

From Chinese “in” to Chinese “of” Thailand: The Politics of Knowledge Production during the Cold War¹

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Abstract

This article explores the process leading to perceptual change towards the Chinese in Thailand in the 1980s. From being the “other” who were marginalized from Thai national imagination, a convergence of exogenous and endogenous factors beginning in the 1970s has significantly transformed the Chinese into a part of the Thai nation. The changing landscape of Thai history during the 1970s to the 1980s and the normalization of Sino-Thai relationships played a significant role in this process. The popular uprising in October 1973 tremendously affected Thai academia, especially in the history field, leading to the inclusion of the Chinese as a historical agent in Thai history. Simultaneously, the change in international politics, especially the normalization of diplomatic relations between Thailand and China, opened a floodgate for new sets of knowledge on Thai history that paved the way for the inclusion of the Chinese into Thai history.

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Introduction

Since World War II, numerous monographs on the Chinese in Southeast Asia have been published. Knowledge of the Chinese has develop over time until it covers almost every aspect of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, from identities, social patterns, kinship organizations, education, religious beliefs, political and economic roles. At first glance, it seems as if there is nothing to be done except find the missing parts in the abovementioned aspects. However, once one distances oneself from these aspects and starts to question the whole body of knowledge produced by generations of scholars, one may find some new horizon.

Instead of joining the conventional lines of argument, this article questions the “truths” produced by scholars working on the Chinese in Southeast Asia by using the Chinese in Thailand as a case study. Exploring production of knowledge of the Chinese in Thailand and its entanglement with both domestic and international politics reveals the politics of knowledge, its function in negotiating and shaping both Chinese and Thai identities, and its role in local and international political realms from the end of World War II to the end of the 1990s.

From the end of World War II to the end of the 1990s, knowledge on the Chinese of Thailand and the Chinese of Southeast Asia underwent significant changes. From being perceived as a threat to the nation in the post-World War II period, the Chinese elements have gradually become a significant part of the Thai nation. Terms conveying their belonging to the nation, which can be translated as the Chinese of Thailand using such terms as *chin siam* [จีนสยาม], *luk chin* [ลูกจีน], and *khon thai chue sai chin* [คนไทยเชื้อสายจีน], emerged in tandem with the increased visibility of Chinese cultural elements in public space. This phenomenon has some parallels and linkages with perceptual changes toward the Chinese in other Southeast Asian countries as they began to be perceived as “the Chinese of Southeast Asia” instead of “Chinese in Southeast Asia” around the 1990s.³

³ For instance, see Suriyadinata, *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*; Tong, *Alternate Identities*.

The perceptual transformation from the “Chinese in Thailand” to the “Chinese of Thailand” has been a long and sophisticated process. As prepositions describe the relationship between others words in a sentence, the shift of preposition from “in” to “of” reveals the changing relationship between the Chinese and the Thai nation. Once perceived as suspicious and insignificant “others”, merely living physically “in” a place called Thailand, they have now become a part “of” the nation. Hence, in addition to being physically present in the nation, their existence has become crucial to the nation-building process. Knowledge produced by scholars has played a significant role in shaping this epistemological change.

The Birth of Modern Overseas Chinese Studies: Cold War, Communism, and the Chinese Problem

The end of World War II marked significant change in overseas Chinese studies. Previously dominated by colonial scholars producing knowledge for colonial rule, Chinese studies became dominated by American social scientists, a new generation of scholars equipped with a different worldview and methodology. Although declaring themselves free of the shackles of European orientalism, the knowledge that they produced was not, in fact, apolitical.

The change of world order from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana* in the post-World War II period did not merely lead to politico-economic change, but intellectual change as well. In the post war world, decolonization, the rise of indigenous nationalism and the increasing importance of democracy were the major trends. Colonial scholarship underpinned by white supremacy was delegitimized and became irrelevant to the new context. American experience during World War II made the U.S. realize that it had limited knowledge of the world. The outbreak of the Cold War that happened almost immediately after the end of World War II also forced the American government to seek more knowledge on the world, especially Asia. In this context, studies on the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia underwent significant transformation. Influenced by the popularity of social sciences, growth of area studies programs in American

universities and Washington’s increasing interest in Southeast Asia as a strategic point to counter communism, a new generation of scholars, mostly American equipped with social science methodology and funds for fieldwork, flooded the scene. Claiming scientificness of knowledge being free of shackle of old colonialism, American social science gradually superseded colonial scholarship on the region.

