Wiwaha Phra Samut of King Vajiravudh: Space, Gender, and the Semicoloniality of Siam

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Abstract

The play, *Wiwaha Phra Samut* (*Marriage to the God of the Sea*) by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) is a drama charting the fundraising campaign for the Phra Ruang warship during World War I. The play not only hybridizes several features ranging from Greek mythology and the English navy to Thai culture, but also presents the so-called 'semicoloniality of Siam' and tools for the king's nationalist project. Spatial and gender relationships in the play are crucial evidence of this. This article examines the construction and signification of space and gender and asks how these link to the semicoloniality of Siam. The result shows that colonial discourse underpins the construction of space and gender since *Wiwaha Phra Samut* creates an imaginary island. Within this space, a princess is destined to be martyred to the God of the Sea before the English navy claims itself to be the true God of the Sea to resolve the conflict. In this respect, the island is portrayed as spiritual and feminine whereas the sea represents masculinity, which connotes the white man. Similarly, British males possess the most power, whereas locals and the Other either submit to their power or are demonized. The island can be seen as a metaphor for Siam as Siamese elites designate themselves as 'civilized people' to make sense of their nation's independent status. At the same time, the play also illustrates the attempt to adopt and adapt elements of Western civilization to propagate nationalist sentiment and establish the campaign in the context of World War I.

Keywords: Wiwaha Phra Samut, King Vajiravudh (RamaVI), semicoloniality, space, gender, Siam/Thailand

Introduction

King Vajiravudh or King Rama VI (r. 1910-1925) is a key figure who propagated the nationalist idea of Thainess (*khwam-pen-Thai*) through the pillars of nation, religion, and king. He is also praised as a major Thai author who produced thousands of works and introduced new types of literature to Siam. More importantly, his roles as king and author are deeply connected since his literary works were a significant political tool for his nationalist ideology (see Malakul 2009). From a postcolonial perspective, furthermore, the king's writings are a site embedded in the discourse of the 'semicoloniality of Siam' (Harrison, 2009; Chaochuti, 2009). This means that although Siam had not been officially colonized, Bangkok elites from the late 19th to the early 20th century had to adopt and adapt to Western civility to contest and negotiate their independent status on the global stage. Meanwhile, the project of "civilizing" the nation became political and cultural as the Bangkok elites needed to differentiate themselves from the 'Other' in the nation by claiming their right to govern (see further in Harrison and Jackson, ed., 2010).

These complex relations to the West and propagation of ideologies from Bangkok can be seen in many of the king's literary works including the drama play *Wiwaha Phra Samut* (hereafter *Wiwaha*), which can be translated as 'Marriage to the God of the Sea.' Composed of a mixed spoken and musical performance, *Wiwaha* hybridizes transnational elements from traditional Thai culture, Western forms of drama, and Greek mythology (Satree, 1993; Meesuk, 1998). The play depicts the imaginary island of Alphabeta where every 100 years, Phra Samut - the God of the Sea - rises to claim the tribute of a young maiden to become his bride. *Wiwaha* uses this myth as the main narrative conflict bringing several characters together to prevent the martyrdom of the island's princess. Interestingly, the English Royal Navy is presented as the real hero claiming the right to be the God of the Sea and restoring peace on the island.

Wiwaha played a critical role as propaganda during World War I (hereafter WWI). First performed in August 1916 before Siam declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary in July 1917, *Wiwaha* was part of the king's campaign to raise money for the purchase of the Royal Phra Ruang Warship (Malakul, 2009: 234-243). In doing so, *Wiwaha* not only warns about the maritime crisis by positioning England as the superpower (Pupaka, 2010), but also praises the imitation of a colonial superpower in raising funds for the warship (Chaochuti, 2014). Moreover, space and gender in *Wiwaha* are other crucial issues because the play constructs space from mythological encounters in real-world politics. Additionally, the construction of gender and power relations is deeply connected to colonial discourse and wartime.

