Building a Human Border: The Thai Border Patrol Police School Project in the Post–Cold War Era

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Building a Human Border: The Thai Border Patrol Police School Project in the Post–Cold War Era

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Enjoying royal patronage, the school project of the Border Patrol Police contributed to the construction of a "human border" for Thailand during the Cold War. The project continues to have an impact on current struggles for identity among the country's highland minorities. Historical and anthropological analysis suggests that the hierarchical integration of the border population into the Thai nation resulted in a tension between the national and ethnic identities of the country's highland minorities. This tension challenges the sustainability of the modern nation-building effort of the Border Patrol Police and the Thai royal family.

Keywords: Thai Border Patrol Police, Border Patrol Police schools, nation-building, national identity, ethnicity, highland minorities, human borders, Cold War.

Sinae: Teacher, what is your nationality?
Teacher: Thai.
Sinae: What is your ethnicity?
Teacher: Thai.
(pause)
Sinae: Then, which language do you use when you talk with your family?
Teacher: I speak Lisu with my family.
Sinae: So you are Lisu, right?
Teacher: No, we are all Thai.[1]

I looked again at the list of teachers and the accompanying biographical information that I received from the Border Patrol

Police (BPP) headquarters for Region Three. The biographical data for the teacher identified him as Lisu, but it took me a while to hear that word from him. In fact, this was one of my many repetitive wrestling matches with Border Patrol Police teachers during interviews conducted in Border Patrol Police schools in Northern Thailand during 2010–11.

In 1997, the Thai Border Patrol Police launched a project under the auspices of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn called the Border Patrol Police Heritage Teachers Program.[2] Under the auspices of this programme, the BPP began recruiting applicants among the graduates of BPP schools and training them to become teachers in its schools. Since the launch of the programme, the BPP had trained more than 800 BPP heritage teachers (Border Patrol Police Headquarters for Region Three 2011, p. 13). When I was conducting field research in Thailand on the history of the BPP and its civic action in Northern Thailand, I came to learn about this royal project and thought that, by interviewing heritage teachers, I could gain a better understanding of the impact of the BPP schools project on the lives of highland minorities over the course of the past half-century. I requested a list of heritage teachers from the headquarters of BPP Region Three in Chiangmai and began travelling to BPP schools in Northern Thailand to interview them. The conversation above was typical of the exchanges that began interviews with BPP heritage teachers. What, exactly, is strange about this conversation? More precisely, what is the tension between nationality and ethnicity[3] reflected in this exchange? And how does such an exchange help us understand the nature of modern nation-building processes in Thailand, particularly during the Cold War period, and their impact up to the present day?

This article briefly examines the Cold War nation-building processes undertaken by means of the schools project of the Thai Border Patrol Police. It seeks to understand the role of the project in the creation of a sense of Thainess among the highland minorities in remote border areas of Northern Thailand today. The article has two principal aims.

First, by briefly examining the characteristics of the BPP schools project, it examines the process of matching the borders of Thailand with the borders of Thainess, the process of building a "human border" at the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. Discussion of the process of building a human border highlights the hierarchical nature of ethnic and geopolitical relations strengthened through processes of nation-building during the Cold War period.

Second, drawing on the history of the BPP's Cold War nation-building project and interviews with the BPP teachers, this article examines the ambiguities of national identity among the border people of Northern Thailand in the present day. By investigating the process of building a human border of Thailand throughout the Cold War period and its impact on the present confusion regarding national identity, it highlights the emergence of a sense of belonging to the modern nation-states and the conflict between that sense and ethnic identity among the border people. The article thus seeks to broaden understanding of the nature of struggles for identity among the previously stateless border people in the post–Cold War era.

The Border Patrol Police School Project

BPP accounts of the origins of the BPP schools project go as follows. In patrolling border areas in the early 1950s, BPP officers learned that school-age highland minority children were illiterate and had no chance to receive formal education. Feeling compassion for these children who did not have the same educational opportunities as the Thais in the lowlands, the BPP began to teach them the Thai language and from the mid-1950s extended its efforts to the construction of schools in remote border villages (Border Patrol Police Headquarters 1996*a*, p. 37).

In contrast to this seemingly innocuous narrative, the establishment of BPP schools in fact had important strategic objectives. When discussing the historical background of the BPP schools project in the mountainous border areas of Northern Thailand, Police General Suraphon Chulaphram, a pioneer in the BPP's civic action

programmes and also a former commander of the BPP, recalled that in the early 1950s the Thai state was not aware of the importance of surveilling and controlling the highland minorities in these remote areas. During the Pacific War, both the French and the Vietnamese mobilized ethnic minorities as their foot soldiers in the conflict with Japan, and these forces were very fierce (ibid., p. 50). The experiences of the BPP's founding father during the Pacific War led the BPP to identify the highland minorities as a potential threat to national security because external enemies could easily manipulate them. Further, their ability to operate effectively in the jungle meant that their military strength would not be negligible.

These perceptions ultimately provided the impetus for sending forces from the Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU), a paratrooper unit of the BPP, to the country's northern and northeastern borders to collect information about the condition of border populations, particularly ethnic minority groups. During the survey trip, one of the leaders of the PARU team proposed building Border Information Centres to facilitate intelligence activities. The first Border Information Centre was built in Tak province on a historic route of passage between Thailand and Burma in late 1955 (Nakhon 1987, pp. 209–10). As soon as the Border Information Centre building in Tak was finished, PARU members went out to search for children in the villages. At first, they could find only three or four children willing to reside with strangers. The PARU provided accommodation for these children in the Border Information Centre in Tak and began to teach them the Thai language. Soon, the number of students had increased to two hundred.

In the same period, before BPP and PARU survey teams left for the border areas, they were instructed to teach Thai in order to facilitate communication with minority peoples (Border Patrol Police Headquarters 1996*a*, p. 52). By teaching highland children to speak Thai, the BPP and PARU were able to gather intelligence about border villages. At the same time, by providing this service to these children, the BPP and PARU members believed that they would become a "bridge" between the police force and villagers.

