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“Pirated” Transnational Broadcasting: The Consumption of Thai Soap Operas among Shan Communities in Burma

Amporn JIRATTIKORN

This article examines the roles of transnational media in the lives of Shan communities in Burma with a focus on their consumption of Thai satellite television, the main window to the outside world available to them. It will analyse how the Shan appropriation of transnational television creates a new site of identity transcending national boundaries and expressing an ambivalent sense of interaction with mediated modernity. The paper will demonstrate the role of transnational television as a catalyst for the emergence of Shan migration to Thailand.

Keywords: pirate, transnational media, Shan communities, Burma/Myanmar, consumption, Thai soap opera, localizing, politicizing Thai-ness, satellite, television, migration.

Unlike the other neighbouring countries of Thailand, i.e., Laos and Cambodia where Thai media is consumed directly from satellite signals, most Shans living in Burma¹ have access to and consume Thai television programming mainly in the form of Thai soap operas dubbed in Shan. Being a minority in Burma where television programmes in minority languages have been absent, Shan local businessmen pirated Thai soap operas through satellite signals, dubbed the programmes into Shan language, and changed the titles — including actors and actresses’ names — into Shan. By doing so, they turned “foreign” cultural products into their own form of entertainment. These pirated soap series are distributed in a form of Video CDs available in rental shops everywhere in Shan state.² Shans living in urban areas rent the VCDs to watch at home, while those in the village watch them in small movie theaters adapted from

residential houses. Today, Thai soaps dubbed in Shan have become the most popular form of entertainment among Shan communities throughout the Shan state in Burma. In a country where information is filtered by the apparatus of the Burmese military regime, Thai soap operas, given the illicit nature of their acquisition, have become virtually the main window to the outside world available to many Shan audiences.

Though the most common understanding of product piracy is nothing but robbery, this paper views piracy as part of transnational activities which involve the flow of ideas and lifestyles from one part of the world to another. In this case, the flow originates from a country considered more “modern” and more “developed” and arrives at an area considered “less modern”. It is, therefore, important to examine what impact, if any, the flow of media from one side of the border has on the ways people on the other side of the border think about themselves and the nation. With the increasing mobility of culture, media scholars and anthropologists have studied how transnational flows of media and popular culture have affected the lifestyles of people. While in the past decades, studies on cultural effects of globalization tend to focus on the “West and the Rest paradigm”, and attention was given to the debate on homogenization (Harvey 1990) or hybridization/creolization (Hannerz 1996), recently, scholars tend to agree that globalization is not bringing about a global cultural uniformity (see, for example, Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1996, Miller 1994). The widespread consumption of Coca Cola, McDonald’s and American soap operas has instead brought about increasing cultural diversity across the world. What we have here in the case of the Shan in Burma consuming Thai soap operas invites further examination in terms of both cultural imperialism as regards Thailand’s cultural influence over its neighbouring country and bottom-up cultural appropriation whereby the Shan refashion “foreign” culture into their own form of cultural product.

In examining the role of transnational media in the lives of Shan communities in Burma, this paper explores the piracy and consumption of Thai soap operas on two fronts, national and

transnational. On the national level, I seek to understand how the Shan appropriate transnational satellite signals to create new meanings that in the process help to redefine their ethnic identity. In his well known work on imagined communities, Anderson (1991) suggests an important role of mass media in shaping national imaginaries. While Anderson focuses on print capitalism as fomenting nationalism, this essay explores how the “imagined Shan nation” came to acquire a distinct shape, in part via the appropriation and consumption of Thai soap operas. For the “imagined communities” of the eighteenth century, it was print capitalism which provided the new institutional space for the development of the modern “national” language wherein nations were imagined into existence. What we have here in a society, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, that lacks control over the means of production is an example of mass media which is neither institutionalized nor the creation of elites. Instead, it is pirated from transnational satellite signals which have unexpectedly aided in the development of a modern Shan “national” language. Instead of viewing transnationalism as a challenge to the continued existence of the nation or nation-state (Appadurai 1996, Sassen 1996, Castells 1997), I argue that transnational flows, in this case, have come to fuel a strong nationalist impulse. It is through selective appropriation in which the Shan find themselves as consumers of Thai television soap operas that a Shan nationalist sentiment is intensified and a sense of Shan-ness as a single entity is emerging.

On a transnational level, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (2002) in her study of television watching in Shanghai argues that mass media is a vehicle for imagining not only the nation, but also the larger space beyond national borders. To Yang, transnational media enable the construction of a new transnational subjectivity, detaching Chinese subjectivity from the state. Media provide ways for audiences to traverse great distances without physically moving from local sites. Thus media become crucial components of transnationalism; stationary audiences in effect become transnational. Following Yang’s suggestion that mass media can be a central constituting force for people to imagine themselves beyond national borders, I further

extend such lines of analysis by not only looking at media as a vehicle for imagining nation or trans-nation, but also how media play an important role in attracting people to actually cross real physical borders. This is not “imagination as social practice” as Appadurai has referred to it (1996, p. 31); but “imagination” as a stimulus to move which is deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space. As Appadurai has suggested, those who wish to move and those who have moved rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of mass media (1996, p. 6). This paper examines the role of Thai media as a catalyst for Shan migration into Thailand and as a source of information for potential migrants.

Together, the two parts in my essay address the complex relationship between transnationalism, media consumption and identity formation. My ethnographic data was collected in Shan state, Burma as well as among Shan migrant communities in Chiang Mai, Thailand during 2005–06. In Burma, I traveled to both urban and rural areas to examine the production, distribution and consumption of Thai soap operas. There were two main settings that I visited: locations where programmes were dubbed in Shan, and local movie theaters. While the dubbing was based in Taunggyi, the capital city of Shan state, I have traveled to several parts of Shan state including Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Muse, Namkham as well as Kengtung to participate in watching Thai soaps with Shan audiences. My methodology integrates analysis of language translation, participant observation in the process of dubbing and watching Thai soaps at local theaters as well as in private households with Shan audiences. I also interviewed local businessmen, visited video rental shops, and analysed Shan public discourse towards Thailand. Regarding audience reception, not only did I participate in watching Thai soaps with the Shan audiences, I also chatted, ate, drank and participated in the daily lives of my research informants to understand how the Shan version of Thai soaps is interpreted individually and collectively in the spaces of its interaction with day-to-day social practices (Ang 1985; Katz and Liebes 1990; Murphy 1999).

