet. Furthermore, Sino-Thai literature, frankly, is quite unattractive to Thai readers, because of the depiction of a Chinese community that was so poor and dark. Finally, and most importantly, Thak Chaloeontiarana, a Thai political scientist at Cornell University, has noticed that the Thai literature canon has been assembled by a few Thai academic institutions and Thai scholars trained in literary studies. In other words, to be the Thai literary canon, works must be institutionalized to ensure that they will stand the test of time. So this argument suggests some novels may be selected while others may not on the basis of the taste of a particular group of academic scholars. Therefore, Thak contests the Thai literary canon from the margins, disciplinarily and geographically, and argues that some selected translated novels that Thai academic institutions neglected should be included in the canon of Thai literature, as they are prominent examples of the

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<sup>38</sup> Sima Gong, *Taihua Wenxue Mantan* [Talk on Sino-Thai Literature], 13–14.

translated or vernacular novel.<sup>39</sup> If his argument proves persuasive in negotiating new space for Thai literature, then translated novels of Sino-Thai literature may have a chance to be considered part of Thailand's national literature.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Reflections on urban Bangkok

Although they may be born in different places, the writers of Thai- and Chinese-medium literature, discussed in this chapter, had been living during the 1950's–1970's, during the so-called “American era,”<sup>41</sup> when the advent of the American presence gave an immense amount of financial and military aid to the Thai government, and at the same time, brought fundamental “development” to Thai society. The so called “development” can be seen in many aspects. For example, the Thai economy began a sustained, decade-long boom, giving rise to the burgeoning of a real Thai middle class, together with a great expansion in education.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the economic growth induced the spread of capitalist mindsets to many parts of Thailand.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, eight American military bases built up around the country brought “Americanization” to rural as well as urban Thailand.<sup>44</sup> As a result, such

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<sup>39</sup> Those particular novels are Mae Wan's *Khvam phayabat*, and Khru Liam's *Khvam mai phayabat* and *Nang neramid*. Thak Chloemtiarana, “Making New Space in the Thai Literary Canon,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, no. 1 (Feb 2009): 110.

<sup>40</sup> In fact, there is an attempt to revisit the construction of Thailand's national literature. Recently, Natthanai Prasannam, a young Thai literary scholar, has proposed the term “Chinese-dubbed Thai literature” to define Sino-Thai literature, at a talk organized by Thailand's national book club on 20 November 2010. Natthanai Prasannam, e-mail message to the author, October 27, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Benedict R.O'G Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, eds., *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the Modern Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1985), 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24.

development, supported by the US' financial and military aid, made a social and cultural impact on Thailand.

These writers observed the American presence that had developed in their everyday life. At the same time, they also noticed that Western culture, specifically American consumer culture, had also made an impact, both socially and culturally, on their Chinese society. In response to the American presence, they documented this phenomenon in their writing. In so doing, some described modern elements of Western cultural expression, with the term *farang*,<sup>45</sup> in their writing.

Botan, a Thai writer of Chinese origin, depicts in the novel *Letters from Thailand* a very detailed *farang* impact on Chinese life in Bangkok. The protagonist Tan Suang U, the father of a Chinese family living in the Yaowarat area, noticed that people in Bangkok followed the *farang* in many ways.<sup>46</sup> Even shop assistants preferred *farang* to local people, both Thai and Chinese, resulting in him and his son, Weng Khim, experiencing humiliation, as follows:

One Saturday afternoon when Weng Khim and I went shopping to buy him new shoes, we stopped by one such place. Not only were the prices outrageous, but the clerks would not even bargain. They looked at us if we were peasants, too ignorant to deserve the honor of patronizing their establishment, but whenever *farang* walked in the door they would break into smiles so wide that their eyes

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<sup>45</sup> The term *farang* in the Thai language has two meanings: guava and occidentals. Historically, the latter meaning derives from the Thai pronunciation for franc or Frenchmen. Thai distinguish *farang* from Indians, Africans, Chinese, Japanese, and "others." Ordinarily no distinction is made among types of *farang*, although if context demands, distinctions can be made national grounds, e.g., Americans, Englishmen, Italians, etc. See Herbert P. Phillips, *Modern Thai Literature with an Ethnographic Interpretation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 99.