In short, by teaching highland minority children, the BPP hoped to achieve three goals. First, its units would be able to communicate with the children in Thai and thus could conduct intelligence-related tasks more effectively. Second, its friendly relationship with school children would reduce their parents' fear of the BPP's presence in the border areas. Third, by demonstrating its dedication to enhancing the welfare of highland minorities, the BPP would gain minority villagers' trust and be able to set up surveillance systems in their communities with less resistance. If these objectives were accomplished, the BPP could inspect highland areas freely, and, more significantly, the villagers would willingly provide information about what was happening in the remote mountains of Northern Thailand. These objectives led the BPP to open its first official BPP school on 7 January 1956 in Chiang Khong, Chiangrai province. In the first year of the official schools project, the BPP built a total of eighteen schools along Thailand's borders in the North and Northeast of the country (Border Patrol Police Headquarters 1956, pp. 10–13).

Initially, the BPP's school-building project was called "Schools for Hill Tribes and People in Remote Areas" (Border Patrol Police Headquarters 1956; Border Patrol Police Headquarters 1975, pp. 230–36; Manas 1974, p. 1).[4] It is worth noting that this name for the project indicates that, along with others living in remote areas, the BPP specifically targeted highland minorities. According to Police Lieutenant Colonel Manas Khantatatbumroong, then commander of the BPP's Development Subdivision, this name drew a distinction between Thai citizens who inhabited remote areas and had thus been deprived of educational opportunity and other welfare services from the government on the one hand, and, on the other, "hill tribes". The latter were "minority groups who had migrated from the Union of Burma and the Kingdom of Laos, and had dispersed in Thailand about a hundred years ago.… Their villages were located in the hills higher than three-hundred meters above sea level, and that made them the hill people" (Manas 1975, p. 1). Among the problems that Manas associated with hill tribes were opium cultivation and addiction, slash-and-burn agriculture, the tribes' migratory nature

and, most importantly, their lack of awareness of the authority of the Thai state (ibid., pp. 1–2). His description makes clear that, from the beginning of the schools project in the mid-1950s, members of the BPP were mindful of the differences between Thai citizens and highland minorities, particularly as these differences related to national identity and a sense of belonging (Manas 1965, p. 41). Moreover, while the remote location of Thai citizens in the border areas explained their lack of the opportunity to enjoy modern facilities, the same remoteness was taken in the case of the hill tribes to symbolize their indifference to progress and development. Further, the BPP ascribed these problems to the minority groups' otherness and ignorance. In this context, the goal of building BPP schools for the highland minorities was to open a door to modern Thailand by encouraging them to have their children educated according to the Thai curriculum.

General Sarit Thanarat's coup of September 1957 temporarily halted the BPP's school-building efforts. The Ministry of Education and the interior ministry's Department of Public Welfare withdrew financial and material support for the BPP schools. In fact, the BPP itself was almost disbanded because Sarit's military government was suspicious and jealous of the force, which the CIA had formed and trained and which Sarit's political rival Phao Siyanon had run. The BPP had to survive this life-or-death crisis by demonstrating its contribution to national security through enhanced civilian police work. Consequently, the BPP initiated a number of civic action projects from 1957 onwards. Furthermore, the unit increased its efforts to build close relationships with highland villagers during this period. Officers learned local dialects, volunteered to assist community projects in remote northern villages and fraternized with villagers as much as possible.

The number of BPP schools also increased dramatically in the years following the 1957 coup. While the Border Patrol Police headquarters was dissolved by an order dated 27 December 1957, between Sarit's first coup in September 1957 and second coup in October 1958, sixty-five new BPP schools were built. After the 1958

coup, the BPP managed to build some sixty more schools before Sarit subordinated the BPP to the command of the Provincial Police in 1960 (Border Patrol Police Headquarters 1996*a*, pp. 448–64; Border Patrol Police Headquarters 2006, pp. 353–57, 364).

In the early 1960s, both foreign and Thai institutions offered new opportunities to the BPP to recover some of its lost stature, acknowledging the BPP's continuing efforts to develop and expand civic action efforts in border areas. The first of these opportunities came in mid-1961 via sponsorship of the BPP's civic action work from the United States Operations Mission (USOM), the Bangkok arm of the United States Agency for International Development. When the USOM's Public Safety Division decided to make civic action programmes a central component of its counterinsurgency strategy in the early 1960s, it could easily make use of the BPP's presence, mostly as teachers in BPP schools, in remote areas of Thailand (Lobe 1975, pp. 341–42; Lobe 1977, p. 82).[5] Witnessing the rapidly growing tension in rural areas from the early 1960s onwards, the USOM created a separate budget to support the BPP's civic action programmes under the project title "Remote Area Security Development" in 1965 (Coffey 1971, p. 4). Work to build BPP schools continued alongside other Remote Area Security Development programmes throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s. As a result, from 1962 to 1968, the BPP constructed over two hundred schools and distributed USOM-supplied tools, seeds, livestock and medicine to highland villagers (Lobe 1975, pp. 341–43; Lobe 1977, p. 82).

In addition, the Thai monarchy began to patronize the BPP's civic action programmes starting in the early 1960s. Alongside the king's and queen's support for BPP schools, the primary royal patron of the BPP's civic action programmes was Princess Mother Sangwan, the mother of King Bhumibol. Through her endeavours to bring development and modernization to highland minorities, the princess mother styled herself the royal mother of the marginalized. Thus, she is often referred to as *mae fa luang*, a name sometimes rendered into English as the "royal mother from the sky" and one

that extols her dedication to integrating highland minorities into the Thai nation (Layton 1968, pp. 6, 20). In fact, the princess mother's work for the hill people could not have occurred in the absence of the BPP's civic action programmes in Northern Thailand. The BPP schools project helped further her major interest in education and sanitation for people in the remote areas, and in the process of expanding her royal projects in the border areas the princess mother became the most influential royal patron of the BPP and of highland minorities in Thailand. Indeed, it is not difficult to find photographs of the princess mother dressed in BPP fatigues accompanied by members of the BPP during her visits to the border villages to attend opening ceremonies for BPP schools, to console members of the BPP stationed in remote bases and to distribute goods and medicine to highland minorities. According to an official BPP account, the princess mother visited a total of 140 BPP schools to attend opening ceremonies and distribute school supplies during the 1963–91 period (Border Patrol Police Headquarters 2000, pp. 209–23).