Southeast Asian studies and overseas Chinese studies in Southeast Asia emerged in this context. In the case of Thailand, American-trained social scientists were sent to conduct research on Thai society and the Chinese in Thailand. At the same time, scholarships, funding and technical support from both the American government and foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and the Asia Foundation, were offered to Thailand to create modern academia that would help to learn about the country.⁴ The number of Thai scholars graduating from famous American universities was on the rise.⁵ During this period, analogue to other places in the world, the research agenda on the Chinese in Thailand was the “Chinese problem”. Chinese were viewed as a potential communist fifth column. There were numerous research projects conducted in both Thai and English to find solutions to the problem.⁶

G. William Skinner’s two famous monographs – *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* and *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* – published in the late 1950s were a part of this movement.⁷ After meticulously exploring the history of the Chinese in Thailand and factors shaping their lives from the beginning of Thai history to the mid-1950s, he proposed the assimilation of the Chinese into Thai as a solution to the problem. Academics and politics are closer than one can imagine. In addition to Skinner, Frederick W. Mote, a famous American scholar of Chinese studies, was sent to

⁴ The foundation funded Thai graduate research and the publication of academic journals such as *Sangkomsat Parithat* and *The Journal of Social Sciences* of Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University.

⁵ See Anand, *Reflection on a half century of Thai Studies*, 53-54.

⁶ For instance, Boonsanong, *Chinese-Thai Differential Assimilation in Bangkok*; Galaska, “Continuity and change in Dalat Plu”; Kachatphai, *The Chinese in Thailand*.

⁷ Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*; Skinner, *Leadership and power in the Chinese community in Thailand*.

Thailand in 1964 as an advisor to the Ministry of Education on Chinese education. His task was to deal with the “Chinese problem”.⁸ It was no coincidence that during this period a number of graduate theses from Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Education dealt with how to assimilate the second generation Chinese through education. Mote himself was also involved in supporting a graduate student’s thesis.⁹ American social science, Thai studies and the studies of the Chinese in Thailand, thus, were promoted with purpose. The aim was to develop a practical knowledge that could be utilized to transform the country.¹⁰ In this era, although the Chinese became a subject of study, they were studied as the “other” who needed to be tamed rather than a part of Thai nation.

It should be noted that this knowledge on the assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand was not created in a vacuum. Assimilation was also seen as a solution to Americanize ethnic minorities in the United States during this period. Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson pointed out, Thai scholarship produced by Skinner, the pioneering American Thai specialist, was actually a mirror image of Bangkok elite’s outlook.¹¹ Being uncritical of political aspects of knowledge produced by Thai elites, the pioneering specialist on Thai studies took it for granted that Thai elitist knowledge mirrored the truth of Thai society. Knowledge on the assimilatory nature of the Chinese in Thailand produced by Prince Damrong since the early 19th century, thus, was assumed to be the truth as well.¹²

In parallel with the American production of knowledge, for the Thai side, the government also produced knowledge encouraging the

⁸ Atwell, “Frederick W. Mote 1922-2005”, 4.

⁹ See Tiparat, “The Psychological Assimilation of the Second Generation Chinese in Thailand”.

¹⁰ See Skinner, *The Social Science and Thailand*.

¹¹ Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State”, 211.

¹² Although Skinner did not cite Prince Damrong in his monographs, he acknowledged his intellectual debt to *The Chinese in Thailand* written by Kenneth Landon, who was Prince Damrong close friend. Landon cited the Prince’s works in his book to portray the assimilatory nature of the Chinese in Thailand. See Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand*. On Prince Damrong and his role in creating Thai identity and the assimilation of the Chinese, see Saichol, *Prince Damrong*.