<sup>46</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 261.

disappeared. The *farang* come to buy, they think, while Thais and Chinese come only let their mouths water and pretend they are rich.<sup>47</sup>

The pro-*farang* sentiment can also be seen in many places, such as nightclubs and shops. At a nightclub that Tan Suang U and his Chinese fellows visited, the singers wore very thick makeup, and most of the songs they sang were *farang*. In fact, there were hardly any Thai songs, which seemed peculiar to him.<sup>48</sup> Another instance of pro-*farang* sentiment was reflected in the fate of Tan Suang U's bakery, when sales became poor as the bakery had now become obsolete. Suang U realized that neither Thai nor Chinese customers were as interested in Chinese bakery items as they were five or ten years ago. Instead they bought *farang* concoctions in tins, fashionable but tasteless, in his opinion.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to people in Bangkok in general, each member of Suang U's Chinese family, specifically, did favor *farang* material culture. For example, his wife Mui Eng and sister-in-law Ang Buai were strongly determined to buy an automobile, as it was a modern vehicle that could simplify their lives while giving the feeling of superiority.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, his children had no interest in any kind of traditional Chinese entertainment (such as Teochiu operas). Instead, they were very interested in *farang* performances as well as *farang* costumes.<sup>51</sup> Suang U could not help but feel upset

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<sup>47</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 262.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 234–35.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 261.



with his children's clothes. He became more frustrated, especially when his eldest daughter Chiu Kim wanted to enter a beauty contest. Suang U strictly forbade her, as he argued that no Chinese father would allow his daughters to parade around in a bathing suit. When Bak Li, his younger daughter, mentioned that she had seen pictures of Chinese girls wearing skirts slit up to the thigh on either side, he fiercely refuted:

That is Hong Kong, an island owned by the *farang*. Real Chinese women of good families don't get themselves up like that, not even in Hong Kong. Ugliness of that sort leads to evil behavior. If you are too young to understand that, then I shall have to protect your own gullibility.<sup>52</sup>

The above examples drawn from the novel *Letters from Thailand* demonstrate the impact of Western influences on Chinese life in Bangkok during the 1960's. While the old generation like Tan Suang U expressed frustration and alienation with that impact, the young generation, like his children, was exhilarated by modern Western culture, and therefore, enjoyed it thoroughly.

In addition, the presence of Western cultural expression can be seen in the depiction of Bangkok as an urban area with modern facilities and infrastructure. This development gave rise to Bangkok becoming a prosperous city, especially the Yaowarat area which became a flourishing commercial center of Bangkok. The writers of the Chinese novel, *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*, portray the spectacles of urban Bangkok as follows:

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<sup>52</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 281–82.

At this moment, the city Li Jun cursed is wearing an evening dress, gracefully, with multi-colored neon lights, very long lines of vehicles, movie posters lighting the fronts of cinemas, and advertisement posters of a big-breasted models. Moreover, there were models wearing fashionable costumes in the display windows of department stores, priceless ornaments in glass display cabinets of gold shops and watch shops. Trembling pictures and sound at the entrance door of television and radio shops, as well as bustling streams of passersby made all the Yaowarat road a noisy and busy, lively and flourishing scene.<sup>53</sup>

Changes that were brought by the development of urban Bangkok, as seen in *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*, are mostly in material culture. When friends of Li Jun from his hometown came to visit him in Bangkok, they were stunned by the spectacles of modern vehicles, crowds of people, cinemas' dazzling spotlights with colorful movie postures, and brand-new commodities, as if these items represented the civilization they were yearning for:

The picture of urban civilization seen on this road was unbelievably admirable for Jianming—a young boy who just left the rural area for Bangkok. He could not help but take a glimpse of luxurious commodities in glass display cabinets in department stores and watch

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<sup>53</sup> Li Hong et al, *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm] (Hong Kong: Dipingxian Chubanshe, 1983), 66.

shops, as well as radio receivers, television sets, and refrigerators in electric appliances stores.<sup>54</sup>

But it soon became clear for Jianming that he could not afford such things, as Li Jun warned him: “Stuff here is incredibly expensive. We are not meant to be their customers. Their customers are folks whose parents are wealthy.”<sup>55</sup> This divergence, again, shows that the urban culture is welcomed by the young generations (also seen in *Letters from Thailand*), but that not everyone can afford it and that it is only for men of means.

#### **4. Left behind by the boom**

Despite the growth of Western influence, Thai-medium literature is in agreement with Chinese-medium literature on the issue of those Western influences that also had a strong negative impact on Thai society. In view of this, many writers argue that absorption into American consumer culture, to some extent, led to the flourishing of consumerism that could further develop into materialism. This supposed materialism, or specifically, money-worshipping, was likely to sabotage the good morality of people. As seen in both Thai- and Chinese-medium works, there is a feeling of concern that both Thai and Chinese cultures were being contaminated by Western, specifically American, influences. Moreover, when Western influences

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<sup>54</sup> Li Hong et al, *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm], 247.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 248.

developed in Thai society, they gave rise to social injustice, as many people were left behind by the boom and did not benefit from the great developments. Despite a depiction of a prosperous city, Bangkok was also portrayed as a two-faced city or a wicked city in both Thai- and Chinese-medium literature.

