



Indigenous Educational Movements in Thailand

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Abstract

This chapter celebrates Indigenous education movements in Thailand. Despite state attempts to homogenize its citizenry historically and today, Indigenous communities in Thailand have always been active in strengthening their family, cultural, and linguistic practices. Through connections to other Indigenous movements regionally and globally, Indigenous educators in Thailand are organizing what we call “moves to resurgence” in communities, in schools, and particularly in the in-between spaces across schools and their local communities. In this chapter, we provide an overview of (1) the history and construction of indigeneity and ethnicity in Asia that complicates a “white-other” binary, (2) the long-term impacts of schooling for Indigenous youth as it relates to the formation of nation-states in Southeast Asia, and (3) how Indigenous communities in Thailand have skillfully navigated across worlds to create coherent identities for themselves. We provide three cases that intentionally build innovative “both-and” constructions of identity and resist binary state narratives that attempt to place Indigeneity in contradiction to statehood. To resist the continued erasure of Indigenous peoples in Asia, we highlight case examples of Indigenous resurgence and celebrate Indigeneity in Thailand.

Keywords

Thailand · Education · Indigeneity · Indigenous movements · Indigenous identity · Indigeneity in Asia

Introduction

Distinct linguistic and cultural groups in Thailand have existed long before the formation of the nation-state. Since the 2000s, these communities have been advocating for the rights to play a larger role in the education of their children and mediate long-term impacts of national compulsory education. Until recently, Indigenous highland communities have not been allowed to engage in a process of self-identification and self-determination. This was exacerbated by a system of national compulsory education that left little room to value and celebrate non-Thai practices, languages, and identities. The long-term impact of schooling initiatives that are implemented in the rural mountain villages or initiatives to bring highland youth to lowland schools continue to be felt today through the devaluation of Indigenous practices and the loss of their own culture and languages. While schooling has “reshaped local worlds” (Keyes 1991), this often ignores the agency of Indigenous people who have been setting up systems of learning to shape their own worlds.

This chapter explores how Indigenous communities are moving beyond state constructions of identity, ethnicity, and borderlands to build networks of learning movements for Indigenous education in Thailand. For those that call Thailand’s borderlands home, highland communities have built and led movements of Indigenous people that are purposely collaborative and necessarily transborder. Despite not

being officially recognized as Indigenous by the Thai government, highland leaders have been engaging in a process of self-definition to recognize themselves and their national movement as Indigenous peoples of Thailand. As scholars who have been active in these movements, our chapter outlines first, the political nature of self-definition in relation to state policies. Second, we explore the long-term impacts that schools have had on Indigenous highland identity and knowledge systems; participation in national compulsory education has often resulted in the erasure and devaluation of Indigenous knowledge and identity. Finally, we focus on Indigenous moves to resurgence and how Indigenous people have been acting to promote their own systems of knowledge and languages that bridge the formal school system and the larger community.

The concept of indigeneity is only just being recognized in Asia and is thus complex for schools and communities (Erni 2008; Baird et al. 2017). This chapter highlights how Indigenous communities navigate this complexity to build coherent identities for themselves despite ongoing state efforts to essentialize and place national and Indigenous identities in opposition to each other. We provide cases of Indigenous resurgence that creatively connect and advance state and community learning systems to build Indigenous power in the context of state nationalism in an increasingly globalized world. This chapter expands current notions of indigeneity by resisting the erasure of Indigenous communities in Thailand and highlighting interracial, national, and global dynamics that are common to Indigenous communities in Asia.

PART I: Ethnic Diversity of the Indigenous Peoples in Thailand

Who Are the Indigenous People of Thailand?: Names and Meanings

Unlike the new settlement and former colonized countries, Thailand had never been colonized by European forces. However, as a modern nation-state, the geo-body of Thailand was created by the influence of European colonies and the modern technology of cartography (Thongchai 1994). Initially, the country's name was "Siam" and this was changed to "Thailand" in 1939, due to the mainstream of Tai speaking groups. Other non-Tai speaking groups who are Indigenous groups in Thailand then became ethnic minorities, or the "others within" (Thongchai 2000a). Among those were more than 60 dialect groups throughout the country and 10 highland ethnic groups were labeled "hill tribes" or ชนเขา (*chao khao*) in Thai, the Karen, Lua, Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Khamu, Htin, and Mlabri (McCaskill et al. 2008). In a survey by Mahidol University's Institute of Languages and Culture for Rural Development that continued from 1993 to 2001, 62 languages were identified throughout the country – 24 Tai languages, 22 Austroasiatic languages, 11 Sino-Tibetan languages, 3 Austronesian dialects, and 2 Mien-Hmong (Leepreecha *in press*). The state government then set up specific socioeconomic development projects directly toward developing these "hill tribes" (McCaskill and Kampe 1997); the mountain borderlands of Thailand were problematic, a site of intervention

(McKinnon 2004). Since the mid-2000s, young leaders from these groups joined the international movement of Indigenous peoples in other continents and set up the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT). Despite there were national movement and adoption of United Nation Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2008, the term “Indigenous people” has been rejected by the Thai government who state that the highland people of Thailand are “not considered to be minorities or Indigenous peoples but as Thais who are able to enjoy fundamental rights and are protected by the laws of the Kingdom as any other Thai citizen” (Erni 2008, p. 444).

In the Thai context, labels are often ascribed to Indigenous highland communities without them having much say in their own identity or the process of self-definition. These ethnic groups are referred to by many other names instead. Most commonly, the highland communities are labeled hill tribes or ชาวเขา (*chao khao*) – literally translating to people of the hills (Laungaramsri 2003). The label “hill tribe” did not come from a process of self-definition, but from a way for the Thai officials and foreigners to contrast those who lived at 10,000 ft over sea level to those commonly classified “Thai” or lowlanders (Theerawhekhin 1978, p. 68, as cited by Laungaramsri 2003). *Chao khao* can also mean “the other people” as opposed to ชาวราบ (*chao rao*) or “the us-people” referring to the central Thai people as “us” (Laungaramsri 2003). The term “ethnic minority” ชนกลุ่มน้อย (*chon gloom noi*) is another label used to distinguish this group in opposition to the Thai majority in the country (Burutphat 2518). Another term is “ethnic group” กลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ (*gloom chat ti phan*), which has been used by scholars to refer to groups of people who are not part of the mainstream. This term is broader and has more positive associations than the “hill tribe” or *chao khao* label, since it includes every cultural group throughout the country, regardless of the length of time they have settled in Thailand.

Ethnic Diversity in Thailand

The Indigenous community has been classified by linguists, historians, and anthropologists (See Fig. 1a, b for maps of Southeast Asia). However, according to the National Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand, there are 42 different non-Tai Indigenous groups with a total population of 4,282,702 people have united under this movement (Samnakngan Chonphao Phuenmuang Haeng Prathet Thai 2558, as cited in Leepreecha *in press*). In addition to the Thai speaking groups, other native groups in Thailand include the Mon, Karen, Lua, Shan, Lao, Kui, Khmère, Chong, Munni, Malayu, etc. Ancestors of these groups have lived in Thailand for generations. Meanwhile, there are many groups whose ancestors moved into Thailand before the emergence of the modern Thai state between late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. These include the Chinese, Phuan, Lue, Laos (from Laos), Hmong, Mien, Khamu, etc. There are also groups who have migrated into Thailand a couple of decades ago – the Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Dara-ang, Vietnamese,

