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Embodying ‘Thainess’ and the post-2006 coup crisis in *Buppessannivas (Love Destiny)*

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ABSTRACT


First televised in 2018, *Buppessannivas (Love Destiny)* was among the most popular and influential dramas in Thailand that represented images of Thainess (*khwam-pen-Thai*). Based on a novel by Rompaeng, it tells the story of a twenty-first-century woman who travels back to Ayutthaya, during the political turmoil of King Narai’s reign (r.1656–1688). Her journey not only depicts the ‘golden age’ but also highlights the theme of political conflict between nationalist and foreign bureaucrats, culminating in a victory for the ‘good’ nationalists. As the novel was first published in 2010, this theme can be linked to the post-2006 coup context. This article argues that the novel *Buppessannivas* (2010) brings the mainstream royalist-nationalist narrative into dialogue with the question of national crisis that followed the coup. It thus reflects the anxiety of political polarization and the discourse of the ‘good person’ (*khon di*). Moreover, the article focuses analytically on the bodily representation of Thainess through its key characters. Arguably, while ‘good’ individuals operate within female bodies and minds by retaining a link to traditional Thainess as well as adapting to modernity, the *farang* body and mind constitute the meaning of a ‘bad person’, and hence encapsulate a threat to Thainess.

KEYWORDS

Thainess; Thai literature; *Buppessannivas (Love Destiny)*; Thai history; Thai politics; 2006 coup

Introduction

Before 2018, if Thais had been asked about the meaning of the term *or-chao*¹ (ออเจ้า), most of them would have had no idea what it meant. But this archaic word meaning ‘you’ has become famous since the historical TV drama *Buppessannivas* (บุพเพสันนิวาส; *Love Destiny*; hereafter *Buppe*) was aired on Channel 3 during early 2018. In *Buppe*, Ketsurang (เกศสุรางค์), a female archaeology lecturer² dies and her spirit travels back to the late

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This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article. ¹I use the Royal Institute system of Romanizing Thai. However, I have followed the Thai authors’ preferred spelling of their own names in English when known to maintain consistency, as well as some other Romanizations for terms commonly used in the anglophone-speaking world. For the title of *Buppessannivas* itself, I follow the English translation of the novel that I use for quotations in the article.

²In the TV drama, she is a university student in archaeology. Yet in the novel, the focus of this article, Ketsurang is a university lecturer who graduated with a BA and MA in art history from France.

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seventeenth century to possess the body of an elite Ayutthaya woman named Karaket (การะเกด). Although the main plot focuses on the romantic relationship between this woman and Dech (เดช), a bureaucrat in the royal court, the backdrop of *Buppe* combines the key figures and events of King Narai's reign (r.1656–1688), a so-called golden and international age in Thai history.

With a 'feel-good', comedic story and a glorious portrayal of Ayutthaya, including its intense politics, *Buppe* was not only popular as a so-called national phenomenon but was also regarded by contemporary audiences as being a key representation of 'Thainess' (ความเป็นไทย; *khwam-pen-Thai*).³ *Buppe* nostalgically depicts the imagined glorious past of Thainess at a time of an uncertain present. Irene Stengs (2020, 65) argues that it presents 'an inherent dimension of a cultural politics geared at promoting Thai moral values and cultures, with a pivotal role for love for the king/monarchy and the national unity'. This role was essential at that time; Patrick Jory (2018) points out that the political issues portrayed in *Buppe*, such as the overthrow of King Narai and the power of *farang* (ฝรั่ง), reflect anxieties and nostalgia after the end of King Rama IX's reign in 2016. However, *Buppe* was adapted from the novel that had been written almost a decade before the TV series. The female writer Rompaeng (โรมแพง) had composed *Buppe* on the websites Dek-D and Pantip in 2009 and completed it in 2010. The book was placed as the second-runner-up in the 'Seven Book Award' in 2010 and was translated into English in 2020 after the success of the TV drama.

When discussing *Buppe*, most articles focus on the drama rather than the novel (e.g. Jory 2018; Patcharee and Thanasin 2021; Sorarat 2019; Stengs 2020). Here, I view that the context of composing the novel during the late 2000s had an interesting impact on the construction of *Buppe*, especially its representation of Thainess against the heated politics in the aftermath of the September 2006 coup d'état. The following period saw intensifying political polarization between the ultra conservative faction of the Yellow Shirts and the more progressive Red Shirt faction. There were several protests against the government, which were suppressed. Thainess at that time was thus being emphasized and negotiated by different groups. Meanwhile, the intense political conflict fuelled anxiety about the loss of the nation (สันชาติ; *sin chat*). A discourse of the 'good person' (คนดี; *khon di*) came to dominate society, to promote heroes, good individuals and national unity in the face of polarization.

Although some articles have analysed *Buppe* (such as Sumalee 2020; Teavakorn 2020), none have linked it to the context of the aftermath of the 2006 coup. For me, the novel resonates with that context through its adaptation of mainstream history to serve contemporary needs. Gender, the body and mind are the most critical aspects of the embodiment of Thainess. Therefore, this article asks: how is Thainess adapted and presented in *Buppe*? And how does this resonate with post-2006 Thailand? I argue that the novel brings the mainstream royalist-nationalist narrative of a glorious past into dialogue with the question of national crisis. It also mirrors the anxiety of the post-2006 coup period, the political polarization and the discourse of the 'good person'. The main characters are embodied through being either idealized or undesirable. The *farang* body and mind constitute an accumulation of 'bad person' characteristics, encapsulating a threat to Thainess. Conversely, the good individual operates within female bodies and minds by

³See, for instance, article in *Thairath* "'Buppesannivas Fever" Leads People Wearing Thai Costumes to Visit Wat Chai following Karaket (บุพเพสันนิวาส" ที่เวอร์ คนแต่งชุดไทยเนนวัดไชยฯ ตามรอยการะเกด)," March 2018. <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/central/1225252>

retaining a link to traditional Thainess, while adapting to modernity. Thus, desirable Thainess constitutes a hybrid form between old/modern and national/international identity.

I first examine the fluctuating concept of Thainess and Thailand before and after the 2006 coup. I then describe how Thainess through history is adapted in this novel. Lastly, I analyse the embodiment of the nation through the lenses of gender, the body and the mind, as well as contextualizing it in terms of Thainess during the post-2006 coup.

Thainess and post-2006 coup Thailand

Thainess is a fluctuating term that has been contested and negotiated for over a century. Globalization along with the polarization period caused a new perception of Thainess in the twenty-first century.

