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From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples: The localisation of a global movement in Thailand

Micah F. Morton and Ian G. Baird

This article presents a chronology of the growth of the concept of Indigeneity in Thailand, analysing the particular ways in which the global Indigenous movement has taken root in the country. In Thailand, transnational support networks and the opening of political associational space played key roles in facilitating the growth of, first, a regional, and later a national Indigenous movement during the 1980s and early 2000s, respectively. Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are asserting their identity by drawing on a new concept of Indigeneity being promoted by the United Nations and other international advocacy organisations that identifies them not only as first peoples, but crucially as colonised or oppressed peoples. Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are further asserting both their cultural distinctiveness and their compatibility with the Thai nation. The Indigenous movement in Thailand differs from movements in Australia, Canada, and the United States where Indigenous Peoples must perform their cultural distinctiveness to maintain political recognition, and in turn are accused of being not different enough when exercising their rights. In Thailand, rather, Indigenous Peoples are accused of being not Thai enough in their efforts to push for any political recognition. While the Thai government denies the relevance of the concept of Indigeneity to Thailand, it is clear that the Indigenous movement in Thailand has grown since the early 2000s. In fact, state policies between the 1950s and early 2000s contributed toward the scaling-up of a pan-Hill tribe identity among the core groups associated with the movement.

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Scholars attribute the politicisation of Indigenous[1] identities in the Americas to a resurgence of primordial ties,[2] transnational support networks,[3] and a neoliberal shift in state policies coupled with the opening of political associational space.[4] In this article we examine the rise of Indigenous identity politics in Thailand, where transnational support networks and the opening of political associational space have facilitated the growth of an Indigenous movement since the 1980s.[5] Moreover, in ways distinct from yet similar to the Americas, Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are simultaneously asserting their compatibility with the nation[6] and their cultural distinctiveness.[7]

Although ethnic difference and associated processes of racialisation have long been evident in Thailand,[8] the differentiation of people based on Indigeneity is more recent. While the concept of 'Indigenous Peoples' — in the sense of recognising 'first peoples' — has a longer history in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, it was not recognised by any government in Asia until the mid-1990s. Most national governments in Asia adhere to the 'salt water theory', which stipulates that while the concept of Indigeneity is valid in cases of widespread European settler colonisation, it does not apply for most of Asia, since all Asians can be considered Indigenous to Asia.[9]

Although many Asian governments continue to reject the concept of Indigeneity, it is, nonetheless, becoming increasingly recognised in Asia.[10] It has been officially

1 We capitalise the words 'Indigenous', 'Indigenous Peoples', and 'Indigeneity' according to the reasoning that 'such capitalization accords these terms dignity and recognition as collective proper nouns or derived forms' (Laura Graham and H. Glenn Penny, 'Performing Indigeneity: Emergent identity, self-determination, and sovereignty', in *Performing Indigeneity: Global histories and contemporary experiences*, ed. L. Graham and H.G. Penny (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), pp. 1–31. 'Peoples' is capitalised only when it comes after 'Indigenous' and is used in the collective sense. Other nouns following 'Indigenous', such as 'people and 'representatives', are not capitalised.

2 Kay Warren, *Indigenous movements and their critics: Pan-Maya activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

3 Alison Brysk, *From tribal village to global village: Indian rights and international relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

4 Deborah Yashar, *Contesting citizenship in Latin America: The rise of indigenous movements and the postliberal challenge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

5 This article focuses primarily on the historical period ranging from the 1980s through the late 2000s. For studies addresssing more recent developments in Thailand's Indigenous Peoples' movement see: Micah F. Morton, 'The Indigenous Peoples' movement in Thailand expands', *Perspective*, no. 68, 16 Dec. 2016 (Singapore: ISEAS); Micah F. Morton, 'The rising politics of Indigeneity in Southeast Asia', *Trends*, no. 14 (Singapore: ISEAS, 2017); Ian G. Baird, Prasit Leepreecha and Urai Yangcheepsujarit, 'Who should be considered "Indigenous"? A survey of ethnic groups in northern Thailand', *Asian Ethnicity* 18, 4 (2017): 543–62; Micah F. Morton, 'Reframing the boundaries of Indigeneity: State-based ontologies and assertions of distinction and compatibility in Thailand', *American Anthropologist* 119, 4 (2017): 684–96; and Prasit Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

6 Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'Mimetic minorities: National identity and desire on Thailand's fringe', *Identities* 17, 2 (2010): 108–9.

7 Morton, 'Reframing the boundaries of Indigeneity'.

8 Thongchai Winichakul, 'The others within: Travel and ethno-spatial differentiation of Siamese subjects 1885–1910', in *Civility and savagery: Social identity in Tai states*, ed. Andrew Turton (London: Curzon, 2000), pp. 38–62.

9 *The concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A resource book*, ed. Christian Erni (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA]; Chiang Mai: AIPP, 2008).