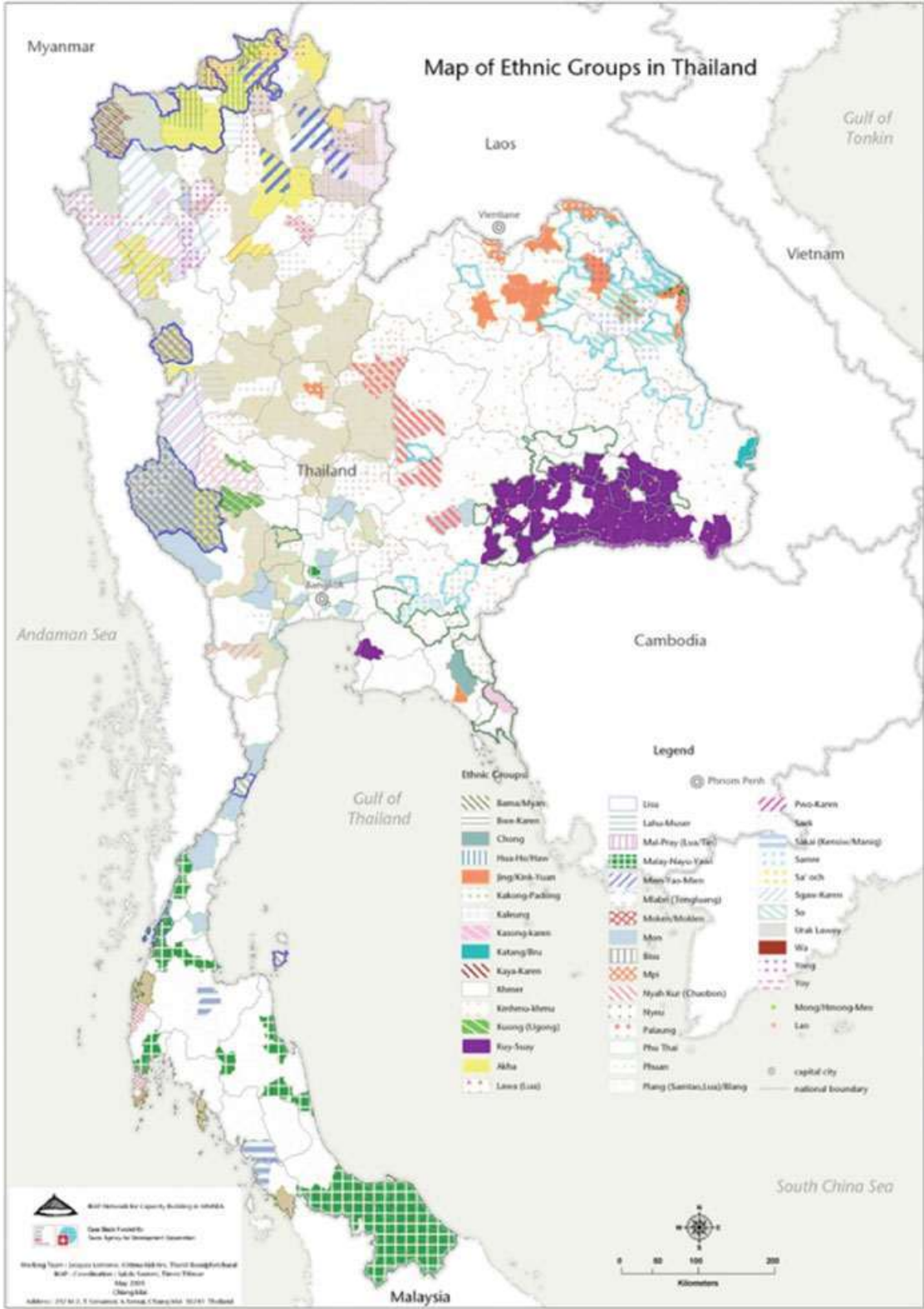


Fig. 1 Distribution of ethnic groups in Thailand (Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples Foundation (IKAP), Chiang Mai)

among others. There is a variety of ethnic groups who have settled in Thailand from different time periods. However, unlike other neighboring countries, the Thai government never surveyed or recognized these ethnic groups but only attempted to assimilate them and make them become Thai. Only in the past decades did the state government register and classify peoples who lacked Thai citizenship into 19 groups and issue different temporary colored cards for them (Laungaramsri 2014). These classifications, however, were based on citizenship concerns and ethnic diversity was never seen as part of the Thai state.

Among those ethnic groups, the “hill tribes” which comprises of ten highland ethnic groups in Northern Thailand became the prominent, due to increasing national security fears that the Thai government believed the “hill tribes” caused. This fear oriented, around 1.2 million peoples much of the government’s policies toward highland groups during 1960–2000s. As stated above, while some groups are native to the land, and while others settled in Thailand for one to two centuries, and yet other groups have migrated into Thailand decades ago, these 10 groups were categorized “hill tribes” and portrayed as recent immigrants (Young 1961) (Fig. 2).

Despite these labels, through the creation of Indigenous networks and after external and internal debates, this group has chosen to call themselves Indigenous people, ชนพื้นเมือง (*chon pheun mueang*) or ชนเผ่าพื้นเมือง (*chon pao pheun mueang*), or literally “people of the land.” The term *chon pao phuen muang* (ชนเผ่าพื้นเมือง) was agreed upon and adopted by the committee members of the National Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NCIPT, สภาชนเผ่าพื้นเมืองในประเทศไทย in Thai) during the October 31, 2558 (2015) workshop at Inter-Mountains Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Leepreecha *in press*). The NCIPT states in a proposal that was submitted together with the act for the National Legislative Assembly, that,

Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those which, having a historical and social continuity before the establishment of present nation-states, consider themselves distinct from the main society. They are not the dominating group in the nation-state and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit their ancestral territories, their ethnic identity, and their language for future generations. These are basic of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal system for living peacefully with other groups in the nation-state society (Samnakngan Chonphao Phuenmuang Haeng Prathet Thai 2558, p. 1, as translated by Prasit Leepreecha)

This shift in words and who decides its terms of use is central to contemporary Indigenous movements. Ethnic categorization and identification in Thailand have historically been an outsider’s one. Indigenous leaders thus responded to the need to self-define and self-identify. They began a transition from using the label of “hill tribe,” which has been a term used by outsiders during the 1950–2000s, to “Indigenous peoples” (Leepreecha *in press*; Morton and Baird *in press*). Choosing to claim Indigenous status for themselves allowed Indigenous leaders in Thailand to connect with Indigenous people’s movements globally and find solidarity with other communities who share similar struggles (Morton and Baird *in press*). Laungaramsri

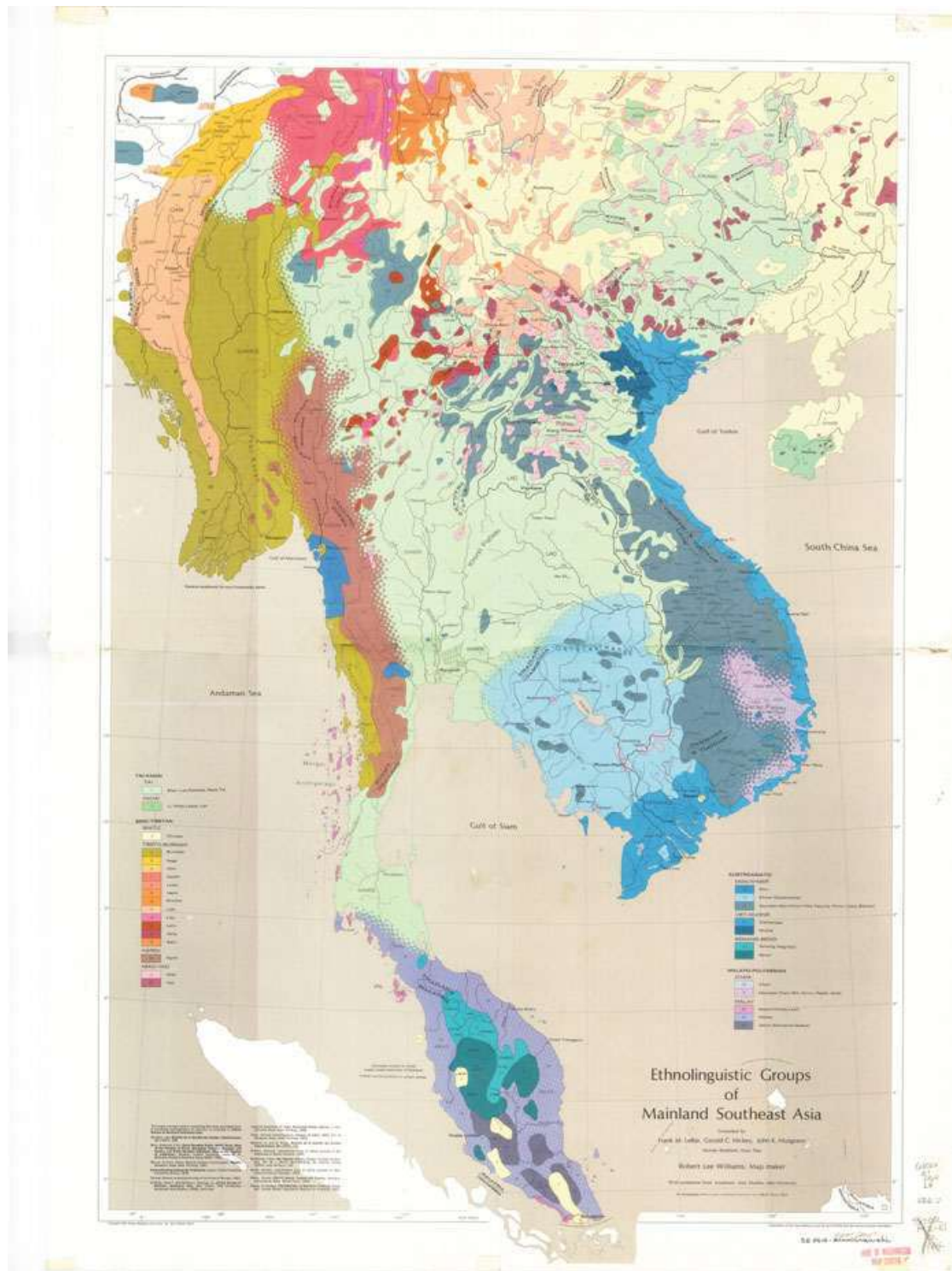


Fig. 2 Map of Ethnolinguistic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia 1964, Human Relations Area Files