Trajectories of Thainess: from singularity to hybridity

Historically, the definition of Thainess came from the top down and emphasized the singularity of national identity to imply unity as one nation. Colonial conditions stimulated this notion of nationhood, led by Siamese monarchs. Although officially an independent territory, colonial tension led to the ‘semicoloniality of Siam’ shown through nation-building projects (see Harrison and Jackson 2010). King Rama V (r. 1868–1910) introduced official nationalism to the Siamese court in the form of a dynastic state and ruled the country as the Western colonizers did in colonized territories (Anderson 2016, 99–100). Later, King Rama VI (r.1910–1925) propagated the Siamese nationalism of ‘nation, religion, and monarchy’ (ชาติ, ศาสนา, พระมหากษัตริย์; *chat, satsana, phra mahakasat*). In short, Thai identity in the colonial period directly connected to a dynastic definition focused on a modernizing monarchy.

The absolute monarchy came to an end in 1932 and was replaced by a constitutional one. During the Second World War, the government led by Field Marshal Phibul Songkhram passed cultural mandates to control and redefine Thainess. Instead of promoting the monarchy, the new definition promoted a chauvinistic view of the purity of Thai ethnicity, ‘inventing’ a glorious ancestral past. In contrast, ‘un-Thai people’ such as overseas Chinese were assimilated into being Thai (Reynolds 2006). However, royalist definitions of Thainess – the ideology of nation, religion and monarchy – returned to the national stage during the Cold War due to anxieties over communism (Baker and Pasuk 2022)

This static definition of Thainess has nonetheless been challenged due to the interplay between diverse groups in Thai society. The end of the Cold War led to a decline in anti-communist policies and brought new perspectives on the ASEAN region, instead of portraying nations as ideological foes. Cultural diversity and embracing ethnicities became a signification discourse (Saichol 2020, 248–249). Meanwhile, local knowledge began to play a significant role on the national stage since it could be seen as authentically Thai against the influx of globalization (Reynolds 2002). Globalization and digital transformation also brought newly contested powers up against the solidarity of Thainess; cyberspace and social media have played a critical role in disturbing conventions of Thainess, introducing varied transnational values. Accordingly, the monopoly on Thainess in terms of ethnicity and Bangkok’s hierarchical culture became blurred,

alongside rapid changes in global trends and technologies. These factors changed Thainess from a singular definition imposed by top-down authorities to something hybridized from many players.

Thailand in the aftermath of the 2006 coup

One of the clearest contests over Thai cultural identity took place during the rise and fall of Thaksin Shinawatra. A successful business tycoon who entered national politics, Thaksin was prime minister between 2001 and 2006. His progressive and populist policies challenged the bureaucratic structures and traditional notions of Thainess. As a result, conservative protests led by journalists and aristocrats and supported by people from the middle classes gathered in 2005–2006 as the ‘Yellow Shirts’, their clothing symbolizing the auspicious colour of King Rama IX. The protestors largely condemned Thaksin’s government for immorality – namely corruption – and disloyalty to the monarchy (Baker and Pasuk 2022).

Subsequently, the military junta led a coup d’état on 19 September 2006, which was not only widely accepted by the conservative wing of the Thai political spectrum, but also inscribed royalist-nationalism as the dominant discourse of Thainess. Royalist and Buddhist ideologies were deployed to relate to the morality of leaders. Nonetheless, the coup could not stop polarization in the country. Thaksin’s party won the election in December 2007, causing the Yellow Shirts to protest again in 2008. They occupied the House of Government for many months and shut down Suvarnabhumi Airport. In response to this a pro-Thaksin group largely from the north and northeast of Thailand was formed, known as the Red Shirts. After the anti-Thaksin party formed a government in 2008, the Red Shirts opposed the government’s legitimacy. They demonstrated to cancel the ASEAN summit in Pattaya in 2009, and gathered in large numbers in central Bangkok during the mid-2010s. Political polarization was the mainstay of this period.

Alongside battles in the political arena, cultural productions also provide useful illustrations of ideological clashes. For instance, ‘ultra-Thai architecture’ was an influential ideology behind major buildings constructed during the post-coup era; these draw on Thai classical cosmology and monarchical symbolism, revealing deep connections to the suppression of democratic ideology by ultra-royalist logic (Chatri 2020). In cinema, Pasoot (2015) reveals that this royalist-nationalist narrative of opposition to greedy politicians is presented along with Buddhism as a core ideology of the middle class in films after 2006. Similarly, Veluree (2015) argues that the film series *The Legend of King Naresuan* (ตำนานสมเด็จพระนเรศวร) (2007, 2011, 2014) reveals an attempt by the authorities to stabilize the meaning of Thainess. Meanwhile, state-defined Thainess has been contested in several of Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s films. In the literary milieu, poetry is the clear site of ideological clashes. Pichet (2018) confirms how Buddhist discourses fuelled conservative poetries during 2006–2010, legitimizing poets’ criticism of Thaksin’s political networks and supporters. During the crackdown on the Red Shirts in 2010, Chusak Pattarakulvanit (2023, 112–119) writes, several once-progressive-poets ‘turned right’ and were blind to the deaths of people in the opposition.

More importantly, popular culture widely uses national history during political conflict. As Pipad (2018) surveys, historical dramas and films during the post-2006 coup were screened by the authorities and private sector to build unity among Thais

by retelling crises back to the Ayutthaya period and positioning kings as national heroes. Interestingly, the retelling of history interplays with the current crisis and shares definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ people. Rachod Nusen’s analysis (2023) of portrayals of the People’s Party (คณะราษฎร) in historical novels, for instance, finds that post-2006 historical novels portray them as untrustworthy, cold-blooded politicians who are obsessed with power. This portrayal connects to the ideological clashes of that time.

In short, during the polarization period, concepts of Thainess like royalist-nationalism and Buddhism were praised by the mainstream media and accepted by the middle class to calm political instability and anxiety. National history is a critical tool to arouse the sense of nationalism and portray ideal heroes, and it has been adapted in many cultural texts, including *Buppe*.

Present in the past: history in *Buppe* and Thai politics following the 2006 coup

Buppe can be regarded as historical fiction since the novel relies on actual events and records from historical sources. The past from which *Buppe* is constructed can be read against the present.

The construction and adaptation of national history in Buppe

Buppe revives a sense of late-seventeenth-century Ayutthaya, which is intertwined with the nostalgic notion of the past. The Ayutthaya era (1351–1767) is generally perceived as the glorious period of Siam/Thailand. During the seventeenth century, Ayutthaya was a strong political kingdom and became wealthy from international commercial business (Wyatt 2003): ‘European travellers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries placed Ayutthaya or Siam among the three great powers of Asia alongside China and India’ (Baker and Pasuk 2017, ix). Accordingly, during the period of colonial tension, Ayutthaya was glorified under the nation-building process which was the legacy of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, the so-called father of Thai history. The history of Ayutthaya came to represent the continuity of Siamese civilization.

