

## **Review: Constructing the Symbolic Meaning of the Thai Monarchy in Contemporary Society (Chanankan Nirundon)**

Chanankan's work concentrates on the fabricated image and public representation of King Bhumibol, the current King of Thailand, in two documentaries, namely "My King" (2012) and "The People's King" (2013). The question of how the fabricated image of the current King of Thailand has been constructed while using contemporary documentary films lies in the centre of the paper. In her thesis, she employs the work of Peter Burke *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. As Chanankan concludes, public representation of King Bhumibol does not significantly differ from that of Louis XIV. She argues that the King integrated the European model with the concept of globalisation and modernity. Last but not least, she is convinced that the favourable fabricated images and their enforcement prevent negative comments and representation of the monarchical institution and strengthen the Thai kingship.

Reading Chanankan's thesis, I experienced certain disappointment. The thesis does not address the question of how the personality cult in Thailand fits other personality cults, common as they were in the past and are in the present. Indeed, there is nothing innovative about stating that the ruler is described as a "father." Chanankan deals with Thai uniqueness, yet she leaves the reader's logical question whether such a cult and its expression can or cannot be attributed to other regimes as well without any answer. For this reason, it is hard to understand why only Louis XIV was chosen as a reference.

In general, the theoretical framework is based solely on the aforementioned work of Peter Burke. This can be, however, considered one of the greatest weaknesses of Chanankan's text. Even though Chanankan rightly sets the scene, other significant authors in the field that have likewise dealt with fabricated images of leading personalities are completely omitted. In like manner, I miss a convincing explanation why and why only Burke's book has been used for the theoretical part of the thesis. Methodology-wise, I cannot but point out once again that more work should have been put into the conceptual section.

The structure of the thesis is understandable. However, with this in mind, I cannot but state that the part describing Thai history seems rather superfluous. Furthermore, I do not understand the switch from the methodological approach to the thesis to the specific situation in Thailand on page 17. In like manner, the part devoted to the historical overview of developments that took place in the Thai state seems to be longer than what would have been necessary for understanding of the specifics of the Thai system.

The language side of the thesis question is likewise by no means flawless: „Thee generous characteristic appears in the public representation of both Louis and Bhumibol“ (p. 38). A situation of the Mahidols in Thailand was unrest (p. 23). Nevertheless, such mistakes do not send the thesis to the category „non understandable“. These represent only a few examples to illustrate to point in mind.

However, the biggest problem of the thesis in concern lies in its limited ambitions. Explaining two documentary films through the lenses of one single book does seem somewhat acceptable

for an academic paper, but a thesis is a different matter and requires much more than that. Similarly, the thesis is also extremely short, its main body consists of no more than 55 pages, which are, on top of that, packed with many pictures – 42 to be more precise. This, once again, supports the impression that the topic should have been chosen more carefully. Furthermore, the list of sources consists of 23 titles only; this is insufficient for an academic work of this sort.

Nevertheless, the thesis shows some shadows, however blur, of academic work. The methodology, although weakly explained, has some rigidity. The author works with some material, which is, regretfully, represented only by two documentary films. It uses a certain methodological background, which is represented mostly by Peter Burke's work. To sum up, the current text should have served as a good basis for a thesis, but it should not have represented the thesis itself as it leaves too many crucial questions still to be answered.

To conclude, the thesis is interesting, yet I am not sure about the final evaluation. Chanankan's work is indeed weak for an M.A. thesis. On the other hand, however, I know Chanankan well from my course and I was able to see immense progress in her writing in last two years. Bearing this in mind, I grade Chanankan's thesis with a C in case of a good defence.

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