(2003) writes that “Ethnic categories in the modern Thai nation are, therefore, not simply constituted by shared/common identity but represent a powerful instrument or confinement and control by the modern state. At the same time, ethnicity is by no means an immediate given but is constantly achieved/ created through a process of

negotiation” (p. 157). This process of negotiation is at the center of debates over Indigenous rights in Thailand.

Even though Indigenous communities in Thailand have participated in Indigenous rights movements internationally, they are not allowed to claim Indigenous status, nor have claimed to such a status translated to authentic meaning for their peoples (Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand 2010). Central Thais also claim indigeneity to Thailand, and the positionality of the Indigenous peoples in relation to Thai society is still contested (Erni 2008). The use of the label “Indigenous peoples” lies at the heart of the politicized citizenship debate for highland communities in Thailand and their rights to control their educational experience.

Thailand boasts of its distinct linguistic and cultural groups, but outside of tourism, diversity is often seen as a threat to a monocultural Thai national identity and thus the unity of the country. This next section explores how highland leaders created an Indigenous network to garner strength as a “community of becoming” (Leepreecha *in press*) – a community that is constantly making and remaking itself and what it means to be Indigenous in Thailand today.

Indigenous Movements in Thailand

Indigenous people in Thailand have always been engaged in the process of self-definition and in 2007, a transIndigenous movement in Thailand solidified. The global flow of ideas and connections to international Indigenous alliances promoted leaders to form the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT) to give voice to Indigenous issues in Thailand (Leepreecha *in press*). Through this network, Thailand celebrated Indigenous Peoples’ Day for the first time in 2007 (Rattanakrangsri 2014) and this public event has been organized every year since. From 18 groups in its inception, the network now has 35–57 active groups from across the country (Leepreecha *in press*). This network (originally made up of mainly highland communities) has steadily grown in strength to include lowland minority groups as well. The Network of Indigenous People in Thailand is organized loosely with an internal coordinating body, IMPECT, as its secretary office to serve as a liaison between Indigenous representatives throughout Thailand, and an external arm, the National Council of Indigenous Peoples of Thailand (NCIPT) that was founded in 2010 to aid with external coordination to NGOs, government offices, and international organizations (Leepreecha *in press*). NIPT has led legal reform initiatives in the National Legislative Assembly and also the nation’s participation in the UN permanent forum on Indigenous issues (Leepreecha *in press*). NIPT is slowly gaining voice and power in civic society. The NIPT has created media, statements, books, and increased public awareness of Indigenous issues in broader Southeast Asia.

However, representations of Indigenous highland people as dangerous or in conflict with the nation-state continue to make it hard for many to be fully participating members of Thai civil society or for Indigenous communities to control their own education (Hyun 2014; Keyes 2008). Even though Thailand voted in favor of

and ratified the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2008, they argue that every group in Thailand, including the Thai, is Indigenous. Today, there is still no clear policy regarding Indigenous people in Thailand or definition of Indigenous people, and it is mostly the work of scholars and nongovernmental organization (NGOs) that try to define the terms and meanings. The Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand has joined and now alliances such as the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact, Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand, and the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs have come together to advocate for the rights of Indigenous peoples across borders. Comprising villagers, elders, Indigenous scholars, and NGOs, the NIPT works on the issues of Indigenous rights to land through community land titles, access to forests homelands and natural resources for food sovereignty, and protest the lack of citizenship for undocumented Indigenous people who were not counted as part of the national census in the early twentieth century and remain stateless. According to a 2008 UNESCO survey, 38% or 380,000 highland Indigenous people still lacked citizenship and only had a "hill tribe" status card (Calderbank 2008).

Initiatives to actively build and strengthen Indigenous identity and knowledge systems through education have also been at the forefront of NIPT and IMPECT's work. Groups such as the Indigenous Education Network, Pestalozzi Children's Foundation, IMPECT, Ton Kla Youth Network (TKN) and Foundation for Applied Linguistics have organized events and projects to protect Indigenous languages. For example, Foundation for Applied Linguistics is embarking on a 4-year project from 2559–2562 (2016–2020), to include of Indigenous studies as part of their strategic plan (Indigenous Education Network, 2559). To engage the public, these groups and scholars also use media and literature to circulate Indigenous perspectives on identity that shift public opinion on highland communities.

Educational initiatives that safeguard Indigenous identity are deeply political in nature as the purposes and practices of schooling for highland communities in Thailand have often limited the ways that Indigenous youth can define themselves. Schools are tangible and powerful forces that have often devalued and erased Indigenous identity through the state-disseminated texts and assessments (Keyes 2008; Goodman 2013). We now turn to how colonial mapping and school as a technology for nation-state building have framed how Indigenous youth and communities imagine who they can be.

PART II State Education to Build a Nation – The Impact of Thai Government Policy Toward Indigenous Youth and Communities

In Siam, the negotiation of kingdom boundaries made school an important tool in the formation of the nation-state. The Kingdom of Siam was a multiethnic kingdom where diverse groups lived and worked (Thaweesit and Napaumporn 2011). In order to maintain the sovereignty of their lands during the height of colonialism, central Siamese leaders were pressured by the French and British to map undefined and porous borders of the kingdom in the quest to create a nation (Thongchai 1994).

Furthermore, in an effort to unite the newly imagined geo-body and prevent the fragmentation common to the premodern states, Siamese leaders undertook nation-building projects to demarcate both a territory and a specific population that would belong to the newly forming nation-state (Thongchai 1994).

After the British waged war with the Burmese in the 1850s, they began to negotiate borders with the Siamese to distinguish British and Siamese domains. In response to the threat of colonization, Bangkok troops were tasked with mapping officials under King Chulalongkorn's instructions to "know all the localities under his sovereignty" (Thongchai 1994, p. 121). For the Siamese leaders, modern geography was "the only language the West would hear and only a modern map could make an argument" that would establish the geo-body of Siam. For the first time ever in Southeast Asia, mapping was used as the technology to establish this new geo-body. As Thongchai says, "the geo-body of Siam was being created literally on paper" (p. 127).

Socioeconomic projects to "civilize" highland communities along the Thai border rapidly intensified during the Cold War (Hyun 2014; Keyes 2008). The international conflict played out in larger Southeast Asia as other nations (Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam) were gaining independence around Thailand (Keyes 1997). Large-scale state educational initiatives for highland communities thus began when Thailand's porous borders were of heightened state interest and highland communities were in the government spotlight (Vaddhanaphuti 2005). During this period, Indigenous highland people began to be stereotyped as dangerous and problematic to the security of the Thai state. National media and textbooks showed Indigenous communities as communist sympathizers and forest destroyers (Hongladarom 1999; Vandergeest 2003); there was a "hill tribe problem" along the borders of Thailand that needed to be dealt with (Keyes 1997; Laungaramsri 2003). The creation of this "other within" served to justify the political and social control of the borders and people into the twentieth century (Thongchai 1994; Hyun 2014). Schooling was thus a tool to ensure central state legitimacy, cultural assimilation, and ideological control of people and the ground the central state had claimed through the process of mapping (Vaddanaphuti 1991, 2005).