However, discussions of *Wiwaha* and other works within the context of colonial tension have not been widely explored. Since the dominant national discourse insists that Siam/Thailand has never been colonized, postcolonial studies related to Siam/Thailand have been limited (see Jackson, 2010b). Regarding the Thai literary field, aesthetic reading has long been a crucial approach whereas postcolonial writings, including 'Western theories' have been perceived as a collective 'beast' that disturbs convention (see Harrison, 2014). Some studies in the Thai language, nevertheless, were undertaken through a postcolonial lens to re-examine classical texts around the 2000s, (e.g. Suvattanavanich, 2004; Prasannam, 2007). Additionally, Rachel Harrison's edited book (2014), *Disturbing Conventions,* is another example of anglophone academics. Although some of King Vajiravudh's works have been re-examined, (Chaochuthi, 2009; Harrison, 2009; Prasannam, 2007; Poolthong, 2015), space and gender regarding the semicolinialty of Siam have yet to be widely explored. Therefore, this article has two aims: (1) to analyze how space and gender are constructed and signified in *Wiwaha,* and (2) to discuss how space and gender in *Wiwaha* resonate with the semicoloniality of Siam. To provide answers, I will review the concepts of space, gender, and colonial discourse before demonstrating the semicoloniality of Siam and linking it to King Vajiravudh's literature and political campaign. Space and gender in *Wiwaha* and its links to the semicoloniality of Siam will follow.

Space, Gender, and Colonial Discourse

Space in this article does not refer to physical space, but rather to social space. In cultural studies, space involves "the participation among a certain group of people at a specific place and time with an emphasis on power relations and social practices" (Barker and Jane, 2016: 522). Social and cultural relationships constituted in that space are the primary concern, and power is a key topic of discussion. This is the result of the 'spatial turn' in social sciences from the 1960s, which was dominated by seminal thinkers like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja. Hence, space, as Theda Wrede (2015: 11) sums it up, is "never neutral but always discursively constructed, ideologically marked, and shaped by the dominant power structures and forms of knowledge." Similarly, Sara Mills (2005: 23) contends that "space is a question of relations," because spaces are the manifestation of power which can expose power structures governed by dominant powers and translated into individual relationships. In other words, the study of space "opens our eyes to hierarchic orderings and social structurings" (Löw, 2006: 120).

Space is inseparable from gender as the two are constructed by each other. Doreen Massey (1994: 186) argues that the "gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back* on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live." This means that spaces are imagined by gendering them while gender underpins spaces. For instance, sports spaces are gendered with masculinity while domestic spaces like kitchens are constructed with femininity. Thus, feminist readings contribute to the spatial turn movement by stressing the intertwining of patriarchy with space, in which private and public spaces each belong to a particular gender (see Wrede 2015).

Space and gender are connected in colonial space. The geographical space of the West and East in colonial discourse is not only signified as physical space. Rather, it constructs 'Us' and the 'Other.' As Edward Said (1979: 1) argues, the Orient (or non-European people and their cultures) "is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience," in which "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West)." According to Said, the West implies a land of wisdom, logic, and civilization, whereas the Orient is constructed as a land of mystery and spiritualism. Subsequently, spatial difference leads to stereotypes and an imbalance of power in the relationship. In addition, this form of knowledge constitutes the system of understanding and the way of seeing the world called 'colonial discourse.' In brief, this discourse is privileged to Eurocentric modernity and the assumptions of superiority according to which Europeans need to civilize colonized subjects (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2013: 50-52). While 'primitive' belongs to the colonized, it allows the idea of 'the white man's burden' to civilize the Other and legitimize their colonization.

One way to imagine and govern the space of the 'Other' is by gendering space. John McLeod (2010: 54) sums up that "the East as a whole is 'feminized,' deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious, and tempting; while the West becomes 'masculine' – that is, active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled and ascetic." This becomes the common trope about white male voyagers traveling to discover or conquer 'barbaric' lands, and those lands are portrayed as exotic beauties that can be embodied through female locals. This so-called 'colonial desire' is thus pervaded by sexuality since the logic of colonization comes along with rape, penetration, and impregnation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2013: 49-50). As the imagination of the Other comes along with sexual exoticism, power in colonial space is thus entangled with gender relationships.

Nevertheless, colonial discourse does not fall into a binary opposition. In fact, it is more flexible and complex since each colonial space is historically, politically, and culturally different. Moreover, the resistance of the colonized and within colonizers as well as gender differences should be considered (McLeod, 2010: 55-61). In this respect, Homi Bhabha (2004) proposed that colonial discourse is ambivalence. Instead of viewing it as a binary, he contends that the cultures of colonizers and the colonized are hybridized, leading to hybrid culture, which is 'similar but not the same.' This 'in-betweenness' challenges

the authority and authenticity of colonizers and becomes the resistance act of the colonized. Here, Siam/Thailand is an essential case that shows this ambivalence and complicated colonial discourse as the country has never been officially colonized, although the hybridization of colonial influences is deeply and widely embedded in the political and cultural milieu.

