

---

# Materializing Thailand



---

MATERIALIZING CULTURE

.....  
Series Editors: Paul Gilroy, Michael Herzfeld and Danny Miller

Barbara Bender, *Stonehenge: Making Space*

Gen Doy, *Materializing Art History*

Laura Rival (ed.), *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*

Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*

Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (eds), *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*

---

# Materializing Thailand

PENNY VAN ESTERIK



Oxford • New York

---

First published in 2000 by

**Berg**

Editorial offices:

150 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JJ, UK

838 Broadway, Third Floor, New York, NY 10003-4812, USA

© Penny Van Esterik 2000

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the written permission of Berg.

Berg is the imprint of Oxford International Publishers Ltd.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 85973 306 9 (Cloth)

1 85973 311 5 (Paper)

Typeset by JS Typesetting, Wellingborough, Northants.

Printed in the United Kingdom by Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn.

---

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	ix
<b>List of Figures</b>	xi
<b>Part I Orientations</b>	
<b>1 Crafting Thailand</b>	3
Amazing Thailand	3
Gendered Surfaces	5
Organization	5
Locating Thailand	8
Disciplining Thailand: Thai Studies and Anthropology	11
Experiencing Thailand	17
Locating Thailand in Southeast Asia	26
Limitations	30
<b>2 Ordering the Past: Representations of Thai Women</b>	35
Woman as Icon: Greetings from the Past	35
<i>Kalatesa</i> : Negotiating the Intersection of Time and Space	36
Palimpsests: Unfolding the Past	41
Historical Representations of Thai Women	43
Literary and Artistic Discourses	45
The Thai Women's Movement	49
The F-Word in Thai Gender Studies	57
Conclusions	60
<b>3 Buddhism and Gender Ideology</b>	65
Buddhism and the Interpretation of Thai Society	65
Buddhism and Women	67
Use of Buddhist Texts	68

Invoking Buddhism	81
Buddhist Feminism	88

## **Part II Representations**

<b>4 Representing Thai Culture</b>	95
Culture and Representation	95
Colonial Discourse, Nationalism and Heritage	96
Political Uses of the Past: Models and Miniatures	108
Exhibiting Thailand	118
Tourism and Selling the Land of Smiles	120
Buy Thai: Don't! Buy! Thai!	122
Conclusions	124
<b>5 Deconstructing Display: Gender and Beauty</b>	129
Ranking Gendered Surfaces	129
Deflowering Democracy	131
The Development of Thai Beauty Contests	139
National Beauty Contests: From Social Cosmetic to	
Avon Calling	147
Local Beauty Contexts	150
Incomplete Erasure: The Ideology of Beauty and	
Buddhism	154
Conclusions	158
<b>6 Prostitution and Foreign Bodies</b>	163
Divergent Voices	163
Historical and Cultural Specificity of Thai Prostitution	172
Globalization and Sex Tourism	179
HIV/AIDS and Prostitution	181
Prostitution and Marriage	187
Conclusions	192

## **Part III Interpretations**

<b>7 Modelling Thai Gender Relations</b>	201
Analyzing Gender	202
Inscribing Bodies	203
Fragrant Bodies	209
Body Fragments	210
Gender Categories	212

Disguise	219
Gender Unfinished	221
<b>8 Context and Continuity: Grasshoppers, Turtles and Feminists</b>	<b>227</b>
‘Other Fields: Other Grasshoppers’	227
Turtles	229
Negotiating Temporal Differences	231
Other Feminisms	232
The Last Turtle	237
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>269</b>

---

**This page intentionally left blank**

---

## Preface

We ride on the shoulders of our teachers and our students. I thank all those who have taught and inspired me in Thailand and North America in the process of researching this book. Rather than select a few to name and risk offending by naming or failure to name, I would like this dedication to A. Thomas Kirsch (1930–1999) to stand as an acknowledgement and thank you to all those who take the time to support others, personally and professionally.