Mapping, Borders, and Indigenous Identity as a Threat to Nation Building

According to Thongchai (1994), before European colonialism, the Kingdom of Siam, Burma, and Vietnam were all overlords of the region, with overlapping kingdom limits. The Siamese kingdom was centered around Bangkok (See Fig. 1 above for a map). Smaller kingdoms (e.g., Lanna, Luang Phrabang, and Vientiane) and tinier chiefdoms (Karen, Lao, Phuan, Phuthai, and other ethnic groups) were interspersed along most of Siam's frontiers. These smaller kingdoms paid submission to multiple overlords for protection, where the chiefdom's limits of control also overlapped with others. Chiefdoms were more fragmented but had autonomy in the ruling of their community. As the British and French began establishing their

colonies around Siam, the Siamese were forced to modernize in order to maintain its sovereignty and prevent further losses of territory through the European technology of mapping. By the end of European expansion in 1909, the Siamese geo-body included various kingdoms that were culturally distinct from those living in Bangkok (about 30–35% of people of the Siamese empire) and that also recently had belonged to other political entities (Keyes 1997).

Mapping led to a territorialization of state power; it defined and organized people and place (Vaddhanaphuti 2005). First, the creation of fixed national boundaries prompted the establishment of state departments such as the Royal Forestry Department and the Ministry of Education. These institutions responsible for natural and human resources such as “unoccupied” forests and “unschooled” communities led to a “paradigm shift in the relationship between the Thai state and resources, people, and space insofar as the state had for the first time accepted responsibility to use all resources for the purposes of national development” (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 153). In *Seeing Like A State* (Scott 1998), “contemporary development schemes . . . require the creation of state spaces where the government can reconfigure the society and economy of those who are to be ‘developed’” (p. 187). Thus there was a need to “transform peripheral nonstate spaces into state spaces,” which was often traumatic and racialized for the inhabitants of highland forest communities (Scott 1998, p. 187, also cited in Vaddhanaphuti 2005).

Second, boundaries constructed ethnospatial taxonomies of the “Other Within” as opposed to the We-Self of “Thainess” (Thongchai 1994, 2000a). Since the border of “Thainess” was more limited than the geo-body of the nation state, the Siamese elite embarked on a project to define the “Others within” that “reaffirmed their superiority, hence justifying their rule, over the rest of the country within the emerging territorial state” (Thongchai 2000a, p. 41). To be civilized, was to thus be “Thai,” and to be modern was to be the West (See Fig. 3 below). This taxonomy of “civility” was a product of both nationalism and globalization and drove Siamese elite to embark on projects along this ethno-spatial-temporal trajectory.

Compulsory state education was a tool to assimilate all ethnic groups under the blanket of “Thai-ness” or *ความเป็นไทย* (*kwarm pen tai*) (Keyes 1991). “Thai-ness” is a collective identity that also reflects the importance of ethnic homogenization as fundamental to nation-building and modernization, where conversely, heterogeneity is a threat to national security and nationhood (Laungaramsri 2003). “Thai-ness” was defined as three things: (1) *chat* or nation (where speaking Tai is a symbol of

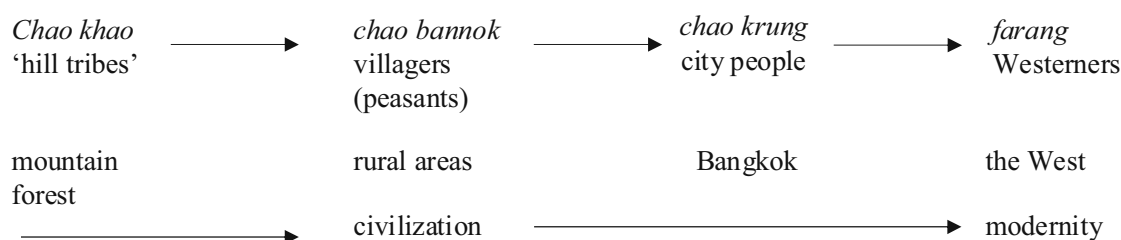


Fig. 3 Table adapted from Thongchai (2000a), The others within: travel and ethnospatial differentiation of Siamese subjects 1885–1910

membership), (2) *satsana* or religion (being Thai is also to be Buddhist), and (3) *phra mahakrasat* or the King (which implied loyalty to the monarchy) (Keyes 1997; Laungaramsri 2003), and schooling was a way to make Thai citizens.

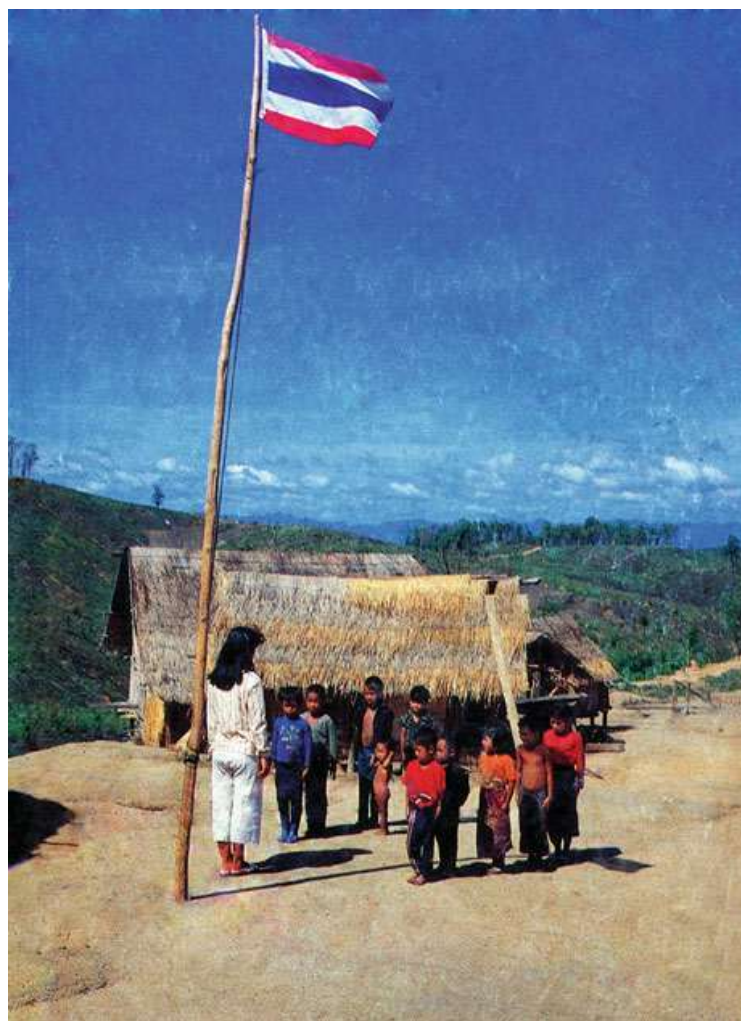
Under King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI), the Compulsory Education Act was created in 1921 to provide “equal” education for all. This act allowed the central government to dominate and control education in Thailand instead of letting ethnic minority groups like the Muslim and Chinese communities run their own schools. Central Thai became the language of instruction; until 2010, teaching languages other than Thai was forbidden in schools (Coalition on Racial Discrimination Watch 2012). In 2010 former Prime Minister Aphisit Vejajiva approved the National Language Policy to allow the teaching of other mother tongue languages and bilingual education in schools for non-Thai speaking children (Coalition on Racial Discrimination Watch, 2012). However, till this day, native languages are still prohibited at all times in highland schools run by the Border Patrol Police to continue to inculcate the idea of “Thai-ness” and loyalty (Hyun 2014). Curriculum and textbooks were also standardized to teach central Thai history, and teacher education programs mandated that all teachers are to be trained by government teachers’ college before they can teach in any school, including religious and private schools (Fig. 4).

Increasing centralized control at the height of Thai nationalism under King Vajiravudh fed emerging ethnic conflict in Thailand, strengthening regional identities (Keyes 1997). The 1930s and 1940s saw the rise of ethnoregionalism in north and especially in the northeast region of Isan (Keyes 1997). Central Thai leaders deemed ethnoregionalism a variation of “Tai-ness” based on geography and language. For these regional groups, Thai leaders began an “inclusivist” national integration policy to “accommodate diversity within a national community” (Keyes 2008, p. 14).