The Semicoloniality of Siam and Politics in King Vajiravudh's Writings

Despite its never having been colonized, the country's nation-building, modernization, and national identity have been shaped to a considerable extent by colonial discourse. This entanglement or so-called 'semicoloniality' presents 'the ambiguous allure of the West' (see Harrison and Jackson (ed.) 2010). While there are several terms defining the colonial condition of Siam, including crypto-colonialism, internal colonialism, auto-colonialism, and so on, I use the term 'semicolonial.' According to Peter Jackson (2010a; 2010b), semicoloniality has two dimensions: international and domestic levels related to the discourse of *siwilai* –the Thai term for 'civilize' or 'civilized'–among Siamese elites. From the late 19th century, Siamese elites–especially during the reigns of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn–attempted to present their *siwilai* through their mimicry of Western culture. Although attempting to prove themselves as civilized as Westerners, this process shows the ambiguous allure of the West since these Siamese elites at the same time needed to 'mind the gap' or identify themselves as different in order to show their independence. Siamese elites thus presented themselves as 'similar but not the same' on the international stage as so-called *siwilai* while differentiating themselves as Siam/Thai.

On the domestic level, the hybridity of the West among Siamese elites constructed hegemonic power to govern the nation. The presentation of *siwilai* is a strategy used to remain superior to other classes in Siam. It further reinforces their right to build the nation based on the Bangkok elites' mandate. For Thongchai Winichakul (2000), the

discourse of 'the Other Within' emerged from the *siwilai* project wielded by the Bangkok elites to view people from different regions such as Lanna and Isan and peripheral lands occupied by "hill tribes" and ethnicities considered inferior and less civilized. Indeed, this allows Bangkok's standard of *siwilai* to become legitimate within centralized Siam.

The literary milieu is an essential realm connected to the semicoloniality of Siam, especially during King Vajiravudh's reign. Rachel Harrison (2009: 329) argues that the king "had imbibed colonial discourses most completely as an effect of his lengthy education in Britain and his consequent exposure" to colonial discourse. King Vajiravudh's writings are a good example because literature showcases the *siwilai* of the nation. In *Phra Non Khamluang* (1916), he manifests that poets are the gems of the nation which (civilized) countries adore, whereas those who hate letters and books are savage (*khon pa*, *khon dong*). Moreover, as Crown Prince, he wrote *Lilit Payap* (1905) during a trip to the Northern region. The work depicts a top-down relationship with the Bangkok elites as the lords while the Others are their subjects (Prasannam, 2007: 100-101). The peripheral lands and people are portrayed as backward spaces (*ban nok*); meanwhile, the civility of Bangkok rulers is emphasized by hybrid modernity (Poolthong, 2015). Additionally, *Nithan Thorng-In* (1904-1905)–the adaption of Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*–illustrates, as Harrison (2009) argues, not only mimicry of the Western style of detective fiction, but also how the Bangkok elites aligned themselves with rational and intellectual modernity. *Nithan Thorng-In* locates the stories in Thai society and shows threats to Siam from the external Other such as the West and the overseas Chinese, issues which need rational intelligent figures to solve them.

More importantly, King Vajiravudh's writings directly connect to his nationalism project. After he became king in 1910, security on the internal and international stages was challenged. For internal security, his power was challenged in the early years of enthronement, in an event known as the Palace Revolt of 1912 (*Kabot R.S. 130*). Despite this failed attempt, the king's nationalism along with the

strengthening of the military and *Sua Pa* (Wild Tiger Corps) were introduced (Vella, 2019). His nationalism of "nation, religion, and king," which was adopted from the British version of 'God, king, and country,' stresses that the king is placed at the heart of the nation, and acts that demonstrate either a threat or loyalty to the king are connected to the nation. Along with internal security, WWI (1914-1918) became another challenge of his reign. Although Siam played a neutral role in the war before declaring to join the Alliance in 1917, the king played a leading role in responding to the war and used this incident to justify his nationalist campaign. Moreover, he had unofficially prepared for the war, as modernizing and strengthening the military were crucial policies. Again, these policies were not only for security reasons but also for the quest of *siwilai*, which Walter Vella (2019: 90) states, was centered around "reasons of pride and security."