As for my research in Chiang Mai, ethnographic data used in this essay is part of long-term participant observation done in the course of my dissertation research among the Shan migrant communities in Chiang Mai, Thailand during 2005–06.³ Most of the Shan audiences in my study migrated from Shan state in Burma during the last ten years to the city of Chiang Mai, where they work in agriculture, construction and other low-paying jobs.

Most discussions in this essay were conducted in the native language of the respondents, i.e., Shan. As will be illustrated in the following section, though there are several dialects spoken among different sub-groups of Tai people in the Shan state area, my research was undertaken predominantly in Tai Long, a dialect which is mostly understood by other Tai dialects in Burma as the “central” dialect. The Shan migrants living in Chiang Mai to which I refer in this article also predominantly come from the area of central Shan state where Tai Long dialect is spoken.

The Shan of Burma

This project focuses on the Shan, the largest of the seven main ethnic minorities in Burma. Shan state is located in east central Burma. It shares borders with China to the north and Thailand to the east and south. The Shan territory makes up approximately one-fourth of the total area of Burma, and the Shan comprise ten per cent of the country’s population or about 4–5 million. The Shan are ethnically and linguistically related to the Thai of Thailand, the Lao of Laotian, and the Dai of Yunnan. All of these groups speak languages of the Tai family, practice rice cultivation, and, at least among the Thai, Laotian and Shan, are Theravada Buddhists. Here I use the term “Shan”, an English word borrowed from Burmese, to refer to this group of people. Their self-designation is, however, “Tai” while the Thai call them “Tai Yai” (Greater Thai) and the Burman⁴ call them “Shan.”

Most of Shan population lives in rural areas where there is no electricity, and a low level of communication with the outside world. Shan who live in urban areas tend to be bilingual (Shan and

Burmese) while Shans living in the countryside predominantly speak Shan. The notion of being Shan, however, is not an uncontested ethnic national identity, homogenous and all-embracing. Smerchai (2003) has argued that within the geographical area of the Salween River, which today is called Shan state in Burma, the Shan can be divided into three sub-groups. Each group has its own history and their ethnic consciousness is not homogeneous. These three sub-groups are (1) the Tai Mao in the area around northern Shan state, a few miles north and south of the stretch of Nammao (or Shweli) River between Muse and Namkham as well as the western Yunnan in China, (2) the Tai Long, the southern Shan who inhabit the central and southern part of Shan state down to northern Thailand, and (3) the Tai Hkun in the eastern plains and river valleys of Kengtung. These three sub-groups speak different dialects and have developed their own scripts independently from each other. Among these three groups, the Tai Long constitutes more than 60 per cent of the Shan population in Burma. While Smerchai (2003) argues that to lump these three groups under the name Shan or Tai is problematic as it conceals differences, he maintains that today the differences between these three groups tend to be blurred, as Shan ethno-nationalism emerged in response to oppression by Burmese military governments. Smerchai also argues that Shan ethno-nationalism works to build an “imagined community” of one “Shan” among these three groups through the construction of narratives of “nation”, religious practices, and by emphasizing Tai Long dialect as the language of its “imagined” nation. In a similar vein, Takatani Michio (2007) argues that the term “Shan” has been used as an umbrella term to refer to several group of Tai peoples living in Burma who had experienced the process of “Burmanization”. Outside the geographical area of present Shan state, there are Khamti Shan (living in Kachin state), Shan-Ni (Red Shan or Tai Lang, in Kachin state), and Tai-Nuea (referred to as Chinese Shan or Shan Tayok who live near the border between China and Burma). Along with the process of Burmanization on the part of the Burmese Government, “Shan-ization” has also occurred. This, in Michio’s view, refers to

various phenomena of cultural dynamics such as the preservation and revitalization of Shan culture in response to the political and cultural pressure of Burmanization. While I agree with the argument mentioned above which holds that Shan nationalist project has been ongoing in order to bring all the different sub-groups together, my paper attempts to show transnational media has unexpectedly come to play a significant role in helping to unite all three different cultural groups as one.

In a political sense, the Shan struggle for independence is one of the most long-standing ethno-nationalist movements in the history of Burma. Shan insurgent groups have taken up arms to demand political autonomy for many decades. The reasons that brought them into fighting with the central government stemmed from the Panglong Agreement signed in 1947 during the struggle for independence. Under the agreement, upon gaining independence from Britain, ethnic minority groups, including the Shan, the Chin, and the Kachin, agreed to become incorporated into the Republic of Union of Burma but maintained their right of secession from the proposed federation after ten years (Smith 1999). The core of the Panglong Agreement, however, has not been observed by the successive military regimes, including the present one, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

In the course of prolonged military rule, the Burmese military has come to dominate all aspects of national and political life in Burma. Burmese nationalist programmes, on one hand, seek to promote an “imagined” nation through a “remembering” of a common bloodshed in the struggle for independence, in the hope that such a remembering will transcend ethnic differences. On the other hand, the Burman-dominated military is Burmanizing the entire country by eliminating any potentially threatening cultural differences in non-Burman areas (Smith 1999). Minority languages virtually disappeared from schools, and publications in non-Burmese languages were severely restricted (Smith 2002). The Burmese press has become an instrument of the military government. The military also set up the “Press Scrutiny Board” (PSB) to censor all media

content (Allott 1994). In addition, opportunities for employment and asset accumulation have come to operate along racial lines in which the Burman benefit at the expense of other ethnic minorities. These contexts form a necessary lens through which one must view the popularity of Thai soaps among Shan communities in Burma.

Burmese Television and the Pirating of Thai Soap Operas

Today, Burma has two television stations. The MRTV is run by the Myanmar Radio and Television Department, and Myawaddy is run by the army. Both television stations offer a variety of programmes: from the 8 p.m. daily news to documentaries, various entertainment fairs and imported Korean or Chinese drama series (with Burmese subtitles). While both television stations broadcast some locally produced short films, there are no Burmese soap operas. The reason perhaps is because soap operas require larger budgets and more time to produce than the other types of programmes. Although the Burmese public believe that all television channels in Burma are propaganda instruments of the government, those who cannot afford satellite television are left with local entertainment and Korean or Chinese series on state television.

While all forms of domestic public media were officially controlled or censored, in 2001 the Burmese Government surprisingly issued licenses for satellite television receivers (Aung Hla Tun 2001). Tin Maung Maung Than reported in 2002 that the number of satellite receiver dishes was over 20,000 (Tin Maung Maung Than 2002). However, the number of unlicensed receiver owners is far higher than this. According to reports by *Burma Campaign* in 2005, there were an estimated 2 million satellite dishes inside Burma, reaching up to 10 million of the country's population of 52 million people (<www.burmacampaign.org.uk>). Possession of a satellite dish without a license is illegal, but the government has lost interest in enforcing its ban on receiving foreign broadcasts.⁵ Nowadays satellite dishes are a pervasive and a distinguishing presence in the Burma urban landscape.