Herein lies the important distinction between “ethnoregional” identities and “ethnic minorities” classification, where “ethnoregional” groups refer to those within the nation’s borders are differences “taken to be characteristic of a particular part of the country rather of a distinctive people” (Keyes 1997, p. 213). Highland communities are seen to never be “Thai enough” and thus a problematic people (Morton and Baird *in press*). The “ชาวเขา (*chao khao*)” term highlights and accentuates a hill-valley dichotomy at odds with the *chao rao*, the us-people (Laungaramsri 2003). Highland dwellers, who once had an interdependent relationship with lowland dwellers, were now seen as dangerous and non-Thai. They were stigmatized, labelled as intruders to Thai territory, destroyers of the forests, opium cultivators, and a threat to national security (Laungaramsri 2003; Keyes 2008; Thongchai 2000a).

Thailand prides itself on never being formally colonized, but Siam’s escape from Western colonialism was legitimized and maintained ironically by their quest for modernity based on drawing knowledge and skills from the West, so much so that scholars have labelled Thailand as having undergone a process internal colonialism or “autocolonizing quest for *siwilai* (civilization)” (Thongchai 2000b; Loos 2006; Harrison and Jackson 2010, p. 18). As a response to growing pressures from EuroAmerican imperial forces during the colonial and postcolonial periods, the Siamese elite’s internal colonization as they built the nation-state makes Thailand

Fig. 4 Photo of highland ethnic students lining up in front of their school and listening to their teacher after singing the Thai national anthem, chanting in Buddhism, and paying respects to Thai national flag (Cover of textbook on Thai Peoples), highland village of Northern Thailand, in early 1980s (Non-formal Education Center, Lampang, 1985)



“semicolonial” or “cryptocolonial” (Harrison and Jackson 2010). Education was thus an important tool for the consolidation of state power driven by EuroAmerican frames of modernity. For with it, political and national purposes could be realized.

Education for Indigenous Highland Communities as Complex and Contradictory

It is difficult to identify a single comprehensive policy for the education for Indigenous communities in Thailand. Often, there were many organizations with overlapping or even conflicting agendas (McNabb 1993). The first state government schools in the highland community were in 1935 in Tak Province. Then in the 1950s, Border Patrol Police schools and Chao Pho Luang Uppatham (His Majesty the King’s Patronage) schools were set up in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Provinces. Later on, schools under regular and specific educational agencies were built in highland villages.

Today, there are a few key players providing education to highland communities. First, the Office of Basic Education Commission is responsible for all schools. This

office sets up school branches in highland villages. Second, the Non-Formal Education Office is in charge of setting up learning centers and bilingual programs in villages where schools could not be set up. A third player is the Special Education Administrative Office, and its two branches, the Welfare Education Schools and the Royal-People Welfare School, build schools in mainly remote areas for children “at-risk.” Fourth, the Border Patrol Police Command Office is also a key player in highland Indigenous education and has set up schools-cum-surveillance centers supported by Thai Royal projects. Finally, the National Buddhism Office also educates ordained highland boys and provides vocational education to girls (Buadaeng and Leepreecha 2009).

These governmental programs ranged from defense concerns to deal with the “hill tribe” problem, tourist development, opium crop replacement initiatives, nation-state objectives, and even unresolved issues such as land ownership and citizenship debates. Educational policies also tend to stretch a monocultural-multicultural continuum, with debates surrounding what “level of cultural diversity is appropriate in the curriculum, the amount of resources that can be allocated to minority schools, and the extent to which higher educational achievement should be encouraged” (McNabb 1993, p. 18). Mobility for Indigenous youth is thus often “one piece of a larger, more complex set of relations, strategies, and negotiation” (McNabb 1993, p. 25).

Indigenous education policies are not only complex but also often contradictory and based on a kind of “selective integration” (Vaddhanaphuti 2005). On the one hand, Indigenous communities are seen to live in harmony with nature and are often used as a symbol of Thailand’s diversity. Indigenous art and culture is often appropriated for tourism and marketed as part of Thailand’s exotic attractions. At the same time, Indigenous communities are seen as uncivilized protestors that oppose the government’s forest policies, fighting for the right to solve their own challenges (Vaddhanaphuti 2005).

Cold War Pressures: Assimilative Education Policies

For the state, schools are important “technologies of power” that are part of ongoing efforts to create, modernize, and secure the Thai nation (Foucault 1977 as cited in Keyes 2008, Jukping 2008; Kampe 1997). Schools were designed to instill a “development orientation” in villagers so that they will “come to accept the domination of the Thai state as an unquestioned given in their social life” (Keyes 1991, p. 89). For the “hill tribes” in northern Thailand, it is clearly stated

Education for tribal people should be implemented in a distinctive way, which differs from general lowland primary schools. Specific educational curriculum should be developed. Teachers [who will be sent to teach tribal children] should be trained in an extraordinary course. It is not only for tribal people to be able to read and write, but also to have them loyal to the government.” (Kachadpai 2518 [1975], p. 226, translated by Prasit Leepreecha)

The first large-scale state educational initiative for Indigenous children began with the creation of Border Patrol Police schools-cum-surveillance centers in

highland villages (Hyun 2014). This included the training and deployment of Border Patrol Police to teach central Thai language and history to highland communities. During the Cold War era (1956–early 1980), 721 Border Patrol Police schools were set up to build a “human border” along the territorial border” (Hyun 2014, p. 344) so that the border of “Thainess” would coincide with the defined geo-body boundary of Thailand (Hyun 2014). There are currently about 61 Border Patrol Police schools in northern Thailand with about 507 teachers and 30% being heritage teachers – teachers who had previously attended Border Patrol Police schools and came back to teach (Hyun 2014). National security was equated to strong Thai nationalism and the Border Patrol Police schools administered government presence and ideological control to fashion Thai citizens (Gilligly 2004). Second, government programs and Christian missionaries also brought Indigenous youth to city centers to study (Keyes 1997; McNabb 1993). Buddhist missionaries then followed suit to begin similar assimilation projects (Keyes 1997). This practice is especially common for students who want to continue onto secondary school in villages without one.

In school, the teaching of nation-state traditions, symbols, and songs, along with the use of official calendars, state-sanctioned textbooks, and learning materials based in the Thai language and history “re-shaped local worlds” (Keyes 1991) and also created imaginary ones. Through school, disperse populations would thus feel like part of an “imagined community” based on Thainess (Anderson 1983/2006). Schools enacted a “spatial culture” with a temporal order where uncultured, rural citizens learn how to appropriately interact with government officials and organizations (Keyes 1991, p. 90). Teachers are “cultural brokers” (Keyes 1991) that “ha [ve] leaned less toward brokering knowledge relevant to the villagers’ world than to establishing the authority of a particular form of knowledge” (Keyes 1991, p. 109) – in this case, the superiority of Thai knowledge and the Thai way of being.

Moreover, textbooks and curriculum produced and distributed in Bangkok seldom mention ethnic minorities, unless in ways that characterize highland Indigenous people as problematic. Schools perpetuate ethnic stereotypes through such deeply troubling practices while Indigenous history, knowledge, or traditions of highland communities are not represented in state-disseminated educational materials. Such projects to “civilize the margins” that were based on “ethnocide” and “cultural imperialism” (Duncan 2004, p. 108). In fact, these assimilation and erasure projects were deemed so effective that the Tribal Research Institute focused closed in 2004 stating that “there was no need for the further study of the hill tribes as they were now considered to have become Thai” (The Nation April 15, 2004; Buadaeng 2006).

Global Pressures: Testing and Other Global Trends in Education

Moreover, in standardized testing, Thailand’s Ordinary National Educational Test or (O-Net) reveals the “myth of meritocracy” by using testing as an evaluation tool (Goodman 2013). Goodman (2013) argues O-Net promotes a kind of “policing” and a “normalizing gaze” of the Thai education system (citing Foucault 1977). This normalizing gaze “molds society in nearly invisible ways and encourages

self-censorship” so that students are “methodically socialized” to accept the true knowledge of the test and not question the central knowledge of the O-Net exam. For example, a multiple choice question (See below) asks “The kind of terrain in which humans chose to settle from ancient times until today is: (a) river basins, (b) plateaux, (c) mountains, or (d) valleys” (Goodman 2013, p. 11).

Question on the O-Net Thai National Test (Goodman 2013, p. 11)

The kind of terrain in which humans chose to settle from ancient times until today is:

1. River basins
2. Plateaux
3. Mountains
4. Valleys

The question privileges lowland communities over highland ones as they are the “humans” that chose to settle in river basins (only one answer is allowed) – as real humans live in the river basin, not the mountains. Similar questions privilege urban knowledge over rural knowledge and the use of central Thai as the official language. As this test that can deny or admit students to university, O-Net seems to privilege only knowledge from the center and is another tool to consolidate central power for nationalistic purposes. Goodman’s (2013) analysis of the Thai standardized test shows the educational hegemony that has begun to shape education initiatives and to determine the lived opportunities for students in Thailand. Thus the longer Indigenous students participate in the dominant national state schools, the more often they accept Thai hegemony and their second-class status in Thailand.

