

**แนวคิดยุคหลังจักรวรรดินิยมบางประการ  
เกี่ยวกับวัฒนธรรมและการท่องเที่ยวแห่งชาติ:  
กรณีของประเทศไทยร่วมสมัย**  
*Postcolonial Arguments on Culture and  
National Tourism:  
A Case of Contemporary Thailand*

ดร.จุฬาพรรณ ผดุงชีวิต \*

Judhaphan Padunchewit, Ph.D.

**บทคัดย่อ**

ประเทศต่าง ๆ ในกลุ่มอาเซียนซึ่งล้วนเป็นประเทศกำลังพัฒนานั้นต่างมีเป้าหมายหลักในการพัฒนาประเทศของตนโดยมุ่งเรื่องเน้นเรื่องเศรษฐกิจปากท้องของประชาชนเป็นสำคัญ ประเทศไทยก็เป็นหนึ่งที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว กระแสเงินตราที่ไหลเข้ามาจากนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติ ย่อมต้องการสิ่งแลกเปลี่ยนและผลพลอยได้จากกลไกการแลกเปลี่ยนนั้นก็คือการเลื่อนไหลและการรื้อซึมทางวัฒนธรรม บทความนี้เขียนขึ้นโดยการอิงกรอบทฤษฎีหลังยุคจักรวรรดินิยมในการนำเสนอแนวคิด 3 ประการคือ 1) วัฒนธรรมกลายเป็นแหล่งของการต่อสู้ช่วงชิงทางอำนาจระหว่างรูปแบบวัฒนธรรมสามชั่วคือวัฒนธรรมไทย วัฒนธรรมนักท่องเที่ยวที่ได้รับการสลักหลังโดยการท่องเที่ยวแห่งชาติและวัฒนธรรมโลก 2) รูปลักษณ์ของวัฒนธรรมแบบลูกผสมที่ปรากฏขึ้นกับสังคมไทยที่ขาดความชัดเจนทั้งด้านภูมิท้องถิ่นนิยมและภูมิสากลนิยม และ 3) ข้อเสนอแนะในการจับตามองและวิเคราะห์รูปแบบบริเฉตต่าง ๆ โดยชาวตะวันตกที่ต้องการตีแผ่วัฒนธรรมไทยในยุคหลังสมัยใหม่และผลกระทบของอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวที่มีต่อประเทศไทย อนึ่ง บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของสาขาวิชาทางนิเทศศาสตร์ การสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม

\* Lecturer, School of Language and Communication, National Institute of Development Administration.

### *Abstract*

Tourism, one of the chief vehicles of globalization, has been a major industry and a leading earner of foreign exchange for Thailand for decades. The aim of this article is to take a critical approach using postcolonial theory to 1) propose the concept of culture as a site of struggle for imperial power among three forms of cultures: namely, the traditional Thai culture, the tourist culture as promoted by national tourism, and the global culture penetrated into the porosity of Thailand through global modernization and global cultural flow; 2) present the notion of hybridity of cultural configuration of contemporary Thai culture, by which the scope and boundaries of primordialism and universalism become blurred; and 3) suggest that special attention should be paid on the discourses of the Western episteme on Thai tourism. From the standpoints of postcolonial perspectives, it yields dual benefits; first, it brings the case into the attention and consideration of those establishments and state agencies responsible for carrying out the national agenda on national tourism; and second, it contributes to the advancement of the field of intercultural communication where postcolonial theory is found to be rather alien and hardly brought into dialogue with current paradigms.

### *Tourism and its Sphere*

Tourism is no longer luxury and oddity. Smith (1989) states that a modern person has broader horizons and is prone to travel. "Tourism is no more the prerogative of few but is an accepted recognizable and accustomed, even expected, part of the lifestyles of a large and growing number of people" (Murphy, 1989: 6). Arguably, tourism is the largest of multinational activities. In 1996, some 592 million international trips were made (World Tourism Organization, 1997) and, according to WTO forecasts, by the year 2002, this will almost have trebled to some 1.6 billion international trips, worth some \$2 trillion annually.

