

Hegemonism in Thai Country Music

A Lesson-Learned Implication in Intercultural Communication

Manachai Inkaew

Rattana Bundit University - Thailand

Abstract

This paper investigated Thailand's "hegemonism" towards its neighbors implicitly penned in two famous long-lasting Thai country songs composed in the 1980s. "Siam Muang Yim" or "Siam, the Land of Smiles" and "Sao Song Muang" or "Ladies of the Two Nations" were examined and analyzed mainly through the lens of discourse analysis by Van Dijk (2004). The findings indicated a strong formation of Thai national identity with a sense of habitual inferiorization perception towards the neighboring countries. The revealed outcome may trigger intercultural awareness through a realization of the existing hegemonic practices and attitudes. Lessons learned from ruinous past events may be able to enrich a peaceful and harmonious living among people in the region.

Keywords: *Hegemonism, Discourse analysis, Inferiorization, Thai country songs*

Introduction

Although Thailand, Laos and Cambodia are geographically separated by natural barriers like the Great Mekong River and mountains or man-made borderlines, their peoples have long been shaped by similar values mainly derived from Buddhism (Sucharitthanrak, 2016). Biologically, they are like brothers or sisters that share the same ancestors and are like a family who are linked with similar norms and cultural roots. They are not only physically connected by their borders, but also have significantly connected and shared traditions, cultures and ways of life, languages, writing systems, vocabulary, literature and dramatic arts (Kasetsiri, 2003).

However, although people of these three countries have several norms and practices in common, through the lenses of social, political and cultural contexts, there is still evidence of group power and dominance found in everyday intercultural communication among the residents living in this region, Thailand in particular.

The feeling among Thai people of being the elite group in the region could also be traced back to the past through socio-historical contexts. The Siam Kingdom (the previous name of Thailand) was the home of many ethnic groups, namely Tai, Lao, Khmer, Mon, Indian, Chinese, Malay, and other minority groups (Theeravit, Semyaem and Manolom, 2001). Geographically, the area or the map of Siam Kingdom before the year 1909 showed that the territory covered the areas of present-day Cambodia and Laos. It is revealed in the official document of the Royal Institute Dictionary in 1950 that Laos and Cambodia used to be part of Thailand (Royal Institute Dictionary, 1950). This implied that Lao and Khmer were the minorities in the Kingdom.

Additional explanation that supports a strong perspective of Thailand as an elite group in the region probably originated in the year 1939 when Field Marshal Plaek Phibulsongkhram changed the name of

the country from ‘Siam’ to ‘Thailand’ with the ultimate purpose of not only encouraging Thai people to be proud of being Thai, which encouraged the formation of national identity and by chance “being superior”, but also wanting to lift up Thailand to be a so-called modernized country (Kasetsiri, 2000). That created an intense feeling of elitism. However, several years later, there was a concern about discrimination issues when several attempts were initiated to change the name back to ‘Siam’ (“Changing name from Siam to be Thailand,” 2004). Those who were supportive of reverting the name to ‘Siam’ claimed that changing the name from ‘Siam’ into ‘Thailand’ would ignite conflicts, especially those who were considered ‘patriotic’ and ‘racist’ (The originality of “Siam” and “Thailand,” 1974). From Thailand’s former Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong’s written work of the ‘history of names – ‘Siam’ and ‘Thailand’’, racism and racial discrimination are used to describe discrimination on an ethnic or cultural basis. Those who were against the name change tended to believe that changing the name would create for Thai people a sense of ‘racism’ towards the other groups; as mentioned before, ‘Siam’ comprised several ethnic groups, while ‘Thailand’ seemed to confine itself to only a certain group of people (“Changing name from Siam to be Thailand,” 2004).

Adding to the perceived discriminatory nature of the name change, several internal conflicts in the region formulated Thailand to be a so-called “big brother”; that is, with more power and legitimacy to help its neighbors who were in need. During the 70s and 80s, there were situations of political changes with civil wars in Indochina. Thailand, at that time, was in the role of being a shelter or a resting place for the refugees fleeing from the neighboring countries (Manager Weekly, 1989). During that time, Laos was in an internal instability situation with a great number of Lao refugees fleeing to Thailand. Similar to the situation in Laos, Cambodia was in political turmoil, particularly in the period of a brutal civil war that culminated in the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge (1975–79) and its prolonged political instability in the 1980s. In response to those unstable situations in the neighboring countries, Thailand proclaimed itself as the problem solver in the region.

This phenomenon was relevant to what Thailand was trying to do in the 80s during the period of the former Thai Prime Minister, General Chatichai Choonhavan. At that time (1988–1991), the Thai Prime Minister representing the Thai government launched a campaign of ‘turning the battle fields to be the commercial fields’ (Chantimathorn, 1998) by presenting himself and Thailand as the center to initiate and coordinate peace talks in order to discontinue internal fighting in Cambodia. The outcome was successful and this achievement became one of the outstanding highlights during his leadership.