Nondominant communities that do not align with these goals, nor perform according to this one measure are then deemed deficient and are seen in need of remediation. An added layer of pressures includes global education reform movements that promote only one “ideal” way of being – one congruent with human capital theory that supports consumption, individualistic competition, and economic production (Tatto 2006; Tabulawa 2003; Meyer and Benavot 2013). In the 1990s, with increasing globalization, Thai education systems were worried about building a “knowledge economy” (Baron-Gutty and Chupradit 2009). For example, “global languages” like English and Chinese are offered in every school and are valued more highly than local languages. The interconnectedness of the globe and by extension, education systems, has had an unprecedented effect on teachers and their work and lives (Paine and Zeichner 2012).

Long-Term Impacts of State-Led Educational Initiatives for Indigenous People

In a study of Indigenous students studying at university or vocational schools, McNabb (1993) still questions the effects of educational “achievement” on Indigenous families and communities – mobility at what costs? While the Thai government is mainly designed to socialize Indigenous youth as inferior to their Thai

counterparts, the government, along with NGOs and missionary groups, has provided financial resources to support Indigenous youth to pursue higher education (McNabb 1993). Even so, the “development” of “hill tribe” communities has often come at the expense of “environmental degradation, loss of cultural identity, and the enhancement of conflict between the hill tribes [sic] on the one hand and the state agencies and lowland farmers on the other” (Vaddhanaphuti 2005, p. 164).

Still today, Indigenous youth in urban areas are constantly framed as being deficient in contrast to norms of Thai-ness. Similar to how the label “English-language learners” often reinforces “deficit-oriented, uncomplicated, and uneven narratives about students” from non-dominant communities (Gutiérrez and Orellana 2006, p. 503), Indigenous youth are “Thai-language learners” that need to be “made Thai” in order survive function in Thai society (Kampe 1997). Furthermore, such a label essentializes such a group trait and with it, comes assumptions about academic deficits or disadvantages (Moll 2000; Nasir et al. 2006; Rogoff 2003). Often in Indigenous education, instead of seeing multiple cultural practices within the school as an asset to the construction of a rich learning environment, heterogeneity or “otherness” is often seen as a deviation from the established dominant norm.

Furthermore, due to the lack of representation of highland communities in state-disseminated curricula, Indigenous youth often regard local languages, traditions, ways of knowing, and even the elders themselves to be “backward” or “old-fashioned” (Chandraprasert 1997). They often aspire to be like the *khon muang*, the “city people” (Wallace and Athamesara 2004). This is particularly true for urban Indigenous populations that frequently interact with Thais. They aspire to speak Thai without an accent and may try to hide their tribal identity when operating in lowland Thai society. Thai identities are assumed over tribal ones, and ethnic inferiority and erasure are systematically organized in younger generations (McCaskill 1997; Chandraprasert 1997; Chotichaipiboon 1997; Hyun 2014).

While some highland youth can speak Thai fluently, they often experience conflict between their cultural identity and their Thai national identity. For example, in the Border Patrol Police schools that currently exist in the highlands, there has been a *heritage teachers* program to encourage those from the various Indigenous groups to return to their villages and teach. These heritage teachers who return to the village were proud to assist in their village’s development but simultaneously also felt that they were outsiders to their own village. They did not feel respected by the villagers because as Thai government officials, they were perceived to have “become fully Thai” (Hyun 2014, p. 349). At the same time, these teachers are often never “Thai enough” when participating in Thai society. They *both* want to send their children to Thai schools for a chance at a “better life” and even move into the dominant spaces to acquire membership in that group (Toyota 2005, as cited in Hyun 2014) and also want to be able to teach their own language and traditions to their children.

While the state has set up an Indigenous and Thai identity to be in conflict with each other, we now turn to how Indigenous youth and communities have in fact dextrally navigated through seemingly opposing home-school worlds to build coherent identities for themselves and their communities. In the next section, we

outline moves to resurgence as youth and communities participate in the protection and expansion of Indigenous identity in Thailand today.

PART III Building Coherent Communities – Movements Toward Expanding Indigenous Identity Through Education

Indigenous people of the Greater Mekong Subregion have always “challenged the limits” of such control and asserted their identity and culture (Leepreecha et al. 2008a). This movement has become even stronger since 2007 with the creation of community and youth networks of Indigenous activists to ensure the well-being and educational justice of local communities in Thailand. Moreover, there have also been more transnational efforts that purposely work to refuse national boundaries as limits to collaboration. In this third section, we explore why education is a community right for Indigenous communities. We do so by outlining three moves to Indigenous resurgence. First, we provide a case study of how families in highland villages are collaborating to design local curriculum and implement Mother Tongue education in their schools. Second, we highlight an urban Indigenous school and how they have designed pathways home by deeply engaging students in a learning network that builds from family knowledge. Last, we explore other ways that Indigenous communities are reinventing what it means to be Indigenous within and beyond Thailand today. They are expanding ideas of literacy and development and creatively leveraging globalization and technology to strengthen Indigenous identity in their own communities locally and across borders (McCaskill et al. 2008).

Education as a Community Right

In 2005, the Thai government passed the Education for All Cabinet Resolution that mandated public education be expanded to all children regardless of nationality and legal status up to Grade 12. However, despite state efforts and pressures to broaden access to education, a central question here is education by whom and for whom?

One guiding basis of movements in Indigenous education in Thailand today is that families and communities have the right to play a part in the education of their children. While rights frameworks often still follow nationalist agendas and EuroAmerican frameworks, it also affords a certain kind of consciousness about ones’ rights to culture and education (Barry 2013). In the 1990s, grassroots organizations, like Prawase Wasi and the Assembly of the Poor, criticized the centralized military-based administration, particularly the Ministry of Education, calling for more power to be given to local communities in order to mitigate corruption (Baron-Gutty and Chupradit 2009). During the revision of the constitution of 2540 (1997), villagers throughout the country contributed their thoughts and perspectives to what would be called, the “Constitution of the People” (Baron-Gutty and Chupradit 2009). Community rights in this new constitution included rights to natural resources management, rights to protect their own culture and local wisdom,

and rights to education – that is, the right to teach about their own knowledge for their children in the regular state-sponsored school system (Barry 2013).

In line with the 2540 (1997) Constitution, the National Education Act (NEA) of 2542 (1999) was passed as the largest education reform to promote the decentralization of national curriculum. This act mandated that 30% of all school content should be provided and developed by the local community, driven by local participation in the education of their children, while the remaining 70% of courses taught in K-12 education would come from the national curriculum (NEA 1999 Section 23; Minister of Education 2003 as cited in Baron-Gutty and Chupradit 2009). Legally, each community has not only right to, but obliged to decide what knowledge and practices their children should learn at school.

This 30–70 composition of the local-national curriculum is not actualized in most urban and rural schools. Teachers and school administrations continue to teach without collaborative community participation. They do not invite local community leaders to design and teach local wisdom or languages. Indigenous networks and NGOs have tried to mediate the school-community relationship by working with school leaders and teachers first, to open up space their curriculum for local knowledge systems, and second, train the local experts in the development their own courses that can be taught in local schools.

Indigenous communities have become increasingly aware of the need to build coherent narratives and make meaning of seemingly separate modern knowledge and local wisdom systems (Fujioka 2002). One important example of this is school-village collaboration in Mother Tongue education, particularly for preschool and elementary students. The most successful cases are when local elders and teachers collaborate to create mother tongue and local curriculum that are cotaught during the school day. Furthermore, due to increasing numbers of students leaving their home villages to study in the cities, there also have been initiatives to work with welfare schools in the cities with high populations of Indigenous youth. To illustrate how Indigenous resurgence has begun in across rural and urban schools, we provide two case studies of Indigenous education movements in the following sections. These two examples offer varied ways of how families and communities are centering their dreams and claiming their right to shape the educational experiences of their children (Fig. 5).