10 Ibid.; Benedict Kingsbury, 'Indigenous Peoples in international law: A constructivist approach to the Asian controversy', *American Journal of International Law* 92, 3 (1998): 414–57; and Ian G. Baird, 'The

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adopted by governments in Taiwan (Republic of China), the Philippines, Cambodia, Nepal, and Japan, although to varying degrees.[11] There have also been efforts to bring about recognition in other Asian countries including Thailand,[12] although so far unsuccessfully.[13]

The term Indigenous has a long history of use in Southeast Asia, but in the past European colonisers applied it to differentiate between themselves and colonised Asians, and later to separate Europeans and Asians, with the exception of early twentieth century immigrants from other parts of Asia.[14] More recently the concept of Indigeneity has become associated with ethnic differences amongst Asians. While initially linked to first or original peoples, the United Nations and various nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have, since the late 1980s, lobbied for a new concept of Indigeneity, one that identifies Indigenous Peoples not only as first peoples, but as colonised or oppressed peoples.[15] According to the former director of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Andrew Gray, Indigenous Peoples refers to:

> the quality of a people relating their identity to a particular area and distinguishing them from other, 'alien' people who came to the territory subsequently. These indigenous peoples are 'colonized' in the sense of being disadvantaged and discriminated against. Their right to self-determination is their way of overcoming their obstacles.[16]

This new concept of Indigeneity is associated with self-determination, and the readjusting of power relations and material advantages through providing particular rights and resources to colonised peoples, regardless of where they live, or how long they have lived there.[17] This makes it possible for relatively recent migrants, such as the Hmong in Thailand, to claim to be Indigenous since they can argue that they have long been colonised, including in China, before having to flee to Vietnam, Laos, and eventually Thailand less than two hundred years ago. Crucially, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), which convenes each May in New York, does not have a particular definition of Indigenous Peoples. Instead, self-determination is the basis for identification, thus opening up possibilities for who can claim to be Indigenous.

In spite of being rejected by the Thai government, the political concept of Indigeneity has gained traction among a small network of NGO workers and

construction of "Indigenous Peoples" in Cambodia', in *Alterities in Asia: Reflections on identity and regionalism*, ed. Leong Yew (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 155–76.

11 Erni, *The concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia*.

12 Prasit Leepreecha, '**พหุวัฒนธรรมนิยมจากรากหญ้า: กระบวนการเคลื่อนไหวของเครือข่ายชนเผ่าพื้นเมือง และชาติพันธุ์ในประเทศไทย**' [Multiculturalism from below: The movement of the Network of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Groups in Thailand], **สังคมศาสตร์** 25, 2 (2013): 59–106; Morton, 'Reframing the boundaries of Indigeneity'.

13 Baird et al., 'Who should be considered "Indigenous"?'

14 Ian G. Baird, 'Translocal assemblages and the circulation of the concept of "Indigenous Peoples" in Laos', *Political Geography* 46 (2015): 54–64.

15 Andrew Gray, 'The Indigenous movement in Asia', in *Indigenous Peoples in Asia*, ed. R.H. Barnes, Andrew Gray and Ben Kingsbury (Ann Arbor, MI: Association of Asian Studies, 1995), pp. 35–58.

16 Ibid., p. 37.

17 United Nations, *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples* (New York: UN General Assembly, 13 Sept. 2007).

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academics based mainly in northern urban centres.[18] Still, the concept remains unevenly known and recognised.[19] Yet the appeal is that it acknowledges ethnic, cultural and linguistic difference, while linking smaller groups to a global Indigenous movement that has emancipatory potential.

As the increasingly global Indigenous movement has become influential in Thailand, it has encountered particular circumstances that have resulted in unique hybridisation processes compared to other countries, and also differences in various parts of Thailand. First and foremost, the main movers and shakers behind Thailand's Indigenous movement belong to a particular group of ethnic minorities, the so-called 'Hill tribes', whose cultural and legal membership in the Thai nation have long been questioned and denied by the Thai state and general public. As a result, Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are struggling to assert not merely their cultural distinctiveness but also their membership in the Thai nation.

This article maps out a chronology of how the concept of Indigeneity has been promoted and adopted in Thailand. How has the politics of Indigeneity emerged in Thailand? Where has it gained acceptance and why? How have different groups positioned themselves in relation to the concept of Indigeneity? In addressing these issues, we contribute towards efforts to ground the global by considering the everyday ways in which local actors are variably adopting, resisting, and reworking the global concept of Indigeneity.[20]

We begin by providing some background on the ways in which ideas about ethnicity and 'Hill tribes' (*Chao khao*) have shifted in Thailand.[21] We then consider the circumstances that led to the concept of Indigeneity being introduced to the country in the late 1980s and 1990s. Following this, we examine the gradual, albeit uneven and contested, development of the Indigenous movement in Thailand.

Ethnic formations and the 'Hill tribe' discourse in Thailand

Part of the Othering process at the level of nation-states can be seen in relation to labels attached to particular groups of ethnic minorities. Whereas the governments of Laos and Cambodia started labelling ethnic minorities within their national boundaries as 'upland and midland Lao' (*Lao Soung* and *Lao Theung* in Lao)[22] and 'upland and Islamic Khmer' (*Khmer Loeu* and *Khmer Islam* in Khmer) beginning in the 1950s,[23] the Thais discursively separated lowlander 'Thais' from upland minorities

18 Leepreecha, 'Multiculturalism from below'; Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Prasit Leepreecha, Malee Sittikriangkrai and Panadda Boonyasaranai, **กึงศตวรรษการพัฒนาบนพื้นทีสูง: จากผู้ถูกพัฒนาสู่ผู้กำหนดทิศทางการพัฒนาด้วยตนเอง** [A half century of upland development: From victims of development to self-developers] (Chiang Mai: CESD, Chiang Mai University, 2011), pp. 38–43; Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

19 Baird et al., 'Who should be considered "Indigenous"?'

20 See Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the cultural logic of globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

21 In this article we follow the Royal Thai General System for transcribing most Thai language terms into English.

22 Vatthana Pholsena, *Post-war Laos: The politics of culture, history and identity* (Singapore: ISEAS; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