In fact, after the late 1970s the princess mother made virtually no visits to remote areas of Thailand. However, as she deeply cared about the BPP and highland minority people, the princess mother asked Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to visit BPP schools whenever she travelled to border areas (Winyu 1996, p. 94; Border Patrol Police Headquarters 2006, p. 114). Thus, Princess Sirindhorn has continued the Princess Mother's work with the BPP, and she has initiated a number of her own royal projects in the BPP schools since 1980. At present, about 180 BPP schools have been a part of Princess Sirindhorn's "Development of Children and Youth in the Remote Areas" project, which covers the fields of nutrition, public health, higher education, natural resources and the environment, vocational training and community development.

Schools of Nation-Building

The preceding narrative of the history of the Border Patrol Police schools project illuminates the wider historical context of postcolonial

nation-building, which coincided with the Cold War struggle in Southeast Asia. In brief, political infighting and clashes arose among politically heterogeneous anti-colonialist groups in Southeast Asia during the early postcolonial period. Although Siam may not have been directly colonized, it feared both British and French influence. These powers often clashed with the Siamese kingdom over matters relating to territorial borders during the colonial period, as exemplified in the Paknam Incident of 1893. At the same time, they exercised great economic influence over Siam from the late nineteenth century onwards.[6] Academic discourse on semi-colonialism and crypto-colonialism have contributed to deconstructing the conventional myth of the never-colonized Siam by disclosing the multilayered yet subtle Siamese process of internal colonization in response to growing aggression on the part of Western imperialist forces during the colonial and postcolonial periods.[7] In particular, Michael Herzfeld's study of what he calls "crypto-colonialism" calls attention to Siamese or Thai elites' acceptance of a binary between colonizers and colonized imposed by the European and American imperialists and these elites' resultant, relatively early, submission to the global Cold War order (Herzfeld 2002, pp. 901, 919–21).

Additionally, amid escalating tensions among anti-colonial movements, Thailand witnessed communist groups in neighbouring countries — including Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Malaya/Malaysia — seeking to extend their political influence across their borders with Thailand. Worse yet, the regional decolonization process invited the global superpowers to compete for political ascendancy in the region. In this respect, not only fear of communist penetration but also the regional, territorial and political changes produced by the decolonization process concerned Thai elites from the beginning of the Cold War. It seemed inevitable to those elites that, if left unchecked, growing communist domination and the global superpowers' interference in the region would result in eventual changes to Thailand's borders.[8] Thus, building an integrated and independent nation-state became a survival strategy for Thailand against the historical backdrop of the intensifying Cold War in the region.

Reflecting the "Cold War anxiety that was attached to *chao khao* identity" (Jonsson 2005, p. 45), a number of historical and anthropological accounts show the changing perspective of the Thai state, from the 1960s onwards, on the presence of highland minorities in the border areas (Bowie 1997, pp. 55–111; Jonsson 2005, pp. 44–72; Toyota 2005, pp. 115–18; Duncan 2004, pp. 7–8; Gillogly 2004, pp. 120–31). Both the USOM and the Thai royal family began their sponsorship of the BPP's civic action programmes during this same period. Before the USOM officially initiated its rural development projects in Thailand, it hired Oliver Gordon Young, the son of Baptist missionaries who had served in the country, to conduct research on the highland minorities of Northern Thailand. This research eventually became a widely cited ethnographical study entitled, "The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand: A Socio-Ethnological Report" (Young 1961). Soon, the Siam Society asked for the USOM's permission to reproduce Young's report, and thus the second edition of the report came out as the first monograph of the Siam Society in 1962 (Young 2011, pp. 227–28).[9] Jeffrey Race's article "The War in Northern Thailand" essentially confirmed what Young had written about the rapidly increasing attention of the Thai government to the highland minorities in the remote border areas of the North, as the they came to constitute a potential source of threats to Thailand's security in the eyes of the American and Thai governments in the early 1960s (Race 1974). The work of Robert Hearn documented the ensuing Thai effort to relocate and contain these ethnic minorities as a part of Bangkok's anti-communist counterinsurgency strategy (Hearn 1974). It is noteworthy that each of these accounts frequently refers to the BPP's civic action programmes in Northern Thailand as a part of the Thai state's general policy towards the ethnic minorities. However, these early accounts often overlook two significant elements: first, the objectives of the BPP in undertaking civic action programmes targeting the border people and, second, the multifaceted impact of the remote border area development projects undertaken by the BPP and the Thai royal family on the broader process of Thai nation-building during the Cold War.

Against the historical backdrop of the dramatically intensifying global and local Cold War struggles, Thai elites aimed to build a consolidated and independent nation-state that could effectively repel both communist and superpower interventions. In this respect, the BPP's civic action programmes among the highland minorities in the remote border areas, and especially the schools project, came to constitute concrete steps towards actualizing the vision of a territorially and psychologically consolidated Thailand by ensuring the national loyalty of border populations.[10] In what way, then, did the BPP schools project contribute to the building of the Thai nation in the Cold War era?

From the mid-1950s, the first priority of the BPP schools project was teaching the Thai language to highland people. As discussed above, highland peoples' proficiency in Thai was vital for communication between the BPP and the inhabitants of remote villages. That communication greatly facilitated the collection of intelligence relating to border security. At the same time, the spread of the "language-of-state" represented a prerequisite in building a centralized state (Scott 1998, p. 72; Anderson 1991, p. 84). By enhancing Thai-language proficiency among highland minorities, the BPP could establish state authority and police surveillance in remote areas. The BPP also believed that, if members of highland minorities could speak the Thai language, they would gradually gain a sense of belonging to the Thai nation because, as Benedict Anderson argues, language is one of the clearest attributes of national identity (Anderson 1991, pp. 40–41, 84–85). In this vein, American linguist David Bradley asserted that more accessible and regularized language education for the highland minorities would allow Thailand to gain the "gratitude and increased loyalty of the traditional minorities; a better-informed and more easily administered population in various border regions; and greater unity in the country as a whole" (Bradley 1985, p. 99).