Moves to Resurgence I: Collaborations for Mother Tongue Education in Highland Communities

Thai language is intimately linked to Thai nationalism and nation building. The teaching and use of Indigenous languages in public schools is still deemed suspect and contrary to national interests. We provide a case study from the Inter-Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) and their longstanding work in protecting Indigenous mother tongue languages. This case is important because of the nature of collaboration between various actors – elders, families, and local Thai school teachers – to create locally designed curriculum and



Fig. 5 Indigenous students demonstrate their ability on reading and telling story in both indigenous and Thai languages at the annual mother-tongue conference in Chiang Mai Province of Northern Thailand (Taken by Prasit Leepreecha in 2015)

mother tongue language instruction. We discuss their work in a primary school in the Mowakhi village in Chiang Mai to show that when community participation is truly valued and sustained, education with community members actually helps to build a bridge to students' sociocultural heritage, while also advancing local and modern knowledge (IMPECT 2012).

The multigenerational Mowakhi school involves local leaders, parents, and teachers intimately in the village to design materials and course content for their children (IMPECT 2012). The school curriculum emphasizes learning both Thai and the Pgazk' Nyau systems of knowledge as essential to prepare their children for civic and economic participation both in Thai society and village life. For over 20 years, this school has been kept alive by its community, just as it, too, advances local ways of knowing and being. This has even sparked a growing movement in neighboring villages to also celebrate and uphold their people, language, and ways of knowing. This is similar to Wallace and Athamesara's (2004) work that provides a case study of a community-centered curriculum that involved and honored local community member's histories and knowledge in a rural highland community.

Through this school, the Pgazk' Nyau have prepared their children and their community to expand their identity through a connection to community stories and practices, and in so doing, strengthen their agency for active civic participation in Pgazk' Nyau community life and larger Thai society (IMPECT 2012). In the Mowakhi community, community members are deeply involved as teachers, curriculum designers, and key decision-makers at school. It is only with this heterogeneous expertise based in multiple epistemologies and practices that communities move closer to self-determination in Thailand (IMPECT 2012; Wallace and Athamesara 2004).

This kind of village-school collaboration is difficult to sustain at times. For example, the Hmong village of Mae Sa Mai in Chiang Mai highlights some of the challenges in implementing locally designed curriculum. Even though there were a variety of program offerings that ranged from local plant medicines, working with silverware and tree

plantation and reforestation, cooperation between teachers and elders was unclear (Buadaeng and Leepreecha 2009). Furthermore, teachers' definition of local knowledge often narrowly focuses on vocational skills training and the sale of products, not so much for the learning of school-based subjects (Baron-Gutty and Chupradit 2009). Indigenous home practices and knowledge systems are still largely ignored and not considered productive nor important for school. In other instances, local teachers might be reluctant to collaborate with villagers or are too focused on completing the national syllabus, viewing integrating local knowledge systems as less important. Integration of curriculum might require fellow native educators and NGOs allies to negotiate strategies to make local curriculum an enacted everyday practice in the formal school systems in the villages (Buadaeng and Leepreecha 2009). Since developing local curriculum is not funded by the state, lack of funding for communities to design and teach this curriculum to the youth make might such a project fall through.

However, knowing that cases like the Mowakhi school are possible, more communities are exercising their agency to embark on similar collaboration efforts projects that leverage the National Education Act of 2542 to teach their Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. In 2007, various schools came together to share their locally developed curriculum "Education Systems and the Preservation of Local Wisdom and Ethnic Culture" research program at Chiang Mai University (Buadaeng 2008b). Elders and teachers continue to work through such challenges so that imagining education for self-determination does not have to be a distant reality. In the next section, we highlight another way to create connections between home and school knowledge, and how this might be possible for more communities.

Moves to Resurgence II: Designing Pathways Home from Urban Indigenous Schools

Told that the city offers "better" educational opportunities for their children and that advancement means children must leave behind their community and family in the mountain and adopt urban nation-state forms of life, there is an increasing trend of parents sending their children to stay and study in boarding schools in the city (Morton and Baird *in press*; Buadaeng and Leepreecha 2009). Furthermore, some village schools only go up to Grade 6 and attending secondary school means that students must leave their home villages to study in the lowland cities. This is also driven by financial incentives from a variety of donors and missionaries to provide free room and board for Indigenous highland students while they study (Buadaeng 2008a). While this may create layers of complications between the goals of the donors and state schooling, continuing education after the elementary grades in schools in the city have opened pathways to higher education, but students who have migrated to lowland areas also often lose connection to their homelands and feel inferior to their Thai counterparts (McNabb 1993).

Recently, the largest urban government-supported welfare school in Chiang Rai has undertaken strategies to create connections between school and home. Founded by two Karen educators, Sahasatsuksa school has a student population of over 2700

students from 12–15 different tribes. Almost all their students live in hostel facilities run by Christian or Buddhist missionaries or other international aid groups. While most of the teachers are not Indigenous, there are a significant number of Indigenous teachers who have graduated from Sahasat, then returned to teach there. Sahasat teachers already visit the villages of their students each year to meet with families and here we present initiatives from this urban Indigenous school to describe a new effort to design pathways home for the increasing number of students coming to live and study in the city.

In February 2015, Sahasat began designing learning in tutorial relationships (Tutoría), where students learn to engage in dialogue with their teachers and with each other as a way to learn. Originating from México, Tutoría attempts to transform alienating vertical relationships of power between teachers and students to build a horizontal learning network where students are part of the teaching community in class (Cámara 2003). This was a way to deeply engage heterogeneity in the classroom as this learning network called for student and family participation in a teaching and learning network and more youth and family designed curriculum (Meixi 2017). The data in this paper comes from a community-based design research study that initially involved school leadership, teachers, and students in 2015, and then expanded to include families in 2017 (Bang et al. 2010). In the following section, we highlight some reflections from students, teachers, and families from this work to design pathways home from school.

The first shift that we saw in Sahasat was that students felt that they had value and could contribute to the work of teaching and learning at school. This also resulted in changes in the way students also advocated for new forms of teaching and learning. Using a collection of 40 student reflections, we highlighted typical student responses after they have participated in the Tutoría learning network.

Student 1: I have fun. I can learn in an easy going way and I can have my own thinking because it's easy going activity and I have fun. I dare to think and take action.

Student 2: I am glad that I have learned new things and I have become brave because I have brought what I have known to teach my friends. Normally, I am not a brave one. After I have taught others, I have become brave.

The idea of “dare” was coded on 15 student responses. These students use the Thai word “กล้า,” meaning “to have courage” or “overcome fear to do something.” Importantly, it was the relational nature of learning that made it “fun” and “easy going” so that students felt the responsibility and desire to contribute to the learning network. One other student wrote, “Everyone can help teaching, every classroom should be equal.” This student recognized an individual's own abilities to be a part of teaching, but also saw that the classroom was full of other actors too.

Classroom is often governed by fear and students in small ways are finding their voice and gaining confidence that their opinion matters, that they could own and be agents of learning at school. Students understood their new role as assets to the class and now considered themselves mediators and designers of learning where normatively, teachers are seen as the main mediators of learning in the classroom.

Furthermore, as more students “dared” to be brave and take up agency in learning, teachers also began to question their own perceptions about students’ ability to participate in the work of teaching and learning at school. In a collective reflection session a teacher, Teacher O recognized she was engaging in the suppression of the use of the Akha language in her students in contrast to Thai, which is constantly insisted on as the language of use in school. Akha is an Indigenous language, spoken by around 1000 Akha students in Sahasat school and is one of the commonly spoken languages at school. She said, “I told them, you can’t use Akha to explain it to each other because tomorrow morning, students from (another school) are coming and you can’t use Akha with them! But actually now that I think about it, they actually should speak any language, like Akha.”

Indigenous youth are often asked to not use their language in order to integrate and interact with their Thai counterparts. Speaking Thai is to orient oneself outward, for communicability and translation. While this is true, native languages are often subordinated to the use of Thai. Teacher O makes public her shift from a curriculum-centered framing to a child-centered frame; she began to orient in, toward the child, not what the curriculum externally demanded of her. This is a powerful move of resistance to the required subordination and it is also a standing up to common notions of what is valued by the state. Ultimately it worked against the devaluation of Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, speaking, and being.