In a Thai novel, *Filial Passion*, the author, Yok Burapha, notices that Bangkok was a two-faced city, where the Chinese in urban Bangkok were not different from the Chinese in rural Thailand and elsewhere in the world. That is to say, there were the rich, the middle class, and the poor living together at the same time.<sup>56</sup>

According to Yok Burapha, some wealthy Chinese in Bangkok were known as merchants. They could afford mansions and keep up with social developments, therefore, and were willing to adjust themselves to a new material world and move away from their traditional culture. However, not all the Chinese could be rich. In fact, many Chinese were poor, as they still were cheap wage-laborers. They lived in dirty slum areas or small crowded alleys. Although some of them were able to move out, they still remained. This could be because they were too old to move, or had become used to it.<sup>57</sup>

Not just the Thai novel *Filial Passion*, but also the Chinese novels *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* and *The Ugly Alley*, depict Bangkok as a two-faced city, due to the lives of the poor. In so doing, the writers demonstrate the struggles of the poor to survive in a city where others succeed. In the Chinese novel, *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*, it shows how a young and innocent Chinese girl from rural Thailand, named A-Ying, failed in Bangkok, and became a prostitute in Yaowarat because of materialism and social

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<sup>56</sup> Yok Burapha, *Katanyu Phitsawat* [Filial Passion], 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 3–5

injustice, in the eyes of Li Jun, the novel's protagonist. At first, A-Ying was seduced into coming to Bangkok with hope for a better life. She first worked as a servant in a mansion of one Chinese association director, Mr. You. Mr. You molested and raped A-Ying, then blackmailed her not to tell anyone. A-Ying was fired and became destitute as well as desperate for a better life in Bangkok. She finally made the decision to become a cheap prostitute in Yaowarat, where Li Jun found her. Li Jun saw the story of A-Ying as a tragedy. Though he pitied A-Ying, Li Jun was powerless to help her, as he came to Bangkok for the same reason and could not yet make ends meet. He murmured: "[This is] a cursed city, a wicked city! A cannibalistic city!"<sup>58</sup> Li Jun expressed his frustration at this wicked city, as it had swallowed up an innocent provincial girl and then destroyed her soul.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, *Yaowarat in Rainstorm* also explored the humiliation of Li Jun's greedy and selfish landlady. This landlady married an old man in Bangkok for his money, although she did not love him. After her husband's death, she inherited his apartment building and financially exploited its residents. Whatever the amount of money, it never seemed to be enough for her, as she was lured by materialism. Therefore, she planned to sell her daughter to a wealthy Chinese man. But her attempt failed when Li Jun and his friends discovered this and prevented the tragedy from happening. This landlady was ridiculed for her greed and selfishness, and taught by her lover to be a better person.

Bangkok, as a wicked city that swallowed up young teenagers by turning them into drug addicts, is depicted in another Chinese novel, *The Ugly Alley*. The ugly alley

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<sup>58</sup> Li Hong and al, *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm], 66.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 67.

was located in Saphan Lueang, a dark and dirty slum in the middle of Bangkok. The alley had a gambling den owned by a greedy Chinese merchant that hired gangsters to protect his business. Because of the poverty, the alley resident parents were forced to work hard to earn a living. As a result, they had no time to look over their children. Some children, including a young boy named A-Lun, became vulnerable to the seduction of drug and crime offered by the gangsters, therefore, and were coerced into drug addiction and criminality. One of the alley residents Zeng Xian sadly sighed:

Inside the flourishing of this city, there was darkness in the ugly alley where lived a huge number of poor families. Residents in each corner, each alley of Bangkok, were impoverished and miserable. Would there be any gentlemen who understand and help them?<sup>60</sup>

As seen in these examples, much of Thai- and Chinese-medium literature addressed several issues that were negative effects of the development in urban Bangkok, such as poverty, prostitution, social crime, and drug addiction. The writers of these works take the Chinese communities, such as Yaowarat and Saphan Lueang for example, as a focal point in their criticism towards the development of urban Bangkok. In these works, the writers demonstrate that the Western influences, which were reflected in cultural expressions as well as in modern facilities and infrastructure, made an urban culture out of the Chinese society in Bangkok. However, these writers also demonstrate the growing number of discontented opinions about the Western influences in Chinese society in Bangkok. They seem to respect Chinese and Thai cultures, rather than Western ones. For example, in the Thai