In the case of contemporary Thailand, it becomes obvious that the current growth and development of the tourism industry has set the stage for economic expansion, creation of employment and occupations.

transportation and infrastructure development. Pasuk and Baker (1996) mentioned that Thailand is one of the world's most dynamic countries whose "economy was a classic third-world blend of agriculture and tourism" (p. 1). In 1999, the tourism industry could generate massive revenues for the country from the Amazing Thailand campaign at the total of 253,018 million baht, 4.48% increasing from those of 1998's (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1999).

As noted by Kahn (1998), Southeast Asia is the region whose peoples are dedicated entirely to the single goal of economic development—national tourism and cultural politics are never far down anyone's agenda. Apparently, all Southeast Asian countries have actively promoted international tourism in the last three decades. Thailand is one among them. That is, the country and its state elites have taken a profound interest in tourism as part of economic planning and of the nation-building efforts.

Leong (1989) posits that the link between the state and national tourism lies not only in the fact that tourism is a source of foreign exchange income which the state seek to reap, but also in the key role tourism plays in national image management. This means that national tourism presents selling images to the international market of the exotic and the distinctiveness of the country. "The culture image of the nation-state as presented in tourist paraphernalia and travel brochures is therefore both political and economic" (p. 359). These strategic attempts reflect a unilateral role of many state agencies in various countries in shaping culture and becoming planners of tourist development, marketers of cultural meanings, and arbiters of cultural practices. As Richards (1996: 27) notes, culture is now primarily being promoted for economic, rather than cultural ends. Thailand undoubtedly makes the case.

### ***Postcolonial Theory VS National Tourism and Culture***

The rhetoric of the Postcolonial theory is considered as rather alien to the field of intercultural communication field. Hibler (1998) even points out that postcolonial influences are virtually non-existent in intercultural communication researches, which are being predominated by traditional, positivist, functionalist, interpretive, descriptive, or subjective paradigm. Recently, theorists in this field, especially and largely diasporic intellectuals, have started to pay used-to-be-scant attention to alternative cultural orientation: the postcolonial perspectives, enabling us to go beyond the current paradigms prevailing in the field of intercultural communication.

To pinpoint, the postcolonial theory focuses on the ways in which different cultures have interacted in 'the third space' and on the critical ways in which cultural borders and boundaries have become porous in the contemporary world. Therefore, it can make the greatest contribution to the understanding of intercultural relations in the postmodern era, which bears many labels, such as the era of postmodernism, postnationalism, postcolonialism, globalism, globalization, and the like.

So, to be specific, *what is Postcolonial theory?* Shome (1996), defines postcolonialism as *a poststructural perspective that primarily seeks to expose the Eurocentrism and imperialism of Western discourses and practices.* Conventionally, cultural imperialism in the 1970's was conceptualized as the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling class of the West in order to *reorder* the values, behaviors, institutions, and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform with the interests of the imperial classes (Petras, 1993). It involved the characterization of the colonizer-colonized kinds of relationship between the *core* countries or the colonizers (i.e., rich and industrialized nations of the First World) and the *periphery* nations or the colonized (i.e., poorer and rural countries of the Third World). The European Empire is said to have held sway over 85% of the rest of the world after the end of the First World War.

In its modern form, a new wave of cultural imperialism, or neoimperialism, manifests itself as being more 'global' in scope and 'homogenizing' in impact. Kahn (1998) states that we have to admit that the hegemony of Americanization as the world dominant culture is ubiquitous and absolute. The presupposition of the core-and-periphery literature in imperialism has been declined in popularity. Instead, the interconnectedness of the world (or sometimes called *interdependence*) calls for the new questions on the presence and dynamism of the model of the world cultural order involving the flow of cultural modernization or the interpenetration of universal or global (or even "Western") cultural influences exerted by the hegemony of Eurocentrism or Americanization. To conclude, postcolonial theory presents ways to expose and deconstruct the realm of Western thoughts/discourses in today's world. The cultural politics of investigating neoimperialism and its aftermath is among such attempts.