23 Baird, 'The construction of "Indigenous Peoples" in Cambodia'.

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by referring to them as 'Hill tribes', with the further connotation of the 'Other' as opposed to 'Us' or *Chao rao*.[24]

The government of Thailand has further downplayed ethnoreligious diversity in its portrayal of a homogenous Thai-Buddhist nation.[25] People from upland ethnic groups, such as the Akha, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Lahu and Lisu, have not always been recognised as Thai, instead being racially categorised as non-Thai migrants or foreign transgressors.[26] Thus large numbers have had difficulties obtaining Thai citizenship,[27] although many have received Thai citizenship in recent years.[28] A 2008 survey conducted by UNESCO and the Thai government found that at least 38 percent of the Hill tribe population of roughly one million at the time lacked Thai citizenship.[29]

The latter roughly 380,000 people possess one of several colour-coded Hill tribe identification cards issued since the early 1990s.[30] These cards mark their holders as partial citizen-subjects of the Thai state whose rights to mobility beyond their districts of residence are severely curtailed.[31] These Hill tribe partial citizen-subjects face severe disadvantages in Thai society when attempting to access even the most basic rights to mobility, health care, land tenure, education and political participation.[32]

Ethnic categorisation as a 'rhetoric of control' emerged in Thailand during the 1950s when Hill tribes were first seen as 'a problem' or threat to the Thai nation.[33] During the Cold War, government policies towards Hill tribes varied from integrationist to assimilationist.[34] More recently, however, government policies have become increasingly selective[35] and exclusive due to a post-1988 escalation in irregular

24 Pinkaew Laungaramsi, 'Ethnicity and the politics of ethnic classification in Thailand', in *Ethnicity in Asia*, ed. Colin Mackerras (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 163.

25 Charles F. Keyes, 'Presidential address. "The peoples of Asia": Science and politics in the classification of ethnic groups in Thailand, China and Vietnam', *Journal of Asian Studies* 61, 4 (2002): 1176.

26 Peter Vandergeest, 'Racialization and citizenship in Thai forest politics', *Society and Natural Resources* 16 (2003): 19–27.

27 Mika Toyota, 'Ambivalent categories: Hill tribes and illegal migrants in Thailand', in *Borderscapes: Hidden geographies at territory's edge*, ed. Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 91–116; and Mukdawan Sakboon, 'Controlling bad drugs, creating good citizens: Citizenship and social immobility for Thailand's hill ethnic minorities', in *Rights to culture: Culture, heritage and community in Thailand*, ed. Coeli Barry (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2013), pp. 213–37.

28 Amanda Flaim, pers. comm., 11 Dec. 2013.

29 Daniel Calderbank, 'Plight of the hill tribes: Education needed in struggle to empower hill tribe communities', *Bangkok Post*, 12 Aug. 2008, p. E3.

30 See Mika Toyota, 'Subjects of the nation without citizenship: The case of "Hill tribes" in Thailand', in *Multiculturalism in Asia*, ed. Will Kymlicka and Baogang He (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 110–35.

31 Chao Nawk and Thai Doi, 'Thai-style apartheid?', *Bangkok Post*, 6 June 1999, p. 4.

32 Mukdawan Sakboon, 'Citizenship and education as the basis for national integration of ethnic minorities in north Thailand' (PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2009), p. 41; Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

33 Patya Saihoo, *The Hill tribes of northern Thailand* (Bangkok: Cultural Programme of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization, 1963), p. 14; and Laungaramsi, 'Ethnicity and the politics of ethnic classification in Thailand', pp. 161, 163.

34 Khachatphai Burutphat, **ปัญหาชนกลุ่มน้อยในประเทศไทย** [The problem of minority groups in Thailand] (Bangkok: Phrae Phittaya, 1972), p. 7.

35 Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, 'The Thai state and ethnic minorities: From assimilation to selective integration', in *Ethnic conflicts in Southeast Asia*, ed. Kusuma Snitwongse and W. Scott Thompson (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), pp. 167–74.

migration from Myanmar (Burma), the 1997 Asian economic crisis, and a tendency for the state to view Hill tribes as 'illegal migrants'.[36]

It was not until 1959, however, that the term 'Hill tribes' entered official state discourse in Thailand with the creation of the Hill Tribe Welfare Committee under the Ministry of the Interior.[37] At the time, nine upland minority groups were designated as Hill tribes (Akha, Hmong, H'Tin, Iu-Mien, Karen/Pwakanyaw, Khamu, Lahu, Lisu, and Lua/Lawa).[38] More recently, this list was expanded to include four additional groups (Kachin, Dara'ang, Mlabri and Shan), albeit under the slightly reworked designation of 'Ethnic Hill tribes' (*Klum chatiphan Chao khao*).[39] As of 2004, this re-circumscribed category of Ethnic Hill tribes was estimated to include some 1,034,351 people.[40]

The official designation of frontier-dwelling uplanders in Thailand as non-Thai Hill tribe Others is rooted in both earlier conceptions by lowlanders of the former as 'forest peoples' (*khon pa*) positioned outside of and in opposition to 'civilisation' (*khwam siwilai*),[41] as well as shifting regional and international geopolitics during the Cold War. During the 1950s, the Thai state recrafted the Hill tribe discourse as a key part of nation-building against the backdrop of United States-supported anti-communist efforts and international pressure against opium production. A key component of the latter entailed the so-called 'development' of Hill tribes and upland areas.[42]

The Thai state subsequently constructed Hill tribes as a problem or threat to national security on several fronts.[43] First, they were stigmatised as nomadic border transgressors lacking any loyalty towards the nation. The Hmong, in particular, were stigmatised as Communists and thus enemies of the Thai nation.[44] Second, Hill tribes were labelled as the primary producers of opium and other illegal narcotics.[45] Third, they were stigmatised

36 Toyota, 'Ambivalent categories', pp. 104–8.

37 Khwanchewan Buadaeng, 'The rise and fall of the Tribal Research Institute (TRI): "Hill tribe" policy and studies in Thailand', *Southeast Asian Studies* 44, 3 (2006): 362.