Although I was never a student at Cornell, Tom Kirsch was my teacher in many ways, responding to questions, commenting, commending, correcting. Every few months over the last three years, Tom would gently probe, ‘have you finished your book on Thai gender yet?’ I would offer excuses, only to be buoyed up by Tom’s faith in anthropology, Thai studies (and me). There is no greater gift that a mentor can give than the utter confidence that a task will be completed. Tom critiqued early chapter drafts, seeing connections to draw arguments together, pointing out contradictions, and inspiring insights that were as much his as mine.

In his own work, he saw historical context as integral to anthropological analysis, and incorporated gender as part of good ethnography in a logically elegant, unselfconscious manner into his work long before the subject became popular. His intellectual excitement was infectious.

This book is therefore dedicated to the life and scholarship of A. Thomas Kirsch, whose sensitive approach to history and gender in Thai anthropology inspired so many students and colleagues. His legacy endures in their work.

I acknowledge with thanks a York University, Faculty of Arts Research Fellowship (1992) that allowed me to spend several months at Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, Bangkok. Stimulating visits to Southeast Asian Programs at Michigan, Wisconsin, Hawaii and Cornell made up for the isolation of writing in a school, indeed a

country where Thai studies is not prominent. I would also like to thank Michael Herzfeld who introduced me to Kathryn Earle and Berg Publishers, and Kim Glaze whose computer skills saved this manuscript from near disaster.

In this work, I have transliterated words from standard Thai as a guide to pronunciation, based on a modification of the system used in Mary Haas' Thai-English dictionary. However, I have also used alternative spellings of words that are widely known and used by other authors. Buddhist terms are based on Thai transcriptions of Pali.

And finally, I have broken a promise to Tom that I would write this book without using the word 'discourse', but it crept in while he was otherwise engaged. Sorry Tom.

Penny Van Esterik

---

## List of Figures

1	Honouring Mother Rice ( <i>Mae Prasob</i> ) with cosmetics and gifts fit for a pregnant woman, Suphanburi Province	27
2	Lay women in white prepare to attend temple service, Suphanburi Province	75
3	Giants depicting the fate of adulterers in hell, Wat Phairongwua, Suphanburi Province	86
4	Peaceful rallies for democracy in front of Thammasat University, May 1992	132
5	Poster displays of grotesque, damaged bodies; teaching the concept of impermanence at Buddhist Promotion Week, May 1992, Bangkok	135
6	Cursing ceremony following the May massacre, June 1992, Bangkok	137
7	Replaying the video of the May massacre on Rajdamnern Avenue, June 1992, Bangkok	138
8	Photographing Miss Thailand World Competition, Bangkok	149
9	Provincial beauty queens promote provincial products	153

---

**This page intentionally left blank**

---

**Part I**  
**Orientations**

---

**This page intentionally left blank**

# Crafting Thailand

## **Amazing Thailand**

Everyone knows something about Thailand. The country is known to many as the home of a wonderful cuisine, great package tours, child prostitution, fabulous silk, fake Rolex watches and magnificent temples. We learn about the country through tourist advertising, business and educational exchanges, films and news reports; these fragments reinforce the country's seductive appeal. For Thailand does not permit distancing, but rather sucks us into a sensual world of exotic sights, sounds, tastes, and smells.

Attraction to Thailand is partly aesthetic – the beauty of the country's natural and constructed environments; the Thai enjoyment of things beautiful – orchids, textiles, temples, people; the civility and grace of its peoples; their appreciation of the present moment, and the ease with which the ugly and painful is slipped out of sight. Only within the ascetic system of Theravada Buddhism is sensual pleasure denied, drawing even more attention to the beauty of ascetic simplicity made more striking beside baroque extravagance. Even the dramatic contrasts between wealth and poverty, between Buddhist denial and total indulgence, fascinate rather than repulse. There are no rewards for suppressing beauty or pleasure. This has been in the past and continues to be the fascination of Thailand for travellers and analysts alike.