For Thailand, although the country has *never* been colonized, yet the application of Postcolonial arguments may have some rewards. To explicate, the linkage between the dependency of the country's well-

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beings on foreign currencies generated by tourism sector and the commodification of indigenous culture and its transformation into tourist culture by state agencies under the lure of global (or Western) culture, ever present the case as fitted to the regime of Postcolonial arguments. From its theoretical standpoints, three concepts are herein examined as related to national tourism and the features of contemporary Thai culture.

### ***1) Culture as a site for struggle for imperial power***

As much of traditional intercultural theorists, attempt to search for consistency, patterns, norms, and generality for the understanding of intercultural communication, postcolonial counterparts often strive to convey the world as 'chaotic' or 'contradictory' (Hibler, 1998). The definition of 'culture' in the traditional sense is often posited as a constant, unified, and coherent group of symbols and meaning. The postcolonial culture presents alternative conceptualization of the term.

Culture is hence seen as "a battleground where competing voices vie for imperial power. This power refers *not just to where one is positioned in a hierarchy, but to how one's position in a hierarchy privileges, marginalizes and shapes one's perceptions, values and critiques*" (Hibler, 1998: 5). This is found congruent with what Spivak (1990) noted earlier that "when we look at the word 'culture' we should see it as the site of struggle, a problem, a discursive production, an effect structure rather than a cause" (p. 123).

As the communications revolution breaks down national boundaries, global culture or the hegemony of Americanization (sometimes called the hegemony of capitalist society) introduces universal standards to local culture of the Thais. Interestingly, Appadurai (1990) conceived of global cultural flow in five dimensions: *ethnoscapes*, *finanscapes*, *technoscapes*, *mediascapes*, and *ideoscapes*. The two interrelated concepts applicable to this article are *ethnoscapes*, which refers to the flow of peoples (i.e., tourists, immigrants, refugees, and so on) throughout the globe as people become increasingly mobile, and *ideoscapes*, which refers to the flow of patterns of thoughts/ideas among cultures.

Accordingly, tourism itself maintains its formidable role as a vector of cultural encounters and cultural exchange (UNESCO, 1997). Mathieson and Wall (1982) contend that the study of tourism is the study of people *away* from their usual habitats, of the establishments which respond to the requirement of the travelers, and of the *impacts* that they have on the economic, physical, cultural, social well-beings of their hosts.

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To become a tourist (or sometimes called as a vacation-maker, a sightseer, a pilgrim, an excursionist, an explorer, a sojourner, etc.), 'mobility' is prerequisite.

Interestingly, when mobility occurs, 'acculturation' process would actually follow (Smith, 1989). Samovar, Porter, and Steffani (1998) define the term acculturation, one among key theoretical constructs under the rubric of intercultural communication, as a type of cultural change that "occur when a society undergoes drastic cultural change under the influence of a more dominant culture and society with which it has come in contact"(p.45). This reflects two distinctive characteristics of culture: adaptive and subject to change (Samovar, Porter, and Steffani, 1998). When two cultures come into contact of any duration, each becomes somewhat like the other through a process of "borrowing". Theoretically, when contacts take place between a *strong* culture and a *weaker* one, it is usually the former which influences the latter; that is, the stronger culture will dominate and begins to change the weaker into a *mirror image*. Therefore, the process of borrowing is of *asymmetrical* type (Smith, 1989).

Rojek and Urry (1997) in the context of social and cultural mobility note that cultures 'travel' as well as people. Appadurai's concepts of ethnoscaples and ideoscaples merged and come into combining effects to form the current situations of Thai culture, like elsewhere in the world, as illustrating the symptoms of such effects. We can see cultures at the point of being chaotic and contradictory in nature, the postcolonial ones. Significantly, the vexing questions of how 'cultures of ethnoscaples and ideoscaples' travel and make their domestic journeys in the context of Thailand and of how the country has faced the phenomena of such 'mirror image' are worth scrutinizing but are beyond the scope of this article.