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<sup>60</sup> Ba'er, *Louxiang* [the Ugly Alley], 32.

novel, *Letters from Thailand*, Tan Suang U could accept Thai customs in marriages and funerals, but he could not tolerate *farang* customs, especially in his daughter Chui Kim' s wedding where the bride and the groom were teased by their friends:

Any piece of foolishness that occurs to anyone can be excused by blaming it on another nation's "custom," though I doubt the worst of such behavior can be laid at any nation's door. Why is it, in this nation, that the best examples of foreign behavior are of little interest to anyone, while excesses of all sort of fashionable so long they are imported? <sup>61</sup>

In addition to a Chinese like Tan Suang U, Winyu's mother, a Thai woman, was also willing to accept a Chinese daughter-in-law, rather than a *farang* one. At least, she thought a Chinese girl who grew up in Thailand would have the background that was closer to the Thais:

Thai and Chinese, we are cousins, and I have no difficulty in accepting a Chinese daughter-in-law . . . I don't mind his [Winyu] marrying a Chinese girl. I would be less happy were he to bring home a *farang* . . . I would be happier to see him married to a girl who has grown up here . . . It is in the long years when people are old together that what is called "background" matters . . . for the Thai, for the Chinese, that is not so different. <sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Botan, *Letters from Thailand*, 299.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 372.

The notion of preference for Thai and Chinese cultures over Western cultural expression can also be seen in Chinese-medium literature. The Chinese writers show that they were determined to preserve Chinese education, and at the same time tolerate Thai education rather than foreign education. In *Yaowarat in Rainstorm*, Li Jun spoke highly of an anecdote called “Two Families” written by Shufang, a literature-loving Chinese girl who published her work in newspaper. This anecdote can be read as follows:

There were two families living in the same place: a rich one and a poor one.

A son of the rich family went to a famous *foreign school* to receive education since he was young. When he grew up, he went to study abroad. His rich father expected that when his son graduated, he would come back to inherit the family business. However, his son was actually far from his father’s expectations. The son was illiterate in Chinese; worse, he hardly spoke a single word, while the Chinese language was necessary to their family business. Although he had some knowledge, it was yet an empty, foreign knowledge. Thus, there was no place to display his ability! Moreover, what he learned was all theoretical, and absent from experience in doing business. When it came to real practices, he could not figure out anything. He did not know that theories in the textbooks he learned were dead and inflexible, while the commercial society was so competitive that there were changes all the time. Therefore, the business of the rich family



was declining, as the father was getting old and his knowledgeable son was unable to operate business.

On the contrary, the poor family went out to work in the morning and return home in the evening. A son went to a Chinese school to receive Chinese and Thai education. After gaining a basic diploma, he began to work in business circles, at the same enrolled in an evening school to make up Thai-language lessons. He had a solid ground in the Chinese and Thai languages, therefore, and was able to further study in English. As a result, he not only knew three languages, but also gained experience in doing business. A promising future was in his hands.<sup>63</sup>

It can be said that the story in this anecdote does not seem to make any logical sense. However an attempt to detract from Western influence can be obviously detected. This may be a form of defense by Chinese writers of Chinese education, because the decline of Chinese education was even more dramatic in reality. As seen in Skinner's report in 1952, most Chinese children in Bangkok were not exposed to Chinese schooling. Moreover, the Chinese elite showed a stronger preference for mission and foreign schools than Chinese schools.<sup>64</sup> Foreign education, like other Western styles of consumption, could be achieved only by people who could afford it. That is to say, Western styles of consumption, influenced by American consumer

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<sup>63</sup> Li Hong and al, *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in Rainstorm], 140.

<sup>64</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 371.

culture, were reserved for the middle class and the wealthy. However, it became just a dream for the lower class or the poor who were unable to afford it and, as a result, were left behind by the boom.

## **5. Conclusion**

This chapter attempts to revisit the urban culture in literary narratives of Chinese society in Bangkok, from perspectives of ethnic Chinese writers. It examines differences and similarities in both Thai- and Chinese-medium works. It can be demonstrated that works of Thai-medium literature by Chinese writers, educated in the Thai language, has supported full assimilation. They were, subsequently, assigned for all Thai secondary school students as supplementary reading to promote an ideology of integration. On the other hand, Chinese-medium/Sino-Thai literature by Chinese writers, educated in the Chinese language, paid attention to the depiction of the hard life of the lower class, rather than identity conflict. However, Thai-medium literature is in agreement with Chinese-medium literature on the issue of Western influences. Both appear to criticize the flourishing of urban culture, which they claim to be a result of American influences. As seen in both Thai- and Chinese-medium works, there is the feeling of concern that both Thai and Chinese cultures were being contaminated by Western (specifically American) influences.