'Amazing Thailand Year' was celebrated in 1998. Even in the midst of financial crisis, Thailand amazes. Tourist materials for this campaign feature beautiful men and women wearing the heritage of Thailand on elaborate headdresses including flowers, Thai food, women from upland minorities, boats, Buddhist monks and Buddha images, flanked by Ban Chiang burial pottery, orchids, painted umbrellas, elephants and waterfalls. New Year's cards celebrating Amazing Thailand Year contained cardboard cutouts of miniature monuments including the Giant Swing, temple of the Emerald Buddha, temple of the Dawn, a

guardian deity, and the reclining Buddha, all Bangkok-based tourist attractions.

You can buy anything in Bangkok. Women and representations of the feminine circulate much as other commodities in this very global market. As the cultural, economic and political centre of Thailand, Bangkok has a unique role in establishing cultural and gender hegemonies for the whole country. But Thailand also has a fluid, transnational identity that ranges beyond its national borders. Beauty contestants, factory workers, people with HIV/AIDS and prostitutes affect the representation of the Thai nation state, and of Thai women in Thailand and elsewhere.

Thailand encourages an essentialism of appearances or surfaces. These surfaces are gendered, and easily materialized and transformed through display, presentations, and everyday practices focussed on women as visual icons. Gendered practices such as beauty contests and state rituals fetishize national images which serve both to exoticize and reify the essence of Thainess, enhancing the country's international reputation and tourist appeal. That is why the surface is so effective, the essence quickly grasped; the real is hidden and unchallenged. The surface is taken for the real. In the absence of critical examination of the discourses constructing these gendered surfaces, we all feel we know the real 'Amazing Thailand'.

In contemporary Thailand, two processes collide – those globalizing forces that draw Thailand and Thai people and events onto the world stage, and those localizing forces that reify, exoticize and box Thai culture into opposition against global processes. This play between the surface exoticism of locality and global transnational processes creates the set of paradoxes and contradictions explored in this book. For the importance of fluidity, of surfaces and appearances belies the essentialism that makes it possible for outsiders – analysts and tourists alike – to grasp the essence of Thainess with such speed, certainty and satisfaction. This interpretive arrogance on the part of non-Thai is made possible because of well-developed cultural strategies and skills for constructing and maintaining this reified Thai essence through displays and representations which materialize Thai national identity.

This book examines the historical and cultural processes that make the 'Amazing Thailand' campaign possible and plausible, including the construction of Thai public culture and how gender is materialized. It is based on my research and participant observation in Thailand over a thirty-year period, and a critical engagement with Thai studies and feminist anthropology. It also emerges from the interplay between my sensual attraction to the essence of Thainess and things Thai, the respect

I have for Thai women, and the anger I feel at conditions that exploit women and others in Thai communities. I seek the origins of both emotions in the process of writing.

## **Gendered Surfaces**

Why surfaces? Surface is the inevitable level of understanding available to an outside analyst observing other people, other places. It is linked to the dictionary meaning of superficiality, what is apprehended upon a casual view, without depth. This fear of inevitable superficiality is the Achille's heel of anthropology, a vulnerability that should not keep us from trying. Surface also draws attention to the outermost boundary of any material body, its smooth, polished outer appearance which provides the canvas available for creating new appearances. Consider also the surface tension of a liquid, that elastic enveloping membrane that causes particles to cohere – shades of culture.

The importance of surface appearance emerges in Thai novels and short stories. Boonrot, the heroine of Botan's novel and subsequent film of northeast Thailand in the 1960s, complains of being considered a sex worker because she dressed in bright clothes, wore sunglasses and swaggered. She is reminded that women must dress carefully so that others will not question their respectability. 'We only look at the outside form and structure of one another. We never look inside'.

Concern with appearances also emerges in the political protests led by women students carrying photos of the royal family to demonstrate national loyalty and to make the claim that the protesters are good Thai. The following chapters recount the public relation campaigns following the 1992 democracy protests, tourist promotions, and efforts to clean up Thailand's international image concerning sex tourism as examples of Thai concern and skill with controlling public face.