This article proposes that the cultural structure of the modern Thai culture should be seen as 'a tussle' in which the representations of three ways of culture are contested: namely, *the primordial or traditional culture of the Thais, the tourist culture as shaped and monitored by national tourism, and the global culture marked by Americanization*. Robinson and Boniface (1999) wrote that the rootedness of world tourism in historical relations, the legacy of imperialism, concentrated ownership of tourism's structures, the tendency to assume a dominant-subordinate relationship, together with growing expectations and opportunities amongst developed countries to engage in tourism - all point to

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fundamental inequality and a process of First World hegemony, which is reflected in distant local tourist-host encounters. Importantly, world tourism both reflects and accentuates economic disparities and is marked by fundamental 'imbalances in power'.

How Thai culture should be seen as a rupture and a site of struggle of imperial power is discussed by several scholars. Leong (1989) notes that the bricolage of national tourism is shaped by economic and political forces. Consequently, its intrinsic nature is 'contrivance'. Since nationalism is always an artificial construct or an ideology, it becomes important when things become artificial. Tourist culture in effect is a showcase of postmodernism. That is, primordial culture is purposefully and intentionally transformed into the tourist culture where its cultural elements are invented or 'staged' and sanitized (Leong preferably called this contrivance by the tourist culture 'the culture of consent'). This is how the term 'the commercialization of culture' or 'the commodification of culture' emerged.

*Without exception, the mass tourist demands novelty and uniqueness of place. The marketing of any given tourist attraction must therefore emphasize the distinctiveness of place: for instance, its peculiar scenic beauty, its unique architectural design, its splendid works of art, or the special charm of the people's traditions. Where no such peculiarities exist, they can be invented, or the ordinary can be transformed into something exotic...resorts and places are structured and promoted to attract the tourist. Even places that were previously in a state of untouched nature become different as soon as they draw a tourist crowd, and economic entrepreneurs or the state begin to market them. There is always an element of invention or transformation of place, of history, of traditions in marketing for tourism—(p. 363)*

Murphy (1989) also states that the commercialization of culture has led to the creation of a 'phony folk culture' or 'pseudo-event', which is construed as artificial.

In discussing the socio-cultural impacts of travel and tourism, Harcombe (1999) states that national tourism also serves 'the international taste' of tourists who presume the role of consumers of

culture, not producers. International tourists mostly come and visit Thailand with their packaged cosmopolitanism at certain degrees. That is, they want to spend their vacation within the 'tourist bubble' or 'environmental bubble' — the protective environment provided by hotels or resorts. Cable TV, American breakfast, service-minded and multilingual cultural brokers—those persons whose daily work provides a protective barriers between the tourists and the local communities like receptionists, guides, couriers, waiters—are even expected by tourists. This signifies how the power of Eurocentrism embedded in the consumptive capitalism of world tourism works and spews some effects on primordial culture in the context of Thailand.

In retrospect, the focal points of the postcolonial perspectives involve ways in which different cultures have interacted in 'the third space' and in the critical ways by which cultural boundaries have become increasingly blurred in the contemporary world. This paper presents an overview on the modern forms of Thai culture from postcolonial arguments. Thai culture is proposed as being contested and becoming an amalgamation of the three forms of formerly exclusive cultures: the *primordial*, the *tourist*, and the *global culture*, where tourism and cultures of tourism are forged.

## 2) *Hybridity*

In the globalization era, no nations in the Southeast Asian region can credibly claim cultural homogeneity (Kahn, 1998). As aforementioned, the concept of culture should be seen as fluid and contested. As having been contested, culture deems to be hybrid. Postcolonial arguments expose that the Eurocentrism or the hegemonic attempts of Americanization is found, more or less, established in local cultures of most nations. This has been the result of the process of cultural modernization in the postcolonial time, where most nations are in a state of constant flux owing to the threatening and intimidating tide of global cultural flow.