Due to global and political changes, the three entities were separated and became independent. Each of them had geared up ahead for standing out economically from the others. Viewed through the current lenses of sociopolitical and sociological perspectives, of the three countries, Thailand is clearly perceived to be the well-developed nation with more power in both economic (“Thailand GDP per capita”, 2017) and cultural influences. Particularly from a sociocultural perspective, Thai television programs and other kinds of entertainment media penetrate its neighboring audiences and dominate the popularity in terms of viewership and engagement of viewers (“Thai entertainment,” 2016). Together with the regional spread of Thai cultural influences, the emergence of Thai dominance was reflected specifically through the communication of stereotypes and more generally in the reproduction of social, cultural and political hegemony. Some explicit examples are from the inferior group of characters such as maids, drivers, and laborers represented in most Thai soap operas broadcast through the region as ethnic groups. Statistically, the majority of registered unskilled workers or immigrants numbering around 1.4 million working in Thailand are ethnic minorities from neighboring countries (Ministry of Labour, 2016).

Intercultural communication through conversations (e.g. soap operas) and texts (e.g. news reports) about ethnic minorities or non-Thai people with regard to privileged group dominance could be found in different forms of the aforementioned media. Consequently, I was curious as to whether there would be any hegemonic practices that existed in other forms of entertainment media like Thai country music or “Luk Thung”, which is well-recognized and accepted among the people in the region (“A Cambodian’s favorite Thai entertainment,” 2009).

This paper, therefore, investigated the lyrics and the underlying messages of the Thai country songs composed in the 80s and their influences within the Thai context from the past to the present day. The objective of the analysis is primarily to explore the hegemonism implicitly hidden in the study’s selected

songs through racism discourse analysis. The outcome of the study may be used as a desirable intercultural communication tool to enhance communication among the people in the region through the recognition of hegemonic attitudes and practices.

Literature Review

Hegemonism is defined as dominance, especially by one state or social group over others (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). However, in the context of this study, hegemonism is described as a nation “having a sense of power or being superior over its neighbors.” The framework of discourse analysis by Van Dijk (2004) was mainly operationalized to examine the phenomenon of hegemonism hidden in lyrics. Throughout human history, each civilization or world power has demonstrated hegemonic trends (Chumakov, Mazour & Gay, 2014). It can be implemented to dominate other groups through various strategies such as the exercise of political power, and economic and cultural dominance. The traces of the past are vital evidence. Thai country songs of the 1980s are among them. In this study, discourse analysis strategy was used to gain more insight into the relations between various structures such as lexicons, meanings and perspectives of power relations between the out-group or minorities revealed through the hegemonic phenomenon subliminally presented in the songs’ outwardly beautiful and popular lyrics.

Power relations or race relations can be defined broadly as ‘prejudice against another group’, ‘pro-ingroup bias’ and ‘anti-outgroup bias’ (Hodson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). It is an ideological perception of positive self-presentation (ingroup) and negative other-presentation (outgroup) (Van Dijk, 2006). Racism is thought to be a product of social practices that reflect social inequality (Bunsom & Jimarkon, 2013). The genres of racist discourses that have been focal issues of investigation can range from everyday language (Duncan, 2012; Hill, 2008) and news (Del-Tesco-Craviotto, 2009; Tynes, Reynolds & Greenfield, 2004) to traditional media such as newspapers, and television and radio broadcasts (El Refaie, 2005; Entman, 1990; Van Dijk, 2005), including the music which in the present day can be accessed anytime through both traditional media and new media with different platforms.

In investigating Thai country songs to recognize the underlying hegemonism discreetly hidden in lyrics, it was found that national identity played a vital factor in promoting such an internalized perspective of superiorization. Although in today’s globalized world people tend to be aware of prejudicial practices, some or most people still reveal unconscious and subtle prejudices, which are relatively automatic, cool, indirect and ambiguous (Fiske, 2002). This is because each ethnic group tends to strengthen its inner ties, to keep bright the legend of its own golden age, and to declare that other groups are less worthy, all to increase self-esteem (Allport, 1979). Assuming that the group they belong to is superior, then the assumption can lead to derogatory (insulting) attitudes that members of one group may hold toward others and to the discriminatory behavior that is often associated with this (Vivian & Brown, 1995). “If prejudice is rooted in individual personalities, which are enduring characteristics, then one would expect consistency over time in the expression of prejudice” (Billig, 1976).

In a psychological respect, people feel a state of belonging to a group and start their identity formation process by means of interaction with the ‘other’ or against the ‘others’ (Inaç & Ünal, 2013). The ‘other’ may expose both pejorative implications such as “marginality” and “lack”, and “backwardness” (Kuran-Burçoğlu, 2002). Added to that, some selected theoretical perspectives (Anderson 1991; Breuille, 1993; Gilroy 1993) with regard to national identity were used as guiding frames to analyze the data. The formation of national identity can lead to a state of ethnocentrism that one’s worldview of one’s own culture is central to all reality (Bennett, 1993). This means the beliefs and behaviors that people receive in their primary socialization are unquestioned; they are experienced as “just the way things are”. However, Barrett, Byram, Lazar, Mompoin-Gaillard, and Philippou (2013) argue that a person can decenter themselves from their own worldview only if that person possesses an open attitude with a willingness to understand and tolerate the diversities that exist in this world. Hence, hegemonic phenomena can be gradually attenuated and eliminated if one is well aware of intercultural communication.

Method

The method used in this study was mainly adopted from the discourse analysis on racism by Van Dijk (1993, 2004) with an objective to see how members of a dominant group, which in this study context is Thailand, write about other groups which are its neighboring countries through its country music. The discourse of the texts or lyrics may provide insightful outcome in making relations between texts on in-groups, out-groups, minorities or other group members and mental, sociocultural and political conditions that constitute the production and reproduction of racism, derogation or inferiorization towards the out-groups clearer. The operationalized definition of “racism” in this study mainly focuses on the notions of in-group and out-group perspectives constituted by the dominant group in terms of power relations.