In this way, kings were presented as having a fundamental role in the survival and prosperity of Thailand and its people up until the present, a type of historiography referred to by Thongchai (2016 [2001], 6) as ‘royalist-nationalist history’ (ราชาชาตินิยม; *racha chatniyom*). This history focuses on the invasions by foreign countries and the heroic capability of Thai kings who protected the land or restored the fallen country to stability. In royalist-nationalist history, the thirty-two year reign of King Narai is regarded as one of the greatest (มหาราช; *maharat*), and also as a golden age of Thai commerce, international relations and literature. King Narai successfully sent envoys led by Kosa Pan (โกษาปาน) to meet King Louis XIV in Paris in 1686, which showed the close relationship between Ayutthaya and France. This event became a highlight in the master narrative of Thai history, making Kosa Pan a national hero.

Despite historian Nidhi (2006) contending that King Narai might not have been a virtuous ‘*thammaracha*’ (ธรรมราชา), and that he made people continuously anxious about war, especially with the West, the mainstream understanding of his reign is positive, representing a glorious era of Thai culture. In the literary realm, many canonical texts

were produced, such as *Chindamani* (จินดาmani), the first Thai language textbook, by royal poet Phra Horathibodi (พระโหราธิบดี), and *Samuttakhot Khamchan* (สมุทรโฆษคำฉันท์). In addition, as a consequence of foreign influences, diverse cultural artefacts emerged from this reign such as the Narai Palace in Lopburi, and desserts such as *foi-thong* (ฝอยทอง) and *thong-yip* (ทองหยิม), which originated from a mixing of cultures and became known as ‘Thai dessert’.

As for *Buppe*, the novel was created to align with mainstream history and the positive contemporary perception of the past. In interview, Rompaeng, a graduate of the faculty of archaeology at Silpakorn University, told me that she used a wide range of primary historical sources, such as the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya and Records of Foreigners, and secondary sources like *A History of Thai Commerce* (ประวัติศาสตร์การค้าไทย) by Khun Wichitmatra. Inspired by major historical novels like *Tawiphop* (ทวิภพ; *The Two Worlds*) and *Sai Lohit* (สายโลหิต; *Blood Line*), she aimed to bring a comedic tone to her historical novel, in line with her writing style. She found that King Narai had been underrepresented in Thai historical novels, which made room for reinterpretation. She started to plot and research *Buppe* in 2006, finishing writing in 2009. The character of Ketsurang, the time-travelling archaeologist, is based on the author herself. Ketsurang’s questions, her funny behaviour and positive perspective toward Ayutthaya are all elements of Rompaeng (pers. comm., April 2022).

Ayutthaya in *Buppe* is thus depicted as a flourishing international trade centre and a melting pot of nationalities. The main setting is downtown Ayutthaya, where Ketsurang lives in a high-ranking bureaucrat’s house, near the grand palace and many other key places recorded in history. Sharing Rompaeng’s archaeologist background, Ketsurang’s views and comments illustrate what those places are and how are they important. Her journey through the city is thus the author’s way of reviving Ayutthaya’s glorious past. Moreover, key historical and national heroes and heroines from the areas of diplomacy, literature and culture appear in Ketsurang’s circle, taken from royalist-nationalist history. In her household, she lives with Phra Horathibodi, her fiancé’s father, and she sees him writing the textbook as well as composing *Samuttakhot Khamchan*. Kosa Pan, who is close to Phra Horathibodi’s family, is also described as an adorable figure.

Kosa Pan’s trip to France forms of the essential events of *Buppe*. Dech, Ketsurang’s fiancé, is also present on this diplomatic journey. Initially, Dech works as a servant in the royal court as *Muen Sunthon Thewa* (หมื่นสุนทรเทวา) before being promoted to be *Khun Si Wisan Wacha* (ขุนศรีวิศาลวาจา).⁴ The latter title is derived from the role of the third-ranking diplomat recorded as accompanying Kosa Pan’s trip to France. Even though this *Khun Si Wisan Wacha* is mentioned in only a few sentences in the chronicle (*Prachum Pongsawadan* 1963, 20:143), this unnamed officer person becomes the main character of Dech, son of Phra Horathibodi. More importantly, Rompaeng establishes this character as Ketsurang’s fiancé to link him to a sense of individual and national pride. The text describes Dech striving to learn French because ‘[t]he mission I will be dispatched for is for the affairs of the state. Whatever I can do on behalf of the country I shall do to the best of my ability’ (Rompaeng 2020, 334).⁵ Here, Ketsurang

⁴These are noble titles awarded by the king to his servants for their duties and their career achievements. There are eight ranks, from lowest to highest: *Nai, Pan, Muen, Khun, Laung, Phra, Phraya, and Chaophaya*.

⁵Quotations are taken from the English translation of *Buppe* by Nopamat Veohong (published in 2020 as an e-book via Amazon Kindle and Meb). Some spellings in the novel are different, such as the names Dej and Kate (Dech and

reflects, ‘no wonder Siam’s diplomatic mission has been highly regarded up until her modern times’ (Rompaeng 2020, 334). National pride is thus embodied through romance in their relationship.

Thus, royalist-nationalist history in *Buppe* is narrated positively as a glorious past, rather than focusing on the theme of national crisis at the hands of an external enemy. In contrast to typical historical novels, which largely address wars with Burma and the fall of the Ayutthaya (Apirak 2004), *Buppe* deploys romantic and comedic elements, and Ketsurang is the key character for this. Coming from a different time and behaving differently from Ayutthayan people, she uses modern slang words, confusing everyone. While Dech is portrayed as a well-mannered member of the elite with prudent characteristics, many scenes portray the clash of their personalities, causing both comedy and romance. Notably, this logic of romance is seen through the modern-day norms of monogamy. While Ayutthayan men were allowed to have more than one wife, Dech is ‘unlike most men of this era, he doesn’t see servants and slaves as roadside flowers that he can pick and discard at will’ (Rompaeng 2020, 277). So, the love affair of Ketsurang and Dech follows the modern logic of monogamy, reflecting Thai middle-class ideology.