The king's campaign for the Royal Navy League (*Ratchanawi Samakhom*) to buy the royal warship is a predominant example. In response to the outbreak of WWI, the Royal Navy League was established in 1914 with the key mission of raising money from the people to buy Siam's first warship. In doing so, the journal, *Samutthasan,* published articles and literature to support the campaign by demonstrating the king's marine abilities, convincing the public, and defending his policy from those who opposed it since the warship issue was debated heavily among the royal families, bureaucrats, and journalists (Boontanondha, 2016). In *Samutthasan*, the king published various works towards this goal. For example, *Kap He Ruea* (1914) was adapted from classical royal barge poetry to demonstrate the civility of Bangkok and the importance of the monarchy before emphasizing external threats. This work also parallels the myth of Phra Ruang (the semi-legendary monarch of Sukhothai) who fought for Siamese independence and the name of the warship (Hongthong, 2013). Moreover, the play *Mahatama* (1914) creates the story of the opponents to the fundraising who eventually end up seeing the advantage of the warship. This play asks individuals to make sacrifices for the nation and the king with donations. Conversely, opponents are blamed for their selfishness and disloyalty to the country (Limprasert, 2004: 242).

Interestingly, these works not only target the raising of money and nationalist sentiment, but also disclose the colonial discourse of Siamese elites by linking civility to the Western navy. *Wiwaha* is another major example that portrays this entanglement during wartime Siam embedded in spatial and gender relationships. In the following sections, I will examine spatial and gender relationships linked to power and the colonial discourse adopted in Siam's semicolonial situation.

Shaping Space: The Meaning of the Island and Implication of the Sea

In *Wiwaha*, there are only two spaces: the island and the sea. Demonstrating imbalanced power, the sea is portrayed as more powerful than the land, which has to submit to the sea. This concept originates from the physical space being an enclosed island surrounded by the sea and isolated from the outside world. The play opens by describing Alphabeta's waters as "our guard, our protection" (Sri Ayutthaya (pseudonym). (1966). translation mine). Moreover, the legend of the islander Phra Samut who can also "claim tribute" establishes the sacred status of the sea, which requires the island to accept that power. In this sense, the fate of the island is defined by the sea, which can be seen as the 'invisible Other.'

As the play develops, the invisible Other becomes a competing site of meaning. *Wiwaha* personifies the power of the sea with real-world figures: a Chinese servant and the English navy. First, the citizens of Alphabeta mistakenly view Tek-lee, a Chinese servant on the English navy ship, as a ghost or sea spirit (*phi tha-le*) who comes to claim tribute since "these people have never spotted a Chinese. What a ridiculous being? With his tail on his head?" The chaos from Tek-lee's arrival pressures King Midas to prepare Princess Andromeda as a martyr by floating her out to sea. Yet Prince Andre and Constantinos plot to rescue her and compete to marry her.

These events lead to the involvement of the English navy. Here, the power over the sea is redefined by the claim of Captain Edward Lion.

He claims himself to be Phra Samut as the British navy is the real god of the sea during that time - "the royal navy is the sea ruler, the king! Thou should be noted; thou should be well aware […] as a captain of the royal navy, I must say I am the legitimate representative." His claim then resolves the conflict as the princess does not go to die in the sea, and the prince and princess become a couple by his command, as "people will not dare to challenge the British soldiers, or challenge their guns and swords." In other words, the sea as the invisible Other becomes tangible with the power of the navy which can protect and destroy the island in real life, compared to a mythical god.

It could be said that the power of the sea space is contested through contrast. The depiction of Tek-lee's power comes with characteristics of otherness and relies on traditional beliefs. Moreover, Tek-lee is portrayed as a corrupt and unreliable figure. This is because if Tek-lee, mistakenly identified as Phra Samut, points to anyone as the groom, that one will be the rightful groom. To overcome Prince Andre, Constantinos lobbies Tek-lee to say his name. Although Tek-lee accepts at first, he deliberately thwarts the plan. Therefore, the portrayal of Tek-lee stands in contrast to that of Lion who uses scientific reason and military power. This behavior is shown to be reliable, unlike the untrustworthy myth embodied in Tek-lee.