Even though Van Dijk’s discourse analysis framework mainly focuses on racism between white groups, which are considered the elite groups, and ethnical minorities in the western context, his strategies can be adopted and applied in the context of this study to see the power relations between the Thai dominant group and the out-groups within the same geographical context. Applying Van Dijk’s critical orientation in discourse analysis allows this study to make significant contribution to the study of power relations. In this paper, critical discourse analysis was operationalized to identify both direct and indirect hegemonic practices — derogation, intimidation and inferiorization against the out-group neighbors which were implied in the well-recognized country music.

Racism or power relation is an abstract and conceptual notion. Employing the analysis of various structures of both linguistic features such as lexical, phrasal, sentential and discourse levels and the perspective which is literally from where the events are seen or more generally the social or political “position” of the dominant group allows the study to identify and extract the underlying messages from the songs.

The analyzed structures displayed in Tables 1 and 2 (Finding Part) may illustrate or signal the various perspectives of the dominant group speakers towards the out-groups. Besides, the discourse analysis of the selected songs which function as a socio-historical record allows us to make explicit inferences about inaccessible attitudes and sociocultural contexts of racism in the past (Van Dijk, 1993) which are reflected in habitually produced and reproduced prejudices and stereotypes towards other groups in the present day.

Data

Thai country music, or “Luk Thung”, is defined by a Thai encyclopedia as songs that reflect people’s ways of life, social environment, and ideology, including Thai culture. Luk Thung music, lyrics and ways of singing, especially the clucking sound from the throat, are unique as a form of music (Thai Encyclopedia Online, 2016). In this study, the main focus was on two Thai country songs, “Siam Muang Yim” (Siam, the Land of Smiles) and “Sao Song Muang” (Ladies of the Two Nations). The foremost reasons why the two songs were chosen to be investigated are as follows. These two songs were both composed in 1981 and have been popular ever since. Both “Siam Muang Yim” and “Sao Song Muang” songs have been repeatedly sung by singers of different generations up until now. “Siam Muang Yim,” in particular, has been ranked among the top Thai country songs sung by singing-contest singers.

These two enduring famous songs were composed by the same talented Thai country music composer, Wichien Khamcharoen, widely recognized in the music industry as ‘Lop Burirat’. Many of his songs have won awards and accredited with several honors. In 1991, his “Siam Muang Yim” song was awarded a golden gramophone record. He himself, later in 2005, was honored and recognized as a ‘Thai National Artist’. This reveals another dimension — a song receiving official approval. Khamcharoen revealed his inspiration behind the two songs when giving an interview to Komchaluek Media (“Love songs in the war,” 2009). He claimed that the main reason for writing these two songs was the real political situations in the region during 1976-1986 where there was the Cold War between the ‘Free World’ led by the United States and the ‘Communist World’ led by the Soviet Union (Mengsophon, 2009). The conflict of these two worlds affected the stability of many countries worldwide including that of Laos and Cambodia, both neighbors of Thailand. The internal instability of both countries caused people to flee from their homes,

cross the border of Thailand and live in several refugee camps across the borderlines. Khamcharoen added that Thai country songs at that time functioned as a record keeper of historical phenomena.

Findings

I explored both selected songs by employing Van Dijk's framework with an aim to see the hegemonic practices directly and indirectly underlying in the lyrics. The outcome is as follows. For the first song, "Siam, the Land of Smiles", the findings suggested that in all levels of analysis — lexis, phrase, sentence and discourse — the perspectives of national identity and inferiorization were identifiable. National identity in lexical level was identified in several sentences, for example, "Thai people are *calm* and *sincere*", "Obviously recognized, Siamese (Thais) are *friendly* and *generous*" and "*Kindhearted* Thais still smilingly welcome you anytime". In phrasal level, one outstanding phrase that highlights the Thai national identity is "*Siam, the land of smiles*", signifying that Thai people are friendly (positive self-presentation). At the sentential level, identified statements indicating that Thais are proud of themselves are "*Be proud of being born to be a Thai*", "*We are not slaves to anyone*" and "*We should be proud of our goodness*" (positive self-presentation). In terms of discourse, Excerpts 7, 10, 12, and 13 displayed in Table 1 suggested strong national identity of Thai people such as being friendly and generous, "*We are happy to welcome and pamper you*", and valuing beliefs and norms, "*The sincere Thais take this (gratefulness) as a serious issue*" (positive self-presentation). Besides, the lyrics showed that Thais had a strong determination borne of a great faith in the three key pillars of the country — nation, religion and the King — which also showed the positive perspective of self-group (Excerpts 12 and 13 of Table 1).

