‘I love you mother, but I also love the girl next door’

[This short essay is an introduction to two music video films, which will be screened at the Thai Studies Group meeting on 21 September 2004. Here I just draft ‘a script’ for further discussions at the meeting.]

Sensing ‘Mind of the Thai state’

Metaphorically, motherland, or phaen din mae in Thai, is widely, if not universally, used to represent ‘a place of origin’ where peoples are born, grow up and form their identities (nationally or not). Particularly in literature, poetry, music or films, the metaphor of motherland connotes, in short, ‘my country.’ Of course, the usage of this metaphor is not new, particularly for those who have studied film or literary criticism. In fact, I guess, also in our daily life that this metaphor is taken for granted.

It is however compelling and significant to consider this metaphor (and its usages) as the site for tracing ‘Mind of the State’ (e.g. in what way the state ‘thinks,’ ‘acts’ and ‘exercises’ its power upon its peoples). This is particularly the case when the totality called ‘the State’, the Thai state for an example, uses this metaphor to boost its economic recovery and launches its nationalistic campaign on national development as a whole.

Social scientists, since the late 20th century, have tended to think that the new world order, or disorder if you like, as expressed in the changing world economy and polity following the Cold War in particular, either in the name of globalisation or transnationalisation, is threatening or challenging the power of the nation state. Some go so far as to say that it is the ending era of the nation, which is to be replaced by international/global corporations. To think that globalisation and/or transnationalisaiton has transformed the cultural logics of the nation state, I guess, is partially true, but this does not mean that the state power will be nullified. In the case of Thailand, for an example, when the government has confirmed that the Tourism Authority of Thailand will host the 2005 Miss Universe Pageant, in my view, this probably can be interpreted as a symptom signaling the transformation of the nation state into what Prof. Chaianan Samuthavanij calls, ‘Rat Talat’ (the market state).1

I wonder and question those scholars who tend to ignore or undermine the power of the nation state in the present climate. What ‘we’ have seen daily on TV news (for me via Australian channels), since the September 11 tragedy in particular, seemed to point to a different scenario of non-stop battling stories in many countries, if not around the world, between the states and something called ‘terrorism.’ I think further that currently the states of many nations are making claim, in the name of national security, to the need to protect their citizens (on their territories?) from the threats or attacks by outer enemies through new methods of regulation and exploitation of different species of capital.

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1 For details see Chaianan Samutwanit, Chak Rat Chat Su Rat Talat (From Nation state to Market state), Bangkok: Samnakphim Ban Phraathit, 2544 (in Thai).
As many scholars in Thai studies have theorized, in constructing ‘Thailand’ the state has always used the mass media to disseminate, determine and define the definitions of Thai-ness/Thai identity, via newspapers, magazines, radio programs, the national anthem, talk-shows, or series and serials of TV soap opera. In this sense, the formation of the Thai state and its national identity come together. They are not separable. However, how the Thai respond to these messages is another story.

Thinking and re-thinking about the power of the nation state in this new world regime, I guess, is worth enough.

Thailand in the years following the currency crisis (1997), particularly under the Thaksin government since 2001, has seen a dramatic revival of the nationalistic sentiment. Explicitly, the landslide votes the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) won in the last election was based on the Party’s campaign tactically built on this (new) Thai patriotism. However, the rise and fall of political parties in the Thai political terrain do not simply rest on the party’s advertising strategies propagating its policies (known as ‘populism’ in the case of TRT), the image of its leader, and the quality of candidates, but also local and national (also global?) structures, power, networks and interest groups.

‘Love You Thailand’ Project

In the afternoon of 19 February 2004, the Thai Ministry of Defence convened a press conference to publicly launch its national campaign called, ‘Rak Thuer Prathet Thai’ (‘Love You Thailand’ Project). The Permanent Secretary of the ministry said the project followed to the Prime Minister’s initiation to unite all Thai people and to boost their sense of responsibility. According to this campaign, Thai people should join the government in its attempts to solve ‘the national problems’ such as the threat to the national security posed by insurgency in the South.²

The campaign is jointly by R.S. Promotion, a Thai entertainment corporation, which for this campaign, re-produced ‘Rak Ther Prathet Thai’ (Love You Thailand) a song performed by Rhang Rock-chestra, a Thai rock singer, some ten years ago. Interestingly, Rhang himself served as a member of the Navy Band before turning himself into one of the prominent rock musicians in the 1990s.