38 Pinkaew Laungaramsi, '**วาทกรรมว่าด้วย"ชาวเขา"**' [On the discourse of 'Hill tribes'], **วารสารสังคมศาสตร์** 11, 1 (1998): 103; and Buadaeng, 'The rise and fall of the Tribal Research Institute', p. 376. When the Tribal Research Institute (TRI) was officially established in 1964, however, its initial research mandate focused on what were at the time considered the 'six main tribal groups': the Akha, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Karen/Pwakanyaw, Lahu and Lisu (see Nicola Tannenbaum's 'Foreword' in Jane R. Hanks and Lucien M. Hanks, *Tribes of the north Thailand frontier* [New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 2001], p. xvi). With the exception of the Karen, these groups were at the time considered the main opium-producing 'Hill tribes'.

39 Ethnic Affairs Institute, **อัตลักษณ์ชาติพันธุ์บนพื้นที่สูง** [Ethnic identities in the highlands] (Bangkok: MSDHS, 2011). The Kachin, Dara'ang, and many Shan are generally considered more recent migrants to Thailand from Myanmar/Burma.

40 Ethnic Affairs Institute, **อัตลักษณ์ชาติพันธุ์บนพื้นที่สูง**; and '**เอกสารร่างยุทธศาสตร์เพื่อการพัฒนากลุ่มชาติพันธุ์และชนเผ่าพื้นเมืองแห่งประเทศไทย**' [Draft of strategy for the development of ethnic groups and indigenous tribal peoples in Thailand] (Bangkok: MSDHS, 2013), pp. 4–6.

41 See Winichakul, 'The others within'.

42 Gerard Clark, 'From ethnocide to ethnodevelopment? Ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia', *Third World Quarterly* 22, 3 (2001): 413–36.

43 Laungaramsi, '**วาทกรรมว่าด้วย "ชาวเขา"**'.

44 Thomas Marks, 'The Meo hill tribe problem in northern Thailand', *Asian Survey* 13, 10 (1973): 929–44. Some individuals from upland minority groups, such as the Hmong, did in fact join the Communist Party of Thailand between the 1960s and 1980s.

45 Ronald D. Renard, 'The making of a problem: Narcotics in mainland Southeast Asia', in *Development or domestication? Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia*, ed. Don McCaskill and Ken Kampe (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1997), pp. 307–28.

as destroyers of upland forests and watersheds.[46] Moreover, while some uplanders, particularly the Karen/Pwakanyaw, have been aided by certain ethnic Thai activists and academics in challenging or at least complicating negative stigmas,[47] they nevertheless continue to pervade contemporary state and public discourses on Hill tribes.[48]

In order to address these 'problems' the Thai state carried out various initiatives to render Hill tribes and the upland border regions where they resided more legible and hence controllable. Concerted efforts were made by various state agencies to survey, demarcate, and police Hill tribes and the areas where they resided.[49] Efforts were also made to educate, develop, and convert Hill tribes to Buddhism in order to produce loyal Hill tribe subjects to the Thai monarchy as the Thai nation writ large.[50]

In practice, however, state concerns with, first, national security and, more recently, development, have generally entailed the underdevelopment and marginalisation of upland minorities in Thailand and other parts of the region to peripheral border areas.[51] This has especially been the case in border regions where Hill tribes have long been stigmatised as aliens and either included as third-class citizens or excluded, sometimes violently so, as illegal migrants.[52] Thus, in spite of being the recipients of large amounts of development aid from various state and international agencies, Hill tribes in Thailand have very little, if any, political representation at levels beyond the particular villages and sub-districts wherein they form a majority.[53]

Since adopting the official label Hill tribes in 1959 the Thai state has thrice revised this official terminology. First, in March 1971 the Ministry of the Interior, which was at the time responsible for overseeing Hill tribe affairs, declared that:

> According to a royal recommendation of His Majesty the King, the Hill tribes should henceforth be referred to as 'Mountain Thai' (*Chao Thai phu khao*) in the interests of national unity and security.[54]

46 Vandergeest, 'Racialization and citizenship in Thai forest politics'; Claudio O. Delang, 'Deforestation in northern Thailand: The result of Hmong farming practices or Thai development strategies?', *Society and Natural Resources* 15 (2002): 483–501.

47 Pinkaew Laungaramsi, 'Redefining nature: Karen ecological knowledge and the challenge to the modern conservation paradigm' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2000).

48 Krisadawan Hongladarom, 'Competing discourses on hilltribes: Media representation of ethnic minorities in Thailand', *Manusya Journal of Humanities* 3, 1 (2000): 1–19; and Prasit Leepreecha, pers. comm., 26 Mar. 2012.

49 Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and rebellion: The White Hmong of northern Thailand* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2005[1989]).

50 Nicholas Tapp, 'Buddhism and the Hmong: A case study in social adjustment', *Journal of Developing Societies* 2 (1986): 68–88. For a more recent study of how the Thai monarchy, especially the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (r. 1946–2016), has figured into Thailand's Indigenous movement see Morton, 'Reframing the boundaries of Indigeneity'.