Table 1: Lyrics analysis of "Siam Muang Yim" (Siam, A Land of Smiles)

Data – Thai	Data – Translated Version	Level	Perspective	
(1) จงภูมิใจเกิดที่ เกิดเป็นไทย	Be proud to be born a Thai.	Sentence	National identity	In-group
มิเป็นทาสใครและมี น้ำใจล้นปรี่	We are not slaves to anyone and we are <i>generous</i> people.	Sentence Lexis	National identity	In-group
(2) ทั่วโลกกล่าว ขาน ขนานนาม ให้ ว่าสยามเมืองยิ้ม	The whole world recognizes and names us <i>as Siam, a land of smiles</i> .	Phrase	National identity	In-group
(3) เราควรกระหึ่ม ถึงความดีงาม	We should be proud of our goodness.	Sentence	National identity	In-group
(4) คนเย็นใจชื่อได้ ชื่อว่าไทย	Thai people are <i>calm</i> and <i>sincere</i> .	Lexis	National identity	In-group
(5) ร้อนมาจากไหน ชาติไทยไม่เคยหวง ห้าม	We willingly welcome all those who are in trouble into our country.	Discourse	Inferiorization	Out-group
(6) ข้ามเขตข้าม โขงถิ่นน้ำชุ่ม มาพึ่ง ใบบุญเมืองสยาม	Crossing the muddy-colored river to stay and live under the umbrella of Siam.	Discourse	Inferiorization	Out-group

(7) เรายิ้มรับตามที่ท่านต้องการ	We are happy to welcome and pamper you.	Discourse	National identity	In-group
(8) เลื่องชื่อลือนามสยามมีแต่น้ำใจ	Obviously recognized, Siamese are <i>friendly</i> and <i>generous</i> .	Lexis	National identity	In-group
(9) ขอเตือนท่านผู้อาศัย อย่าทำอะไรให้ไทยร้าวราน	We <i>warn</i> you not to make us unhappy.	Lexis/ Discourse	Inferiorization	Out-group
(10) คนไทยใจซื่อเขาถือแต่โบราณกาล	The sincere Thais take this as a serious issue.	Discourse	National identity	In-group
(11) แค่นี้เพียงข้าวสุกหนึ่งจาน ใครลิ้มของท่านนั้น เหนรคุณ	With only one dish of steamed rice that we have offered to you, and if you do something bad to us, you are considered ‘ungrateful’.	Discourse	Inferiorization	Out-group
(12) คนไทยรักชาติและศาสนา	Thai people love their nation and religion.	Discourse	National identity	In-group
(13) เทิดองค์เจ้าฟ้าผู้ทรงเปี่ยมเมตตาบุญ	As well as our beloved King who is merciful.	Discourse	National identity	In-group
(14) ถ้าท่านเคารพสิทธิ์ของไทย ท่านอยู่ต่อได้อีกนานคุณ	If you respect us, you can stay as long as you like.	Discourse	Inferiorization	Out-group
(15) สยามใจบุญยังยิ้มเสมอ	<i>Kindhearted</i> Thais still smilingly welcome you anytime.	Lexis Discourse	National identity Inferiorization	In-group

With regard to inferiorization perspectives, they could be scrutinized and inferred through discourse level analysis which could be found in Excerpts 5, 6, 9, 11, 14 and 15. The statements contained in these six excerpts suggested that Thailand is a “big brother” (with more power and superiority) in the region. Van Dijk’s discourse and dominance (1993) argues that more powerful players have the means and resources to influence the actions or minds of the less powerful. This can be found through the analysis of the following excerpts of the lyrics, suggesting that Thailand could protect or impair those who are weaker (inferior). Some statements that show more power and superiority are, for example, “*We willingly welcome all those who are in trouble into our country*”, “*Crossing the muddy-colored river to stay and live under the umbrella of Siam*”, “*We warn you not to make us unhappy*”, “*With only one dish of steamed rice that we have offered to you, if you do something bad to us, you are considered ‘ungrateful’*” and “*If you respect us, you can stay as long as you like.*”

Table 2: Lyrics analysis of “Sao Song Muang” (Ladies of the Two Nations)

Data – Thai	Data – Translated version	Level	Perspective
-------------	---------------------------	-------	-------------

(1) ผาคำข้ามโขงลอย โค้งจับสาวเวียงจันทน์ ผาก คำจันรร์จ เลยอรัญจับสาว ชะแมร์	May my words go crossing the Mekong River to pay court to Vientiane girls. May my words go crossing the Aran District to pay court to Khmer girls.	Discourse	National identity
(2) ทุดใจตั้งจิตอยากเป็น มิตรกับน้องจะแะ หนุมไทย อยากนอนร่วมแคร่กับ โฉม แม่เจ้าสาวสองเมือง	My heart deeply wants to have a relationship with both of you. A Thai man wants to share a bed with both of you, ladies of the two nations.	Discourse	National identity
(3) อยากเป็นคู่ครอง น้อง นวลเขมรและลาว เชื่อม ความแตกร้าวดั้งคราว เมื่อครั้งฟูเฟื่อง	I want to have families with Khmer and Lao girls. In order to restore the disunited relationship and recreate the good relationship as we used to have before.	Discourse	Inferiorization
(4) แม้นมีลูกเต้า กับแม่ สาว โฉมงามสองเมือง จะ เป็นไซ่ทองเส้นเชื่อง จุด สามเมือง ให้ดีกันหนอ	If having boys with two of you, the ladies from two nations, it would chain the three nations together and live peacefully.	Discourse	Interiorization
(5) ลูกโตจกาจูกอาจได้ เป็นผู้นำ สายเลือดแห่ง เมตตาธรรม คงดำใจ เหมือนไทยผู้พ่อ	If our boys are grown-up, they might be the leaders. They would be kind persons as they have Thai blood from their father who possesses compassion and kindness.	Discourse	Inferiorization
(6) เรื่องราวคงจบ เรื่อง ขวรบก็คงไม่ก่อ	The conflict will then be ended and no more wars.	Discourse	Inferiorization
(7) เพราะลูกสองเมืองนั้น หนอ ต้องคิดถึงซ้อมีพ่อเป็น ไทย	As sons of those nations are brothers who share the same father	Discourse	Inferiorization
(8) ชะแมร์แก้มขาว อีกทั้ง แม่สาวลาวเวียง พี่แอบส่ง เสียง ลอยมาเพียงกระซิบ ขวัญใจ	The fair-cheeked Khmer and Lao girls, please listen to my words.	Discourse	Inferiorization
(9) พี่คิดเข้าเียนเจ้าจะเห็น จริงด้วยหรือไม่ หากเรา แต่งงานกันได้ โลกคงวิไล ไปค่อนเอเชีย	I keep thinking of this. Would you both agree with me? If we are finally married and united, peacefulness would surely be spread across Asia.	Discourse	National identity