Chinese to be assimilated into Thai society. Two prominent government scholars, Luang Wichit Wathakan and Phaya Anuman Ratchathon were active in this process. Ironically, both were Thais of Chinese descent who hailed as Thai savants.¹³ Luang Wichit Wathakan’s Chinese name in Teochew was Kim Liang [金良],¹⁴ while Phaya Anuman Ratchathon’s Chinese name in Teochew was Li Guangyong [李光荣].¹⁵ Luang Wichit was active in portraying the Chinese as a threat to the Thai nation in order to shame and force them to become Thai like himself. One of his historical musical dramas entitled “*Nanchao*” reflected this theme. The play narrated the story of a purported Thai kingdom in southern China that was attacked by the Chinese. Thus, the Thai had to abandon the kingdom and moved southward to present-day Thailand.¹⁶ Therefore, one had to choose between being Chinese branded as an enemy of the nation or becoming Thai. Unlike his colleague, Phaya Anuman’s works on the Chinese were not straightforward; as a self-trained linguistic and anthropologist, his works were more intricate and academic. In his monograph entitled “*Thai-Chin*”, Phaya Anuman tried to convince the Chinese in Thailand that they were really Thai. His argument was that a long time ago, the Chinese in southern China were Thai, but they forgot their true identity after the long domination by northern Chinese. He proved the argument by using a linguistic approach. In the book, he compared the words from five Chinese dialects – Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and Hainanese – spoken by the Chinese in Thailand and pointed out similarities. This study, according to him, proved that the Chinese in Thailand were originally Thai; therefore, the Chinese in Thailand should re-assimilate themselves into being Thai.¹⁷ Later, he also insisted on Thai culture as an essence of “Thainess”. Thus, regardless of racial background, everyone can be counted as being Thai if they adopted Thai culture.¹⁸

¹³ Saichol Sattayanurak published seminal works on these two scholars. See, Saichol, *Phraya Anuman Ratchathon* and Saichol, *Thai Nation and Thainess by Luang Wichit Wathakan*.

¹⁴ Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity*, 40.

¹⁵ Sathiankoset, *Autobiography of Phaya Anuman Ratchathon*, 3.

¹⁶ Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity*, 155.

¹⁷ Saichol, *Phraya Anuman Ratchathon*, 76-84.

¹⁸ Saichol, *Phraya Anuman Ratchathon*, 182-183.

Nanchao as a Part of China and the Chinese as a Part of the Thai Nation

From being perceived as the “other”, the image of the Chinese in Thailand was gradually changed into a part of the Thai nation. They could be both Chinese and Thai at the same time. Domestic and international political changes beginning in the 1970s were a significant factor facilitating this change.

The 1970s was a turbulent decade for Thailand. Both domestic and international politics shocked the country. The student uprising in October 1973 ended the military regime that had ruled the country for almost two decades. Following the end of militaristic rule, all establishments associated with the old regime became under question. Thai national history utilized by the state to induce nationalism and legitimize the rule of charismatic military leaders began to be dissected seriously. At the same time, local academia became mature. Many intellectuals who were the product of the American era in Thailand started to propose new approaches to history resulting in the reorientation of Thai history. Simultaneously, Thai studies previously dominated by American influence gave way to the local intellectual development as the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina and Thailand affected the state of American Thai studies.

Nixon’s 1972 visit to China, paving the way for the American withdrawal from Indochina and the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China, sent shock waves to Thailand. Left with no choice but to follow its great ally, Thailand established diplomatic relationship with China in 1975. Following the establishment of a Sino-Thai relationship, knowledge on early Thai history from China became one of the factors shaping the perception towards Thai history.

The establishment of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations and the opening of China to the world in the late 1970s brought the two countries closer. The exchange of personnel, information and ideas made the borders porous and brought many problems to the surface. The Tai in China, who were believed to be the ancestors of the Thai and a part of early Thai history, became an issue of concern for both

countries. Thai national history claiming Nanchao as a Tai kingdom and portraying the Chinese as villains was at the heart of the problem. Chinese state-supported scholars, thus, tried to change these perceptions by arguing that Nanchao was always a part of China and it has never been a separate Tai kingdom.¹⁹

The Chinese movement was in parallel with the Thai intellectual movement to redefine national history and Thai nationalism. After the 1970s, an academic movement to liberate Thai national history from the confines of king and battle and racial history paved the way for the inclusion of the Chinese in Thailand into a part of the nation. Although having different agendas, the Chinese and Thai academic movements converged at a certain point and became a coalition of force shaping Thai history and nationalism.