More importantly, spatial relations clearly represent colonial discourse. Mills suggests (2005: 22) that "representations of spatial relations should be seen as part of the process of making sense of colonial power relations." *Wiwaha* shows this by constructing a contrast between two poles: spirituality and reason. The island space is comparable to the East in colonial discourse due to its status as a spiritual and mysterious land. Meanwhile, the English Royal Navy travels to claim the sea through its intellectual power and modernity. In the climactic scene, the priest of the island and the navy officer heatedly discuss the characteristics of Phra Samut. While the priest argues that Phra Samut is Tek-lee using mythical logic, Lion contends that it is he himself. The play's ending with the victory of the naval officer is clear evidence of colonial discourse as Western 'civilization' is depicted as superior to native belief.

In addition, the island is gendered according to colonial discourse. As the title of *Wiwaha* implies marriage to the God of the Sea, the bride here is the princess of the island while the groom is implied to be Phra Samut. Thus, femininity is embodied in the island while the sea represents masculinity. This is apparent from the 'fight for the woman' between Andre, supported by the English navy, and Constantinos, supported by the priest. Interestingly, fighting is a male activity while women are required to be submissive and remain objects to be fought over. In this aspect, the princess's fate is inseparable from the power of the island, which presents the imbalanced power relations with men presented as the sea.

Gender and Power Relations: Politics of Femininity, Masculinity, and Marriage

Apart from gendering space, *Wiwaha* embodies male and female characters referencing colonial discourse. Moreover, as Mills (2005: 4) contends, "the classed and raced nature of gender affects the way that space can be inhabited and spatial relations experienced." The roles of race and class are deeply connected to gender construction in *Wiwaha* as shown in the following analysis.

Passive and Active Roles of Femininity

Beginning with women, *Wiwaha* includes two main heroines, Princess Andromeda and Mary Riddle, a British servant of the princess. As for the princess, she is the center of the conflict in the play. Her role is strictly that of a princess who is under male control during the opening of the play and the wooing scene with the prince. However, she is less present throughout the rest of the play. To replace Andromeda's absence, the character of Mary is then highlighted. When chaos breaks out on the island, the locals, "think we should ask for the English Madam's opinion since she is knowledgeable." Mary then asks for help from Captain Lion, resulting in the successful attempt to rescue the princess. Thus, the roles of the two female characters are not equal. The local

female plays a passive role representing formality based on tradition, a subject of faith, and exists as a goal to be won over. Conversely, the British character plays an active role in solving problems and is praised for her knowledge.

Interestingly, *Wiwaha* chooses to portray the British woman as aligning with public space rather than domestic space. In fact, however, several discussions of feminist works shed light on how women in the West are oppressed under the patriarchy in the private space whereas men enjoy an active role in public space in colonial discourse (see Mills 2005). Yet Mary in *Wiwaha* is different, since she is similar to the British men in terms of travelling to a faraway land while abandoning British conventions (Mills, 2005). Regarding this, the gender role of Mary in this faraway land allows her femininity to play an active role like the white men according to colonial discourse in contrast to the local princess.

Hierarchical Masculinity

The embodiment of males in *Wiwaha* reveals the hierarchical order underpinned by colonial discourse. Their portrayals mirror unequal power relationships between and stereotypical images of the West and the rest. Undoubtedly, the most powerful man is Captain Lion. His navy's power and greatness are repeated from the beginning–"I am well respected in every continent, every place, every sea, everywhere I have ever visited. I am harsh and strong in wars, yet gentle and kind on other occasions. Men and women alike all appreciate my presence!" At the climax, *Wiwaha* highlights his power as he can control the fate of the island, so even the king must fear him. Notably, the name Lion connotes the king of the jungle, to emphasize his leadership and power. The lion is also an animal symbol of England.

On the other hand, the native males of the island are all described as being of inferior status, ridiculous, and uncanny, despite being royalty. Taken from Midas, an unwise king in Greek mythology, King Midas in *Wiwaha* is depicted in the same sense (Satree, 1993). He is portrayed as inferior when he meets the navy as he says, "Britain is like the king of the sea; its power is beyond borders. The power of the navy towers

over the land and the sea. While Alphabeta is just a small island, we are delighted to admit you in a favorable fashion." Similarly, Prince Andre has no bargaining power because he lacks both military and economic power, even though he is a royal. The prince has to rely on the English navy's power to claim his authority and legitimacy to marry the princess. In the climax, the prince is dressed in an English navy uniform and announces, "I am the captain; I am from the sea. Thy authority can well confirm that, and in such a case, thou aren't moved that I am Phra Samut's relative."