Having examined the lyrics of the “Ladies of the Two Nations” song through discourse level analysis by employing the perspective of discourse and dominance (Van Dijk, 1993), the results suggested that national identity and inferiorization were implicit in the contents of the song. A sense of national identity by being proud to be born a Thai and by Thailand being the center of the region was illustrated in the following examples. “My heart deeply wants to have a relationship with both of you (Lao and

Cambodian ladies)” (more powerful as a Thai man), “*A Thai man wants to share a bed with both of you, ladies of the two nations*” and “*I keep thinking of this. Would you both agree with me? If we are finally married and united, peacefulness would surely be spread across Asia*” (more powerful as a Thai man). The internalized superiority possessed by the dominant group and inferiorization perspective towards the less powerful group could be found in several statements (Excerpts 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). The selected examples are (1) “*If having boys with two of you, the ladies from two nations, it would chain the three nations together and we can live peacefully*” (more powerful perspective), (2) “*If our boys are grown-up, they might be the leaders. They would be kind persons as they have Thai blood from their father who possesses compassion and kindness*” (positive self-presentation, more powerful perspective) and (3) “*The conflict would be ended and no more wars as sons of those nations are brothers who share the same father*” (more powerful perspective). Apart from that, the assumptions of Thailand as “male” and his production being “boys” introduce another dimension of hegemony against Laos and Cambodia as “female”, being the boys’ mothers.

Discussions

The “Siam, the Land of Smiles” and “Ladies of the Two Nations” songs could be considered as the region’s history keeper with their lyrics telling a story of what had happened in the region, particularly in Laos and Cambodia. For example, “*ข้ามเขตข้าม โขงถินน้ำชุ่มมาพึ่ง ไบบุญเมืองสยาม*” or *crossing the muddy-colored river to live and stay under the umbrella of Siam*, or “*เชื่อมความแตกร้าวดั้งคราวเมื่อครั้งฟูเฟื่อง*” or “*heal any conflicts and bring them to be a good relationship like we used to have before*”. These two messages indirectly indicated the political problems of these two countries that had continued for several decades including in the 1980s, the time when some neighbors were fleeing from their countries. There was a report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) which revealed that in March 1980 alone, there were 48,937 Hmong refugees from Laos with 998 new arrivals in five camps in Northern Thailand in February 1981 (UNHCR Monthly Statistics, March 1980 and February 1981). And, about 75,000 Lao refugees were known to be in Thailand in 1987, the largest group of Indochinese refugees under UNHCR protection (Feith, 1988).

The lyrical statements of the “Ladies of the Two Nations” are, for example, “*อยากเป็นคู่ครองนวลน้อง เขมรและลาวเชื่อมความแตกร้าวดั้งคราวเมื่อครั้งฟูเฟื่อง*” – *I (Thailand) want to have families with Cambodian and Lao ladies in order to restore the disunited relationship and recreate a good relationship one as we used to have before.*” and “*ลูกโตจนกาจลูกอาจได้เป็นผู้นำสายเลือดแห่งเมตตาธรรมคงดำใจเหมือนไทยผู้พ่อเรื่องความคงจบเรื่องชนรบก็คงไม่ก่อเพราะลูกสองเมืองนั้นหนอต้องคิดถึงข้อมีพ่อเป็นไทย*” – *When our boys are grown up, they might become the leaders (of the two countries – Laos and Cambodia) and they would not create any conflicts or problems as they both have the same father (literally means “Thailand”).* With these circumstances, we could interpret and perceive the paternalistic character in the message suggesting that Thai people take themselves as a center or a big brother. In becoming the big brother in the region, this means that Thailand tends to possess more power over the two neighboring countries. Added to this, the sense of being superior or more powerful could also be commonly heard or seen from the governmental or business to business speeches and texts that always included the classic utterance for Thais, “*Ban Pi, Muang Nong*”, when communicating with Laos; this phrase literally means Thailand is an older brother country and Laos is a younger brother country. This saying has a subliminal message that hints at the power relations between Thailand (with more power as an older brother) and Laos (with less power as a younger brother).