The vast majority of the dishes can pick up free-to-air channels such as BBC World and CNN, but most popular among Burmese people is the Thai satellite pay service, the United Broadcasting Corporation (UBC), which is owned by the Shin Corporation.⁶ While local businessmen buy yearly pre-paid UBC decoder cards in Thailand and receiver-sets (from Thailand or China) and sell them to customers, some local businessmen in Rangoon have successfully counterfeited the decoder cards and sell them at a cheaper price (*Irrawaddy* 2003).

Given that the contents of state-owned television are subject to approval from the Information Minister and are almost solely made up of speeches by military leaders, celebrations of commemorative events, and educational programmes with an absence of ethnic language-programmes, there was an unfulfilled need for entertainment and information in ethnic languages. The pirating of Thai television was driven by this need. Shan businessmen were looking for a form of entertainment that would serve the interests of the Shan audience. They found Thai soaps the best choice. Thus about ten or fifteen years ago, Shans living in urban areas with access to satellite dishes and equipped with a decent command of Thai language began illegally taping Thai soaps through satellite programmes and dubbing them into Shan. Although the Shan and Thai languages are similar, Shan audiences in general could not understand the content of the programmes entirely without dubbing since the two languages are not fully mutually comprehensible. Many Shan living in the countryside are also illiterate, subtitling was therefore not an option. Dubbing was, therefore, the best choice. These programmes were then distributed in the form of video tapes to rental shops everywhere in Shan state.

About fifteen years ago, the dubbing of Thai television programmes into Shan was limited to Thai “period” series based on Thai folk tales or legends. The plots and dialogues of these folk tale series originate from Thai society and date back centuries. The Shan find cultural similarities with these tales and so the dubbing of Thai folk tales quickly became popular when it was launched. It was so popular among Shan

audiences that local production houses saw an opportunity to pirate Thai soap operas aired during prime time. The first production house to dub Thai romantic and Thai melodrama soaps to Shan was that of the Taunggyi-based local businessman, Sai Lek. The recording of Thai soaps dubbed in Shan gained immediate popularity. The success of this production was such that it was followed by the dubbing of Thai soaps by other production houses.

The fact that there was no copyright cost in pirating these Thai soaps, combined with the low-tech dubbing expense, led many local production houses to jump into this business. Before 2005, I was told that there were a few dubbing houses located in different towns in Shan state. One was based in Namkham in northern Shan state, bordering with China, another one was in Lashio, a central town in northern Shan state; and two others were based in Taunggyi, the capital city of Shan state. But by the time that I did my fieldwork in Burma in 2005, there was only one production house left, the one based in Taunggyi, doing this business. According to Sai Lek, the Taunggyi-based businessman who is the only one remaining in this dubbing business, there were essentially two factors that led to the disappearance of other competitors.

First, in February 2005, the Burmese Government began to charge all rental shops for distributing foreign films, including Hollywood and Thai television programmes featured on video tapes, DVDs and VCDs.⁷ Because these pirated products could by-pass state regulations, the government regarded its new policy as an effort to prevent Burmese people from being corrupted by uncensored movies (*Agence France Presse* 2005). Thai soap operas dubbed in Shan were also forbidden because they were foreign and uncensored. The ban forced rental shops to pull all foreign films from their shelves. As for the dubbing of Thai soaps, the rental shops in Shan state, which were usually owned by Shans, took them off the shelves and kept them in closed drawers, available to customers only upon request.

While the rental shops found ways to continue to distribute these Thai soaps, as long as Shan audiences still enjoyed watching them, the ban has affected the small production houses. Fearful of being

seized by the Burmese police, they disappeared from the scene. Sai Lek's production house based in Taunggyi, perhaps due to his close connection to the Burmese army, still continues pirating and dubbing Thai soaps. As Sai Lek put it, "If we don't do this, our brothers and sisters, most of whom living in the countryside and do not understand Burmese, will be left with nothing. As they have nothing to watch for sources of information, this also means to close their eyes." The second reason that Sai Lek's production house remains the only one in this dubbing business is that people love the voices dubbed by Sai Lek's team (interview with Sai Lek, August 2005). As many Shan audiences told me, other production houses did not do a good job in narrating the Thai soaps. They prefer to watch Thai soaps voiced by Sai Lek's team as their dubbing did justice to the local language.

It should be noted that by "production house", I do not mean a production house in the western sense. A "Shan production house" refers to a family whose members know enough Thai language to translate Thai soaps into Shan. Each night around 8.30 p.m. they start recording Thai soaps airing on Channel 3 and 7 through satellite signals. When they copy a programme, they cut off all advertisements that were broadcasted with the original programme before they start the dubbing. Sai Lek's dubbing team consists of four members: a young male and female dub young people's voices while the older pair dub old people's voices. In the process of changing everything into Shan by dubbing, the titles are also translated into Shan. The credit songs are replaced by Shan pop songs. The actors' and actresses' names are changed into Shan. Interestingly, instead of changing the actors' names according to the roles the actors and actresses play in each series in the original programmes, Thai actors and actresses are given fixed Shan names which are never changed no matter what roles they play in subsequent series. The reason for this, I was told by Sai Lek's production house, is because Shan audiences do not want to remember so many names that keep changing according to the character roles in each series. Before Sai Lek's production house monopolized this dubbing business, the fixed names of Thai

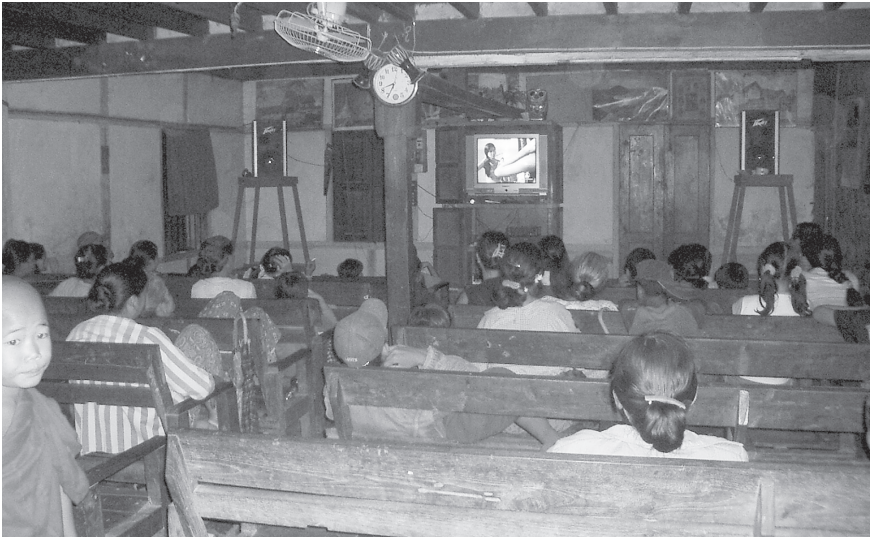
actors/actresses varied according to each dubbing house. Now that most other dubbing houses have disappeared, audiences only accept and remember the Shan names that Sai Lek's production house uses.