Given that colonial discourse aligns the masculinity of white men with modernity and scientific knowledge, it is interesting that *Wiwaha* embodies the priest, Christopher, as the opposite. While Christopher represents old-world knowledge by underlining the role of Phra Samut's myth and ritual, Lion denies this–"the sea has no life, and how can it be so cruel, harming us ungratefully? […] and if the sea is alive, is full of power, how can it let the navy ship glide along?" Aside from outdated logic, the priest's lessened reliability is also asserted in his being bribed by Constantinos. When the truth is unmasked, his reliability and morality are not only destroyed, but the power and credibility of the English also become more accepted. In short, reliable and reasonable qualities are embodied in the white men's navy, whereas 'primitive' and untrustworthy practices are inscribed in the local religious leader.

The logic of colonial discourse shows a contrast between men from the West and the locals in *Wiwaha*, whereas Tek-lee embodies a 'double Other' because he is neither English nor an Alphabeta local. Despite being set up as a realistic nationality like the English, Tek-lee differs from both the English and those from the island. He is a rather ridiculous character and is looked down on by the locals for his appearance and Chinese accent as "a savage! He's from 'Dong' - the woods!" […] Right! This savage cannot talk properly -- wood! woodland!" He is then demonized to be a *phi tha-le* or sea ghost. Moreover, his untrustworthiness is comparable to that of a ghost in terms of being frightening, causing disorder, and existing beyond scientific

explanations. In this respect, the embodiment of Tek-lee illustrates the untrustworthy and hard-to-control 'Other.' Therefore, although his gender is the same as that of the other men, this Chinese man is posited as the lowest figure in the constructed social hierarchy and reflects threats to social norms, of course, grounded in colonial discourse, in complete contrast to the English man.

A summary of the politics of masculinity and femininity in *Wiwaha* is shown in Table 1 below. It is apparent that the local female character is portrayed as a damsel in distress and the conduit for a fight for power among the males. Evidently, the center of power is the English Royal Navy followed by other male characters based on class and race. A male Chinese man is shown to hold the lowest status in being perceived as a demon. Interestingly, an English woman can be seen as the middle ground between the locals and the English as she is the mediator between the two parties; however, at the same time, she evidently signifies how powerful the English and their mission are.

Table 1 Gender roles in *Wiwaha*

Character	Gender	Race	Class	Role in the play
Edward Lion	Male	English	English Royal Navy	Pinpointing the princess's fate to survival and being with the proper man
Mary Riddle	Female	English	English caregiver for the princess	Helping the locals by asking the English for help
Andromeda	Female	Local	Princess	Portrayed as a goal to be rescued and fought over
Andre	Male	Local	Prince of a nearby city	Depends on the English navy's power to marry the princess
King Midas	Male	Local	King of Alphabeta	Depends on the English navy's power to rescue his daughter
Christopher	Male	Local	Priest leader	Goes against the English navy's power
Constantinos	Male	Local	Local	Goes against the English navy's power to be with the princess
Tek-lee	Male	Chinese	Servant on the English warship	A sea ghost who causes chaos in the city

Marriage to the Sea, Marriage to the (Colonial) Power

As with the title, the power relations in *Wiwaha* are also connected to the meaning of marriage. On the surface, the play seems to be a typical romance about a prince and princess falling in love, overcoming all obstacles, and living happily ever after. Nonetheless, their romance cannot succeed without colonial power as their marriage cannot take place without help from the English navy. Likewise, this power is used to destroy the antagonist in the play. Therefore, the marriage between Andre and Andromeda, which is guided by the English Royal Navy, acts as the common ground between the local elites and the colonists. In short, the marriage implies the influence of colonial power that comes to manipulate internal affairs.

Another marriage that takes place is one between Lion and Mary. They are considered to be a proper couple because of their nationality and roles, as both are foreigners taking on a mission in an exotic land. Both characters hold status superior to that of the locals. The meeting of the two in a foreign land is thus a connection for their 'colonial power,' leading to their love while their quest on Alphabeta Island is comparable to the white peoples' attempts at civilizing and colonizing the land. Ultimately, their marriage at the end can be depicted as a successful cooperation of white men and women in terms of military and intelligent power over the island.