The analysis of Excerpts 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the first song indicated that Thais perceived themselves as a generous and kindhearted people and took that as their national identity (positive self-presentation). “*คนเย็นใจชื่อได้ชื่อว่าไทยร้อนมาจากไหนชาติไทยไม่เคยหวงห้ามข้ามเขตข้าม โขงถินน้ำชุ่มมาพึ่ง ไบบุญเมืองสยามเรย์มีรับตามที่ท่านต้องการ*– “*Thai people are calm and sincere (4). We willingly welcome all those who are in trouble into our country (5). Crossing the muddy-colored River to stay and live under the umbrella of Siam (6). We are happy to welcome and pamper you. (7)*”.

On the surface, it was evident that the main message of the “Siam, Land of Smiles” song displayed the beauty of Thai people — kind and welcoming with their supportive offer to their neighbors who were experiencing a time of trouble (positive self-presentation). In the track “Ladies of the Two Nations”, the lyrics proposed a partnership of the three countries via marriage to a Thai man who was presumably the only powerful man and could consolidate peace in the region (more powerful players).

The “Siam, the Land of Smiles” song was composed with an intention to communicate with its neighbors who sought protection that Thailand was willing to help, but with conditions attached. They expected the help seekers to be grateful to Thailand and its people. Through discourse and dominance analysis (Van Dijk, 1993), it could be inferred that Thai people are a dominant group and perceive themselves as the only powerful nation in the region. Some of the messages indicated a threatening action, which only more powerful actors could do, towards other nations who were considered inferior. The Excerpts 8, 9, 10, and 11 of Table 1 illustrated a sense of power relations implied in the lyrics. “*เลื่องชื่อลือนามสยามมีแต่น้ำใจขอเตือนท่านผู้อาศัยอย่าทำอะไรให้ไทยร้าวรานคนไทยใจชื้อเขาถือแต่โบราณกาลแค่เพียงข้าวสุกหนึ่งจานใครลืมนของท่านนั้นเนรคุณ*” — “*Obviously recognized, Siamese are friendly and generous (8). We warn you not to make us unhappy (9). The sincere Thais take this as a serious issue (10). With only one dish of steamed rice that we have offered to you, if you do something bad to us, you are considered ‘ungrateful’ (11)*”. These sentences reveal that the status of people who are in the position of offering help to others could be interpreted thus — they tend to think that they are more superior by having more power over the help seekers, meaning that they feel that those people are inferior and need support.

In response to this phenomenon, Thailand tended to perceive itself as the problem solver and the big brother in the region. A perception of paternalism or big brotherhood was subtly conveyed in the two songs with a sense of inferiorization to its neighboring friends. This more powerful perspective transpires when an individual perceives oneself to have the status of being able to tell the less powerful players not to do something even if they have the freedom to refuse (Van Dijk, 1993).

Another perspective found in this study is the name of the song “Siam, the Land of Smiles” that provoked listeners with the question why the composer named the country ‘Siam’ instead of ‘Thailand’. Historically, the former name of Thailand was Siam, which originated from westerners who called the Suvarnabhumi plateau as Siam. Later on, during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1867), the king named his own territory as the Siam Kingdom when signing a treaty with countries from the West. During the reign of King Rama IV, there was constant intrusion from the West through colonization efforts. The King tried his best to avoid being invaded or colonized by land hunters. He initiated changes for Thailand to become more of a so-called ‘civilized’ nation as other countries (Kasetsiri, 2000). A more concentrated nationalism of Thais was added during the period of 1938-1944 administered by the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Plaek Phibulsongkhram. It was not only Thai nationalism that was being promoted, but also the emergence of significant Thai irredentism in society. The more prominent of these efforts had to do with the recovery of the various territories which Thailand had been obliged to surrender to France in the course of the previous fifty years or so (“Thai nationalist feelings,” 2010). Later, on June 24, 1939, Field Marshal Plaek Phibulsongkhram pushed forward his policy of trying to arouse the people on the basis of the ‘nationalism’ of being Thai, which was the first move in yielding the nation-building and national ideology.

Historically speaking, “Siam” was changed to “Thailand” in 1939 and the song ‘Siam, the Land of Smiles’ was composed in 1981, with a lengthy 42-year gap. Why do the messages in the song, particularly when communicating with its neighbors, convey that Thailand calls itself ‘Siam’? To begin to understand this, a further question needs to be explored whether Thai people consciously or unconsciously feel that the two adjoining areas once belonged to ‘Siam’ with the residual feeling of once having dominated or exercised power over them (Anderson, 1991) resulting in subsequently treating them in an inferior way.

Even though Thailand views itself as a friendly nation in the region, there is much evidence and many critical voices from its neighbors indicating that Thailand and Thai people have viewed themselves as superior while looking down on their neighbors in several ways. The study on Asian Ethnicity (Vail, 2007) concluded that Thais are accused of using words or phrases that refer to their neighbors’ identity (the out-group) as something foolish, old fashioned, under-developed, and so on. The ethno-linguistic

term 'Lao', when uttered by speakers, is often pejorative, suggesting country-bumpkinness and inferiority. Van Dijk (1993) supports this argument as he claimed that racism discourse may also directly express and convey general ethnic attitudes, for instance, in racial slurs and in well-known over-generalizations (e.g., "Turks are...").