Political conflict in Buppe and the politics of Thainess after the 2006 coup

Aside from the nostalgic notion of a peaceful and prosperous past, *Buppe* exposes polarization among royal court bureaucrats along with the tensions caused by foreign powers looming over Ayutthaya. Indeed, this section of the narrative sheds light on contemporary Thai politics, especially the anxiety of the loss of the nation and the need for a national hero. After the romantic relationship between the main couple stabilizes, a disruptive event leads Ketsurang and her fiancé to address this change. Rompaeng deploys the revolution in 1688 led by Phra Phetracha (พระเพทราชา), a high-ranking and powerful bureaucrat in King Narai’s court, at the climax of *Buppe*.

Phra Phetracha is another real figure who appears in this novel in Ketsurang’s close circle. Dech also positions himself closely to Phra Phetracha and his son, Luang Sorasak. While *Buppe* depicts several loyal Thai bureaucrats, a foreign bureaucrat, Constantine Phaulkon, is opposed to this group. Phaulkon is able to dominate the king and gains rapid promotion to the highest rank within Ayutthaya nobility with the title *Chao Phraya Wichai Yen* (เจ้าพระยาวิไชยชนทร). *Buppe* portrays Phaulkon’s character trying to convert Ayutthaya into a Christian kingdom with support from the French government. Due to King Narai’s fatal illness, he rises in power. However, Phra Phetracha, both in the novel and in history, seizes power and sentences Phaulkon to death. After this success, Phra Phetracha becomes king, eliminating the power of the Pasatthong dynasty and establishing the house of Banpluluang, the last dynasty of Ayutthaya.

In *Buppe*, Dech is a member of the Phra Phetracha movement. At first Ketsurang views Phra Phetracha as ‘reprehensible’, but later she considers him ‘an intelligent, thoughtful man ... he is a rather open-minded and generous man’ (Rompaeng 2020, 484). The text shows Ketsurang’s reluctance to get involved as ‘she and her husband

Ketsurang), and Ayodhya (Ayutthaya). To avoid confusion, I change the spelling of these specific names from the translation to align with Royal Institute Romanization, yet retain other spellings from Nopamat’s text.

are part of history in the making. They are part of the Siamese noblemen making an unrighteous claim to power' (Rompaeng 2020, 647–648), but Dech explains that

in this place and time, our life is to survive and keep our family intact, even if we are somewhat tainted. The country needs strong leadership. I think Phra Phetracha is a strong leader. (Rompaeng 2020, 648)

Dech is promoted after the coup and at the story's conclusion he becomes *Phraya* (พระยา), which automatically makes Ketsurang a noble lady, titled *Khunyng* (คุณหญิง). In this respect, Phra Phetracha becomes a national hero, while Phaulkon is considered a national enemy. Because the so-called junta side maintains and restores the peace and order of Ayutthaya against the 'bad and un-Thai politician', *Buppe* sets the moral standard to be the protagonists aligned with Phra Phetracha. This enables them to live successfully.

This portrayal resonates with contemporary middle-class expectations and anxieties. During the aftermath of the 2006 coup, the anxiety of the loss of the nation and the notion of a good person from Buddhist concepts featured strongly and are clearly presented in the narrative of *Buppe*. Moreover, the political conflict in the late King Narai's reign in *Buppe* mirrors the conflict between the Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts that disrupted national unity and order. Specifically, *Buppe* was completed around 2009–2010, a critical period when the Red Shirt protestors gathered before eventually being suppressed by the government. The notion of 'civil war' and 'internal threats' clearly led to an anxiety about the loss of the nation.

Generally, the anxiety of the loss of the nation recurs during periods of crisis. According to Shane Strate (2015) the master narrative of Thai history revolves around 'the lost territories' (เสียดินแดน; *sia dindaen*) resulting in 'national humiliation' as with the crisis of Siam/Thailand being forced to give 'their land' to others. This 'chosen trauma', as Strate calls it, is repeated frequently to arouse nationalism in critical periods. This plot has repeatedly appeared in Thai historical popular media and novels. For instance, the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 was the dominant period depicted in historical novels from the 1930s to the 1990s (Apirak 2004). Apart from the shared themes of threat and unity, the concept of a 'good person of Ayutthaya' (คนดีศรีอยุธยา), who sacrifices for the nation, religion and the king, indeed the dignity of Thainess, is needed to engender hope after crisis (Apirak 2004, 127). Colonial threat is another key topic referenced in Thai historical media. *Tawiphop* is a prominent example that tells of the Franco-Siamese crisis in 1893. Natthanai (2010) argues that the 2004 adapted film version (*The Siam Renaissance*, dir. Surapong Piniakhar) presents it as a counter-colonial narrative in response to the 1997 economic crisis. The film echoes royalist-nationalist history by recalling Thainess for those Thais who have forgotten and to heal the sense of loss.

Although the crisis in the aftermath of 2006 did not stem from an external enemy, the anxiety of loss was heightened by the country's lack of unity (ขาดความสามัคคี; *khat khwam samakkhi*). Moreover, the conflict between the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts centred around demonizing the 'Other.' This can be seen by the political chaos led by the Red Shirts in 2009–2010 that caused anxiety for Thais, especially those living in Bangkok, as they faced the prospect of 'civil war' in the centre of the country. A fire during this chaos in the heart of Bangkok recalled the historical burning of Ayutthaya by Burmese soldiers. Following this logic, the discourse of 'burning the nation' (เผาบ้านเผาเมือง; *phao-ban-phao-mueang*) recurred, blame shifting from an external enemy to an

internal threat – people who destroy their own nation. Given that lost territories can arouse a sense of Thai nationalism through the act of land taken by the Other, this discourse worked after the 2006 coup for the anxiety of loss of the nation from the enemy within.

When a national enemy appears, national heroes are needed. The discourse of calling for a good person or *khon di* was widely disseminated during the late 2000s. The post-coup government appointed by the junta launched many campaigns asking people to ‘be a good person’. Indeed, this was in opposition to the actions of the Red Shirts who were perceived as Thaksin’s supporters. Hence, a ‘good person’ is not merely a simplistic term, but is tied to many ideologies such as royalism, nationalism and Buddhism, and resonates with the widespread perception of King Rama IX. According to Baker and Pasuk (2022, 265–268), when the threat of communism declined, the King’s image moved from rural to urban sites, touching more on the middle class in cities. His birthday speech became a sermon focusing on unity and being a ‘good person.’ Subsequently, the King embodied morality, hope, unity and national stability. Accordingly, during the polarization period, ‘[h]is moral authority became available for others to claim and deploy’ (Baker and Pasuk 2022, 327). Royalists repeatedly quoted the king’s speech of 1969 which referenced a ‘good person governing the country’ (ให้คนดีปกครองบ้านเมือง; *hai khon di pokkhrong ban mueang*) and this became a major political campaign by anti-Thaksin movements (Prajak 2022). This ideal is reflected in *Buppe* when Ketsurang tells Phra Phetracha what a ‘good’ leader means. She ‘is so reminded of King Bhumibol in her present time. She is so overwhelmed by his magnanimity that she continues citing endless examples of the Ten Kingly Virtues’ (Rompaeng 2020, 483). This scene clearly demonstrates the role model of a ‘good person’ and the expectations of Phra Phetracha, the soon-to-be national leader, corresponding with the current logic of a ‘good person.’