Surfaces also relate to Thai concepts of temporal and spatial order that put primacy on how events and relationships come together in an impermanent world in constant flux. Rituals, both religious and secular, and codes of conduct that regulate the social cosmetic such as *kalatesa*, try to pin down points of reference in this flux. Attention to surfaces and appearances are the observable results of this pattern of adaptation.

## **Organization**

The book is organized in three parts, titled Orientations, Representations and Interpretations. Part I orients the reader to knowledge produced

about Thailand, past and present. This first chapter develops three trajectories of change: the transformation of Thailand over the last thirty years, changes in the disciplines of Thai studies and Cultural Anthropology, and my personal experience in Thailand over the same years. Although Thai studies stresses the uniqueness of Thailand, it is important to consider how Thai gender studies relate to Southeast Asian gender research, although the detailed comparisons must be left for other researchers in other texts.

In the second chapter, I introduce two orienting metaphors that emerge out of Thai experience: *kalatesa* (time/space) and palimpsest. *Kalatesa* draws attention to order and surface appearances, a theme developed further throughout the book. Palimpsest is a metaphor from Western literary traditions used here to link historical and ethnographic knowledge. The term palimpsest refers to parchment or slate from which old writing has been nearly erased to make room for new writing. The act of writing over an earlier draft version of something that has been wiped out suggests that the original version has disappeared. But palimpsests are never completely erased; nor are historical and literary representations of Thai women. I ask how Thai women have come to bear the burden of signifying Thainess both within the country and globally and explore the response of the Thai women's movement to the position and condition of Thai women, asking if Thai feminism has been shaped by global feminism. But the Thai women's movement is a pragmatic one, addressing the consequences of gender inequities and poverty often without theorizing about their historical and cultural causes.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 3 explores the various linkages that have been made between Buddhism and gender in Thai society. Theravada Buddhism, the dominant religion in Thailand, provides an ideological reference system that is both liberating and confining for women. Buddhism is important to Thai identity because it is part of the logic of everyday life, not only because its texts and rituals structure gender hierarchies. Ideological orientations toward non-self and impermanence discourage essentialisms, particularly fixed binary gender identities. I develop the commonalities and contrasts between Buddhist and feminist ways of knowing, arguing that these two perspectives are both compatible and powerful explanatory frameworks for exploring Thai gender relations.

Part II, Representations, examines the logic and paradox of public culture at several sites of gender negotiation in Thailand. Each site requires rethinking cultural context, as contextual sensitivity determines how gender is read. Current practices are shaped and constrained

by earlier ones, requiring analytical frameworks that incorporate both historical evidence and the selective inventions of imagined pasts to interpret the present. Hence, my concern with palimpsests that are incompletely erased.

Chapter 4 looks at gendered nationalism and how the state requires the display of women as icons that express Thai national identity and confirm Thai masculinity. The imposition of order is also materialized through heritage sites – objects and buildings recreated to conform to an imagined past. These concrete palimpsests raise questions about Thai and Western approaches to authenticity. The representations of gender and national identity in Thai public culture – past and present – have the added benefit of forming the heart of Thai tourist attractions.

Beauty contests, both local and global, exemplify the display of women as visual icons and are examined in Chapter 5. Juxtaposed to the display of femininity in the 1992 Miss Universe contest in Bangkok, the political protests and subsequent killings in May 1992 draw attention to the military and masculinity. The political economy of Thailand frames the discussion of prostitution and is one result of these national displays of women's beauty. Chapter 6 considers how these sex practices are attached to national and international power structures, and to the nature of Thai marriage.

The choice of the contexts elaborated in Part II, over the infinite possibilities of other contexts can be justified by their particular effectiveness for interpreting the contemporary Thai gender system. Each context adds to the density, 'thickness' and complexity of the picture. Beauty contests, temple fairs, shopping malls, Patpong disco bars and sex shows, fake Gucci watches and Thai tourist attractions are all elements of public culture, all localities, objects and events that demonstrate Thailand's accessibility to an internationally constituted 'public'. They are also particular sociocultural settings where gender is most visibly constructed, negotiated and displayed. They reveal contradictions and tensions in the representations of Thai gender, and require stretching the boundaries of Thai to include transnational contexts where overseas Thai communities recreate Thai contexts in Europe, Australia and North America. Thainess is easily deterritorialized and taken away with immigrants and exiles as they create Thai communities in Los Angeles, Chicago, and London. But the essence of Thainess is also reproduced in the wife-buying schemes of Japan, the Los Angeles born 'Thai' beauty contestants, the mail order brides, prostitutes in the cities of Europe and North America, and even in the Thai women workers imprisoned in the toy and garment factories of southern

California. Everything is exportable, including contradictory attitudes towards women and gender existing within Thailand as a nation state.