51 Nicholas Tapp, 'Squatters or refugees: Development and the Hmong', in *Ethnic groups across national boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*, ed. Gehan Wijeyewardene (Singapore: ISEAS, 1990), pp. 162, 167.

52 Cornelia Kammerer, 'Of labels and laws: Thailand's resettlement and repatriation policies', *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 12, 4 (1988): 7–12; Chupinit Kesmanee, 'Hilltribe relocation policy in Thailand', *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 12, 4 (1988): 2–6; Keyes, "The peoples of Asia", p. 1183.

53 Ken Kampe, 'Introduction: Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia', in McCaskill and Kampe, *Development or domestication?*, pp. 23–4; and Tapp, 'Squatters or refugees'.

54 Siam Rath, '**ชาวเขาได้ชื่อใหม่ชาวไทยผู้เขาตามพระราชดำริ**' [Hill tribes get a new name, Mountain Thai, by way of a royal suggestion), *Siam Rath*, 16 Mar. 1971.

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Second, in 2002 the government dissolved the Hill Tribe Welfare Division and the Tribal Research Institute — two key state agencies formerly responsible for the development and research of northern Hill tribes.[55] The dissolution of these agencies and relegation of Hill tribe affairs to the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) reflected an official stance that Hill tribes legitimately residing within the nation were no longer a problem and were to be considered as any other Thais.

Third, in 2006 a new government office, the Ethnic Affairs Institute (EAI), was established under the MSDHS to deal with 'ethnic' issues, including those of Hill tribes reframed as 'Ethnic Highlanders'.[56] The establishment of the EAI, however, largely represented a mere gesture on the part of the state to symbolically reframe the Thai nation as ethnically diverse.[57] The EAI's more implicit directive seems to have been that of governing this newly acknowledged diversity in the form of staged ethnic performances celebrating national unity and promoting tourism. In spite of these official efforts to re-categorise Hill tribes as somehow included in the Thai nation, the older term 'Hill tribe' and its associated stigmas of upland ethnic groups as threats to the nation continue to pervade popular Thai discourse and often slip out in official statements.[58]

The state-constructed categories of Hill tribe and Ethnic Highlander mask a great deal of diversity in terms of the histories, languages, cultures, and popular stereotypes of the various groups categorised as such. For example, it is generally held in Thai society that the Lua/Lawa and the Karen/Pwakanyaw have longer and hence more legitimate historical presences within the Thai nation. In contrast, the Akha, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Lahu, and Lisu are perceived as more recent and hence illegitimate migrants.[59] These perceptions further rest upon the hegemonic view of the Thai nation as existing from time immemorial.

In spite of this diversity, however, the Thai state's policies towards and classifications of Hill tribes as a special group of partial citizen-subjects beginning in the 1950s laid the groundwork for the emergence of a pan-Hill tribe identity in Thailand during the latter part of the twentieth century.[60] This pan-Hill tribe identity first emerged and gradually solidified during the 1970s and 1980s as a result of five key factors.

55 Buadaeng, 'The rise and fall of the Tribal Research Institute'.

56 Anan Ganjanaphan, **รัฐชาติและชาติพันธุ์: พหุวัฒนธรรมในบริบทของการเปลี่ยนผ่านทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรม** [The nation and ethnicity: Multiculturalism in the context of societal and cultural changes] (Bangkok: MSDHS, 2012), p. 3; Ethnic Affairs Institute, **อัตลักษณ์ชาติพันธุ์บนพื้นที่สูง**.

57 The EAI was disbanded by the military regime which seized control of the government in May 2014.

58 Supara Janchitfah, 'Natural scapegoats', *Bangkok Post*, Perspective, 6 June 1999, p. 1; and Thai Rath Online, '**อุทยานฯชี้ชนกลุ่มน้อยโค่นไม้-ปลูกกัญชาลุกปาแก่งกระจาน**' [National Park indicates that a minority group has invaded Kaeng Krachan forest and destroyed trees to plant marijuana], *Thai Rath Online*, 6 May 2012.

59 See Saihoo, *The hill tribes of northern Thailand*, pp. 11–12.

60 Other scholars attribute the scaling-up of *intra*-ethnic identities among upland minority groups in Thailand, such as the Karen/Pwakanyaw and Akha, to shifting state policies, expanding telecommunications, and the agencies of foreign Christian missionaries and 'Hill tribe' elite. See Khwanchewan Buadaeng and Panadda Boonyasaranai, 'Religious conversion and ethnic identity: The Karen and the Akha in northern Thailand', in *Living in a globalized world: Ethnic minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion*, ed. Don N. McCaskill, Prasit Leepreecha and Shaoying He (Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2008), pp. 61–2.

Ironically, it developed in certain lowland, urban centres in north Thailand, thereby defying the upland–lowland binary that has long defined the ethnoscapes of not only Thailand, but much of Southeast Asia.[61]

First, foreign Christian missionaries established several pan-Hill tribe church-based associations.[62] Upland minorities in Thailand and the larger region have historically been more susceptible to Christian proselytisation than lowland Buddhist majorities. Second, foreign and Thai Hill tribe advocates established numerous non-denominational NGOs working with Hill tribes. The majority of these groups were centred in the expanding urban centres of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Third, as Jonsson notes, Hill tribes were afforded greater political associational space in Thailand during the 1980s following the end of the Cold War and due to greater regional economic integration.[63]