There is a significant quote from Laotian people in a book titled "Thai-Lao Relations in Laotian Perspective" published in 2009. Hiem Phommachanh (former Ambassador of Laos PDR in Thailand), in his Master of International Studies thesis in 1991 and cited in Theeravit, Semyaem and Manolom (2001), asserted that Thai people considered themselves superior over Laotians and try to look down on the traditional identities of Laos. He added that during the period of conflict between Thailand's Romklao District and Laos' Bothen in 1988, the former Prime Minister of Thailand, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, insulted the Laotian people. Immediately after the halt of the Romklao-Bothen conflict, the former Thai Prime Minister gave an interview to the Thai media and stated, "Being friends with Lao is like having a gibbon with you. It could bite you any time. It cuddles you and then bites you without warning" (Theeravit et al., 2001).

There is valuable information derived from the research conducted by the Asia Studies Institute of Chulalongkorn University on Thailand/Thai people and their perception of Lao cited in Theeravit et al., (2001). There were several interesting points to learn from and to be aware of. The research investigated and questioned Lao people on the subject of who they thought was looking down on them the most when comparing among the selected countries of Cambodia, Vietnam, Japan, China, US and Thailand. The reflections from the participants indicated that Thailand and its people was unanimously ranked number one.

It is not an issue of conflict with only Laotians in the case of hegemony or insulting speech, but a similar case is also made when dealing with Cambodian friends. In January 2003, a Cambodian newspaper published an article regarding a famous Thai star, Suwanan Kongying, claiming that she gave an interview on TV saying that she would never come to Cambodia unless it returned Angkor Wat to Thailand. Whether this news was true or not, an immediate impact of the alleged comment was that it caused an intense nationalist feeling among Cambodians, who had always held the view, probably with some justification, that Thais always looked down on them (Hinton, 2006; Kasetsiri, 2003). The consequence was that the Thai embassy was set on fire and Thai companies in Cambodia were threatened.

This anti-Thai riot was not just only to express the feeling of nationalism but it was also a statement about the dignity of Cambodian people. The gap in development between Thailand and its neighbors makes some Thai people think that they are more advanced than their neighbors, whether with intention or senselessly making fun of their neighbors. This can arguably hurt the sensibilities of viewers or listeners who have already amassed negative feelings that can easily spark conflicts anytime whether it is on a personal or national level.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this paper did not unjustifiably assume that Thai people have conducted numerous discriminatory acts against their close neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. The paper has tried to explore Thai people's hegemonic perspectives through critical discourse analysis as well as attempted to disclose the information or the disparate voices from people who are living in an extended community. Although these three countries are quite similar in several aspects, there are many more intranational features that are different and exist in the comfort zone of each nation. However, all parties have to keep in mind the basic and classic human practice that we all need to be treated equally no matter how different people are or their different cultural affiliations. Simply starting from being aware of the differences, understanding them, and tolerating any differences from one's own culture or identity would lead to harmoniously living together in an extended community.

Recommendations and Implications

Living together peacefully in an intercultural world could be made possible. Barrett et al. (2013) proposed four principles as a guideline for people living in this globalized community. The first three are possessing open attitudes, having knowledge and understanding about others, and having skills in decentering from one's own perspectives while taking other people's perspectives into consideration alongside one's own. The final guideline is producing appropriate and effective actions in intercultural communication. Possessing all these traits, people tend to be able to tolerate and appreciate the differences of others.

With regard to phenomena presented in this paper, people in the region, particularly in the three nations highlighted, can join hands and design their "living together harmoniously" ideology. According to Confucius, "study the past if you would define the future", and this is the lesson learned from the analysis of this study. Problematic issues that occurred and were discussed in this paper were aspects that could have been resolved or even prevented. Thailand, Laos and Cambodia share the same origin. No matter the geographical territory, or the physical separation through modernization and capitalism, these countries are still bound by shared norms and beliefs that originated from the same ancestors. People, no matter where they live or how they are, are equal in terms of human rights and dignity. Peaceful living in the region is not something that is unachievable. The people in this region all had experienced their collective pasts and were well aware of what had happened. Today, being mindful of the past cautionary tales, they can design and create a better future to enhance their peaceful living in the region.

References

- A Cambodia's favorite Thai entertainment. (2009, November 14). Thai entertainment: A Cambodians' favorite media that goes beyond conflict. *Komchadluek*. Retrieved from <http://www.komchadluek.net/news/politic/37171>
- Allport, W. G. (1979). *The nature of prejudice* (25th anniversary ed.). Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Banomyong, P. (1974). *The originality of "Siam" and "Thailand"*. Bangkok: Nithiwej Printing.
- Barrett, M., Byram, M., Lazar, I., Mompoin-Gaillard, P. & Philippou, S. (2013). *Developing intercultural competence through education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Billig, M. (1976). *Social psychology and intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Breuilly, J. (1993). *Nationalism and the state* (2nd ed.). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bunsom, T. & Jimarkon, P. (2013). *Rohingya? worse than dogs: A discourse analysis of Thai online gay community's racist attitudes towards Rohingya immigrants*. Proceedings from ICHSS 2013: The 9th International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences 2013 (pp. 331-342). 14-15 November, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen.
- Chantimathorn, S. (1998). *Chatichai Choonhavan: A democratic soldier*. Bangkok: Mathichon.
- Changing name from Siam to be Thailand. (2004, June 29). The originality of "Siam" and "Thailand". *Manager*. Retrieved from <http://www.manager.co.th/politics/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9470000014299>