Part III, Interpretations, explores how these understandings of Thai cultural contexts can be used to rethink a Thai model of gender relations. In Chapter 7, I propose a theory of gender relations that draws on Thai interpretations of gender as explored in the ethnographic sites of Part II, rather than on Western gender categories. Here disguise and transgenering add to the difficulty in fixing essential categories. Chapter 8 concludes with observations on how Thai studies might contribute to rethinking cultural context and feminist anthropology.

Thailand has undergone enormous changes over the last thirty years. Locating Thailand provides an opportunity to present, selectively and briefly, foundational information about the country, its history, political economy and culture. My work in the field has been shaped by the disciplines of Thai studies and cultural anthropology. Just as my experiences in Thailand have changed over the years, so too have these fields of study. These three trajectories of locality, disciplinary and personal transformations provide orientations to the later chapters.

### **Locating Thailand**

Before Thongchai Winichakul (1994) argued for the power of the map in creating and defining Thai national identity, locating Thailand was an easy task; it is surrounded by other nation states. It is north of Malaysia, east of Burma (Myanmar), west of Lao PDR and Cambodia, and south of China. How do we locate Thailand now, while acknowledging that the old story that told how a patriotic elite modernized to save the nation from Western colonialism is itself a modern invention (O'Connor 1997:280)? The old story represented Thailand as a stable, homogeneous, Buddhist constitutional monarchy, transformed by an enlightened coup in 1932 which ended the power of the absolute monarchy, the Lords of Life of the Chakri dynasty. Founded, along with Bangkok in 1782, the Chakri dynasty is represented today in the beloved person of Rama IX, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who, at his coronation in May, 1950 recited the ancient oath of accession: 'We will reign with righteousness, for the benefits and happiness of the Siamese people.' As a symbol of national unity, the royal family reinforces the primacy of Bangkok as the cosmological, religious, political and economic centre of the nation.

Royal authority draws legitimacy from a succession of large and small kingdoms of Tai,<sup>2</sup> Mon or Khmer origin from the ninth century onwards.

Most significant are the thirteenth century kingdom of Sukhothai (1240–1438) and the fifteenth century kingdom of Ayutthaya, (1351–1767), models of *dhammaraja* (righteous king) and *devaraja* (god king) political authority. Before the Burmese destroyed Ayutthaya in 1767, occasional missionaries, traders and diplomats visited the city state. The court gained some familiarity with the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Persian, and Japanese; but it was the British who succeeded in opening up trade with European countries following the Bowring treaty of 1855.

By the fourth reign of the Chakri dynasty, King Mongkut was sufficiently familiar with French and British colonial power that he recognized the need for centralizing Bangkok's control over peripheral princedoms and adopting European institutions of rule.

Thailand is the one nation in Southeast Asia that was never colonized by European powers. This historical fact, proudly asserted by Thais, is often attributed to the Chakri administration's skills at compromise and negotiation. Thailand emerges as the space in-between British and French colonies. Lack of direct colonial experience does not mean that Thai modes of production were not shaped by external forces nor that there was no interference in the internal affairs of the Thai state. 'The French were reorganizing the country's legal system, the British its treasury and the Germans its army' (Copeland 1993:93). In the nineteenth century, most commercial enterprises were in white hands and the rulers preserved independence by allowing colonial powers to exploit the nation and its resources (Copeland 1993:159). Thailand has the characteristics of an indirectly ruled colonial state with a politicized military used as a means of internal consolidation and control rather than external protection.