Wiwaha and Semicoloniality: Metaphors of Siam Encountering the West and the War

While an analysis of the construction of space and gender in *Wiwaha* clearly shows the influence of colonial discourse, it also leads to the question of why the king of Siam glorifies the colonists and supports the logic of colonial discourse. To understand this situation, the concept of semicoloniality and the context of WWI should be examined. Arguably, *Wiwaha* represents Siamese semicolonial discourse in praising the civility of the West, with whom they align themselves as a *siwilai* nation. At the same time, *Wiwaha* illuminates the anxiety of the

Siamese elites over the threat of colonialism, and the need to negotiate independence by relying on 'true power.' The imbalance of power in this relationship can also be seen in the specific WWI context as the Siamese Royal Navy needs to be modernized with the British Royal Navy as its model. Thus, the real aim of the play is to promote fundraising for a royal warship.

Alphabeta and Siam Amid International Challenges

The spatial relations of Alphabeta are a metaphor for Siam's being 'in-between' a colony and a free state. Though the island is not colonized by the English and its independence is secured, the island's ruling class cannot reject English power as the sea impacts the island. The island's ruling class needs an educated English female and the English Royal Navy to secure its fate. This scenario directly reflects Siam's situation during the period of colonial tension wherein the nation's politics were impacted by the colonists, even though Siam was not directly colonized.

Furthermore, spatial relations in *Wiwaha* reflect how the Siamese elites aligned their *siwilai* with the West, especially Britain, to gain legitimacy. In this context, it means the king's project of fundraising for the warship, which is stated clearly in the play – "The nation that possesses warships to navigate the seas is always prepared for battle. It is like having great strength to protect the nation, religion, and monarchy. […] Let us all donate for the rightful and honorable Phra Ruang warship. The royal navy will have the power to defeat enemies swiftly!" Thus, the English Royal Navy in *Wiwaha* as a reference to glory and civility mirrors the king's view of modernizing the Siamese military because "the equation of national power and naval strength was, in Vajiravudh's view, demonstrated conclusively by Britain" (Vella, 2019: 102). Moreover, since the king himself played Captain Lion in the play's first public performance (Malakul, 2009: 234), the desirable civility and power of the British navy were represented through the king.

At the same time, *Wiwaha* demonstrates the tensions in spatial relationship similar to Siam's entanglement with colonial threat.

The play also reveals the strategy of the elites in negotiating with Western powers for the country's independence. First, *Wiwaha* shows the threat from colonial power that surrounds the island like the geographical space of Siam, wherein all neighboring lands belonged to either Britain or France. While Alphabeta remains independent, *Wiwaha* presents the external threat from the sea. This can be linked to the anxiety of the Siamese elites and is embedded in grand Thai history through the discourse of the 'lost territories' (*sia dindaen*). Shane Strate (2015) argues that the Franco-Siamese Crisis in 1893 resulted in the 'national humiliation' of losing territories. This discourse becomes the main narrative in Thai history, especially to stimulate nationalist sentiment among Thais to protect the country's independence. This is reflected in King Vajiravudh's writing as he emphasizes the word 'Thai' as 'freedom' of the Thais (Jackson, 2010a: 201).

Subsequently, when WWI broke out, the king's propaganda stressing the survival of Siam was intense. *Wiwaha* presents the king's strategy of aligning with Britain rather than with Germany and France. According to Thep Boontanondha (2016), the king, having an English educational background, was likely to support the Alliance. However, there was no consensus among senior royal members and bureaucrats since some had been trained in Germany or Russia. As Vella (2019) and Boontanondha (2016) explain, the king prepared to join Britain's side since Siam declared neutrality in WWI. *Wiwaha*–which was performed only one year before the declaration of war–might be evidence of the king's intention to convince the public of who the 'real power' was.