Fourth, in 1988 the Center for the Coordination of Non-governmental Tribal Development Organizations (CONTO) was established in response to demands by the Thai National Security Council and the Third Army that Hill tribe NGOs be represented by a single coordinating body.[64] While the government sought to control the work of NGOs working with Hill tribes through CONTO, the grouping was nevertheless instrumental in bringing together a larger coalition of Hill tribe NGO leaders from throughout the north.[65] Last, growing numbers of Hill tribes began to more permanently settle in lowland urban centres for reasons related to education, employment, business, and kinship relations.[66]

In these lowland-Thai dominated settings, individuals from distinct ethnic groups were perceived and stigmatised as Hill tribes, regardless of ethnic affiliation. As a result of their common experiences of discrimination as the internal Other, Hill tribe newcomers to the urban scene, particularly a new generation of youth educated in national schools, came to identify with an emerging pan-Hill tribe identity.[67] Many of these youth were initially brought together as Hill tribe beneficiaries of various NGO (Christian and nondenominational) and state-royal sponsored education programmes.

Certain youth rose to positions of leadership and decided to establish independent organisations to work on behalf of issues such as legal citizenship status, land tenure, livelihoods, education, gender relations and drug addiction. The earliest example of one such organisation is the Association for Inter-Mountain Peoples' Education

61 James C. Scott, *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

62 Paul W. Lewis and Elaine T. Lewis, 'The fourth dimension in Thailand', in *Gospel tide in Thailand: American Baptist World Mission study*, ed. Helen M. Powers (Valley Forge, PA: American Baptist International Ministries, 1973), p. 49.

63 Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'Presentable ethnicity: Constituting Mien in contemporary Thailand', in *Dislocating nation-states: Globalization in Asia and Africa*, ed. Patricio N. Abinales, Ishikawa Noboru and Tanabe Akio (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2005), p. 242.

64 Sommart Sukonthaphathipak, 'Recollections of the Hill tribes', in McCaskill and Kampe, *Development or domestication?*, p. 71.

65 Vaddhanaphuti et al., **กึ่งศตวรรษการพัฒนาบนพื้นที่สูง**, pp. 38–39; Ken Kampe, pers. comm., 22 Mar. 2012.

66 Khwanchewan Buadaeng, Panadda Boonyasaranai and Prasit Leepreccha, **วิถีชีวิตชาติพันธุ์ในเมือง** [Ethnic lifestyles in the city] (Chiang Mai: SSRC, Chiang Mai University, 2003).

67 Kathleen Gillogly, pers. comm., 19 Oct. 2013.

and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT), which broke off from its mother organisation, the Mountain Peoples' Culture, Development and Education Foundation (MPCDE), in 1991. At the time of its official founding in 1989, MPCDE was the first NGO in Thailand to specifically work with Hill tribes.[68]

In their emerging positions as cultural brokers between the uplands and lowlands, these young ethnic leaders grew increasingly aware of how they were being (mis) represented within Thai society, especially via the massive tourism industry in which Hill tribes figure as exemplary forms of exotica for the gaze of domestic and foreign tourists.[69] They began to challenge the labels and stigmas that outsiders had long imposed upon them — whether in relation to their distinct ethnic groups or their pan-Hill tribe identity. For example, they tended to prefer the term 'Tribal person' (*Chon phao*) in more popular discourse. The term 'Tribal', which some Indigenous scholars argue connotes 'primitiveness',[70] is generally viewed as less derogatory and spatially confining than the term 'Hill tribe', at least within the Thai context. Finally, more recently these ethnic leaders began to look beyond the state for alternative terms of self-reference, such as Indigenous Peoples, as is explained below.

The Indigenous Peoples' movement comes to Asia and Thailand

Although ethnic minorities in Thailand have long struggled against oppression and discrimination, including some as fighters in the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) between the 1960s and 1980s,[71] the introduction of the modern concept of Indigeneity to Thailand did not emerge as a direct result of the involvement of those who identify as Indigenous Peoples today. Instead, it originated with outsiders who came to politically organise and live in Thailand in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the first was Luingam Luithui, an ethnic Naga leader from India with a history of engagement in radical Left politics.[72]

Before discussing Luithui's involvement in the movement, however, we must stress that we are aware of the potential dangers of arguing that the modern concept of Indigeneity in Thailand originated with outsiders. Indeed, numerous Indigenous movements the world over have been discredited nationally as lackeys of their foreign sponsors.[73] Our argument is rather that while the modern concept of Indigeneity was first introduced to Thailand by outsiders such as Luithui, certain local actors in Thailand have since localised and reworked the concept in ways reflecting not only

68 MPCDE was founded by a network of government officials as well as Thai and foreign scholars and social critics, including the Dutch anthropologist Leo Alting von Geusau and the Thai scholar Chupinit Kesmanee. Prominent Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa served as the first chair.

69 In their public performances of Indigeneity, Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are simultaneously working to meet and challenge many of the stereotypes about them that have been propagated and exploited by the tourism industry. See Morton, 'Reframing the boundaries of Indigeneity'.

70 Leepreecha, pers. comm., 26 Mar. 2012.

71 Marks, 'The Meo hill tribe problem in northern Thailand'.

72 See also Michael Dunford, 'Indigeneity, ethnopolitics, and *taingyinthar*: Myanmar and the global Indigenous Peoples' movement', this vol.

73 See Adam Kuper, 'The return of the native', *Current Anthropology* 44 (2003): 389–402; Virginia Tilley, 'New help or new hegemony? The transnational Indigenous Peoples' movement and "Being Indian" in El Salvador', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (2002): 525–54; and Warren, *Indigenous movements and their critics*.