- Chumakov, N. A., Mazour, I. I. & Gay, C. W. (2014). *Global studies encyclopedic dictionary*. New York: Editions Rodopi B.V.
- Del-Teso-Craviotto, M. (2009). Racism and xenophobia in immigrants' discourse: The case of Argentines in Spain. *Discourse & Society*, 20(5), 571–592.
- Duncan, N. (2012). 'Race' talk: Discourses on 'race' and racial difference. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 27(2), 135–156.
- El Refaie, E. (2005). Our purebred ethnic compatriots: Irony in newspaper journalism. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37(6), 781–797.
- Entman, R. M. (1990). Modern racism and the image of blacks in local television news. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 7(4), 332–345.
- Fiske, T. S. (2002). What we know now about bias and intergroup conflict, the problem of the century. *American Psychological Society*, 11(4), 123-128.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Hill, J. H. (2008). *The everyday language of white racism*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hinton, A. (2006). Khmerness and the Thai 'other': Violence, discourse and symbolism in the 2003 anti-Thai riots in Cambodia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37, 445-468.
- Hodson, G., Dovidio, J. F. & Gaertner, S. L. (2004). The aversive form of racism. In J. L. Chin (Ed.), *The psychology of prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 119-135). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- İnaç, H. & Ünal, F. (2013). The Construction of national identity in modern times: Theoretical perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(11), 223-232.
- Love songs in the war. (2009, November 20). Love songs in the war: Kru Lob and Sao Song Muang. *Komchadluek*. Retrieved from <http://www.komchadluek.net/news/ent/38090>
- Kasetsiri, C. (2000). Siam/civilization - - Thailand/globalization: Things to come?. *Thammasat Review*, 5(1). Retrieved from <http://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/tureview/article/view/40988>.
- Kasetsiri, C. (2003). Thailand-Cambodia, a love-hate relationship. *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 3. Retrieved from <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-3-nations-and-stories/a-love-hate-relationship/>.
- Kuran-Burçoğlu, Nedret. (2002). L'Image des Turcs en Europe. In Chebal, Pierre & de Raulin, Arnaud (Eds.), *Les chemins de la Turquie vers l'Europe* (pp. 67-68). Arras: Artois Presses Universitaires.
- Mengsophon, R. (2009). *Thok Khmer Lae Khamen: History and political and social conditions of Cambodia*. Bangkok: Ban Pra-Athit.
- Ministry of Labour. (2016, December 20). Registered Foreign Worker Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.mol.go.th/academician/10694>
- Oxford Dictionaries. (2016). *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hegemonism>.
- Sucharitthanarak, W. (2016). Neighboring countries (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam): Sustainable relationship development. *Pathumthani University Academic Journal*, 8(1), 220-227.

- Thai Encyclopedia Online. (2016). *Definition of 'Lukthung'*. Retrieved from <http://kanchanapisek.or.th/kp6/sub/book/book.php?book=33&chap=2&page=t33-2-infodetail01.html>
- Thai entertainment. (2016, January 2). Thai entertainment: The ASEAN entertainment leader. *Thairath*. Retrieved from <http://www.thairath.co.th/content/556969>.
- Thai nationalist feelings. (2010, October 20). Irredentism:Thai Nationalist Feelings. Retrieved from <http://irredentism-thailand.blogspot.com/>
- Thailand GDP per capita. (2017, January 30). Thailand GDP per capita Forecast 2016-2020. Retrieved from <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp-per-capita/forecast>
- Theeravit, T. (1982). Thai - Kampuchean relations: Problems and prospects. *Asian Survey*, 22(6), 561-576.
- Theeravit, K., Semyaem, A. & Manolom, T. (2001). *Thai-Lao relations in Laotian perspective*. Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies of Chulalongkorn University.
- Tynes, B., Reynolds, L. & Greenfield, P. (2004). Adolescence, race, and ethnicity on the Internet: A comparison of discourse in monitored vs. unmonitored chat rooms. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25(6), 667-684.
- Vail, P. (2007). Thailand's Khmer as 'invisible minority': Language, ethnicity and cultural politics in North-Eastern Thailand. *Asian Ethnicity*, 8(2), 111-130.
- Van Dijk, T. (1993). Analyzing Racism Through Discourse Analysis. In J. H. Stanfield & R. M. Dennis (Eds.), *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods* (pp. 92-134). CA: Sage.
- Van Dijk, T. (2004). Racist discourse. In E. Cashmore (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of race and ethnic studies* (pp. 351-355). London: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. (2005). *Racism and discourse in Spain and Latin America*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Van Dijk, T. (2006). Ideological discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.
- Vivian, J., & Brown, R. (1995). Prejudice and intergroup conflict. In M. Argyle & A.M. Coleman (Eds.), *Social Psychology* (pp. 57-77). London: Logman.
- Vivian, J., Brown, R. & Hewstone, M. (1999). Changing attitudes through intergroup contact: The effects of group membership salience. *European Journal Social Psychology*, 29, 741-764.

About the Author

Manachai Inkaew holds a B.A. in English, an M.A. in English for Careers and a Ph.D. in English Language Studies from Thammasat University. He is currently a full time lecturer at the Business English Department, College of International Business, Rattana Bundit University. His research interest is intercultural communication.

Author's Address

Rattana Bundit University
306, Soi Ladprao 107
Klongchan, Bangkok
Bangkok, THAILAND 10240