Idealizing Siamese Men, Women, and Family

Gender relations in *Wiwaha* present another strategy of the king to promote notions of *siwilai* men and women as well as modern families as part of his nationalism. Again, these ideas are adopted and adapted from Victorian culture to define desirable citizens as 'gentleman' (*suphap burut*) and decent women. According to Tamara Loos (2006), the king's idea of desirable men and women is connected to the ideal family, and so the family is a metaphor for the nation. Thus, the king's

invention of nationalism focused on the notion of the individual body and mind as the basis of the nation. Not only did he reject the practice of polygamy, the idea of a gentleman was first established and family law was enacted during his reign. In his writings, the quality of 'Siamese gentlemen' relies on a noble class characterized by bravery, dignity, and manners in regard to women. More importantly, the idea gentlemen should make sacrifices for the public extends to the nation and the king (Kittimahacharoen, 2020). Regarding women, the king was actively engaged in women's rights and roles as he stated in the article, *The Symbol of the Glory is the Status of Women (khrueangmai haeng khwam rungrueang khue saphap haeng satri)*. In his writings, female protagonists are thus knowledgeable, independent, and free to choose their lovers. They voice the problems resulting from polygamy and support nationalism (Noinimit, 2006).

The embodiment of protagonists in *Wiwaha* illustrates these idealized individuals. Interestingly, members of the British Royal Navy like Lion are posited as ideal men compared to the local men who are portrayed as inferior and dependant on the navy's power. Moreover, Lion's glorification parallels antagonist characters such as the priest. This can be compared to the embodiment of Mr. Thong-In with rational and modern knowledge whereas the antagonists are related to primitive figures, as Harrison (2009) and Chaochuti (2009) demonstrate. Thus, desirable and undesirable figures are equated with the West and the rest, respectively. Similarly, knowledgeable women are linked to British women. In addition, the play establishes conflict with arranged marriage before ending with romantic love and marriage. The latter kind of marriage implies an idealized family, which stems from individuals being able to choose their lovers. It is also noteworthy that the marriage of two couples is monogamous. Therefore, these representations present the allure of the West and Siamese idealized men, women, and families.

On the other hand, undesirable individuals are embodied in the Other Within as with Tek-lee. As Thak Chaloemtiarana (2018) argues, new Chinese immigrants were thought to cause problems in Siam, as a result of which the Siamese elites, especially King Vajiravudh, see them

as the Other Within who present a threat. This trope is thus common in the king's works. More importantly, Wasana Wongsurawat (2019: 72-73) contends that since Siam positions itself as a powerful nation like England, Chinese immigrants are considered inferior. Thus, several overseas Chinese groups needed to prove their loyalty through donations to the warship fundraiser, from which Boontanondha (2017: 70-71) contends that they were the key group in which the king was appreciated. From these contexts, it is understandable that Tek-lee is portrayed as the most inferior man and a ghost who can harm the nation's security. In contrast to idealized men from the West, the male qualities of Tek-lee are seen as undesirable not only for his race but also for his ability to destabilize action. In summary, these characters shed light on the colonial discourse that the Siamese elites adopted to build a *siwilai* nation by governing from the national level into individual embodiment.

Conclusion

This article examines how space and gender are constructed and signified within the context of Siam's semicoloniality in *Wiwaha*. The result shows that colonial discourse underpins spatial and gender relations in the play. In terms of space, the island represents a spiritual and feminine land which is submissive and relies on the sea. Although the sea is presented as an invisible god at first, *Wiwaha* concludes with the role of English men as the real Phra Samut. Regarding gender relations, the highest order is with the English navy and women. For the locals, the female character is needed to help as a symbol for gaining power among the men; meanwhile, local males are made fun of for being inferior. Meanwhile, the Chinese are demonized as a 'double Other.' The play's ending with marriage, moreover, portrays collaboration between the local elites and colonists.

Spatial and gender relations in *Wiwaha* can be seen as metaphors for Siam under semicolonial conditions and King Vajiravudh's agenda during WWI. The play demonstrates the discourse of *siwilai*, which denotes Siamese elites aligning themselves with the West, and Britain

in particular. At the same time, however, these elites attempted to differentiate themselves by constructing a national identity from a nationalist project. This situation is made clear as *Wiwaha* was a tool used to fundraise for the warship, which combines a sense of security and pride with the British Royal Navy as the model. The island space is thus similar to that of Siam being surrounded by the Other, which can threaten the nation. To align and ally with Britain as the true power of the sea is ultimately shown to be the correct choice, as the more civilized the English were, the more convincing the king's policy was. Finally, the desirable qualities of individuals derived from the West are also embodied in *Wiwaha* since the play portrays the ideal concepts of gentlemen, contemporary women, and marriage from the king's personal preferences.

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