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their distinct circumstances, but also their historical struggles to overcome oppression and discrimination as discussed earlier.[74]

Luithui was invited to attend an inter-faith meeting in the Philippines in 1977, and on his way back the YMCA invited him and 16 other meeting participants to visit Thailand. During this first trip to Thailand, Luithui was taken on a two-day trek in the north, where he first encountered Thailand's upland minorities, including some who were hiding in the forests and being accused of being communists.[75] That experience left a mark on Luithui, who was beginning to learn about the concept of Indigeneity, especially from people he met from the Americas.

Luithui did not, however, return to Thailand until over a decade later, when, in August 1988 he was invited by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), an NGO, to an Indigenous Peoples' Forum in Chiang Mai. The main organiser of the Forum was a South Korean Reverend named Kwon Ho-Kyung.[76] According to Luithui, some minority 'Dayak' participants from Kalimantan were unhappy when they learned that there were Javanese participating. Believing that the Javanese were Indonesian government spies, the Dayak refused to speak during the forum.

Many were sympathetic with the Dayak, including Rev. Kwon, who realised that Indigenous Peoples from Asia wanted their own forum. Therefore, the idea for creating the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) emerged, with CCA supporting the initiative. Luithui became the first forum chair. Initially based in Bombay, India, Luithui began working to build connections with other groups in Asia supporting ethnic minority rights.[77]

After four years, the first general assembly of AIPP was organised on 4 June 1992 in Bangkok, just days following serious political unrest in Thailand related to the events known as 'Black May'.[78] Luithui and others decided to hold the meeting in Bangkok because of its central location in the region, and because, as he put it, 'Thai people are generally polite and friendly'. Representatives from 11 organisations in Asia attended.

Although Prasert Trakansuphakon, an ethnic Karen/Pwakanyaw man, had attended the meeting in Chiang Mai in August 1988, at the time of the 1992 meeting he had returned to his village due to the political turmoil in Thailand and could not be contacted. Therefore, no Indigenous Peoples from Thailand attended. Instead, a prominent Thai figure, Tuanjai Deetes, represented Thailand, even though she is ethnically Thai.[79] Representatives from groups in Nepal, Bangladesh, India (Nagaland), Indonesia as well as the Philippines and Solomon Islands also attended.[80]

74 See also Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

75 Luingam Luithui, pers. comm., 30 Sept. 2013.

76 *Indigenous Peoples in Asia: Towards self-determination*; *Report of the Indigenous Peoples Forum, Chiengmai, Thailand, August 1988*, ed. Colin Nicholas (Bombay: AIPP, 1989), p. iii.

77 Luithui, pers. comm., 30 Sept. 2013.

78 'Black May' refers to the events surrounding a mass demonstration of largely middle-class urbanites in Bangkok in May 1992 in opposition to a military junta that dismissed the results of a national election in March 1992. The junta violently suppressed the demonstration, causing a major public outcry and the intervention of the King. Shortly thereafter an interim civilian government was installed and national elections held. As a result, the military suffered a major blow to its public image. See Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A history of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 243–6.

79 Tuanjai Deetes co-founded the Hill Area Development Foundation (HADF) in 1986.

80 Luithui, pers. comm., 30 Sept. 2013.

During the first General Assembly of AIPP it was agreed to establish an official secretariat. Due to the considerable NGO support coming from Thailand, Luithui decided to establish a small office in Bangkok. Two prominent Thais, scholar Gottama Ariya and social critic Sulak Sivaraksa, were important supporters of AIPP at the time. Although Luithui could not speak Thai, and had a very limited budget and no staff from Thailand, these Thais were willing to help, and he felt accepted.

Luithui's wife, Peingam, joined him from India in February 1993. He initially wanted to move AIPP's secretariat to Chiang Mai, but people in the Thai government security services warned him that doing so would be dangerous, especially as a Naga dissident. Indeed, in 1995 the Indian government impounded Luithui's passport.[81] As a result, he remained based in Bangkok until 1999 when his Thai contacts informed him that it would be safe to move to Chiang Mai.[82]

AIPP slowly began organising in Thailand, working closely with the IWGIA based in Copenhagen, Denmark, and IMPECT, which, as noted earlier, was officially established in Chiang Mai by various Tribal leaders in 1993. In October 1995, AIPP, IWGIA and IMPECT jointly organised a conference called 'Indigenous Peoples in Asia'. Over 50 representatives attended, mostly Indigenous, from Thailand, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines.

Early one morning in January 1996, the Thai police raided AIPP's office in Bangkok, apparently based on a complaint from the Indian government, which opposed the establishment of AIPP.[83] The police had been informed that AIPP was involved with gun smuggling and drug running. According to Luithui, when the Thai police raided his house, they commented, 'You aren't Indian', since their physical features were more akin to Southeast Asians. Moreover, when the Thai police found that none of the allegations were true, they were embarrassed, apologised, and never bothered Luithui again.[84]

Later in 1996, AIPP planned to organise their second General Assembly in Nepal, but when Luithui flew into Kathmandu from Bangkok to attend he was detained by Nepalese officials following a complaint from the Indian government. The Indians wanted Luithui extradited to India, since his work with the Indigenous movement was deemed a security threat. The Nepalese officials, however, while not permitting Luithui to attend the General Assembly, allowed him to return to Thailand.[85]

Shortly after coming back to Thailand it was decided that AIPP should be registered in Thailand, and the Thai scholar Chupinit Kesmanee became the first chair of AIPP's board in Thailand in 1997. Chupinit noted that the growth of the Indigenous movement in Thailand in the 1990s was especially influenced by the groundbreaking 1987 report of José R. Martínez-Cobo,[86] the Special Rapporteur on the United Nation's Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of

81 Indigenous News, 'To live as an exile, and to be back home', *Indigenous News*, 18 Dec. 2014, http://www.indigenousnews.info/2014/12/live-exile-back-home (accessed 20 Apr. 2015).
82 Luithui, pers. comm., 30 Sept. 2013.
83 The Bangladesh government was also unhappy with Luithui due to his involvement in the Chittagong Hill Tribes negotiation process.
84 Luithui, pers. comm., 30 Sept. 2013.
85 Ibid.
86 Chupinit Kesmanee, pers. comm., 23 July 2013.