After dubbing, the production house will send out the original copies to every town in Shan state. The rental shops will buy only one original copy for around 10,000 kyat (around US\$10) and then make several copies to be rented out. In the past, they were distributed on videotape (VHS), but today with digital technology, they are copied onto VCDs. While the Shan versions of Thai soaps are seen by about a million Shan every night, it would, however, be difficult to estimate how much money is made out of this business. According to Sai Lek, every week he sends out 10–14 original copies (of 5–7 series) to his main distribution in each town (around 25 towns). Each copy costs 10,000 kyat. The main distributors in every big town are in charge of duplicating the series for smaller rental shops (at this level, each VCD costs 5,000 kyats), who in turn can also make several copies freely according to the demand for rentals. Each rental copy costs around 200 kyat (around US\$0.20). Customers (most of whom live in urban areas) rent a VCD for 1–2 days whereas those in the rural areas pay 50–100 kyat to watch Thai soaps dubbed in Shan in local theaters every night.

Watching Thai soap opera has become increasingly popular among Shan audiences. One Shan estimates that each night about one million Shans watch Thai soap operas. Having watched Thai soaps dubbed in Shan in several local theaters, I found that women of all ages comprise the largest segment of the audience. However, in private urban households, adult men also participate in viewing while young Shan men would rather hang out in karaokes or at friends' houses to play guitar. Although the dubbed versions of Thai soaps were recently forbidden when the regime realized the existence of this media, the great majority of Shans secretly or openly watch Thai soap opera dubbed in Shan every night. Local theaters advertise the programmes on blackboards in front of the theaters. Some urban Shans who own satellite dishes would watch Thai soap programming through satellite



Local theaters advertise the programmes on blackboards in front of the theaters (photograph courtesy of Amporn Jirattikorn).



“Yone Video” or a mini-theater where Shan audience come to watch Thai soaps every night (photograph courtesy of Amporn Jirattikorn).

channels, but because of the language barrier, they still rent the dubbed version to watch at home. As one audience member puts it, “it is for better understanding and more appreciation of the story.” Those who cannot afford satellite dishes rent the copies and watch the videos at home. In a village area, because there is no electricity, people who can afford to get a television set and a VCD player plus a generator for electricity turn their houses into mini-theaters called in Burmese “Yone Video”. These video houses in Shan state play Thai soaps dubbed in Shan every night by selling tickets for only 100 kyat (US\$0.10). Each night there would be about 50–100 people in each video house who had come to watch Thai soaps along with other villagers.

Since the government does not permit the publication of newspapers and television programmes in any of the languages used by Burma’s ethnic communities, including Shan, the dubbing of Thai soaps has become the main medium providing entertainment and information to the Shan in their language. In the absence of local production, this fulfills a desire to make their own programming at little expense. While the most common understanding of product piracy is that it is nothing but stealing by uncivilized and selfish thieves, this condemnation fails to reveal the complex relationship between global power network and local resistance. Piracy, I would argue, provides informal access to commodities and lifestyles that some people cannot otherwise access or to which access is restricted. Moreover, the Shan pirating of Thai soap operas is not direct copying; they alter the original content, combine it and mix it with local elements. While piracy, in general understanding, entails the direct copying of cultural products in terms of both ideas and expression, and it involves no exercise in creativity (Pang 2004), the Shan versions of Thai soaps are perhaps more suitably categorized as “appropriation”, a process referring to the conversion of what belongs to one individual or group into the property of another individual or group (Hart 1997, p. 138). In the process of appropriation, Thai soap operas have become indigenized and localized through changing the titles — including the names of actors and actresses — into Shan and

through the dubbing of media texts (by adding local elements and contexts into the Shan version). The result is thus “re-athouring” or “Shan-izing” of cultural text in which Shan audiences may feel being addressed simultaneously as both a Shan and a Thai person, a point I shall return to later.

Localizing Thai Soaps, Politicizing Thai-ness

Before examining how the Shan localize Thai soaps into their own form of entertainment, let us consider what kinds of Thai soaps are consumed by Shan audiences. Thai soaps are usually shown every night at prime time, starting around 8.30, after the news. Today, there are three channels (out of six free-to-air channels) showing prime time soap operas: channel 3, 5 and 7.⁸ Channel 5 runs an hour-long episode; the other two channels run episodes for two-hours (including commercials). Channel 3 and 7 air two or three episodes a week. The pattern is usually Monday–Tuesday, Wednesday–Thursday, and Friday–Sunday, therefore, the two channels will air three series simultaneously at any given time. The prime time soaps on each channel have their own distinctive characteristics. Channel 7’s soaps are typically viewed as *talad* (market-oriented), i.e., full of “cat fighting” scenes, and present a visual grammar of lavish and luxurious settings, over-exaggerated acting, and melodramatic plots. Channel 3’s soaps are seen as more “realistic”, and the acting and settings are more “natural”. However, the boundaries between the various types of soaps are becoming blurred as the two channels compete to attract the most viewers. This has resulted in the channel 3’s soaps becoming more *talad* in recent years. Channel 5’s series, on the other hand, are seen as catering to a more “educated” middle-class audience.

Thai soap operas are rather more like Latin American’s *telenovelas* than American soap operas. While American soap operas can continue for years, a Thai series will run for about three months. Thai soap operas are often called “*lakorn nam nao*” (lit. polluted soaps) for their portrayal of “unreal” life, presenting characters who are more attractive, glamorous, and wealthy than everyday reality. The plot

usually involves romance between a poor girl and a rich boy whose family spurns her. The evil ex-girlfriend or a hero's admirer (usually accompanied by the rich guy's elder sister) stands in their way to happiness. A popular plot twist is also the discovery of the real father or mother of the poor heroine, who turns out to be wealthy. However, Pasuk and Baker (1998) noted that not only do Thai soaps present a distraction from the burden of everyday reality, they also do deal with issues of social change and social conflict relevant to the urban core of the audience. Some dramas deal with the struggle of the new middle class to achieve success while retaining their souls. Others deal with the changing role of women as lovers, mothers and businesswomen. A large number of Thai soaps also deal with historical themes. These historical dramas, argued Pasuk and Baker, create a nostalgic past for the new city that has only recently sprung into existence. I would add that an increasing number of popular plots today also deal with the lives and loves of younger people in urban settings.