The new version of ‘Rak Ther Prathet Thai’ is rearranged and sung by five R.S. Promotion pop singers. The song, both in the audio and music video versions, is expected to broadcast throughout the country via the Defense Ministry’s communication networks and radio and television programs run by the R.S. Promotion. In the press conference, the Secretary expressed his hope that journalists and other media businesses would also support the dissemination of this song for the nation.

Since then, I guess, the song would be disseminated in public places such as hospitals, provincial town halls, airports, and train stations. Also it would be used and reproduced in various ways almost throughout the country, probably.

² I should emphasise here that this campaign had begun before the southern violence (re) exploded in late April 2004.
For instance, encouraged by the Prime Minister himself, a recomposed version of ‘Love You Thailand’ was performed by a choral group of eighty school students at the grand opening of the Educational Reform Fair organized by the Ministry of Education in Bangkok in mid July this year.\(^3\) And just last month (August 2004), at a reception party hosted by the government to welcome home Thai Olympics ‘heroes and heroines’ the press reported that the five R.S. pop singers were invited to sing the song as a highlight of the party.

**Miss You ‘Muang Thai’**

No one questions, whether he or she loves his or her country, I guess (of course this is my personal view). But how, or in what way, we ‘love’ or should love our motherland is worth to be questioning.

A song, widely known as ‘Duen Phen’ (Full Moon) is another Thai popular song that I selectively propose to think about here, in responding to the ‘Love You Thailand.’

Since its first release about twenty years ago, ‘Duen Phen’ has remained one of the most popular songs performed, reproduced and remembered by the Thais, poor and rich, old and young, whether in Thailand and overseas Thai migrant communities (e.g. in Taiwan, Japan, Sydney, London, Los Angeles, and Amsterdam). Nevertheless, I wonder how many people know about the genesis of this most nostalgic and sentimental song.

It was written by ‘Naipi’ (literally means, ‘Mr. Ghost’)\(^4\) one of the various pennames of Asanee Pholchan (1918-1987), a prominent Thai Left (or a communist if you like) whose work and life have become a legend among the Thai leftists. Jit Phumisak, another prominent Thai Left scholar, describes ‘Mr. Ghost’ as ‘the great poet for ordinary people.’

Originally, Naipi titled his song, ‘Khid Theng Baan’ (Missing Home). It is believed, according to one of his relatives who fled to the forest to join the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the 1970s, that Naipi wrote the song, in the late 1950s to the early 1960s, during his exile in China.

I guess, this song must be popular among the then young Thai leftists, who also fled from the city, in the aftermath of Thai political turmoil in 1973 and 1976, to join the CPT (to fight against the Thai military regime) in the forest and the countryside, in the eastern part of Nan Province and along the northern Thai-Laos border where Naipi was based since the late 1960s, in particular.

Since the early 1980s, when the anti-communism tension began to ease up, the young Thai leftists who began to return to their motherland also brought back with them the song ‘Khid Thueng Baan.’ It was Kga, a lead singer of Caravan, recognised as the legendary band of ‘Song for Life’ of Thailand, who introduced the song, in its original title, to the wider (but still limited) public in 1983: the album called ‘Baan Na Sa Theun’ (The Tragedy of the Countryside). Kga, along with other members of Caravan, was among the

\(^3\) [http://business.siam2you.com/dnews02/index_thread.asp?thread=dnews0042](http://business.siam2you.com/dnews02/index_thread.asp?thread=dnews0042)

\(^4\) For a short biography of Naipi see: [http://www.geocities.com/thaifreeman/pe/pe.html](http://www.geocities.com/thaifreeman/pe/pe.html)
young Thai leftists who fled to the forest after the political turmoil at Thammasat University, in October 1976.