As non-western nations are now having to deal with a wrenching cultural identity crisis (Miyoshi, 1991), *this article would like to propose that we should bravely acknowledge our positions and accept such commonalities, the common fate and communal destiny of the world to be influenced by Eurocentrism.* As a result, in the era of globalization, the local cultures, aware or unaware, become inevitably hybrid to certain extents. Cultural attention should be spent on the issue of how to raise

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the consciousness of the Thais to grasp the understanding on the constructedness of the unique kind of cultural identities the country is facing. How “being hybrid in the Thai sense” makes sense for the Thais, especially when applied to the matter of the deep structure of Thai culture?

Kahn (1998) dichotomizes the languages of culture and identity into two apparently contradictory kinds: the universal language of culture and identity (or the global culture) and the particularistic one (the local or the primordial culture). Interestingly, he pinpoints that seemingly contradictory, in fact nationalism in the modern sense appears to have always required both universal and primordial elements. This sounds logical. Being hybrid may be fruitful, even become a prerequisite for nationalism. In order to understand the process, some brief background information on the underpinnings of the history of the country is needed.

Watananguhn (1998) discussed that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the reign of King Rama V, colonialism took place; strategically and politically, His Majesty had to adopt western technology and knowledge extensively. The concept of importing western civilization into Thailand could be apparently seen from the change of Thai absolute monarchy to western democracy in 1932 by the group called ‘People’s Party’ who had been educated and trained in Europe. That rests the point where cultural transition in Thailand pivotally started.

*The core of the ‘People’s Party’, especially those who had been trained in Europe, were convinced that so long as Siam remained an absolute Monarchy, the country was unwesternized, and therefore, undeveloped... This idea of democracy as a ready-made product can be explained as an aftermath of the westernization of the educational system in the reign of King Rama V, when the traditional Siamese concepts of knowledge were completely transformed (p. 86).*

Thirayuth (1994) ranked Thailand as a moderate-to-high ‘outward-oriented’ society. Historically, the country was accustomed to a polyethnic population long before the term ‘multiculturalism’ even flourished in intercultural communication field (Reynolds, 1998). Therefore, the notion of hybridity of Thai culture was not something unusual. Reynolds (1998) remarkably stated that Thais are ‘natural’ globalizers able to make the necessary adaptations. As global culture, which is also seen to be “standardized,” “universalized,” and “homogenized” diffused into Thai culture,

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the process of "Thai-ness" was formed and made concrete and bureaucratized as a form of cultural protectionism. It is also worth mentioning here that Thais define their Thai-ness by looking at how they are different from other nations, as in their use of the term *farang* to mean Westerners, or *khaek* to mean Arabs. The nebulous concept of *kwampenthai* is therefore based upon identifying what is un-Thai (Thongchai, 1994).

Tourism is considered one of the chief vehicles of globalization. National Tourism in Thailand is said to be a willing agent in the development and marketing of primordialism of Thai-ness. An international advertising agency was hired to promote and aggressively sell Thailand's image abroad. A series of campaigns presented the images of national tourism of the country as 'the Exotic East' as follows: "Brilliant Thailand" (1986); "Visit Thailand Year" (1987); "Thailand Arts and Crafts Year (1989), "I Love Thailand" (1990), "Exotic Thailand—See More of the Country, See More of the People" (1991)...until recently, the Amazing Thailand Campaign has been successfully launched. For the year 2000, the country has been promoted as "The Land of Cultural Treasures". Evidently, the new cultural label of the country initiated a few years ago nicely says "Thailand: the Land of Diversity and Refinement". *Intentional or unintentional, the term 'diversity' may implicitly hint the idea of hybridity in Thai culture, whether it be the hybridity of primordial subcultures in the country itself, or the hybridity of being open and vulnerable to the universalism of global culture. Consequently, tourism performs dual functions here: first, as a mean to promote Thai-ness; and second, as aforementioned in the previous section, as a vector for cultural exchange.*

This paper also emphasizes that the character of hybridity for Thailand is presently under challenge, and that it is not inherently constructive or destructive. Suffice it here to suggest that this indicates the emergent global cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, the ranges and degrees of hybridity shown in the features of Thai lives or Thai cosmopolitanism was still less known and understood; hence, its importance should not be overlooked by those 'cultural managers': namely, the state elites and agencies responsible for cultural nationalism. The cultural clash between primordialism and universalism as witnessed in Thailand should be taken into serious account, and continuing searches for the points of balance of this hybridity are encouraged.