Besides typical plots of "modern fable drama", distinctive characteristics of Thai soaps can be summed up as follows: (1) the presence of "evil" female characters whose actions are overly theatrical, including numerous screams and shrieks, is essential, (2) most Thai soaps are developed from Thai paperback romance novels (which are also called "*niyai nam nao*" (lit. polluted novels), where romance, secret relationships, extra-marital affairs, and genuine love form the basis for the plots. While romance novels often portray the upper-class of Thai society, usually through the male lead who has his origin in the royal or noble classes or from influential business families, Thai soaps exaggerate the characters' wealth through setting and locations. Though it is always unclear what kind of businesses the families are involved in, grandiose houses, luxurious automobiles, fancy decor, and female characters dressed as if they were going to a fancy ball are essential, and (3) unlike American series which often involve sexual drama, there is a lack of love scenes in Thai soaps. Kissing scenes and sex scenes are self-censored unless the couple in the story is married. This perhaps has to do with the way many

Thai people and the Ministry of Culture hold that such intimacy and behaviour do not occur in Thailand outside marriage. Along with all the above elements, a happy ending, in which the villains are punished or forgiven and the two heroes can live happily ever after, is a must. In this respect, Thai soaps can be seen as conveying cultural and moral messages in accordance with the laws of Buddhist karma that good always wins over evil.

According to Sai Lek, his production house does not dub every Thai soap airing on Thai television. He usually dubs the series airing on channel 7 because the audiences are likely to like channel 7's soap series more than the ones airing on channel 3. Besides, the signals of channel 7 are far better than channel 3, which in turn provides a better quality when copied onto VCDs. He rarely dubs series from Channel 5 because, he says, the other two channels (3 and 7) already provide enough material to be dubbed. In any case, he also does not have enough equipment and manpower to dub series airing on three channels simultaneously. Before deciding which programme to dub, Sai Lek watches the first few episodes to see if the storyline is appealing. However, if actors/actresses are already well-known among Shan audience, Sai Lek could decide to dub the series without having to watch the series first. Every week, Sai Lek's production house dubs about five series. The pattern would be three series from channel 7, one series from channel 3, and one series from a "period" folk tale (airing early evening on the weekdays or every weekend morning on Channel 7). Because commercials are cut off in the process of dubbing, the two-hour episode in a Thai version is reduced to sixty or seventy minutes in the dubbed version, which fits perfectly onto one VCD. At the end of the week, Sai Lek's dubbing house would send out about ten VCDs of five series to rental shops in almost every town in Shan state (about twenty-five towns), and also to Rangoon and Mandalay where a large number of Shan reside.

As watching Thai soaps dubbed in Shan, both privately and publicly, has become a shared cultural experience among Shan people living in Burma, during the time I was traveling in the Shan state, when Shans realized that I was a Thai from Thailand, it was easy for

them to turn a conversation to the topic of Thai soap operas. I was often asked about Thai actors and actresses whose names they only knew in Shan. It became my job then to figure out whom they are talking about. The questions often involve romances between actors and actresses they were fans of.

When asked what they liked about Thai soaps, most Shan audiences I interviewed replied that they were fascinated by the beauty of Thai actors and actresses, in particular the look of Thai actresses; they say that Thai actresses' style is very modern. Besides the display of physical beauty by Thai women, the images of Thailand which appear in the Thai soaps are very glossy, glamorously modern. This, I would contend, must be understood in comparison with television programmes in Burma. Some audience members explain that difference between Thai television programmes and Burmese state television is the reason behind the popularity of Thai soaps. Thai television soap operas provided a cultural landscape of beauty and pleasure in contrast with the monotonal, drab culture offered by Burmese television. In the view of Shan viewers, Burmese actresses are fat, unfashionable, "traditional" in their look, and therefore not as beautiful as Thai actresses. Thai soaps portray images of women's bodies in the dominant urban-centered culture, linking beauty with modernity and active sexuality in ways the Burmese actresses seem to lack. The idea of beauty has thus become representative of modernity, expressed in a sense of longing and envy by the Shan audiences. When I was traveling in Burma, I often encountered statements such as "Thai girls are prettier than Shan girls. They know how to wear make-up and dress up, unlike Shan girls. We are not up-to-date like Thai girls."

The appeal of Thai soaps among Shan audiences can also be viewed in terms of the difference in material products available in Burma. When asked "what do you think about Thailand when you watch Thai soaps?", the most common answer to my question was "*Muang Thai hang lee*" or "Thailand is beautiful." When asked what they particularly thought was "beautiful" about Thailand, a number of Shan audiences stated that it was the material wealth and western

commodities that Thailand has obtained. Thailand is a place where everyone has a cellphone and lives in a nice house and roads are full of nice and luxurious cars. The fact that Thai soap operas often follow the lives of characters from upper class or rich families, I would argue, has contributed to the ways in which Shan audience come to view Thailand as a beautiful place. In this respect, beauty has been linked with the display of new technologies, western commodities and a more “advanced” economy. While the Burmese economy has weakened considerably under the past four decades of military rule and the majority of people continue to live in poverty, Thai soaps offers an aspect of life — a world of unrestricted fulfillment of the consumerist imagination — that the local culture is lacking and has not been able to provide. Thai soaps thus appear to offer access to different ways of having.

It is crucial to note here that a Shan term equivalent to “modern” is “*kheud kap*”. For most Shan, something that is *kheud kap* is a thing, a process, a style, or a condition that is not only new, but is perceived as a movement from the “time before” (old times) to new times, or being up-to-date. Shan audiences often say that Burmese television, besides being boring, is not *kheud kap* like Thai television. A Shan woman in her 60s sums up the reasons for the popularity of Thai soaps among Shan audiences: “Watching Thai soaps is like going traveling every night. It is a source of cheap entertainment and information. I pay only 100 kyat (US\$0.10), I can get to Thailand every night without having to get a passport or apply for a visa. Sometimes they take me to New York or Europe and my ‘airplane ticket’ costs only 100 kyat.”

When asked if she also likes watching Hollywood or Bollywood films, as these are increasingly popular among Burman audiences, she replies: “Those ‘Kalafilm’ (Bollywood) and ‘Engalet’ (Hollywood) movies are very rude, especially ‘Kalafilm’. Those movies are full of seductive, semi-naked scenes and girls dancing around everywhere.”