## Conclusion

Writers, whether publishing their works in the Thai or Chinese languages, have depicted Chinese society in Bangkok in the postwar era as commercially-oriented and culturally-diverse. They perceived Yaowarat—the center of Chinese society in Bangkok—as a multi-cultural community. It was demonstrated in these works that urban culture seemed to have developed in this Chinese community, in forms such as foreign cinemas, modern radio and night life entertainment. The notion of urban culture in the Chinese society in Bangkok is quite poorly documented in modern scholarship on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. The present research, therefore, has addressed urban culture in Chinese society in Bangkok in the postwar era, with particular focus on cinemas, broadcast and literature. These forms of cultural expression appear in the social sphere—in the streets, on the air and in texts, which constitute important parts of the urban culture in the Chinese society in Bangkok.

The purpose of this dissertation, however, is not simply to explore the urban culture of the Chinese society in Bangkok. It aims to engage with dialogues of scholarship on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand on questions relating to the issue of assimilation, which have long been discussed. It demonstrates that the shift of scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese from early postwar to the late postwar decades shows a significant trend of the studies of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. In fact, it is a response to the transformation of the nation-state era into the multi-culturalism era. That is to say, unlike the early postwar years when Skinner proposed the thesis of complete assimilation of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand by the fourth generation, modern scholarship in the late postwar years is inclined to work in the

light of multi-culturalism, which attempts to look into the maintenance of Chinese elements among the Chinese in the Thai society. The scholarly contribution of multiculturalists has promoted the idea of continuity of traditional Chinese culture among the ethnic Chinese from past to present. It, however, fails to see Chinese cultural expressions in the urban context that are not embedded in Chinese traditions. This dissertation, on the other hand, has sought to provide an alternative to the understanding of life and society of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok from a historical perspective. Materials used in this dissertation are archives, official reports, newspapers, magazines, memoirs and fictions at the period of time—mostly during the 1950s -1970s.

This dissertation traces the historical development of the Chinese community in Bangkok, shaped by political and socioeconomic factors. The growth of economy since the eighteenth century supported the urbanization of Bangkok, which facilitated the rapid expansion of the Chinese community, as the Chinese tended to be concentrated especially in urban areas. The (re)mapping of Chinese community in Bangkok—in its geographical setting and construction—can demonstrate concrete manifestations of urban culture, including department stores, financial institutions, hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, night clubs and cinemas. In turn, these manifestations of urban culture make it clear that Yaowarat, one of the oldest and largest Chinese communities in Bangkok, is not a culturally and ethnically isolated community. Rather, it seems to be open and exposed to foreign cultures, which made it a multi-cultural community, and not simply a unilateral and monolithic Chinese race-based community.

Under the pressure of the Cold War as well as American influences in Thailand, and when connections to the PRC was discouraged, the Chinese cultural expression in Chinese society in Bangkok was transformed to absorb cultures from a wider Chinese-speaking world than just mainland China. In other words, the absence of the PRC was partially compensated for by other Chinese communities, mostly from Hong Kong, whose materials helped to fulfill a need of the Chinese in Thailand left behind by the Cold War. To some extent, Hong Kong provided an alternative to Chinese cultural production for the consumption of the Chinese in Bangkok.

The emergence of Hong Kong—‘thoroughly Chinese yet oriented to the modern world’—into the urban culture in Chinese society in Bangkok can be seen in an influx of Hong Kong’s Chinese cinema. In the postwar decades, cinema was common in everyday life in Bangkok. Hong Kong-produced Chinese films, including Teochiu dialect films and modern Mandarin films, were said to be a popular genre of cinema industry in Bangkok, second only to American Hollywood films. To enter and entertain the Thai market, Hong Kong’s production studios brought about the bandwagon of accommodation and collaboration with Bangkok’s elites. This cooperation can be seen in coproduction between Aswin Pictures of Thailand and production studios of Hong Kong, when Chinese stars featured in Thai films and Thai stars in Hong Kong’s films, such as ‘The Boat House’ (1961) and ‘Crocodile River’(1964).