In addition, the BPP and USOM believed that if the BPP schools could successfully undertake rural development projects in the border areas and stabilize political and socio-economic conditions,

they could diminish the external communists' pool of potential recruits and curtail the expansion of communism in undeveloped areas.[11] They thus expected the BPP schools project to play the role of a development agency in remote areas and, to an extent, to offset the absence of governmental organizations and programmes devoted to rural development in such areas (Office of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Projects 2000, p. 6). At the same time, the schools served as centres for the propagation of "development for security" programmes to the marginalized.[12] As one BPP officer noted, the short-term objectives of BPP civic action centred on development, but the long-term goal was to "make the hilltribes to be civilized [*sic*]" (Ministry of Interior 1962, p. 3). Once hill tribe villagers communicated to their BPP teachers a desire to modernize their communities following the example of lowland Thai villages, the school would become the centre of local development.[13]

The final objective of the BPP schools project lay in the construction of a national security state in the border areas. First, all teachers in the BPP schools have been members of the BPP themselves; the schools have served the role of police station from their inception to present. In addition to teaching children in the schools, the BPP carried out civic action in such areas as provision of medical services and occupational training in agricultural skills and husbandry. In this way, BPP teachers could build friendly relationships with villagers, and those relationships would serve a central mission of the BPP by increasing the flow of intelligence from the schools. When a teacher in a BPP school learned of a security-related problem near the village in which he taught, he relayed this information to BPP area commanders. Then, the regional division commander would send a public relations team to survey the conditions of affected communities and people and to build rapport with the villagers. Soon, a BPP development team would construct a school building and accommodations for BPP teachers in the village that reportedly had security problems. Once the school building was prepared and the teachers opened a class for the children, the BPP assumed that

the BPP officers-cum-teachers could stay in the village without the villagers' suspicion. In this way, the new BPP school became an actual operational base in the effort to guard national security on the frontiers of Thailand.

BPP schools have played multiple roles in modernizing and integrating the highland minorities up to the present. These roles have included teaching the Thai language, introducing Thai modernity to minorities, propagating the development imperatives of the border people and ensuring border security through the presence of state agents — the BPP teacher in this case. All of these activities served one ultimate goal, to build a "human border" along the territorial border. Since it operated on the frontiers of Thailand, the BPP was aware that the territorial boundary defined by mountains and rivers was porous, and practically meaningless to border people. In addition, highland minorities lived in poor, underdeveloped conditions that could provide a haven for external enemies like communists during the Cold War period (Ministry of Interior 1962, p. 17). Worse yet, the degree of their sense of belonging to the nation could make of the highland minorities who lived on the northern borders of Thailand either friends or enemies of the state. In this respect, two elements underpin the Cold War nation-state that the BPP has helped build through its schools project. One is the expansion of state surveillance on the frontiers, with the goal of defending Thai territory. The other is the spread of national loyalty and Thainess among the border people, with the goal of constructing a human barrier at the state's boundary. By integrating the border populations into the Thai nation, the BPP could narrow the gap between the "border of Thailand" and "border of Thainess" and thus contribute to building a modern territorial nation-state (Thongchai 1994, pp. 3–6, 169–70).

However, this integration process during the Cold War period did not necessarily take place on an equal basis. The BPP taught about the superiority and progress of the Thai nation, placing ethnic minorities at the bottom of a vertical order. Ethnic minority students were to follow their teachers' instructions. This vertical relationship allows us to identify the BPP schools' programme of integration

as a process of assimilation, as did the American anthropologist who identified the BPP's civic action programmes as "a conscious instrument of gradual assimilation" (Pierson 1967, p. 859). From a historical perspective, the hierarchical ethnic relationship has been a theme in the development of the Thai state since the colonial period. In his study of ethno-spatial differentiation in late nineteenth-century Siam, Thongchai Winichakul argues, "since its inception Siam has always been a hierarchical domain, differentiated not only by class and status, but by ethno-geography as well" (Thongchai 2000*a*, p. 41). In this sense, Siam's civilizing process was its rulers' project to "reaffirm their superiority, hence justifying their rule" (ibid.). Similarly, Mika Toyota contends that the process of creating Thainess constructed a dichotomy of lowland Thai (*mueang*) and upland jungle (*pa*) people that eventually "justified Bangkok officials in looking down on 'non-Thai others'" (Toyota 2005, p. 115). Interestingly enough, twentieth-century Thai authorities reiterated this late-nineteenth century Siamese rulers' mission of civilizing the "wild people" (*chao pa*). When she first came to know about the BPP's schools project in 1963, the prince mother became "deeply involved in their endeavors to open a path to civilization for remote border villages" (Layton 1968, p. 49).

Thongchai also suggests that the nineteenth-century Siamese elite perceived highland minorities or wild jungle people as untameable and impossible to civilize (Thongchai 2000*a*, p. 49). In similar fashion, Hjorleifur Jonsson argues that Thai use of the term *chao khao* ("hill tribe") in the mid-twentieth century signified the highland minorities' "unruliness, illicit practices, and a threat to the country's borders" (Jonsson 2005, p. 45). In this context, the BPP took a step to "civilize" these wild people because the changing geopolitical environment in the region made it impossible for Thai authorities to let them remain wild and untamed. It was believed that the highland minorities' ignorance and indifference to the Thai nation and territorial state would threaten national security (Duncan 2004, pp. 7–8; Gillogly 2004, pp. 120–23, 140–41). In this respect, the crucial importance of BPP schools to the Cold War nation-building

project lies in their encouragement, if not enforcement, of highland minorities' assimilation, as they came to use the Thai language and to admit the superiority of the Thai nation. Furthermore, the mission of modernizing the wild people during the Cold War period signifies attempts by the Thai authorities to establish "proper" ethnic and power relations between Thai(ness) and Other(ness).[14]