One year later, Ad Carabao, a famous Thai country-rock musician, rearranged the song, changed its title to ‘Duen Phen’ (Full Moon), and putted a track in his solo album, Khamphucha. Since then the song has become popular nation wide. It has been reproduced by many Thai musicians (my favorite one is the version reproduced by Asanee-Wasan Chotikul, the brother rock band). It has been opened, broadcasted, performed and used by its consumers variously and differently. Moreover, it has significantly become part of the Thai daily life, especially among Thai immigrants around the world, I would say. The Thai, and non Thai perhaps, would sing this song or ask someone else to perform it, whether in households, karaoke centres, parties, restaurants and so on.

Twenty years after it had been released, Ad Carabao recently re-mixed and produced ‘Duen Phen’ again. This time he made also its music video film. Ad putted the newest version of ‘Duen Phen’, as one of the two extra tracks, in the re-mastered album, ‘Made in Thailand (2546)’ (the band’s own legendary album first released in December 1984). Ad and his friends in Carabao band had given a press conference detailing the reproduction of this historic album on 15 January 2004, just a month before the ‘Love You Thailand’ Project was launched.

The music video film of ‘Full Moon’, purposively, I guess, illustrates Naiphi’s original work in its own way. The film narrates a story of a young Thai communist who, along with his comrades, fought and struggled for his life and ideology in a forest battlefield, as well as hoped that one day he would have a chance to return to his motherland, ‘Muang Thai.’

**Reading**

For short, after I watched these two music films, intertextually, my reading is that both films are telling the Thai audiences ‘to love’ their motherland. However the two songs ask their audiences in their own ways, differently.

Whereas ‘Love You Thailand’ leads me to think further about the Thai national anthem, ‘Full Moon’ reminds me of the scenes from the controversial film ‘14 October: War of the People’ which features a contemporary history of the Thai political situations in the 1970s. Cinematographically, the film narrates the story, through the eyes of one of the leaders of the people and university student movement (Seksan Praserthgul), flashing back and forth between a situation in the countryside (focused on the lives of young Thai university students who fled to join the CPT in the forest) and what had happened previously in Bangkok (focused on the student uprising, on 14 October 1973 in particular).  

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5 I understand that originally, Dr. Seksan himself, as ‘a co-director,’ entitled the film ‘The Moon Hunter,’ implied to its fictional story rather than the documentary. However for marketing strategy, the film production company changed the film title, and this partly caused controversies and criticism from scholars, columnists, and many (former) Thai Lefts, whether this film distorted some ‘real stories’ that had happened previously in a history of ‘the October peoples.’
While ‘Love You Thailand’ overtly represents the way the Thai nation state asks its citizens to be patriotic: ‘Can you die for your motherland?’ ‘Full Moon’ tells me that a young Thai communist also loves his country, but he would rather die for his ‘moral ideology.’

The Full Moon in the Made in Thailand (2546) album directly reflects the life history, or legend?, of Naiphi who had to be exiled from Thailand to China in the late 1950s because, according to my reading, he loved his country and was strongly determined to make it better. Ironically, in the late 1970s, when the Communist Party of Thailand was about to follow the Domino plan, using the military support from the International Party to attack and revolve Thai society, Naiphi was also one of CPT members who argued against this strategy. The internal conflict between the communist factions (among the different nationality communists!) eventually pushed Naiphi to cross from his base in Laos back to his country, where the Thai state was also hunting him and his comrades down. Finally, he was forced to return to Laos and lived there until the end of his life in the late 1980s.

The Thai left was predestinated to miss his motherland forever.

It is perhaps this side of the story, apart from Naiphi’s literary talent, that makes his expressionist song a legend. In my view, since the 1980s, ‘Duen Phen’ has become most nostalgic among Thai Diaspora and the Thais who have been away, temporarily, from their motherland. (Think, for example, about Caravan and Carabao overseas concert tours and the circulations of the song in its various forms and dimensions).

Let me discuss a little further about the legend of Naiphi.

22 November 1997, about ten years after his death, the remains of Naiphi’s body, packed in a greenly stow away classic bag, were transported from Laos via the Thai-Laos friendship bridge (built with the financial support from the Australian government) to Nakhon Ratchasima. (It was cremated, in a couple of months after that, in Kamphaengphet, the hometown of his beloved wife.)

On the night of the arrival of Naiphi’s skeleton, it is said, in Nakhon Ratchasima the song ‘Khid Thueng Baan’ was collectively sung, for him, by about thirty thousands people (most of them former Thai leftists who fled to the forest, I guess) in the city’s soccer field. Someone boasted that this was probably the loudest collective singing of the song ever since it has come into being, and has since been sung repeatedly hundreds of thousands of times.