The hybrid body and hybridized Thainess: the negotiation of Thainess and the embodiment of a ‘good/bad’ person

Buppe is an excellent example of how good and bad people are embodied in the representation of Thainess. I use the framework of the embodiment of the nation which governs individuals’ bodies and minds as well as the intersection of gender to analyse three characters: Ketsurang, the female Thai protagonist; Mali, a female *luk-khrueng*; and Constantine Phaulkon, the *farang* male antagonist.

The embodiment of Thainess: nation, body and mind

The body here is not merely seen in ‘nature’ as a living organism, rather it represents cultural production. ‘Embodiment’ is ‘the practices we perform in order to accomplish various tasks ... is the product or effect of training and discipline’ (Turner and Zheng 2009, 7). For Paul Bowman (2019, 75), embodiment is conceived as ‘embodiment of’, which is.

the embodiment of *something else*; specifically, as the performative and interpretive elaboration of something *other* than is received, perceived, felt, constructed, believed, assumed or otherwise lived as being either an aim, ideal, desire, objective, fantasy, or as a norm, or indeed as the warding off of something undesired or feared.

In short, bodily representation is governed by the ideologies and cultural practices of a particular space and time. Accordingly, when the nation is embodied, there are norms under which individuals should behave and think, which can be derived from political ideology and religious discourse. In the case of Thainess, the governing of the body and mind is crucial to present the notion of a good person and positive images of Thailand.

To illustrate, the body is a site used to imagine what the nation looks like and who belongs to it, following the notion of the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2016). The individual body narrates the national story and vice versa since the embodiment of one body is inscribed by meanings from national construction. Following this perspective, when Siam was mapped, the geo-body of the nation was imaginable (Thongchai 1994). In other words, the notion of ‘nationhood’ emerged when the boundary of Siam was drawn on a map to identify what Siam looked like and what was not included in the nation. Here, the metaphorical term ‘geo-body’ shows a relationship between the geographical nation and the human body. As the nation is abstract, whereas the body is tangible, imagining the nation usually calls for the use of metaphors from human organs (Turner and Zheng 2009).

The embodiment of a Thai individual is thus linked to national representation. The ‘regime of images’, as proposed by Peter Jackson (2004), is an essential tool for the Thai authorities since image (ภาพลักษณ์; *phap lak*) or self-representation to other people is a serious concern among Thais. The authorities try to control images of the country by governing the individual body. Jackson refers to the Thai term *kala-thesa* (กาลเทศะ, time and place) – knowing how to do the right thing at the right time and in the right place – and highlights two key domain spaces: public and private. In the private domain, one can do anything one wants, whereas there are many restrictions on how to behave in the public domain. When a transgression occurs in a public space, it disturbs the stability of society and can come under legal prohibition. A concept of what is ‘appropriate’ (เหมาะสม; *mosom*) is very important in the regime of images.

Buddhism is also critical for regulating the behaviour of a ‘good person’ in the Thai context. The body and mind in the Thai context cannot be separated: the physical body is only one component embodying one person since there are ‘inner elements’ reflected through speech and the mind, as represented through the Thai idiom ‘the mind is master, the body is servant’ (จิตเป็นนาย กายเป็นบ่าว; *chit pen nai kai pen bao*). Through logic, the inner mind is more important than the outer body; at the same time, the physical body can expose the individual mind. Thus, if a person speaks good words and does good things, it means that he or she has a good mind.

In short, the embodiment of a good Thai person connotes the peace and order of the Thai nation. The practice of the individual body then is governed by a regime of images especially in the public sphere to show positive representations of the country. Furthermore, Buddhist logic comes to shape the meaning of a good person, which is not only presented through a good body but also a good mind. These accumulations come to shape desirable and undesirable definitions of Thai individuals against the backdrop of the post-2006 coup reflected in *Buppe*.

Becoming a perfect person: the good modern mind in the traditionally beautiful body

The body of Karaket is a key feature in *Buppe* to illustrate the story's main theme. The shift between one mind and another body not only emphasizes the morality of a 'good mind' in a controlled body, but also implies in a social aspect the hybridity between traditional and modern elements in one body. This perspective, I argue, responds to the definition of the perfect person who protects the past while also being knowledgeable about modern society.

Firstly, the possession by Ketsurang's spirit is a process of transforming Karaket's body to become a good person in both body and mind (งามทั้งกายและใจ; *ngam thang kai lae chai*). The construction of Ketsurang's body in the present time is as a fat woman,

she feels abject and self-resentful every time she looks at herself in the mirror. In her reflection, all she sees is her obesity with the layers of fat covering over any other appealing personality traits. (Rompaeng 2020, 21)

When Ketsurang first meets Karaket's spirit at an Ayutthaya temple, she is not only scared but also stunned by her idealized beauty. Ketsurang contemplates, '[i]f only she could be half as slim, half as pretty, and half as graceful as this spirit of the past, she would live happily ever after and die in peace!' (Rompaeng 2020, 27). Suddenly, Ketsurang dies in a car crash and her spirit travels back to possess Karaket's body, which she had envied.

Nevertheless, this pretty and slim body does not showcase ideal beauty. Ketsurang 'had the chance of a lifetime, getting into gorgeous and slender body, but she must face the responsibility of solving this inextricable problem that comes with her body' (Rompaeng 2020, 98). Karaket had undergone various difficulties before passing away from her body, leading everyone to hate or fear her. Accordingly, Ketsurang must prove herself throughout the story to change the minds of people around her so they accept her. Here, Buddhist didactics come into play with her new identity. She does many kind and empathetic things for others, especially her servants, and is sincere to those around her without jealousy or anger. These personality traits, which stand in contrast to the old Karaket, lead people to gradually see her in a positive light.

The crucial success of the transformation from the 'bad Karaket' to the 'good Karaket' is apparent in the happy ending between her and Dech. The story hints that Dech suspects that Karaket's body does not belong to the same mind. When Ketsurang saves him from drowning in a river, Dech sees the overlapping image of another person in Karaket's body. This makes him gradually believe that Karaket's body and mind are not the same. Finally, when they marry, the couple joke that if Ketsurang becomes fat, Dech might lose interest in her. Conversely, he responds,

[w]hat is inside you is what binds me to you, not outer appearance ... [e]ven if you look different and not as attractive as how you look now, fatter than I can wrap my arms around, to me you shall be my Karaket always. (Rompaeng 2020, 627)

This scene is crucial as Ketsurang is now satisfied with her life and has resolved her inner conflict. In short, this ending highlights the possibility of 'love destiny' leading to true love based on the individual mind and not the physical body.