Deracializing Thai History: The Unintended Coalition

Thai national history as reflected in Luang Wichit's *Nanchao* is a linear progressive story telling the development of a glorious nation under the great monarchs who possessed militaristic prowess. It is a southward exodus-like story of the Thai led by great monarchs who fought with the Chinese and other foreign enemies from their origin in Mount Altai in Mongolia down to present-day Thailand. A list of great Thai kingdoms from Nanchao in Yunnan, China, down to Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok are mentioned. It is said that the Thais had to leave its prosperous Nanchao kingdom, the last stand of the Thai in China, as Kublai Khan, the founder of Yuan dynasty, conquered it. This plot was exploited by the military dictators to legitimize their rule by emphasizing the déjà vu of the Chinese threat that expelled the Thai from Nanchao.²⁰ Simultaneously, this narrative was also exploited to assimilate the Chinese in Thailand into being Thai since retaining their Chinese identity could be interpreted as being an enemy of the nation.

¹⁹ For this point, I am indebted to Hsieh Shih-Chung of National Taiwan University who provided me his article on the issue. See Hsieh, “Nanzhao, Thailand, Ancient Yunnan”, 50-69.

²⁰ Somphong, “Three decades of Tai studies and Thai studies”, 49.

As fieldwork research on the Tai speaking people in China became possible for Thai scholars after normalization of relations, various groups of scholars started to work on the Tai in China with various purposes. Some wanted to study the Tai as they could illuminate the Thai past and the Thai villager's life; some believed that as they still retained pristine Thai culture, knowledge on their culture was an antidote to Westernization and capitalism that polluted Thai identity; and some wanted to restore the Tai culture outside Thailand.²¹ The study of the Tai was, thus, one of the battlefields for the reorientation of Thai history and Thainess in the 1980s. Many projects and conferences between Thailand and China were initiated, such as Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Asian Studies and Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Southeast Asian Studies who co-worked on a project entitled "The Origin of the Thai: Nanzhao or Sukhothai?"

Instead of revealing the homogeneity between the Tai outside Thailand, research by Thai scholars has shown how the Tai from different countries are diverse in terms of culture, religion and way of life, which supports the widely circulated proposition that the Thai are diverse. Thainess is not defined by homogeneity of culture, but by cultural pluralism. Furthermore, the claim of Nanchao as a Tai kingdom and a southward exodus were debunked by Thai scholars who went to China to explore those issues. The static domain of Thainess supported by Thai history and the quest for an essentialized Thai identity were also debunked. In this sense, the Thai of Chinese descent could be counted as a part of the Thai nation. Furthermore, it could be said that they share more with the Thai than the Tai outside Thailand since they speak the same Thai language, practice Buddhism and are loyal to the Thai monarch.²²

Simultaneously, state-supported Chinese scholars were eager to deny the claims about Nanchao as a Tai kingdom and that a Chinese invasion was the cause of the exodus of Thai ancestors southward. In addition to creating a positive image of China, the denial was necessary

²¹ Rattanaporn, "History", 6-9.

²² Keyes, "Who are the Tai?", 159.

since the narrative was a threat to the “Chinese nation” (Zhonghua minzu [中华民]). China is constitutionally defined as “a unitary multi-nation state” (Tongyi de duo minzu guojia [统一的多民族国家]). With the Han as the core, all nationalities in China together to form a “Big Family of Ethnic Unity” (Minzu tuanjie dajiating [民族团结大家庭]). Thus, maintaining ethnic harmony and fostering national unity are always of grave concern in China. Haunted by Phibun’s Pan-Thaiism and his claim over Sipsongpanna during World War II to create “Greater Thailand” (มหาอาณาจักรไทย), the penetration of Thai national history claiming Nanchao as a Tai kingdom was perceived as a threat to Chinese national unity. Furthermore, Thai national history interrupted the Chinese claim over the ethnic minorities past as a part of a Chinese nation.

A campaign against the narrative of a southward exodus and Nanchao as a Tai kingdom was launched both in and outside China. Chinese scholars went to Thailand to propagate their findings, denying the Tai southward exodus and Nanchao as a Tai kingdom at prestigious Thai institutes, such as Chulalongkorn University, Silpakorn University and The Siam Society. They also participated in and brought the issue to international conferences on Thai studies. In China, research was disseminated through many publications. The Yunnan Academy of Social Science’s Institute of Southeast Asian was the spearhead in this campaign. Numerous research articles related to the issue were published in its journal, *Dongnanya*. In denying Nanchao as a Tai kingdom, when referring to Nanchao, Chinese scholars used the word “local power” (Difang zhengquan [地方政权]) or “local separatist regime” (Difang geju zhengquan [地方割据政权]) signifying that Nanchao was always a part of China. The conflicts between Nanchao and the Chinese court were also portrayed as caused by a selfish Nanchao ruling class who acted against the people’s longing for national unity.²³ Kublai Khan’s conquest of Nanchao was done in quite a peaceful manner that did not lead to the en masse migration to the south. Furthermore, the Chinese argued that Nanchao was established by the ancestors of the Yi and Bai in Yunnan during the Tang dynasty.