What this woman is telling us, though it is a matter of her personal taste, can also be interpreted as an indicator of collective taste among Shan audiences. While the backwardness and unfashionableness

offered by Burmese stars and television programmes contrasts sharply with the triumph of beauty, modernity and wealth offered by Thai television, Bollywood and Hollywood movies provide a distance version of modernity, which Shan audiences may find less accessible or applicable to their local situation. The rejection of Bollywood and Hollywood movies, I would argue, emerges from the negative appeal of their societies' cultural values in the Shan audience perception. Thai soaps, in contrast, while saturated with modernity through their settings, the display of new technologies and foreign products and the beauty of Thai actors/actresses, they maintain "Asian" cultural values by not presenting overtly sexual scenes as well as adhering to morality in accordance with the laws of Buddhist karma. Interestingly, from my observations, when Shan audience talk about Burmese television and Bollywood or Hollywood movies, the expression seems to be on the level of "form" — abstract concepts such as boredom, boldness, and distance⁹ — whereas they eagerly discuss with friends and families the specific "content" of Thai soaps which they follow every night.

The question remains, however: how are the ideas and ideologies attached to Thai soaps consumed by the Shan audience? I would argue that while the Shan project their capitalist desires through the consumption of Thai soaps, they at the same time express an ambivalent sense of interaction with mediated modernity. While most of the Shan adults I interviewed point out that it is good to see Thai girls wearing suggestive and sexy clothes because they are not "our women", they are not expecting to see Shan girls wearing this style of clothes. Most of the Shan girls I interview say that they want to dress up in a modern style like Thai women. However, given their condition of living, they could not adopt this urban, modern style of clothes. They also could not find any occasion in Burma appropriate for this kind of clothing. It is important to note that here I am talking about the majority of the Shan population who live in rural areas where Thai fashions do not seem to resonate with their everyday life. Shans in some urban areas such as Muse and Namkham, the two border towns in northern Shan state opposite

China, have already become familiar with ideas and images associated with “modern life” through border exchange. Hence, these exchanges have familiarized them with highly sexualized images of woman’s bodies that are linked with the notion of modernity. For the rest of the Shan state, not only in the remote areas but also in towns such as Taunggyi, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, where I did my fieldwork, the desire to pursue these standards of modern womanhood, I would contend, solely exists on the level of desire and is not confronted or expressed in everyday life. The same holds true for the other aspects of urban lifestyle Shans may consume through watching Thai soaps. They may or may not want to do things they have seen in television, i.e., to study and to work in an office, to go on holiday and travel, or simply to live comfortably in a nice house. They know that these expectations are far from their reality. The desire to catch up with the fantasy the Thai soaps promises — the availability of consumer goods in a land of pleasure and entertainment — become real action which involves deciding to move, to cross the physical border to the fantasy land. This is a point I shall return to in the last section.

In suggesting that modernity seen through the prism of Thai soaps may evoke a sense of yearning on the part of Shan audiences, I would, however, argue that what we have here is quite different from the intra-regional flows of popular culture in other Asian nations. Research on cultural flows in developed Asian contexts such as between Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea demonstrates that the differences being experienced in consuming cultural texts produced by other Asian nations has to do with different urban textures and different “modernities” (see Iwabuchi 2002, Iwabuchi *et al.* 2004). As Iwabuchi (2002) argues, the appeal of Japanese TV dramas among Taiwanese audiences is due in part to an emerging sense that Taiwanese share a modern temporality with Japan. Contemporary Burma provides a different context where material modernity is not really present. What is it then that is the desired quality of Thai soaps viewed by Shan audience living in Burma? The appeal of Thai soaps by the Shan audience, I would argue, illuminates ways in which aspects of Thai culture are desired in a distinctive manner — one that

reflects the complex relationship between the two cultural groups. On the one hand, the consumption of Thai soaps has produced an association of Thailand with the West, a galaxy of images and symbols according to the economic and material prosperity they connote. On the other hand, as seen through the belief systems of the Shan that they and the Thai share the same origins and are closely linked by culture, religion, language and history, Thailand thus becomes the imagined space onto which Shans project their hopes and desires. Thailand is linked to the Shan in a kind of symbolic brotherhood. The Thai are seen as a long-lost brethren with whom the Shan can claim some sort of “kin” relationship (Eberhardt 2006). Under the notion of “cultural proximity” which explains the audience preference for products from countries with which the consumers allegedly share cultural ties (Iwabuchi 2002, p. 130), Thai soaps are thus “proximate”. However, by saying that Thai soaps are proximate, I am not suggesting they are not “foreign” anymore. On one level, Thai soaps are more accessible and resonant with Shan culture than Burmese programmes, and Hollywood or Bollywood movies. On the other level, they are distinct enough from Shan reality in Burma to nevertheless remain foreign and not immediately attainable, though they do provide a model or goal which many Shan may aspire to. As Iwabuchi warns us, we should also ask under which historical context that the idea of cultural similarity become associated with the pleasure of text. This feeling, I would contend, is recent partly because Thailand has become a success story, economically and politically in contrast with Burma, while the hostility between the Shan and the Burmese regime has steadily increased since independence in 1948 and especially since 1988. In the process of this idealized projection, Thailand has been configured as not only culturally closer to the Shan than others, but as a more advanced version of their own culture. In resonance with the Shan’s past, Thailand has effectively embodied the Shan’s aspiration of modernity.

Then again, we should not forget that what Shan audiences are consuming is not merely an intact version of Thai culture. Rather, Thai media is appropriated and then transformed into Shan media.

This consumption is, therefore, not just simple transportation, simple transmission of tangible forms loaded with intrinsic meanings (Hannerz 1997, p. 6). Instead it is indicative of the ways in which subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan social and cultural group — in this case, via transnational cultural flows. We can now turn to the point I mentioned earlier about “re-authoring” of cultural text. On one level, people who pirated Thai soaps change several elements into Shan — including titles, names of actors and actresses as well as media texts and theme songs. The result thus is a sense of being addressed as a Shan person by other Shans. On the other level, since the images and contexts are left intact, the audiences are aware that they are actually watching Thai soaps. Together, this “re-authoring” and “Shan-izing” of Thai media texts make Shan audiences feel that they are being addressed ambiguously and simultaneously as both Shan and a Thai person. The perception of consuming “national” and “trans-national” media thus coexists with the sense of consuming a version of “self” and “other”. Here what is imagined is not only “imagined community” but also “imagined transnational community”. As Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (2002) argues, mainland Chinese audience’s identification with roles of Taiwanese and Hong Kong stars represents the longing to be reunited or merged with the Chinese other. Here, less known to the outside world, the Shan imagine themselves breaking out into a wider “Tai world” which the Shan and the Thai share. Shans no longer wish to plug themselves into a Burmese state imaginary; instead they “cast their imagination outward” (Yang 2002, p. 197) which is not solely outward but a more advanced version of their own culture.