The combination of Karaket's body and Ketsurang's mind can be interpreted as a hybridization of tradition and modernity. Though Ketsurang travels to the past to be a part of traditional Thainess, she retains her modernity in her ways of thinking and self-confident behaviour. Initially, others regard her as an 'insane lady' (แม่หญิงวิปลาต; *mae ying wipalat*), for instance when Ketsurang helps Dech after his near-drowning by performing CPR in public. Witnesses perceive this practice as kissing in public and a female playing an active role. As a result, she is shamed for being a dishonourable woman making Dech's family lose their dignity. Thus, Dech's family decides to speed up the wedding to restore honour to themselves and Ketsurang. In another scene, Ketsurang goes to a Chinese market, known as a site for prostitutes, without permission. Here, she challenges norms again by entering a controversial place. Additionally, she uses her skill in martial arts to protect herself and fight off men who try to abuse her, actions that cause gossip and lead to the family losing dignity again, resulting in her punishment.

These examples can be called a 'clash of manners and civility' (Jory 2018) – constructing the deviation from social norms through Ketsurang who transgresses the *kala-thesa* or proper manner of a noblewoman (กุลสตรี; *kunlasatri*). A good Thai woman is generally portrayed as a devoted mother, wife and daughter who is calm, with sweet manners and a desexualized body. A bad woman is depicted through sexual desire and bad manners. In literature and media, such women are demonized through the depiction of female ghosts and monsters or as prostitutes who must be controlled to maintain social order (see further in Chutima 2020; Harrison 1999; 2017; Jiratorn 2019). Ketsurang contravenes the image of good, desexualized female bodies by involving the prostitute and actively kissing a man when she performs CPR. Linking back to the regime of images, Ketsurang challenges the traditional Thai regime of images associated with a noble lady, especially in the public domain. Accordingly, it causes trouble since 'losing face' is a crucial concern for elites like Dech's family.

Nevertheless, *Buppe* negotiates the meaning of a good woman. Ketsurang's body becomes a site of negotiation as her good mind and her ability to serve political and social needs are highlighted. While her good mind changes people's perceptions of her, Ketsurang's academic abilities, unique among Ayutthaya women, make her a valuable figure both in the household and for the country. For instance, realizing that the health and hygiene practices of Ayutthaya are behind the standards of her time, Ketsurang instructs the servants to make a hand-made water filter. When unclean water causes an epidemic in Ayutthaya, hers is the only household not affected. Ketsurang thus becomes a heroine by saving the lives of individuals through her 'modern innovation.'

Furthermore, Ketsurang's modern knowledge leads her to become a respected woman when the authorities recognize her abilities and allow her to take part in the male domain by serving the state. For instance, she becomes a French tutor to Ayutthaya's diplomats such as Kosa Pan and Dech. This shows Ketsurang's shifting role as she can be a high-ranking officer's teacher and the only woman who can insert herself into the patriarchal bureaucratic system. Moreover, her knowledge of Thai history is clear and allows her to warn people about future events. When she is proven right, her social status is raised. In other words, modern knowledge presented through Ketsurang is accepted and praised under the condition that it serves national interests and restores peace and order. In

short, the modern mind thus comes to negotiate the meaning of a ‘good’ woman in traditional Thainess, and it is praised as it supports Thainess.

The hybridization of Ketsurang’s mind in Karaket’s body can be explained by Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity (2004). As a postcolonial scholar, Bhabha views cultural hybridity as a ‘third space’ challenging authenticity and subverting dominant power. Cultural hybridization opens an ‘in-between’ space where the power structure is contested and negotiated. Adopting Bhabha’s concept, the heroine’s body is an ambivalent site since it represents neither Karaket nor Ketsurang, neither tradition nor modernity, and neither past nor present. Consequently, the female body opens a chamber for the redefined identity of Karaket/Ketsurang along with the reconstructed meaning of a good woman. In this sense, *Buppe* can be seen as part of Thai society governing the individual body and emphasizing the higher status of the mind controlling the body. It also demonstrates the desirable perspective that if a good mind meets with a beautiful body, the result will be a perfect person. This body becomes a space where traditional Thainess and modernity encounter each other. The heroine’s body sheds light on an ideal person who can protect Thainess as well as adopt modern knowledge to be part of Thainess.

In brief, Ketsurang in Karaket’s body is an example of the notion of ‘hybridized Thainess’ within which a good Thai person should be hybridized between traditional ways such as Buddhist perspectives and modernity, especially from Western knowledge. Indeed, it supports the Thai authorities who have good intentions for the nation by protecting it from threats.

‘Luk-khrueng’ loves the nation: an ideal hybridization of foreignness and Thainess

Buppe contains another crucial female character, Mali (มะลิ) or Marie Guimar, who is not Thai but strongly supports Thainess. This fictional character is taken from a real-life figure who is renowned as the inventor of a famous Thai dessert. *Buppe* embodies Mali as an ideal person from her *luk-khrueng* body and Thai mind who can adopt Thainess as well as adapt to a foreign civilization.

Luk-khrueng normally refers to Thai-*farang* progeny; the term can be traced back to the Ayutthaya period, but the discourse surrounding *luk-khrueng* has risen since the Cold War, when there was an increase in the number of *luk-khrueng*, or ‘GI children’, due to US air force bases in Thailand. *Luk-khrueng* became dominant figures in mainstream media from the 1980s onwards, including successful actors and contestants in beauty pageants (Pattana 2010, 71–72). Interestingly, *luk-khrueng* became sites of modernity that reflect both Thainess and an international outlook. In other words, the embodiment of *luk-khrueng* responds to the notion of an ideal Thainess which is modern and yet retains its Thai characteristics.

This perception can be found in the depiction of Mali. Thais commonly recognize Marie Guimar through the noble title Thao Thong-kip-ma (ท้าวทองกีบม้า) as she created a Thai dessert. While her race was not recognized as Thai, her entire life was closely tied to Ayutthaya, especially her contributions towards Thai identity (see further in Sansani 2003), and this feature includes her as part of the Thainess which is portrayed in *Buppe*. Rompaeng herself admires this historical figure and wanted to promote her role in the story, so appropriated her to create the character of Mali using historical

sources (Rompaeng, pers. comm., April 2022). She is regarded as Ketsurang's friend before she marries Phaulkon. Notably, the novel consistently refers to her with the Thai name Mali, meaning jasmine, instead of her foreign name.