In addition to the cooperation between Hong Kong and Thai filmmakers, studios from Hong Kong also attempted to strengthen distribution and promotional networks in Bangkok. As the price of Mandarin films was comparatively cheaper than Hollywood films, many urban cinemas in Bangkok appeared to screen more and more

Mandarin films. As a result, the Shaw Brothers' Mandarin films came to dominate Chinese cinema in Bangkok. It can be said that the demand for Mandarin films related to the overseas Chinese sense of kinship and nostalgia for Chinese culture, since some of SB films were based on stories from Chinese legends, myths and history, such as 'Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai,' 'Jiangshan Meiren' and 'Baishe Zhuan'. On the other hand, *Wuxia* (martial arts) films such as 'Du Bi Dao' also became popular among audiences in Bangkok who were not necessarily Chinese or in any direct contact with Chinese culture, as they liked *Wuxia* films simply for magnificent production and exciting experience.

In addition to Chinese cinema, Thai Rediffusion—the only legal Chinese radio station in Thailand from the early 1960s—also incorporated materials from Hong Kong to produce broadcasting programmes. It supported the import of modern Teochiu opera troupes from Hong Kong to Thailand, which gave rise to the revival in popularity of Teochiu operas in Bangkok in the mid 1960s. Moreover, Thai Rediffusion introduced a variety of Chinese pop music from Hong Kong to young audiences in Bangkok. The popularity of Chinese pop music led the Thai Rediffusion Company to hold singing contests called the "White Lion Cup," broadcast live every Sunday for several years. Rediffusion ended its service on 31 August 1982, having served the Chinese community in Bangkok since 1956. During its lifetime, Thai Rediffusion performed a vital role by introducing modern Chinese entertainment culture like Chinese pop music from Hong Kong to young Chinese audiences in Bangkok, which connected the Chinese community in Bangkok to the Chinese-speaking world with its broadcast programs.

Despite the growing popularity of urban culture, many Chinese writers, both educated in the Thai and Chinese languages, appeared to criticize the flourishing of urban culture, which they claimed to be a result of American influences at the height of the Cold War. In view of this, many writers argued that the absorption into American mass culture, to some extent, led to the rise of consumerism that could further degenerate into materialism or, some may say, money-worshipping. As seen in both Thai- and Chinese- medium works, there was the feeling of concern that both Thai and Chinese cultures were contaminated by American influences. Moreover, while the expansion of western influences developed in Thai society, it brought social injustice, as many people did not benefit from the great development seen in urban culture. That is to say, the civilization that urban culture brought to Chinese society was reserved for those who could afford it, with many people left behind by the boom, whether they were Thai or Chinese.





## Character Glossary

A-han-da-jia	阿罕达加
Baishe Zhuan	白蛇传
Baishi Gewang Bei	白狮歌王杯
Baiyu Laohu	白玉老虎
Caiyun	彩云
Caizi Jiaren	才子佳人
Chang-e ben yue	嫦娥奔月
Chaoju	潮剧
Chaoyupian	潮语片
Chen Kexin	陈可辛
Chen Tongmin	陈同民
Chi ren	吃人
Chuliuxiang	楚留香
Ci Ma	刺马
Danji	姐己
Deng Lijun	邓丽君
Dianmao	电懋
Du Bi Dao	独臂刀
Duanpian Xiaoshuo	短篇小说
E-yu He	鳄鱼河

Fengyu Yaohuali	风雨耀华力
Guochae/Gece	歌册
Guinan Huizhan	桂南会战
Guishugan	归属感
Gulong	古龙
Guotai	国泰
Heri jun zailai	何日君再来
Hewenxiu Antanghuiqi	何文秀庵堂会妻
Hoitianlao/Haitianlou	海天楼
Honglou Meng	红楼梦
Hongxiguan	洪熙官
Hu Yi	胡翼
Hua Mulan	花木兰
Huafeng Zhoubao	华丰周报
Huajia	花街
Huang Qingyuan	黄清元
Huangmei(diao)	黄梅调
Huangqiao	黄桥
Huaqiao	华侨
Jiangshan Meiren	江山美人
Jidu xiyang hong	几度夕阳红
Jielong xiaoshuo	接龙小说

Jin Yanzi	金燕子
Jindao Guaike	金刀怪客
Jinghuabao	京华报
Jingu Qiguan	今古奇观
Jinyong	金庸
Juedai Shuangjiao	绝代双骄
Juntun Yingye Gongsì	军吞影业公司
Kujiu Manhuai	苦酒满怀
Lesheng	乐声
Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai	梁山伯与祝英台
Liang Yusheng	梁羽生
Liang-Zhu	梁祝
Lide husheng	丽的呼声
Li-ngow/Liyi	丽艺
Liuxing Hudiejian	流星蝴蝶剑
Longmen Kezhan	龙门客栈
Louxiang	陋巷
Luodi shenggen	落地生根
Manli	曼莉
Meigui Meigui wo ai ni	玫瑰玫瑰我爱你
Meizheng	梅正
Mudanting	牡丹亭