Satellite Imagined Community

In Burma, many Shan nationalists are concerned that Burmese culture has intruded into every area of the state. Faced with a Burmanization process that subordinated ethnic languages, cultures and religions, Shan ethno-nationalism has emerged in response to such political

and cultural pressure. Shan ethno-nationalism works to build an “imagined community” of one “Shan” among different Tai-speaking sub-groups, through various means such as the construction of narratives of “nation”, religious practice, and the preservation and revitalization of Shan culture (see Michio 2007; Smerchai 2003). Since 1962, after General Ne Win seized power, Burmese language has become the only language used in schools (Fink 2001). Educated in Burmese, Shan children are growing up speaking Burmese at school. When they return home, they find it difficult to switch back to speaking Shan with their parents. Fearing language loss among the young generation, the Shan Literature and Cultural Committee (Kor Lik Lai Lae Fing Nge Tai), which has representatives in every town in Shan state, has been active in campaigning for a “Shan speaking Shan” project and in teaching Shan language outside the Burmese school system (see Michio 2007). They set-up summer schools throughout Shan state to teach Shan script to both adult villagers and Shan children, even though they face difficulties in negotiating with the Burmese Government. In the absence of ethnic media production, thanks to the advent of satellite television and low-tech movie piracy, pirated Thai soaps have helped to propagate the Shan spoken dialect, providing language materials otherwise not accessible in Burma, to almost every household in Shan state. According to many urban Shans I interviewed, they found that becoming addicted to Thai soaps dubbed in Shan has exposed their children to Shan language more than ever before. A Shan woman living in Kyaukme, whose daughter primarily speaks Burmese at home, told me that her daughter is now becoming more competent in Shan after having been exposed to Shan language via Thai soaps for a few years. Along with this, as some members of Shan Literature and Cultural Committee told me, Shan parents now prefer to name their sons and daughters in Shan according to the Shan names given to actors and actresses in the dubbed versions. When asked the reason why Shan parents named their children in Burmese in the first place (before the popularity of Thai soaps), some stated that it was because Burmese-speaking people in general cannot pronounce

Shan names properly. Thus, when Shan kids were sent to school, Burmese teachers often changed their Shan names into Burmese names. Not wanting to burden their children with two names, Shan parents decided to name their kids in Burmese from the start. However, the popularity of Thai soaps dubbed in Shan has brought Shan names back into fashion, and many Shan parents now choose to name their kids in Shan.

Here, the core of transmission between the Thai and the Shan is interwoven with language politics. As argued, the notion of being Shan is not an uncontested ethnic national identity, homogenous and all-embracing. The three sub-groups, Tai Mao, Tai Long, and Tai Hkun, though they live in the same territory of Shan state, speak different dialects. Their writing systems are also related, although again not mutually intelligible. In recent years, the Shan Literature and Cultural Committee, while campaigning for a “Shan speaking Shan”, has emphasized the use of Tai Long dialect and script as a “central” language for all Shan everywhere. In their view, by speaking one language and using one alphabet system, Shan everywhere could feel integrated. Perhaps for economic reasons as Tai Long is spoken by the largest segment of the Shan population, Thai soap operas are dubbed in Tai Long dialect. This choice of language has, in effect, re-created a symbolic geography which feeds back to the interests of Shan nationalists. The popularity of the Shan version of Thai soaps has helped in disseminating Tai Long dialect throughout Shan state. Before the popularity of Thai soaps, as members of the Shan Literature and Cultural Committee and many other Shans told me, when a Shan from Kengtung (an area where people speak Tai Khun) met with a Shan from the north (an area where Tai Mao dialect is spoken), they had to speak Burmese to each other because their different Shan dialects were not mutually intelligible. Now that Shans in different regions all would watch Thai soaps dubbed in Shan, they have become exposed to Tai Long and have come to be competent in Tai Long dialect. As a result, I was told, more Shan people from different regions can now communicate by using Tai Long dialect.

Anderson (1991) suggested that nations are not the determinate products of given conditions such as language or race or religion; rather they have been imagined into existence. While the Shan nationalists have been operating on the level of Anderson's print-capitalism in order to construct the notion of one language and one "Shan," the flow of media from across the border — the images and ideas that are produced as a form of entertainment for an audience of one country — has ironically come to have an impact on the development of the modern Shan "national" language. Lacking control over the means of media production, Shan local businessmen have pirated transnational satellite signals and transported them into local culture. In the physical absence of "nation-state", what we have here is an example of a business enterprise that comes to act as pseudo-state, playing a crucial role in the standardization of Shan spoken language. Hence, the combination of capitalism (the dubbing business), the technology of communication (the pirated television soap operas), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity (through which the new language, modern and standardized, is given shape), a sense of Shan-ness as an imagined community is strengthened. This piracy or "appropriation" of transnational satellite signals, I would argue, has in effect messed up the boundaries of national and transnational as this is all done through a form of mass media which is both foreign and pirated, as well as localized and indigenized. It is through low-tech movie piracy that Shan nation-building is taking place, and the relationship between identity and modernity gets complicated.

Thai Soap Operas as a "Catalyst" for Migration

Here I come to my last point, the role of Thai television in attracting Shan migrating to Thailand. Nicola Mai (2001) has conducted research on the role of Italian television in Albanian migration to Italy, arguing that the consumption of Italian television has stimulated the desire to migrate in order to be able to experience new aspects of the self, and new networks of social relationships. Albanians, argued

Mai, because of the state of isolation by the Communist regime, were exposed to capitalist modernity via Italian television viewing, which provided them with a landscape of consumerist satisfaction, celebration and beauty. Thus the desire to migrate has emerged. Likewise, Appadurai notes that today those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassette and videos, newsprint and telephone (1996, p. 6). In a similar vein, Shan people in Burma, drawn into images of materials provided by the imaginary world of Thai television, have flocked to Thailand, the country that fuelled their hopes and desires.