The regime of images of decent Thai woman depicts Mali's body in the private space as a good daughter and wife and in the public space as a good foreigner who supports Thainess. In private, she sacrifices her personal wishes to enter a loveless marriage with Phaulkon, and she behaves as a decent wife despite never loving him. Her character is not sexualized, in contrast to her husband and his concubines. Her original dessert also closely ties her to the duties of a good wife in the domestic space: for example, in one scene Ketsurang visits Mali after she has married Phaulkon, and Ketsurang sees her creating the new dessert. This scene demonstrates the role of Mali as an ideal wife and also reinvents the origin of a popular Thai dish for contemporary readers.

Yet this scene also demonstrates a clear willingness to use a Thai person to interplay with Thainess. When Ketsurang sees desserts that differ from present-day versions, she tries to guide the recipes or their names. She accidentally takes part in adapting the features of a dessert, leading Mali to say 'without you, I would not have made this beautiful-looking dessert', making Ketsurang 'blush with embarrassment. Has the accident resulting from her gluttony spurred the now well-known shape of this famous dessert?' (Rompaeng 2020, 442). This scene, therefore, combines the ideology of a decent woman and Thainess embodied in Mali, while Thainess is still preserved for Thai individuals like Ketsurang to fulfil. It also connotes that Thai identity is not a wholly foreign invention but is a process of hybridity between Thai and foreign cultures.

Regarding the public domain, Mali clearly exemplifies the definition of a good foreigner. She shows sincere love and loyalty to Ayutthaya in contrast to Phaulkon; he poses a threat to the nation whereas she is the ideal person to support Thainess. Mali's body and mind relate to being a good foreigner who is 'grateful to the land' (รู้สึกแผ่นดิน; *ru khun phaendin*). The text repeatedly emphasizes that she appreciates and is happy living in Ayutthaya, which she regards as her homeland. Therefore, when she marries Phaulkon, whom she suspects of not being loyal to Ayutthaya, she tells Ketsurang, 'although I am marrying a *farang* under French extraterritorial jurisdiction, I was born and raised in the land of the Siamese. I shall never forget it and betray Siam' (Rompaeng 2020, 366).

Although Mali does not love Phaulkon, she declares 'if love can change my husband's mind on his ambitious plan, I shall try my best' (Rompaeng 2020, 514). She tries to convince her husband to also be 'grateful to the land' asking him,

do you not know that Ayutthaya is so good to us? The King is generous and broad-minded. He does not discriminate against *farangs* and expatriates whatever their faiths are. [...] we expatriates should be grateful to this land of our refuge. (Rompaeng 2020, 560)

Finally, when Phaulkon's movement begins to seize power over Ayutthaya using the French military, she reiterates clearly, 'Siam has given you refuge and livelihood. Were they not enough for you, Phaulkon? ... France is not your birth country, nor the land of your refuge' (Rompaeng 2020, 629–630). Interestingly, Phaulkon changes his mind at the last minute. Despite this not changing his ending, the transformation is a key element enacted under the guidance of Mali.

The construction of Mali is comparable to the contemporary Thai context. Globalization now allows ethnicities and marginalized groups in Thai society to express their identity, yet the expectation of loyalty to the king and the nation remains. This discourse, I argue, stems from the concept that the happiness of refugees in the kingdom is caused by ‘royal protection’ and relying on the king’s *barami* or ‘Bodhisombara’ (พึ่งพระบรมโพธิสมภาร; *phueng phraborom phothisomphan*). This concept is repeated in the royalist-nationalist history to illustrate how Thai kings have treated foreigners and refugees in the country by rescuing them from migration to become happy citizens in Thai society. The country enables them to live peacefully and gain prosperity as well as granting liberty for every belief system. So, this concept not only stresses the power of the kings as lords of the land, but it also calls for these groups to be ‘grateful to the land’, which also implies gratitude to the king.

Similarly to the case of Mali, mixed ethnicities in Thailand during the mid-2000s, especially Sino-Thai individuals and families, became dominant. For instance, among the Yellow Shirt movement, they used the phrase ‘Overseas Chinese love the nation’ (ลูกจีนรักชาติ; *luk chin rak chat*), stressing that even if their ancestors are migrants, they are ‘grateful to the land’ as Thais. Many other ethnicities joined conservative movements underlining their backgrounds, such as hill tribes and Muslim Thais, who proclaimed their loyalty through the phrase ‘Muslim Thais love the King’. Adopting the ‘Other within’ term from Thongchai (2000), Mali is a fictional character taken from the master ideology about the ‘good Other within’, as she is an ideal person mixing Thainess and foreignness and repeating the grand narrative of Thainess. This contrasts with the embodiment of her husband, Phaulkon.

‘West within’ as a threat to Thainess: the clash between Thainess and the un-Thai

Constantine Phaulkon stands in extreme opposition to Ketsurang and Mali. In historical terms, his life and role appear widely in Thai and foreign records due to his dominant role in Ayutthaya’s court during the late seventeenth century. Originally born as Greek, the young Phaulkon travelled to many places before settling down in Ayutthaya. In this kingdom, he fortunately met powerful authorities leading to his role in King Narai’s court. His background and experience as a *farang* voyager responded to the needs of the court at that time and satisfied the king. He became the first foreigner to serve the Ayutthaya court, and rapidly grew in his career from being *Luang*, to *Phra*, to *Phraya* and finally *Chao Phraya*. He was recognized as the close and favourite servant of King Narai, whom he could meet at any time, and he influenced many policies of the period (Baker and Pasuk 2017; Nidhi 2006). On the one hand, Phaulkon is viewed as a self-made person who excelled beyond his peers, especially other Thai bureaucrats. On the other hand, he is a controversial figure whose actions and motivations can be interpreted as corrupt.

As a fictional character, *Buppe* firstly portrays Phaulkon as an antagonist who is a racialized ‘Other’ as a *farang*; his body and mind are then opposed to the notion of a ‘good’ person, which breaks personal relationships and threat to social order. In the private sphere, *Buppe* adds that he is an unfaithful husband, unlike the protagonist couple and the faithful Mali. Phaulkon has many minor wives, and his relationship

with Mali is not smooth or founded on love. Since middle-class expectations of monogamous and romantic relationships are key features for contemporary readers, Phaulkon and his counterparts break this expectation. As a *farang* he may be excluded from Ayutthaya's norm of polygamy, yet he exploits this norm to have many wives. Moreover, when he falls in love with Mali, he tries to coerce her to become his wife instead of pursuing a romantic affair. Thus, the novel reveals their rough relationship after their wedding.