Namtiang/Nantian	南天
Nanguo Dianying	南国电影
Nanren de yanlei	男人的眼泪
Nanyang Lun	南洋论
Pan Dihua	潘迪华
Pan Xiuqiong	潘秀琼
Qi Zhuangshi	七壮士
Qingren de Yanlei	情人的眼泪
Qingren Qiao	情人桥
Qiongju	琼剧
Qiongyao	琼瑶
Saibao	赛宝
Sanguo	三国
Sanpin	三聘
Shan Lian Ge	山恋歌
Shaoshi	邵氏
Shaxiaozi	傻小子
Shediao Yingxiong Zhuan	射雕英雄传
Shengyi	昇艺
Shipinggui huiku	石平贵回窟
Shuangbaiyan	双白燕
Sin Sian Yit Pao	星暹日报

Si-sia/Xixiang	西厢
Suoluohu zhiwan	梭罗河之湾
Taiguo Huawen Zuoqia Xiehui	泰国华文作家协会
Taihua wenxue	泰华文学
Tianhua	天华
Tingyuan shenshen	庭院深深
Touming Zhuang	投名状
Tuojiang Yingye Gongsi	陀江影业公司
Wangjin Long	王金龙
Wen Rui'an	温瑞安
Wenyi Pian	文艺片
Wo Longsheng	卧龙生
Wo shi yi pian yun	我是一片云
Wu Zetian	武则天
Wuxia	武侠
Xiaju	厦剧
Xianluo zaji	暹罗杂记
Xin Du Bi Dao	新独臂刀
Xin you qianqian jie	心有千千结
Xingchashenglan	星槎胜览
Xintiancai	新天彩
Xishi yu Fanli	西施与范蠡

Xixiangji	西厢记
Yangjiajiang	杨家将
Yanyu mengmeng	烟雨蒙蒙
Yaohuali	耀华力
Yelaixiang	夜来香
Yi Jiang Chun Shui Xiang Dong Liu	一江春水向东流
Yili	怡梨
Yilian youmeng	一帘幽梦
Yingyashenglan	瀛涯胜览
Yueju (Cantonese Opera)	粤剧
Yueju (Shaoxing Opera)	越剧
Zai shui yi fang	在水一方
Zaishengyuan	再生缘
Zhaoniang Henshi	招娘恨史
Zheng Yingnian	郑膺年
Zhongguo Lianhe Yingye Gongsì	中国联合影业公司
Zhongyi	中一
Zhuihunbiao	追魂镖

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## Appendix A

### Brief biographies of informants

**Bailing** (Li Youzhong) is a prominent Sino-Thai writer. His work includes *Fengyu Yaohuali* [Yaowarat in rainstorm]. He also works as a librarian at Chinese library of Teochew Association of Thailand.

**Bang-orn Aphachaemsai** is a Thai-Chinese of Teochiu ancestry, who received Chinese education. She loves to be an amateur Chinese singer.

**Boonruang Chunsuvimol** is a Thai-Chinese of Hakka ancestry. He is a university professor in linguistics, and also a huge fan of the Shaw Brothers.

**Hua Saetung** is a Thai-Chinese of Teochiu ancestry, who runs a small grocery store at home in Samut Prakan.

**Kanokporn Numtong** is a university professor in classical Chinese literature. She is also a prolific translator of Chinese literature, both classical and modern.

**Liangtio Lertkeunkunt**, as well as his elder sister **Phornthip Lertkeunkunt**, is a Thai-Chinese of Teochiu ancestry. Both run a Chinese bakery shop in Samut Prakan.

**Suthi Tejawiriyataweesin** is a Thai-Chinese of Teochiu ancestry. He has been working at the Chinese materials section of the National library of Thailand.

**Wanna Nawikamul** (as well as her husband Anek Nawikamul) is a university professor who has deep interest in Thai local history. They operate a lovely museum called “House of Museum”.

**Zheng Yingnian** was a deputy director at the Thai Rediffusion company. He also produced many interesting programmes, such as storytelling and dramas.

## Appendix B

### 1) Rediffusion application form

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แบบ 1 ต.ก.

เลขติดตั้ง.....  
เลขทะเบียนสมาชิก.....