In a wider geographical context, this process paralleled a process of building consolidated but hierarchical nation-states on the part of the Free World during the Cold War. The United States endeavoured to bring modernization and liberal democracy to the former colonies of Southeast Asia during the immediate postcolonial period. This effort derived from the assumption that these newly independent states were "unstable and uniquely vulnerable to pressure and subversion" and therefore, in 1959, U.S. Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon confirmed that "[t]heir very weakness invites intervention" (Shafer 1988, p. 82). Christina Klein argues that the U.S. government's developmental assistance and aid to Thailand "established a tutelary relationship between the two nations, with the U.S. assuming the position of teacher and guide to modernization, and Thailand the position of eager students" (Klein 2003, pp. 197–98).

The same rationale that had justified the American intervention in Asian countries was reproduced among Thailand's leadership, as is clear in the princess mother's conviction that the BPP schools should bring "these outlying peoples into the national structure of progress" (Layton 1968, p. 7). This conviction indicated the inability of the ethnic minorities to civilize or modernize themselves. The presupposed tutelary relationship between the United States and Thailand and the hierarchical ethnic relations between the Thai and ethnic minorities within Thailand were mirror-image vertical relationships, both serving the building of the hierarchical order of the Free World.

The BPP school-building project sought to build a consolidated Thai nation-state by safeguarding Thailand's territorial borders and by securing the loyalty of border populations that would eventually constitute a human border for Thailand. This human border could be

far more important than the territorial border because the borderlines drawn through jungles and rivers are not easily enforceable in the face of transnational migrants and external enemies. The most workable and efficient way to protect the territorial border was thus to have people who identify themselves with the Thai nation on the frontiers of Thailand. They can deflect any communist propaganda and infiltration on the part of an external enemy. The second underpinning of the Cold War nation-building process embodied in the BPP schools project was to maintain the superiority of the Thai ethnicity over that of every minority. This two-pronged agenda illustrates the nature of the modern Thai nation. Although borrowed from the nineteenth century, that nature was further articulated through the Thai state's population control policies and its extra-bureaucratic development projects — particularly those of the BPP and the royal family — throughout the Cold War period. In the end, the integration of highland minorities into the Thai nation during the Cold War was a process of taming and assimilating the wild. But, despite their growing national loyalty, these ethnic minorities were only accepted at the bottom of the hierarchical domain of Thainess. They could remain, at best, students of Thai modernization.

The Students of Thai Modernization Today[15]

These students of Thai modernization are now returning to BPP schools as teachers. Former students in BPP schools selected for the "Border Patrol Police Heritage Teachers Program" participate in two separate training programmes, lasting about a year in all. The programmes cover policing and teaching. Once they complete both training programmes, the BPP heritage teachers usually return to their own villages and begin teaching in BPP schools. If the BPP has transferred their former schools to the Ministry of Education, then BPP heritage teachers are generally assigned to different villages populated by people from the same ethnic group. On settling into the schools to which they are assigned, BPP heritage teachers are to carry out regular BPP missions such as teaching, offering basic

medical services, providing agricultural training under the auspices of royal projects and ensuring village security through routine police work.

BPP heritage teachers usually encounter numerous problems with members of the BPP as well as with the local villagers when they start working as teachers in BPP schools. The sense of ethnic hierarchy still exists between the regular BPP and the heritage teachers. During my interviews, the BPP heritage teachers, after some hesitation, showed dissatisfaction with their relationship with other BPP teachers. Many times, the regular BPP teachers still treated the heritage teachers like children or like their students, thus denying the heritage teachers the respect that they felt they deserved. BPP teachers on the other hand expressed uneasiness with the heritage teachers, as they regarded the latter as neither police nor teachers. While the regular members of the BPP have completed comprehensive police training and received additional training in teaching, BPP heritage teachers received mixed, and thus seemingly insufficient, training to become BPP teachers. As mentioned earlier, the teachers in BPP schools are members of the BPP; they are to carry out regular police work like other Thai police. For the regular members of the BPP, police work is more critical than teaching. They often doubted whether heritage teachers could provide appropriate security services as effectively as ordinary Thai police.

In addition, although the heritage teachers spoke Thai fluently, regular BPP teachers considered their non-native accents and pronunciation unsuitable for people giving Thai language instruction to highland minority children.[16] My own experiences during interviews with both the regular BPP and heritage teachers have left me with mixed memories of these two groups. I conducted all the interviews in central Thai, and, more often than not, the regular BPP teachers corrected my non-native Thai in the same way that they corrected that of their students in the BPP schools. On the other hand, the heritage teachers usually seemed at ease with me, a foreigner speaking Thai with a non-native accent and pronunciation because, I assume, they felt a sort of affinity with non-natives. Normally I requested private interviews with individual teachers so that the interviewee

could answer my questions freely, but in informal conversation over meals or at school events with mixed groups of regular BPP teachers and heritage teachers, the latter tended to speak less or offer only brief answers to my questions.

Tensions also mark relations between the heritage teachers and the local villagers. When I asked the heritage teachers how they felt about working in their birthplaces, they reported mixed feelings. Most of the time, they started by emphasizing their pride in assisting village development and enhancing the education of village children, often members of their families and their relatives. As our interviews progressed, they often complained that even villagers did not treat them with respect. This lack of respect could be partly due to a sort of jealousy of heritage teachers' having become Thai government officials, which ostensibly means that they have become fully Thai. Also, having known these teachers since they were children, villagers could not give the trust and respect that the heritage teachers expected for being police officers and teachers in BPP schools. Those heritage teachers whom I interviewed had a difficult time explaining their complex relationship with the villagers because, in my understanding, they did not want to speak directly about problems that seemingly derived from local villagers' jealousy or bitterness over an alleged betrayal of their ethnicity.