²³ Hsieh, “Nanzhao, the Thai, and Ancient Yunnan”, 54.

According to Chinese historical records, such as the History of Later Han dynasty (Houhan Shu [后汉书]), ancestors of the Thai were in the northern part of Indochinese peninsular. Hence, Nanchao was not a Tai kingdom and the southward exodus never occurred.²⁴

The Institute also played a significant role in inviting Thai scholars and statesmen to witness the Tai and Dali, where the Nanchao kingdom was located, with their own eyes. Guests, including Sujit Wongthes, Srisak Vallibhotama, Princess Galyani Vadhana and Chuan Leekpai, were taken to many cultural sites and allowed to have first-hand experience with local culture. Along the trip, they were accompanied by the Institute scholars and were scheduled to attend lectures by Chinese scholars denying a southward exodus and Nanchao as a Tai kingdom.²⁵

Furthermore, the works of Thai scholars, such as Sujit, whose stance could be used to support the Chinese argument, were translated into Chinese and published in *Dongnanya* to legitimize the Chinese claims. One of the most famous translations was Sujit's *The Thais Did Not Come from Somewhere Else?*²⁶ In return, the Chinese campaign was utilized by progressive Thai scholars who began to challenge the issue, although with limited impact since the 1960s. Many pieces of Chinese research were selected to be published in *Sinlapa Watthanantham* and *Muang Boran*, two progressive magazines serving as mouthpieces for the intellectual movement in reorienting Thai history.

The Chinese movement was in parallel with the Thai intellectual movement to reorient the Thai past. Although having different aims, the parallel movements at a certain point converged and became a collective attack on Thai national history. The origin of the Thai and the plot of Thai history came under question. This facilitated the deracialization of Thai history that previously was dominated by the

²⁴ Hsieh, "Nanzhao, the Thai, and Ancient Yunnan"; Du Yuting, "Did Kublai Khan's Conquest of the Dali Kingdom Give Rise to the Mass Migration of the Thai People to the South?", 33-41.

²⁵ Hsieh, "Nanzhao, the Thai, and Ancient Yunnan", 56-58.

²⁶ Suji Wengtie, "*The Thai did not come from somewhere else*", 17-26, 55-64. For the original edition in Thai, see Sujit Wongthes, *The Thai Did Not Come from Somewhere Else*.

idea of a Thai race. It was, thus, possible to include other races into Thai history, such as the Chinese and the Laos, as the title of Sujit’s book in the 1980s, *Chinese Mixed with Lao*, suggests.²⁷

Placing the Chinese into Thai History

In Thailand, the intellectual movement to change the Thai historical landscape progressed during the 1980s. The rise of local history, a Marxist-inspired history of political economy and an alternative history proposed by Nidhi Aeosriwongse were significant forces in shaping the Thai historical landscape leading to the inclusion of the Chinese into Thai history.

As a reaction to national history focusing on war and glory, local history advocates a polycentric narrative that includes people from different regions regardless of their races into Thai history. From 1978 to 1991, at least 46 conferences were held in different provinces of Thailand. Scholars who supported the movement, including Srisak Vallibhotama, Sujit Wongthes, Nidhi Aeosriwongse and Dhida Saraya, always appeared in these conferences. Amongst them, Srisak was the most dedicated. He spoke at more than 20 conferences.²⁸ Although the primary purpose was not aimed at placing the Chinese into Thai history, these efforts did facilitate the process. In writing local histories, in many places the Chinese were included as agents of politico-economic changes, either as tax-farmers, merchants or bureaucrats.²⁹

The Marxist inspired political economy group, led by Chattip Natsupa, also turned Thai history upside down. The glorious past under the charismatic and benevolent monarchs was turned into a story of economic exploitation, mode of production, bourgeois and capitalists. The application of American modernization theory to Thailand from the 1960s did not lead to a pleasant result as expected.

²⁷ Sujit, *Chinese Mixed with Lao*.