บริษัท ส่งเสียงทางสาย จำกัด  
หนังสือแจ้งความจำนงค์ขอติดตั้งเครื่องรับเสียง บริษัท ส่งเสียงทางสาย จำกัด

### 泰國麗的呼聲聽戶裝機申請表

ชื่อบริษัทห้างร้านหรือบุคคล 申請人商號或姓名	โทรศัพท 電話號碼	
สถานที่อยู่ 詳細地址	บ้านเลขที่ 門牌號	ซอยหรือตรอก 街或巷
	ถนน 路	ตำบล 區
	อำเภอ 縣	จังหวัด 府
จำนวนเครื่องที่ประสงค์จะติดตั้ง 擬安裝機數		
วันที่ยื่นขอ 申請日期	วันที่ 日	เดือน 月
	พ.ศ. 年	ผู้แทนบริษัท 經手人
หมายเหตุ 備 攷		

นามผู้ขอ  
申請人簽名

โปรดกรอกข้อความลงในแบบข้างบนนี้ให้ถูกต้องเรียบร้อยแล้วจึง

- มอบให้ผู้แทนบริษัท ฯ รับไป หรือ
- ติดต่อทางโทรศัพท์ หมายเลข 25655-25656-57812-63372 เพื่อทางบริษัท ฯ  
จะได้ส่งเจ้าหน้าที่มารับแบบ หรือ
- ส่งทางไปรษณีย์ตามตำบลที่อยู่ดังนี้ บริษัท ส่งเสียงทางสาย จำกัด  
260-268 ถนนเยาวราช (ชั้น 4 ตึกธนาคารกรุงไทย)  
พระนคร

請將申請書填妥之後

- 交敝公司聯絡員或
- 撥電話 25655•25656•57812•63372 聯絡自當派員  
登門接洽或
- 函交：耀華力路門牌260至268(泰京銀行四樓)

泰國麗的呼聲有限公司

送撕者如  
交下，要  
本填可申  
公寫將請  
司明此裝  
。白頁機

Source: Lide Husheng Zazhi (henian kan) [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)] 1969, 51.

## 2) Rediffusion's broadcasting programmes

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บริษัท ส่งเสียงทางสาย จำกัด  
รายการประจำวันฝ่ายรายการจีน

### 泰國麗的呼聲華語節目表

วันจันทร์ - วันเสาร์  
星期一至星期六

รายการพิเศษวันอาทิตย์  
星期日

時間	摘要	時間	摘要
6.00	早晨清歌	6.00	早晨清歌
6.30	益智講座	6.30	今日香港
7.00	聽眾須知 (英文教育班)	7.00	時代歌曲
7.15	時代曲	7.15	今日美國
8.00	報時後潮曲	7.45	康樂報導
8.30	歌冊	8.00	報時後潮曲
9.00	話劇	8.30	歌冊
9.30	新聞簡報 (社團消息)	9.00	兒童故事
9.45	無所不談	9.30	粵語節目
10.00	粵語節目	10.00	特別節目 (歌唱比賽)
10.30	故事	11.00	歌樂介紹
11.00	歌冊	12.00	一週新聞摘要
11.30	時代歌曲	12.30	時代曲
12.00	新聞報告	12.45	轉播 (或潮曲)
12.15	時代歌曲 (聽戶聯誼節目)	2.30	點唱
12.45	海南曲	4.30	一週時事分析
1.00	潮曲	4.45	清奏
1.30	益智講座 逢1、4世界獵奇 逢2、5家庭與婦女 逢3、6泰國風光	5.00	歌冊
1.45	時代曲	5.30	佛學講座
2.00	故事講述	6.00	潮曲 (上段)
2.30	時代歌曲 (社團消息)	7.00	歌冊 (敬告聽眾輕聲開放)
3.00	潮曲	7.30	潮曲 (下段)
3.30	故事講述	8.30	粵語話劇
4.00	社會新聞報導, 警世歌冊	9.00	歌冊 (敬告聽眾輕聲開放)
4.15	客語節目	9.30	音樂, 時代曲, 黃梅調
4.30	故事講述	10.30	音樂清奏
5.00	話劇	11.00	閉台
5.30	清奏		
5.45	新聞報告		
6.00	時代歌曲 (聽戶聯誼節目)		
6.30	潮曲		
7.00	歌冊 (敬告聽戶輕聲開放)		
7.30	話劇		
8.00	報時後故事講述		
8.30	粵語節目		
9.00	歌冊 (敬告聽戶輕聲開放)		
9.30	時代歌曲		
10.00	潮曲		
10.30	時代曲		
11.00	閉台		

麗的呼聲電話：二五六五五·二五六五六  
三養：五七八一二 吞府：六三三七二

Source: *Lide Husheng Zazhi (henian kan)* [Rediffusion Magazine (New Year Edition)] 1969, 47.