More importantly, Phaulkon is depicted as a successful and smart person, though he is a corrupt bureaucrat who betrays his own lord for his personal aims. His first appearance in the novel follows him and his companions to a market where they meet Mali, whereupon he shows his power to bully local people as a favourite of the king. Moreover, he competes with other bureaucrats, angering the Thai elites, who feel they have lost their dignity to the *farang* – which suggests a notion of the inferiority of Thais against the West. For example, Ketsurang realizes that Phra Phetracha ‘does not harbour a treasonous plan. He seems to hate the *farangs* to the bones’ (Rompaeng 2020, 478).

Moreover, *Buppe* describes Phaulkon's hidden plan to convert Siam into a Christian territory under France's power, ‘once this mission is accomplished, he is sure to have glory, material and immaterial, showered on him by the grace of God’ (Rompaeng 2020, 421). Although he claims it is for God, the novel contrasts him with his wife, who is a good Christian, saying, ‘my husband has no true faith in God. He merely acts out of greed for power and wealth’ (Rompaeng 2020, 511). During the climax of *Buppe*, Phaulkon's hidden agenda leads Ayutthaya to chaos while King Narai is suffering from a deadly illness. When Phaulkon is eliminated by Phra Phetracha, it marks the resolution of the conflicts, and the story has a happy ending. This could be interpreted as a solution to protect the kingdom from an immoral and corrupt bureaucrat, and the legitimacy of the coup could not be accepted without a ‘bad person’.

The embodiment of these negative representations of the *farang* body can be tied with the ‘Occidentalism of Siam/Thailand’ – to draw on Pattana Kitiarsa's term – a ‘historically and culturally constructed way of knowing, dealing with, criticizing, condemning, consuming and imagining the West as a powerful and suspicious Other’ (Pattana 2010, 58). In seventeenth-century Ayutthaya, Pattana (2010, 63) contends, the *farang* was a ‘suspicious stranger’ before anti-foreign sentiments increased during the 1688 revolution, and Phaulkon is a key figure of xenophobia. Conversely, Phra Petracha, according to Baker and Pasuk (2017), is viewed as a nationalist hero to suppress this threat. Critically, the use of the *farang* body not only presents a threat to Thainess in Ayutthaya but also mirrors the ideology of the post-2006 coup. Arguably, the *farang* body encapsulates the anxiety of losing Thainess and presents the opposite definition of a ‘good’ person.

Buppe voices anxiety toward the West by mixing it with colonial threat. Phaulkon's attempt to turn Siam under France mirrors royalist-nationalist history's focus on lost territories, especially the Franco-Siamese Crisis in 1893. In *Buppe*, Dech tells Ketsurang, ‘[n]either the French nor the British mean well for us ... [t]hey only come in to take advantage for themselves ... all the *farangs* may intend to colonise Saim, every one of them’ (Rompaeng 2020, 286). This discourse of colonial threat embodies Phaulkon as the ‘Other’, initially from his race but more essentially through the ‘un-Thai’ nature of his corrupt mind. Interestingly, Phaulkon is not the only foreign bureaucrat in Ayutthaya. His portrayal conflicts with that of Yamada Nagamasa, a Japanese bureaucrat

who had earlier served the Ayutthaya court. The film *Yamada: The Samurai of Ayothaya* (2010), released in the same year as *Buppe*, depicts Yamada as a Thai national hero with desirable Thainess in both body and mind. His foreign body conforms with Thai soldiers in line with rules around tattoos and haircuts, his mind is royally-aligned, and he makes sacrifices in the war for Ayutthaya (Pasoot 2015; Veluree 2015). Conversely, though Phaulkon in *Buppe* tries to conform to Thainess, his intentions are not guided by loyalty to the country, and he attempts to make the country lose its independence.

This anxiety of the loss from *farang* merges with the perception of ‘smart but corrupt and unroyal politicians’ during political polarization. Phaulkon’s corrupted mind fixated on ‘selling the nation’ (ขายชาติ; *khai chat*) in his un-Thai politician body resonates with the undesirable person in the conservative wings. Thus, the embodiment of Phaulkon as the ‘West within’ shows what is un-Thai; it mirrors royalist-nationalist narratives concerning ‘the lost territories’, since he is a national enemy within who can ‘sell the Thai nation.’

Conclusion

Against the unstable political situation following the 2006 coup, *Buppe* reimagines the glorious past; political conflict ends through the coup of ‘good people’ coming to ‘restore the nation’ from ‘bad people’ who are trying to ‘sell the nation.’ The mainstream royalist-nationalist history along with the ‘lost territories’ discourse and Buddhist didacticism becomes part of the definition of the good individual used to maintain Thainess. The body and mind of the main characters in *Buppe* are sites for the embodiment of idealized Thainess and threats against Thainess. Female bodies in *Buppe* imply ideal Thainess as the notion of a good individual which operates within the female characters. Interestingly, the definition of a good Thai woman is contested and negotiated. The female body of the Thai heroines as well as the *luk-khrueng* reflects ideal Thainess in contemporary Thailand, in which a person must retain the traditional ways of Thainess while adapting themselves to modernity from foreign cultures, especially the West. In contrast, the *farang* body encapsulates a fear of loss of the nation as well as a threat to Thainess. The depiction of the *farang* is an accumulation of many definitions of a ‘bad person’ and is posited as an absolute opposition to Thainess as ‘the Other.’

Buppe thus projects an idealized notion in which so-called hybridized Thainess maintains traditional Thainess with modernized foreignness. In fact, this ideal can be viewed as the legacy of colonial traits in Siam wherein Bangkok elites must modernize while trying to construct Thainess. At the same time, it elucidates the results of globalization making Thainess hybridize into a transnational phenomenon. Evidently, the role of knowledgeable women contests and negotiates the honourable values of Thai women. *Buppe* voices this issue against the patriarchal norms of Thai society. However, the royalist-nationalist notion from the grand narrative of Thai history remains strong. Thainess here still revolves around royalist-nationalist history which serves the contemporary Thai crisis. The ‘un-Thai’ notion then remains as a threat to warn Thais in contemporary times not to be too ‘foreign’ and forget the core value of Thainess. In other words, embodying Thainess in *Buppe* attempts to portray a hybridized Thainess like gender roles and modernity, yet there is unchallengeable Thainess especially through nation,

religion and the king. Critically, these come to play a central role in defining a ‘good/bad’ Thai against the post-coup backdrop and political polarization.

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