Over the past ten years, Chiang Mai, a northern metropolitan centre in Thailand, has experienced a large-scale migration of Shan people coming illegally across large transnational terrains. This new and massive flow of people is a recent phenomenon stimulated by the growing demand for cheap labour in Thailand as well as the dire economic and political situations in Burma. Chiang Mai, has become a main destination for ethnic Shan migrating from Burma for three main reasons: its provincial border with Shan state in Burma, the language similarity between the northern Thai dialect and Shan language, and its status as a metropolitan centre in the north where there is a great deal of demand for cheap labour. Most of the Shan migrants in Chiang Mai I have interviewed say that they had watched Thai soap operas dubbed in Shan before migrating to Thailand. When asked if watching Thai soap operas makes them dream of coming to Thailand, most of them say that economic necessity is the main reason behind their migration. But it is also true that their imaginary about Thailand was shaped by watching Thai soap operas at home. While the economic survival of the family unit may be the main factor behind the Shan mass migration, Thai television has also played a very strategic and important role in attracting Shan migrating to Thailand. It came to be a unique source of information about the outside world, about the place they were thinking of migrating to, in a context where the information was filtered by the apparatus of military regime.

In fact, I would argue, economic reasons and the desire to experience the fantasy world is one and the same. Watching a Thai soap is like entering into a fantasy land — fantasy that includes a sense of longing and envy. So people leave Burma to try to fulfill their fantasy. For many Shans, migrating to Thailand has been a way of mediating between their desire to experience new aspects of their selves, and their roles as loyal sons and daughters, sacrificing their lives for the survival of the family unit. Nevertheless, once migrated, Shan migrants found they were deceived by the consumerist utopia provided by Thai media. The imagination that the Thai and the Shan share the same origins and share some sort of “kin” relationship was no longer true as Shan migrants found themselves experiencing discrimination and marginalization by their Thai employers. Being exploited as cheap labour, living in poor conditions, Thailand was no longer a place where pleasure and entertainment could be attained with little work.

Conclusion

I have tried to show how the Shan have constructed themselves through the appropriation and consumption of transnational satellite signals. To conclude then, I suggest we bring together the idea of images (mechanically produced images), the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense) and the imagination (in Appadurai’s sense) in order to make sense of this new transnational phenomenon. First, it is in the consumption of “images” that constitutes “modernity”, drawing those Shan viewers into a wider world from which their present marginality, and state control in Burma seem to separate them. Consumption in a sense of “living through objects and images not of one’s own creation” (Miller 1995, p. 1) allows viewers to imagine themselves beyond the territorialized boundaries of the Burmese nation-state. Second, it is in the appropriation of transnational satellite signals that a sense of Shan “imagined community” has been intensified. In light of transnational openings, yet in the physical absence of nation-state and nation-building body, a business enterprise has come to act as a

pseudo-state, playing a crucial role in nation-building project. Third, it is in the “imagination” of the fantasy land the Thai soap operas promise that the real productive action occurs when people decide to move to catch the fantasy. The image, the imagined, the imagination — born out of a society that lacks access to and control the means of production — provide new resources for identity and energies for creating alternatives to the nation-state. This example shows us that transnationalism is not necessarily antithetical to national identity formation. It is through transnational flows and mass commodity consumption that Shan nation-building is taking place and the relationship between identity and modernity has become complicated.

NOTES

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1. Burma was renamed Myanmar in 1989. The names are interchangeable in this article.
2. Burma is divided into seven states and seven divisions. While divisions are predominantly Burman, states are home to particular ethnic minorities. The seven states are Chin, Kachin, Karen (Kayin), Karenni (Kayah), Mon, Arakan (Rakhine), and Shan states.
3. My dissertation project deals with the consumption of Shan pop music through cassettes, VCDs, karaoke pubs, live concerts, as well as radio programmes among the Shan migrant community in Chiang Mai, Thailand. My interest in Thai soaps dubbed in Shan language, however, began when I learnt that the promotion of Shan pop music in Burma relied heavily on Thai soaps dubbed in Shan. In the absence of ethnic language-channels of marketing in Burma and the immense popularity of Thai soaps, Shan pop music producers utilize Thai soaps dubbed on Shan VCDs to promote new products by inserting video clips of a new album in the middle or the end of a series' episode. As I investigated this issue further, I realize the need to study this new form of media in light of transnational openings.
4. The term “Burman” is used here as an adjective to refer to ethnic “Burmans” who comprise about 68 per cent of the population in Burma. This term is

used especially in comparison with other ethnic groups in Burma. The term “Burmese” is, however, used in a more general and broader sense, when referring to Burmese language, state, culture or music.

5. Although the government cannot really enforce its ban on foreign broadcast on satellite signals, recently the Burmese Government has ordered a massive hike in the annual satellite television license fee; on the 2 January 2008, the satellite license fee has increased from 6,000 kyat (around US\$5) to 1 million kyat (US\$800). As foreign media such as BBC, DVB (the Norway-based Democratic Voice of Burma) and Al-Jazeera (Doha-based) are popular sources of information and have played a major role in the August and September pro-democracy demonstrations in 2007, the huge increase in satellite license fee is seen as an attempt to stop Burmese citizens from accessing foreign news and information broadcasts. (see “Junta Levies Massive Fee Increase to Access Satellite TV” *Irrawaddy*, 2 January 2008 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9782>).
6. In 5 April 2006, former Thaksin Shinawatra sold his shares in the family’s Shin Corporation for the sum of US\$1.8 billion to Temasek Holdings, a Singaporean state-owned entity. UBC satellite pay service is thus no longer a Thai asset. However, General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, the chief of the Council for National Security, which orchestrated the September 19 Thai coup, said he would like to see satellites under ShinSat and other assets of Shin Corporation to be back under Thai control. See “Satellite Row Rich in Contradictions”, *Bangkok Post*, 25 February 2007, p. 6.
7. VCDs are CD-ROMs that can hold about 45 minutes of moving images and audio. They can be played on a computer disc drive, or on an inexpensive VCD player. VCDs utilize digital technology but they are more flexible, and cheaper. Their image and sound quality is comparatively inferior, but their price is perhaps five times cheaper than the cost of an authorized DVD. VCDs never gain a foothold in the United States, Europe or Japan but are very popular throughout the rest of Asia because of the low price of the players, their tolerance of high humidity, and the lower-cost media.
8. Thailand has six free television channels. The government controls two stations directly (channel 9 and 11), and licenses two others (channel 3 and 7) to private companies. Channel 5 is owned and operated by the Royal Thai Army, while TITV, the sixth television channel, has recently been forced to become state property. The reason that channel 9 and 11 hardly run soap opera series is perhaps because they are under the control of the government which subsidizes the channels for education.
9. Shan expression for “distance” would be “toey aum pong jai” (not understand), and “fing khao aum meau how” (their culture is not like our culture).

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