Although they may sound trivial, the heritage teachers' complaints spoke to the broader issue of current struggles over ethnic identity in the border areas. One example of the contradictory nature of Thai policies in this area is Princess Sirindhorn's promotion of ethnic culture as a part of Thailand's heritage, an effort that is supposed "to encourage many minority people to keep their language" (Office of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's Projects 2008, p. 14). Ironically, however, there is a prohibition on speaking ethnic-minority languages in BPP schools. Students and teachers in those schools must speak Thai at all times.[17] This constraint actually produces a dilemma among the teachers and students. It is natural that the children in the school feel more comfortable speaking their own mother languages with the teachers and that they thus often find the BPP heritage teachers more friendly and approachable than the

other BPP teachers. Since the regular BPP teachers must enforce the rule requiring that Thai be spoken in BPP schools, they feel alienated from the students and also from villagers in general. In a sense, these Thai BPP teachers are actually the minority in the villages in which they serve. Whereas heritage teachers share common ethnic and cultural backgrounds with the villagers, the regular BPP teachers are from lowland villages or towns and thus unfamiliar with highland minority culture and society. Moreover, as the Heritage Teachers Project continues to grow, the number of BPP heritage teachers is increasing. In 2010 heritage teachers numbered 152 out of a total of 507 BPP teachers in the 61 BPP schools in Northern Thailand; almost thirty per cent of BPP teachers in the schools are heritage teachers.[18] Predictably, the gulf between the regular BPP teachers and heritage teachers will widen if recruitment under the auspices of the princess's project continues. In the end, the latter will become the majority among the teachers in the BPP schools.

More importantly, the previously less visible conflict between ethnic-minority identities and Thai national identities has gradually become apparent, as the problems faced by heritage teachers in their relations with regular BPP teachers and villagers suggests. BPP schools were expected to build a human border for Thailand by modernizing the ethnic minorities in the border areas and by instilling in them a sense of belonging to the superior Thai nation. In a superficial way, the BPP schools project has achieved that objective. Ethnic-minority villagers now know that they are governed by the Thai government. They are willing to send their children to Thai schools so that they can enjoy better opportunities for employment or pursue higher education, like the BPP heritage teachers (Mukdawan 2007, pp. 12–13). Several recent ethnographical accounts similarly make clear that the state- or private-driven development projects and the process of national integration more generally do not always incur the disfavour of Thailand's ethnic minorities (Jonsson 2005, pp. 9–15; Yoko 2006, pp. 399–407; Brosius 2003, pp. 78–92; Duncan 2004, pp. 16–18). More often than not, as Toyota contends, members of ethnic minorities themselves "voluntarily" move into the dominant national

group "in order to acquire the status that comes with membership of the dominant group" (Toyota 2005, p. 134).

Nevertheless, ethnic-minority villagers in Northern Thailand have also become gradually aware of the necessity to defend their ethnic identities from outsiders. I visited a BPP school in a village in Mae Fa Luang district in Chiangrai province composed of Chinese, Akha and Shan people. Next to the BPP school stood a Chinese school with a signboard giving its name in Chinese characters. I asked the BPP schoolmaster about this school and he told me that, after classes ended for the day, a large number of the students from his school went to the Chinese school to learn their mother language.[19] Usually I stayed overnight in BPP schools during my visits and could therefore meet the heritage teachers' families and children if they resided in the same village or in teachers' housing in the school compound. The heritage teachers normally spoke their ethnic languages with their parents and children. When I asked the heritage teachers whether they wished to send their children to the BPP school, they unanimously said "yes", because they could thus help their children to become fully Thai and the children would have a better future than other uneducated, non-Thai villagers. At the same time, the heritage teachers still wished to teach their own languages and traditions to their children so that they would not be completely alienated from the village community. From their experiences, they knew that becoming fully Thai could have a negative impact on their sense of ethnic belonging at the local level as well as on their relationships with fellow villagers.[20]

These mixed feelings among BPP heritage teachers and ethnic-minority villagers forced me to rethink their difficulty in comfortably residing within the borders of Thailand and of Thainess. In a sense, it is more convenient for ethnic-minority people to be officially designated as Thai nationality, so that their lives within Thailand's territorial boundaries could be stable and secure. On the other hand, members of these ethnic minorities come to realize that, even if they accept Thai nationality and have the sense of belonging to the Thai nation, they are still regarded as a lower-status group within

the nation, one that requires constant instruction and guidance from "truly" Thai people (Toyota 2005, pp. 131–32). Mukdawan Sakboon highlights the contradictory quality of the modern Thai nation-building processes through case studies of Thai local governments issuing citizenship to ethnic minorities. She argues that the national integration policy "alienates instead of incorporates [*sic*] the hill ethnic minorities, as local administrators politicized, ethnicized and racialized the issue of citizenship and other related rights pertain[ing] to it" (Mukdawan 2007, p. 19).

In similar fashion, Joseph Harris, in his examination of the differential effects of universal healthcare reforms on citizens, migrants and stateless people, concludes that the Thai state's integration efforts have been constrained in "uneven inclusion". Harris brings up the system of assigning numbers on identity cards, which differentiates between the ethnic-minority people and other citizens with the result that state officials can easily discern Thai and non-Thai people (Harris 2013, p. 113; see also Toyota 2005, pp. 120–23).

In sum, the Thai people still maintain their superiority in ethnic relations within the domain of Thai nationalism and the Thai state bureaucracy. Consequently, ethnic minorities are now well aware of the fact that even if they have been assimilated by the BPP and other governmental organizations, they are still integrated into the Thai nation-state on an unequal basis and still considered inferior people in need of constant instruction by the Thai nation-state.