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In addition, it becomes imperative for the development of 'tolerance towards ambiguities' in the mindsets of every Thai. Being tolerant is one stated qualification needed by intercultural communication theorists who echo the essence of developing the mindfulness towards ethnocentrism and the increasing diversity and hybridity of the world's cultures.

### 3) Discourse

Kelly (1999) states that Michel Foucault's work has been the source of the term 'colonial discourse' which has played vital role in postcolonial thought. Foucault proposes that each period or 'epoch' has its distinctive character of knowledge called 'episteme' or 'discursive formation' (LittleJohn, 1991). The discursive formation can be found in the form of discourses, including both speech and written texts. Postcolonial discourses are often produced by the West on the East and its impacts are said to be remarkably influential, monolithic, and long-lasting (Kelly, 1999).

This article aims to display the ways Western discourses have been produced and tailored to present the dialogue or the 'episteme' on the production and patterning of culture through the policy of national tourism in contemporary Thailand. State elites should pay more attention on the western discourses as ways to capture the essence of how such episteme could present some features of 'painful-to-Thais' information on Thai culture to the eyes of the world. Conglomeration of such discourses is herein illustrated as showcases. They are as follows:

a) Wehrfritz and Handley (1999) wrote in *Newsweek* on the scoop entitled *Thailand: Beyond Sex and Golf* that the country has two comparative advantages," says one Western diplomat in Bangkok, "*Sex and Golf courses*"

*Tourism is up, and it's helped Thailand through the crisis. Cheap rates and golf—down to \$ 10 a round—have attracted Asian travelers...but the raunchy strip bars at Pattaya are a big draw too.*

b) On the Internet <http://wildcomputercontrol.com>, an article entitled *The World's oldest profession gets a facelift: The sex and prostitution trade in Thailand* presents the images of Thailand as related to tourism and the sex trade in the country.

*Thailand's infamous sex business dates back to the Vietnam War. American GIs fell all over each other to*

*enjoy their R&R in Thailand, replete with gracious hospitality, food that is now world famous, and an activity they all missed very much...sex. Word spread quickly (Penhouse published a 1984 article saying that Pattaya had the most beautiful women in the world) and soon men arrived from everywhere on the planet to explore the possibilities of having an arranged marriage, or to simply enjoy what Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Hua Hin, Koh Samui & Chiang Rai all have to offer... an endless supply of go-go bars, massage parlors, escort services, and brothels, full of women ready, willing and able to exchange their services for hard cold cash--.*

(And also a lot more tourism-related topics on Thailand on other websites; for instance, *Gay Patong Beach Phuket Island in Gay Thailand*, *Thailand: The Land of Sexual Treasures*, etc.)

c) Cabrera (1999) wrote that Thailand's 'economic miracle' was a success because tourism—heavily dependent on the sex industry—brought in \$4 billion per year.

d) Goldstein (1989) reported that “*Thailand provides the best of the danger of letting the travelers' consumption dictate excessively to the tourism industry—the dominance of sex tourism especially the sex-based business in southern part of the country was keeping other tourism away*” (p. 50).

As a conclusion, whereas the economic benefits of tourism have been willingly recognized for decades, the author believes that the application of the postcolonial perspectives on national tourism and culture in the Thai context could shed lights on the understanding of their interrelationships and all-pervading impacts. Representations of the conceptualization of tourism as a simplistic and value-neutral construct may not be a true reflection of the true story in the country.

One key objective of the 1997-2003's Tourism Promotion and Development Policy is to “promote the conservation and revival of the arts, culture and tourism resources alongside environment by placing priority on the quality of sustainable tourism development to enable it to cater to long-term increase of visitors while retaining the national identity and heritage”. As the State Agency, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, comes to reach the 40-year founding, the attempts, in parallel with the promotion of national tourism, to search for the true identity and spirits of Thai-ness, as clearly stated in the policy, may not become outdated.

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