The internal reforms following the turn of the century were not sufficient to transform an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one, and in 1932 a small group of civil servants and military officers staged a coup and forced Rama VII to become Thailand's first constitutional monarch. Political changes and World War II strengthened efforts to develop a Thai national identity, and selectively borrow Western paths to modernity and progress.

The military has had a great influence on Thailand through its involvement in the many coups and political crises since 1932. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Thailand was transformed from a subsistence-based agricultural economy to a market-oriented rice economy and by the eighties, to an industrializing economy. While the Thai military with American support provided the stability to make this economic transformation possible, military ambitions had other consequences.

The military suppressed attempts to form a constitutional democracy in 1972, but was unable to suppress the public outrage at the oppression, corruption and ineptitude of the government of Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn in 1973. The student-led revolution heralded a period of democratic rule (1973–6) which was ruthlessly crushed in 1976. Stable governments in the 1980s encouraged programs of economic development, including international tourism, an immensely successful earner of foreign exchange.

Thailand experienced an exceptionally high rate of economic growth between 1985 and 1996 due to the dynamic growth of urban manufacturing, tourism and the service industry. The booming economy was growing by 8 percent a year in the late 1980s, and even 6.4 percent in 1996. Thailand is now facing a financial crisis of major proportions, and did not even reach its revised projection of 0.6 percent growth in 1997. Land prices soared in the boom years, and developers overextended themselves, building condominiums and housing estates for the new urban middle class. Banks and finance companies were stuck with huge foreign loans to these developers, at the same time that the central bank was no longer willing to prop up the local currency (*baht*). Investors, local businesses, and consumers all suffered after the currency was allowed to float in July 1997. By October, the baht had fallen 40 percent in value. Higher prices and unemployment worsened the situation. The October 1997 collapse of the Thai financial markets prompted Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchayudh to remind investors that they should not leave a country where they could get three caddies on any Thai golf course: 'one to carry your clubs, one to hold your umbrella, and one to massage your back' (*Globe and Mail*, 5 November 1997). Other approaches to encourage investors to continue to support Thailand include promotional messages in the Thai Airways magazine, *Sawasdee* (November 1997:41): 'Those who look behind the headlines, however, are finding that Thailand's growing pains can mean substantial gains for investors. Out of the country's crisis, opportunity has arisen.' The government's mismanagement of the crisis increased political instability, resulting in the resignation of Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchayudh on 30 October 1997. The \$17 billion (US) bailout from the International Monetary Fund offered the country financial support, contingent on following a recovery plan that included checking inflation and reducing public spending such as halting the construction of Bangkok's \$4.5 (US) billion expressway.

The new 'people's constitution' passed by parliament in September of 1997 began the process of political reform designed to deliver transparency and good governance and end corruption. One now needs a

BA to be Member of Parliament, setting up a whole new arena for potential corruption. Ironically, it was the military that forced political reform to proceed, easing public tensions and siding with a popular cause against an 'unusually corrupt' and incompetent government. For example, 123 members of the Thai parliament received envelopes containing fifty 1000 *baht* notes from the Minister of Education during a 6 February 1997 meeting about reform of the education system. This was not unusual or unacceptable behavior, although some complained it was not enough to buy an MP. Even Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchayudh defended his minister, pointing out that 'he did not secretly distribute the money in the toilet' (*Economist*, 15 February 1997:36).

Thailand's public face obscures the power of the military, the marginalization of minority groups, the factions within Buddhism, the treatment of minority religions, the growing disparity between rich and poor, the high murder rate,<sup>3</sup> and other costs of rapid modernization. As Thailand began its tourist theme for 1998 – Amazing Thailand – the speed with which such facts are forgotten attests to how well the government of Thailand represents itself to the international community. Even the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country, an epidemic of staggering proportions, does not taint the international image of the country. Thailand remains a popular tourist destination. Tourists to Thailand revel in the opportunity provided by the devaluation of the *baht* for bargain shopping. 'You will love the country,' I say, and they will, they do. And so too do academics working in Thailand who are attracted back again and again, reinforcing their loyalty to Thai studies.