My fieldwork afforded numerous opportunities to observe the way in which the highland minorities were treated as a subject of "instruction" by lowland Thai people. In the cold season, various governmental and non-governmental organizations from major towns donate winter jackets, socks, gloves, blankets and medicines to the BPP for distribution to villagers in the border areas, urging potential donors to "help the brothers and sisters who suffer from cold".[21] In a charity event at one BPP school, the representative of a donor group was invited to speak to the Lisu villagers. The representative brought to the podium a first-aid kit that would be donated to the villagers and began to explain how to use its contents in Northern

Thai dialect. The representative took out a bandage and explained, "[T]his is not for decorating a face. It is to cover the wounds." Then the representative took out an antiseptic solution bottle and said, "[D]o not eat! You cannot eat!" The representative's friendly gesture made other donors and BPP commanders laugh, but none of the villagers or BPP heritage teachers responded to her.[22]

In a similar vein, I repeatedly heard complaints about BPP community projects that illuminated the assertion of Thai superiority over ethnic minorities. BPP schools provide everything for the students and their parents, from school uniforms to textbooks, pencils, milk and, sometimes, even free accommodation for the students who live far from their schools. A number of BPP teachers and civic action officials that I interviewed commented that villagers have become increasingly dependent on BPP schools.[23] When the BPP decides to transfer a BPP school to the Ministry of Education, villagers often oppose the decision because sending their children to schools under the jurisdiction of the ministry would cost more. In this sense, one BPP heritage teacher's criticism of the role of BPP schools in community development is very telling. The teacher said, "the villagers are treated like children and thus the school gives everything for free. In that way, the villagers do not have the opportunity to develop on their own."[24]

These examples hark back to the vignette of one of my continuous verbal wrestling matches with BPP heritage teachers. Among the several Thai terms that denote "ethnicity" and "nationality", I chose to use *chueachat* for the former and *sanchat* for the latter in my interviews with BPP heritage teachers. This choice was based on the fact that these were the terms used in the sections of the BPP schools project's official reports giving biographical information on students and heritage teachers. In conventional Thai usage, *chueachat* may have a range of meanings, from "race" or "ethnic origin", while *sanchat* is used for "nationality" or "citizenship" (Mukdawan 2007, pp. 5–6; Thongchai 2009, pp. 795–96). The term *chueachat*, which is also the translation for "race" in English, is often used to denote ethnicity as well, because the definition and perception of race in Thai are not based on physiological or biological concepts. Rather,

the concept of ethnic differences and prejudice in Thai thinking is cultural and spatial (Thongchai 2009, pp. 794–96; Thongchai 2000*a*, pp. 40–41, 56–57; Jonsson 2005, pp. 5–6; Toyota 2005, p. 115). The conflicting concepts of "ethnicity" and "nationality" require consideration of not only their literal or academic meanings but also agendas in the politics of distinction of those who use these terms. The objective of Thai members of the BPP in creating a distinction between ethnicity and nationality derives from their general perception of ethnic minorities, particularly in Northern Thailand. They still do not regard members of this latter population as genuinely Thai. On the other hand, BPP heritage teachers believe that they have become fully Thai in the senses of both ethnicity and nationality, since most of them were born in Thailand, speak Thai fluently and have obtained Thai citizenship as well as official government positions. Therefore, the necessity of drawing a distinction between ethnicity and nationality is a Thai agenda, not the interest of members of the ethnic-minority groups who now permanently inhabit the border areas of Thailand. Because of this conflicting perception of the necessity of making a distinction, struggles for identity among Thais and ethnic minorities continue to the present day.

After interviewing over 120 BPP teachers, my thoughts about the current identity politics among the BPP heritage teachers and border villagers eventually reached a conclusion. To live within Thailand's modern territorial state, members of ethnic-minority groups must obtain Thai nationality and at the same time adopt Thainess — the attributes and behaviours that render them part of the Thai people. However, they are well aware of the fact that even if they accept the Thai national identity imposed by the Thai state, they will never be placed in the same column with ethnic Thais. On the contrary, the existence of highland minorities within Thailand's territorial boundaries will be continuously exploited as evidence of the Thai state's benevolence towards previously stateless people. In addition, despite the seemingly benign campaign on the part of the Thai government and Princess Sirindhorn to promote ethnic diversity in Thailand, these ethnic minorities in the border villages remain under constant state surveillance and guidance, as their loyalty to the Thai

nation is still not perceived as genuine. The highland minorities may constitute the human border of Thailand, but the Thai state's uneven inclusion of these border people may prove to be a source of disintegration in the future.

Looking Ahead

At the charity event mentioned above, students from the BPP school received sweatshirts from the Bangkokian donors. A girl wearing a traditional Lisu dress came to me with a wry expression on her face after receiving the gift. I asked her if she did not like the pink sweatshirt that she had received. She replied, "there is no Mickey Mouse on this shirt. Mickey Mouse shirts are a big hit in Korea now!" Soon I learned that this Lisu girl was a huge fan of Korean popular singers because she was able to watch Korean programmes on pirated VCDs that her friends and families bought from the Mae Sai market on the Thai-Burmese border. While waiting hour after hour for the people who had come from Bangkok to distribute supposedly modern goods to the non-modernized border villagers, this girl expected to get something special or at least something trendy that could impress her friends in the village. However, she did not receive anything that she desired and thus came to me to complain that these Bangkok people did not know what was popular among members of the younger generation. Then she added, "Korean singers are cooler than Thais. I want to be a Korean like you."[25]

National identity may be a mere passport that acknowledges where we bureaucratically belong and that indicates to which countries we can travel to and to which countries we cannot. After a half-century-long effort to assimilate ethnic minorities in the border areas into the superior Thai nation, the government can now issue Thai identification cards, although not to everyone and not on an equal basis. However, access to Thai nationality may still not be able to convince people in the borders of either the superiority of the Thai nation or its benevolence to the formerly stateless people. As it turned out, obtaining Thai nationality and becoming Thai through the building of a human border has created more elaborate

ladders of ethnic and national identities to climb. The Lisu girl who complained about her new sweatshirt may pursue the path that the BPP heritage teachers have taken and become fully Thai, but she knows that Thailand may not be the best country in the world and that Bangkok people may not be the most advanced or modernized. Worse still, since her Thai identity card indicates that she is not a full Thai citizen, why would she bother to be loyal to the Thai's land?