Furthermore, during our family interviews at students’ home villages, families shared skills and practices that were important to their family and community. While there was a shyness about the knowledge that the family held, there was also pride in intergenerational knowledge of bamboo for the creation of their home and in the expertise in recognizing patterns when harvesting mangoes. In one family, a student, Beu heard about the practice of his grandmother who was an expert at spinning cotton into thread but also that his mother could not do so anymore. When asked what learning he wanted to design at school, Beu spoke of his desire to learn the practice of cotton spinning and prevent its potential loss of such a valuable family practice. When asked why he wanted to focus his curriculum on this practice, Beu said, “I want to create lessons on practices that we had before but are not really seen in everyday life today. . . what people did in the past, like how we can turn cotton into thread.” Beu is currently working with his grandmother to create and teach this practice to his teachers and classmates at Sahasat. Indigenous youth in urban areas can be conduits that actively build school-village connections for continued family involvement in the practices of school.

These are some examples of how urban Indigenous youth and their school are opening up spaces to design pathways back home to strengthen relations between knowledge systems that schools and society has otherwise have tried to erase. This, however, just involved 6 students out of the 2700 at Sahasat and more work needs to be done to open up these spaces at school. Designing participation structures and curriculum at school was a potential pathway to a resurgence of these community practices and as Beu shared, for such practices to take on contemporary forms.

Instead of allowing the state to run and determine educational pathways for their children, Indigenous peoples have solidified and expanded their role to set goals,

negotiate curriculum, and participate in school, both in highland villages and in the lowland areas where they send their children to school. In light of the history of state education as a means to remediate deficits, designing for legitimate student and family participation in the work of learning and teaching at school opens up new possibilities for strengthening both school and home practices by creating coherence between them.

Moves to Resurgence III: Expanding New Terms and Identities to Build Indigenous Power

Until today, Indigenous peoples have developed a variety of strategies to defend their rights to define “development,” define “language,” and to define who they are. Particularly when their world is highly globalized and international borders are increasingly porous, “nation-states continue to exercise substantial control over Indigenous people and their territories” (Leepreecha et al. 2008b, p. 2). However as schooling attempted to forget who we are to reshape local worlds, Indigenous communities have always been shaping their own worlds and reconstituting space and possibility. Indigenous communities are always in processes of “internalizing aspects of globalization and nationalism, while at the same time attempting to externalize aspects of their Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices” (Leepreecha et al. 2008b, p. 2). In the book *Challenging the Limits* (2008a), Leepreecha et al. synthesize five strategic response of various Indigenous groups in the Greater Mekong Subregion to the forces of globalization and nationalism. The first tactic is direct mobilization and organization in the case of the Karen in Burma. Second, groups have been taking control to defining their own identities as a way to counter dominant negative stereotypes and gain recognition and influence in the social, economic, and political spheres. Third, Indigenous groups have been reconstructing social relations and traditional knowledge in order to maximize influence and benefits from existing government structures. Fourth, other groups have taken a more subversive stance involving nonconfrontation but the “rejection/withdrawal/escape/hiding” in response to expanding power and control by government and nongovernment authorities (Leepreecha et al. 2008b, p. 7). Last, others have challenged the notion of boundaries to form cross-border projects through “the use of available social and cultural spaces” to take advantage of the opening of more economic and diplomatic relations between states. These movements take place in a context of collaboration and learning and building upon the tactics and strategies of each other.

For example, Hmong communities have collaborated to create a transnational identity with the aid of technology (Leepreecha 2008). Nationalism and globalization which were meant to shape and erode Hmong ethnic identity can and has been reappropriated. In a study of Hmong identity, Leepreecha examines how Hmong communities in Thailand and the USA transcend state borders to create artifacts of globalization for a shrinking world. These include audiovisual media, publications, and cultural artifacts such as story cloths for circulation. Hmong communities have also expanded global networks of kinship to cyberspace, churches, and businesses

for increased connections across time-space to strengthen and reproduce Hmong identity (Leepreecha 2008).

Similarly, Lahu communities work between a tension of opposing forces of homogenization, erasing difference among various practices that exist in an imaginary space, and heterogenization, maintaining and creating difference at local levels (Pine 2008, citing Appadurai). Using the case of literacy, Pine (2008) examines how the Lahu have been “desettling” ideas of literacy through being aliterate. While writing is a technology of power, “the possession of writing identifies the group in question as modern, while the absence of writing is an important aspect of a “traditional” identity,” as in the case of the Lahu (Pine 2008, p. 220). While the highland-lowland divide has categorized hill tribe peoples as being uncivilized and less developed because they possess no writing system, Pine offers that the Lahu challenges common notions of literacy that supposedly is at the pinnacle of a “civilized” culture and the classification of “developed” people based on orthography. Instead, being Lahu is a practice and *speaking* Lahu is at the heart of it. Lahu “loss-of-writing myths” problematizes literacy as a homogenous discourse today and the ways which we understand development and civilizing projects (Pine 2008). In a world where being with-writing grants access to the “civilized” and “global currents intent on eliminating difference” (p. 232), Lahu people are negotiating what it would be to be with-writing, just as those with-writing cannot place Lahu and other minoritized groups at the margins of literacy practices.

Finally, while the Karen were more readily accepted into Thai society, they too undergo the “dual process of defining one’s own group and being defined by others to establish meaningful ethnic group boundaries” (Leepreecha et al. 2008b, p. 2). Their strategy has been a “process of converting modernity into tradition and inscribing part of their knowledge tradition into modernity” (Gravers 2008, p. 150). They have participated in official governmental capacities across borders, while mobilizing their own communities, protecting their Indigenous knowledge systems and cosmology, and using “communalization within/against nationalization and globalization” (Gravers 2008, p. 174).

Compulsory state schooling steeped in Thai nationalism and global orientations to education mandate that Indigenous youth constantly negotiate being essentialized in their individual and collective processes of becoming. In this section, we have tried to show various ways the expansion of connections between school and home can help Indigenous youth navigate and move between the worlds of home and school to find coherence in the making of who they are. In response to efforts to define, reduce, and simplify, Indigenous identity in Thailand, youth and families hold the complexity of what it means to be Indigenous today. They hold onto their histories, languages, practices, and culture while simultaneously invent and expand the definitions of what it means to be Indigenous. They have creatively used globalization to strengthen their own movements and identities (Leepreecha *in press*; Leepreecha 2008). They have used the school to facilitate increased connections to their language, practices, and culture, *and* learned the skills and tools to allow them to navigate Thai society with incredible dexterity. The move to see themselves as “both” “and” are Indigenous moves to resurgence.

Conclusion Building a Fire: Bridges of Power Toward a “Both–And”

ŕŕ? mâ à-mī hê, cho mâ ò-gâ ī.

When there is lots of wood the fire is strong; when there are many people their strength is great.

– Lahu Proverb

(Using transcription by Matisoff 2011)

In the years ahead, the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand continues to build a stronger network to negotiate pathways to Indigenous education with the state government so that parents and community leaders can determine the learning of their young. We are collectively creating bridges of power that both ground our young people in their own language and culture and provide them the skills to participate in Thai society. Unlike Indigenous movements in the Americas, Indigenous people in Thailand often have to prove they are “Thai enough” to have their claims translate into actual provisions and rights (Morton and Baird [in press](#)). Like in the Lahu proverb above, this makes a transIndigenous, transborder network is key to sustaining its development and strength to understand and grow from how others navigated the complexity of state policies and provisions.

For Thai educators and policy makers, they should understand that Indigenous identity is not in conflict with a national one; youth should not need to choose between being Thai or “not Thai enough.” Schools must support Indigenous youth to be proud of *both* their history and culture *and* also be “Thai-enough.” Indigenous youth and peoples always have and continue to build a complex yet coherent identity of what it means to operate and thrive in the space in-between school and home, from highland to lowland, from home wisdom to Thai ones. They do so with amazing resourcefulness and grace. Our schools need to allow for and accept the navigation of complex, multilayered identities that our Indigenous youth bring to school.

Finally, there is much more research to be done in the academy to highlight and the ongoing strength and struggles of Indigenous people in Thailand and in Asia. This will help people understand and resist the erasure of Indigenous communities in Asia and expand the conversation of settler-colonialism that is conflated with inter-race dynamics. The concept of indigeneity is beginning to be recognized in Asia and has been officially adopted by governments in Japan, Taiwan, Nepal, the Philippines, and Cambodia (Erni 2008). Many Asian governments, however, continue to reject the concept of “indigeneity” (Erni 2008). Increased research in this area will help shift and expand public opinion and policy on indigeneity in Asia where much more work and research need to be done to resist the continued erasure of Indigenous people in the region. Being Indigenous in Asia is deeply political and the more voices we have centering Indigenous voices on this complex issue, the stronger our fire.

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