²⁸ Thongchai, “*Changing Landscape of the Past: New Histories in Thailand since 1973*”, 110.

²⁹ For instance see Nidhi, “From peripheral state to monthon thesapiban”, 82-103; Punnee, “Tin mining industry and economic change in Southern Thailand 1868-1931”.

The group aimed to search for the answer to economic backwardness in Thailand. In searching for the answer, they explored the capitalist development in Thailand in which the Chinese played an important role. They argued that Thailand lacked national capitalists who could act as the economic dynamo of the nation. For them, the Chinese, who were in the best position to promote economic development after Thailand was integrated into world economy in 1855, relied too much on Western capitalism and the patronage of Thai elites.³⁰ Inspired by this argument, a series of research efforts to explore the Chinese role in Thai economic history were undertaken.³¹ Henceforth, the Chinese became a significant actor in Thai history.

Nidhi's alternative approach to history was also a striking force and he may be the one who was most influential in placing the Chinese into Thai history. Denying the great man theory, Nidhi has tried to portray how structural forces and people from all walks of life have shaped history. His two controversial works, *Bourgeois Culture and Early Bangkok Literature* and the *King of Thonburi*,³² portrayed the Chinese as agents of historical change and redefined Chineseness in Thailand. In the first monograph, he argues that the early Bangkok period was not an inert era as widely believed. Using literature as evidence, he portrays vivid changes in mentality, culture, society and economy during that era. Nidhi argues that the Chinese were actors who played a significant role in transforming Thai society at that time. Furthermore, he argues that Chinese culture, such as literature and tea drinking, was part of Thai elite culture. In the latter work, Nidhi turns the Thai king, Taksin, into a Chinese adventurer, making Taksin's Chinese cultural roots explicit. Taksin is portrayed as rescuing the kingdom after the old elites led it to fall apart. In doing so, his Chinese connections were utilized to consolidate political power and unite the kingdom. In the preface, Nidhi redefines the meaning of "chek" [เชก], a prerogative term for the Chinese in Thailand, into a unique

³⁰ For more details on Marxist inspired history, see Reynolds, "Marxism in Thai Historical Studies", 77-104.

³¹ For instance, see Panni, *The Analysis of Thai Commercial Bank Capitalists*; Sungsidh, *Thai Bureaucratic Capitalism*.

³² Nidhi, *Bourgeois culture and early Bangkok literature*; Nidhi, "Thai politics in the reign of King of Thonburi".

nomenclature to call the Chinese in Thailand. Nidhi admitted that his choice of writing on King Taksin of Thonburi was intention as the king and he are both “chek”.

Along with the increasing visibility of Chineseness in Thailand owing to the elevated status of the Chinese as the economic dynamo of the economy since the 1980s, these three streams of intellectual movement together formed a network of knowledge that gave the Chinese historical roles in Thai history. The Chinese began to be perceived as a part of the nation instead of as a “Chinese problem”. Hence, it became possible to speak of “the Chinese of Thailand” instead of “the Chinese in Thailand” as terms connoting the Chinese belonging to Thai nation; *chin siam*, *luk chin*, and *khon thai chue sai chin*, became popularized in tandem with the change in the historical landscape.

Conclusion

On the cover of *Muang Boran*'s January-March issue in 1996 lays a picturesque Chinese painting of Buddhist saints from Wat Somanas, a second-class royal monastery in Bangkok built by the order of King Rama IV. At the bottom of the page, there is an eye-catching caption in Thai, which has a double meaning: “The Chinese in Thailand, The Tai in China” and “Chinese elements in Thai culture, T(h)ai elements in Chinese culture”. Looking at the content page, readers can find many interesting academic articles discussing the origin of the Tai and the Chinese in Thailand by both Chinese and Thai scholars.³³

Owned by Srisak, one of the prominent figures in the intellectual movement in the 1980s, this issue of *Muang Boran* reflected the changing view on the Chinese in Thailand proposed by Thai scholars. Chineseness and Thainess could now coexist, complementing each other. It was now possible to speak of “the Chinese of Thailand” instead of “the Chinese in Thailand”. At the same time, this issue also reveals how the changing academic knowledge on Tai and Thai history

³³ *Muang Boran*.

has played a significant role in shaping historical perception towards the Chinese of Thailand. The Thai and the Chinese are inseparable. Change in one always affects the other. Knowledge is never neutral; it is always a part of politics.

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