The human border of Thailand that the BPP and the royal family strove to build at Thailand's international boundary during the past century ironically led ethnic-minority villagers in the border areas to realize that, if they were to remain at the bottom of the hierarchy of ethnic relations within the Thai nation, then — as the case of the Lisu girl mentioned above illustrates — there is no need to admire the seemingly less modern Thais more than any other ethnicity or country. In this respect, the question of ethnic and national identity is not only a matter of whether one lives in Thailand or not. It is also a matter of whether one wants to live like a Thai or not. Granting Thai national identity does not guarantee national loyalty among the border people. By contrast, the hierarchical assimilation of highland minorities within the Thai nation-state may in fact foster a process of disintegration, which may ultimately leave the Thai nation encircled by a human border of non-Thai citizens. In a sense, the efforts to build a human border for Thailand among the highland minorities have left Thainess in competition with various ethnic and national identities, in which boundaries are still porous and becoming a brick in Thailand's human border remains optional. Until today, the BPP under Princess Sirindhorn's patronage continues to build schools in the remote border areas of Thailand, but whether the endeavour to build a human border at the territorial boundary will ensure the successful consolidation of the border population with the Thai nation in the post–Cold War era remains in question.

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NOTES

1. Interview with BPP heritage teacher in a BPP school, Mae Suai district, Chiangrai province, 5 July 2010.
2. In Thai, *khrongkan khru kharuthayat tamruat trawen chaidaen*.
3. In Thai, *sanchat* and *chueachat*.
4. In Thai, *rongrian chao khao lae prachachon klai khamanakhom*. This name for the project was used until the late 1990s. It is not clear when the Border Patrol Police changed its name to "Border Patrol Police Schools" (*rongrian tamruat trawen chaidaen*), but it was most likely in the early 2000s.
5. Thomas Lobe's doctoral dissertation and monograph provide rich detail on the aid and assistance to the Thai Border Patrol Police and its civic action programmes extended by the United States Agency for International Development. See Lobe 1975 and 1977.
6. On the Paknam Incident, see Baker and Pasuk 2005, pp. 58–60. For the British colonial influence on the Thai political and economic sphere, see Hong 2004.
7. For further discussion on semi- and crypto-colonialism, see, for example, Thongchai 1994, 2000*a*, 2000*b*; Herzfeld 2002; Hong 2004; Chaiyan 1994; Jackson 2004; and Harrison and Jackson 2010.
8. One example of the Thai military government's growing concern over the possibility of rearrangement in the early Cold War years is the original name of the Border Patrol Police. While the CIA and American advisors called the unit the "Gendarme Police Force" in English, the Thai government named it "Territorial Defence Police" (*tamruat raksa dindaen*) when it was first formed in 1951. In 1953, the Thai police established another unit called the "Border Defence Police" (*tamruat raksa chaidaen*) to assist the former group. Finally, in 1954, these two organizations merged and became the Border Patrol Police. Interview with Manas Khantatatbumroong, Bangkok, 21 February 2011.
9. Interview with Oliver Gordon Young, San Luis Obispo, California, 10 March 2012.
10. For instance, a 1968 police department report noted, "The BPP purposely works directly with the population of remote areas to win their confidence [and] to insure [*sic*] their loyalty to the Thai Government and cooperation with security forces. This emphasis on population commitment and development is reinforced by the separate Remote Area Security Project Agreement." Police Department 1968, p. 1.
11. See the detailed discussion on modernization as a counterinsurgency ideology in Latham 2003 and Shafer 1988, pp. 104–14.
12. It should be noted that there existed several state-sponsored programmes

to propagate the development imperative and national loyalty among the highland minorities in addition to the BPP schools project. For example, the Asia Foundation funded the Dhammacarik Bhikku Programme in 1965 to spread the teachings of the Buddha and to encourage villagers to cooperate in development projects by deploying the Buddhist monks to the ethnic minority villages. See Sanit 1988 and Tambiah, 1973.

13. The relationship between the state-driven development projects and ethnic minorities' collaboration and opposition is extensively discussed in Duncan 2004. On the other hand, Rosaldo (2003) brings attention to the dynamics of cultural citizenship among previously (and/or currently) marginalized populations that have begun to challenge the concept of the state and modernity/development.
14. Thongchai Winichakul, personal communication, 12 May 2013.
15. This section draws on interviews with the BPP teachers in the BPP schools of Northern Thailand. I interviewed 38 BPP schoolmasters or teachers and 85 heritage teachers between June and November 2010 in 54 BPP schools in 9 provinces: Phayao, Chiangrai, Tak, Phitsanulok, Uttaradit, Phetchabun, Chiangmai, Maehongson and Nan. Since most of the interviewees are current members of the BPP, the narrative in this section does not use any personal information.
16. Interview conducted at BPP unit in Region Thirty-Three in Sansai district, Chiangmai province, 23 June 2010.
17. Interview conducted at BPP unit in Region Thirty-Four in Tak city, Tak province, 10 August 2010.
18. The number of BPP and heritage teachers is compiled from the list of teachers provided by Border Patrol Police headquarters and the four subdivisions of the Third Regional Division of the Border Patrol Police in 2010. The number of heritage teachers given here included only those who work in the Border Patrol Police schools, not those working in other Border Patrol Police camps. In total, there were 187 heritage teachers under the Third Regional Division as of 2010.
19. Interview conducted at a BPP School in Mae Fa Luang district, Chiangrai province, 1 July 2010.
20. Interview conducted at a BPP School in Fang district, Chiangmai province, 27–28 September 2010.
21. In Thai, *chuai phi nong phu prasop phai nao*. See, for example, *Chiangmai News* (2013).
22. Field notes on visit to a BPP school in Mae Suai district, Chiangrai province, 27 November 2010.
23. Interview conducted at BPP unit in Region Thirty-Three in Sansai district, Chiangmai province, 24 September 2010.
24. Interview conducted at a BPP school in Mae Suai district, Chiangrai province, 5 July 2010.

25. Field notes on visit to a BPP school in Mae Suai district, Chiangrai province, 27 November 2010.

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