The silence, at that moment, following the end of the collective singing, thus marked the end of Naiphi’s journey, signifying that ‘Mr. Ghost’ has finally returned to his motherland.

Seemingly, ‘the Spectre of Communism is still haunting us.’

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So?

I think by using these two music video films, I had partly described above, probably and partially, we will be able to trace ‘the mind of the Thai state’ and perhaps the ways in which the Thais express their loves to their country in these days.

Besides, the sounds and scenarios of the two music video films are beautiful, really. Musically, both songs, perhaps called the Phleng Phuer Chat and the Phleng Phuer Chiwit, are compelling and significant, I think. In terms of productions and reproductions, these two pieces of musical work are very inspirational. They provoke us to re-think and think about the future of several aspects of Thai studies.

How much do ‘we’ understand Thai culture and society, particularly a history of the Thai Left movement and its place in contemporary Thai history? Whilst many of the former Thai leftists joined and formed part of a powerful faction in the TRT, how do we make sense of this phenomenon within the current Thai political terrain? Does this relate to the Thai national flag in ‘Love You Thailand’ or the young communists in the ‘Full Moon’? Why does the filmmaker put so many Thai national flags in the former? Where is the place for the Thai peasants and ethnic groups in the latter? Unfortunately both of them are invisible here (in these two films).

Why?

Is there any link between the images of the Thai national soccer team and its compatriot supporters, represented in ‘Love You Thailand,’ and the 2005 Miss Universe Pageant to be held in this country?

Come along, watch ‘Full Moon’ and ‘Love You Thailand’ on a big screen, to be shown only once here, then share your ideas and discuss your opinions.

Wasan Panyagaew  
11 September 2004
**Song Lyrics**  
*Translated by Julian Kusa*

**รักเธอประกาศไทย/Love you Thailand** (R.S. Promotion - 2004)

**Intro**

จะยอมให้ใครมาทำร้ายเธอเป็นนี้ได้ไหม  
How could I possibly allow anyone to harm you?

รักเธอ........รักเธอ........ประเทศไทย.....  
Love you..love you.Thailand!

**Verse 1**

เป็นตัวเป็นคนรวมเป็นคนชั่วนี้我才得以  
To come into being and to have this human life

จะใดจะตายไม่แน่นอน  
There is no certainty that we will live or die

จะต้องจะต้องชั่วหรือไม่ต้อง  
Whether we are firm or flexible

แล้วแต่ท่านจะทำ  
Depends on whom it is done for

จะต้องจะพอหรือไม่พอ  
Whether good or bad, you still stand beside us

จะทำให้ไม่ท้อเขินใจ  
We shall remember this vividly and deeply

จะเป็นจะตายได้ก็ได้  
No matter how hard or easy life may be

ผ่านทำให้เพื่อนเธอ  
I can do anything for you
Chorus

I have no regrets taking an oath for you

Losing someone does not compare to losing you

How could we possibly allow anyone to harm you?

Love you Thailand

Repeat first verse

Chorus

People are protective of their belongings

We will protect and love you

Please don’t have to be afraid

Be at ease, sleep feeling secure

Chorus

I am willing to die (for you)!

Chorus

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Verse 1
Full moon, peaceful and shining splendidly
The sky glowing beautifully, so refreshing is the movement of the cool breeze
The moon’s glow entice thoughts of home
memories of rice fields and the house that I am accustom to

Verse 2
The rerai (cicada like insect) cries aloud
The cries that it repeatedly echoes
Oh dear breeze, whispering close to me
I am still with you without being tired
Without being distant from you
Endless thoughts arise of us being separate and afar

Verse 3 & 5
The camp fire burns near the buffalo corrals
The flames won’t extinguish easily, Oh dear moon, please ask
The breeze to help fan the fire
In order for the smouldering flames to expel the chill and coldness

so that we may sleep well, warm and comfortably

Oh dear breeze, help me communicate

And send the love deep within my heart

To tell her

So that she (Thailand) knows that it wouldn’t be long until her child will return

to embrace his mother (homeland) again