

Tutor's report of M.A. thesis

Chanankan Nirundon, Constructing the Symbolic Meaning of the Thai Monarchy in Contemporary Society (Department of World History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2015, 66 pp.)

The presented thesis focuses on the fabrication of public image of the contemporary king of Thailand. Inspired by the well-known Burke's analysis of public representation of Louis XIV the thesis aims at deconstructing patterns in public representation of the Thai ruler. Due to technical and methodological constraints the scope of analysis was sensibly narrowed down to a couple of official biographical documentaries, both of which reached large audiences in Thailand in the early 2010s. Taking Burke's study as model, Chanankan identified a set of attributes assigned implicitly to Bhumibol by authors of both movies and pointed out which aspects and characteristics of his personality were silenced to enhance the glorious image of the people's king. From the comparison of representations of Louis XIV and Bhumibol she drew a conclusion that, despite temporal and geographical divide, fabricated image of Bhumibol was constructed along the same lines as that of the French king three centuries ago.

The thesis is logically structured – the opening part introduces main theoretical assumptions and methodological instruments and explains how Burke's method has been adapted to fit vastly different technological and cultural milieu. Second part offers insights into the historical and cultural context, indispensable for understanding of the specific position of royal family in Thai society and the country's unique visual culture (or "regime of images"). The third and final part is devoted to the analysis itself. The thesis is written in clear and concise manner, although the language is rather less sophisticated.

Undeniably, the thesis suffers from several shortcomings (not very ambitious general design and limited scope of analysis, length only just above the required minimum). These are, however, reducible to a single problem. The research was carried under the umbrella of the Erasmus Mundus program, designed to promote European higher education worldwide and to bring foreign students to European universities. Chanakan in a way fell a victim to the ambitions of this program, and throughout her study struggled heavily to adapt, in a limited time offered by the scholarship, to European academic standards. The initial discrepancy between her academic background and requirements of European universities demonstrated most visibly in her passionate engagement with the topic of research, which made it a perplexing task for her to meet principles of academic writing and achieve a critical distance

from the subject of research. However, especially since the first draft of her thesis was rejected by supervisors, she has shown admirable dedication and focus and improved her manuscript significantly.

The main asset of the presented thesis lies not in its academic qualities, but rather in its value as a testament to the personal commitment and development. During the last two years, Chanankan managed not only to produce what I believe to be a fully acceptable thesis and to accomplish the highly demanding bilingual TEMA program (she spent three semesters in Prague and one at Paris EHESS), but she also personally and professionally matured. Despite the fact that the thesis is far from perfect, it meets the standards of academic work that must be maintained on the MA level and thus it qualifies for a successful defense.

Therefore, I recommend the thesis for defense with a preliminary mark C.

Prague, 15.8. 2015

Mgr. Jiří Janáč, PhD.