### **Disciplining Thailand: Thai Studies and Anthropology**

How has Thai studies been disciplined? How has it enlarged the universe of human discourse and contributed to anthropology? Thai studies is a particular way of knowing about Thailand, where Thailand is viewed as an object of knowledge. Only recently has it been possible to describe Thai studies as a definable entity. It flourishes in Thailand, North America, Australia, Europe, India and Japan. Thai studies began in Japan after World War II, although student exchanges began earlier in 1942 during the Japanese occupation of Thailand. In North America, Thai studies is lodged within the study of Southeast Asia, itself a region with no clearly demarcated boundaries, although a product of colonial boundary making exercises. Southeast Asian studies is part of Asian studies – in North America, the smallest most peripheral part, in the

boundary conscious area studies of the 1960s and 1970s. Tongchai Winichakul (1994) has convincingly demonstrated that this academic 'mapping' is also a colonial construction of great historical complexity. Area studies defined 'ethnological fields of study' (Josselin de Jong 1965), and divided up clearly bounded objects of study in the world system, treating geographical divisions, cultural differences and national boundaries as if they were isomorphic (Appadurai 1996:16).<sup>4</sup> For all the critiques of area studies as being too narrowly focussed on the particular, too obsessed with philology and history, and too driven by foreign-policy needs, '... area studies has provided the major counterpoint to the delusions of the view from nowhere that underwrites much canonical social science' (Appadurai 1996:16). Area studies, like feminist studies demands a view from somewhere.

Thai studies is the study of the nation state of Thailand, and of Tai groups speaking languages in the Tai language family residing outside Thailand's borders. Thai studies has remained firmly in the model of area studies. Broader associated groupings of countries such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation) and AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area) influenced disciplines such as economics and political science more than anthropology. These overlapping rubrics of Southeast Asian studies, Thai studies, ASEAN, APEC and AFTA underscore the difficulties analysts would encounter if they considered local Thai communities in isolation from national and transnational processes. This text emerges from the space left by area studies, where place and local geographies and histories still matter, but the boundaries of locality do not.<sup>5</sup>

Most foreign Thai specialists might be identified as those people who subscribe (or who have subscribed) to the *Journal of the Siam Society*, the Thai orientalist association founded in 1904, where elite, Western-educated Thai and visiting researchers exchange texts and talks, often in English. The objectives of the society include 'the investigation and encouragement of the Arts and Sciences in relation to Thailand and neighbouring countries' (from the rules of the Siam Society, Article 2).

Recently, foreign and Thai scholars have interacted more energetically at the international Thai studies conferences, held first in New Delhi (1981), and subsequently in Bangkok (1984), Canberra, Australia (1987), Kunming, China (1990), London (1993), Chiang Mai (1996) and Amsterdam (1999). International Thai studies conferences are visible evidence of the power of dominant discourses and the people who shape them.

International Thai studies conferences explore the foundational

- [read Nobody's Cuter than You: A Memoir about the Beauty of Friendship pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [read Opening the Dragon Gate](#)
- [download online Gourmet Made Simple \(Cookery Dishes Courses\)](#)
- [eBay For Dummies \(8th Edition\) pdf](#)
- [download Edge of Danger \(Sean Dillon, Book 9\) for free](#)
  
- <http://www.mmastyles.com/books/Nobody-s-Cuter-than-You--A-Memoir-about-the-Beauty-of-Friendship.pdf>
- <http://twilightblogs.com/library/Flow--The-Psychology-of-Optimal-Experience.pdf>
- <http://reseauplatoparis.com/library/Never-Cry-Wolf---Amazing-True-Story-of-Life-Among-Arctic-Wolves.pdf>
- <http://www.freightunlocked.co.uk/lib/Syntax-and-Semantics-of-Prepositions--Text--Speech-and-Language-Technology--Volume-29-.pdf>
- <http://studystategically.com/freebooks/Edge-of-Danger--Sean-Dillon--Book-9-.pdf>