Minorities.[87] Together with IMPECT, AIPP began to increasingly support the development of an Indigenous movement in Thailand and other parts of Asia.

The formation of an Indigenous Peoples' movement in Thailand

AIPP and IWGIA have played crucial roles in developing the concept of Indigeneity amongst NGOs and academics, especially in Chiang Mai, the centre of the movement. Reflecting the particularities of Thailand, however, Jonsson notes that with IMPECT's establishment in the early 1990s, ethnic minorities in the north began to be concerned with both representing themselves as 'loyal members of the nation-state' and also drawing on 'an international discourse of indigenous peoples and their right to engage in culture and development on their own terms'.[88]

Other developments that served to mobilise upland minorities in the north during the late 1980s and 1990s involved a burgeoning resistance movement to government efforts to resettle communities from forested areas, block access to upland farmlands, and repatriate Hill tribes from Burma considered illegal migrants.[89] Although these struggles did not initially employ arguments associated with Indigeneity, groups like IMPECT and supporting academics from Chiang Mai University and elsewhere began supporting communities faced with resettlement and land and forest loss.

From the late 1980s onwards through the 1990s, Hill tribes — long stigmatised as forest destroyers — were being increasingly blamed for the widespread deforestation taking place in northern Thailand.[90] The stakes of this stigmatisation escalated following a devastating flood in southern Thailand in January 1989 that was attributed to upland deforestation. In response, the government issued a nationwide logging ban and the Royal Forestry Department rapidly expanded efforts to designate protected areas.[91] The ideological framework guiding these efforts is one wherein people and forests are viewed as separate and incompatible.

In the early 1990s, AIPP was already cooperating with the World Rainforest Movement, the Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), and various other European organisations with an interest in creating alliances with Indigenous Peoples in order to protect the environment and Indigenous Peoples' rights. This work extended to investigating the status of Indigenous Peoples in protected areas.[92]

87 See José R. Martínez-Cobo, *Study of the problem of discrimination against Indigenous populations. Vol. 5: Conclusions, proposals and recommendations* (New York: United Nations, 1987). See also Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

88 Jonsson, 'Presentable ethnicity', pp. 232, 246.

89 Kesmanee, 'Hilltribe relocation policy in Thailand'; IWGIA, *IWGIA Yearbook 1989* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1990), pp. 115–16; and Prasert Trakansuphakon, 'The history and contemporary situation of Karen and other Indigenous Tribal Peoples' movements in Thailand', in '*…Vines that won't bind …*': *Indigenous Peoples in Asia*, Proceedings of a Conference held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1995, ed. Christian Erni (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1996), p. 176.

90 Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, 'The present situation of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', in Erni, '*…Vines that won't bind …*', pp. 85–7.

91 Sureeratna Lakanavichian, 'Forest policy and history', in *Forest in culture, culture in forest: Perspectives from north Thailand* (Copenhagen: Research Centre on Forest and People in Thailand, Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, 2001), pp. 120–21.

92 Marcus Colchester and Christian Erni, eds., *Indigenous Peoples and protected areas in South and Southeast Asia: From principles to practice* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1999).

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Although there was initially not a term for 'Indigenous Peoples' in Thai, sometime between 1988 and 1993, as AIPP became more involved in Thailand, a Thai translation for the term was worked out in the form of '*Chon phuen mueang*'. On 20 May 1993, 'The Organization-Network of 13 Tribal Peoples in Thailand' (ONTP)[93] issued the following statement:

> On the occasion of the UN's declaration of 1993 as the International Year of 'Indigenous Peoples', we the 'Tribal peoples' of Thailand announce the following intentions ….[94]

According to Chupinit Kesmanee, 'At the time, people from the Americas did not like the term tribal, but those from Asia preferred it.'[95] In their 1993 declaration, the ONTP demanded that 'tribal persons' be granted greater political participation, full Thai citizenship, and land tenure.[96] These demands continue to figure prominently in the burgeoning Indigenous movement, alongside increasing calls for the protection of Indigenous Peoples' distinct cultures and languages.

The ONTP's decision to release its declaration in 1993 may have been influenced by factors taking place nationally and internationally. First, the United Nations declared 1993 to be the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The ONTP leadership, however, refrained from directly referring to themselves as Indigenous Peoples but rather as 'Tribal peoples'. The latter may have been due to the fact that in the prior year of 1992 the Thai government first conveyed its view to the United Nations that 'Hill tribes … are not considered to be minorities nor indigenous peoples but as Thais who are able to enjoy fundamental rights … as any other Thai citizen.'[97] In addition, the political aftermath of Black May 1992, as described earlier, may have emboldened the ONTP's members to convey their demands to the larger Thai society.

Three years later, in May 1955, representatives from Tribal NGOs, such as the ONTP and IMPECT organised a peaceful walking demonstration of some 3,000 Tribal peoples from Chiang Mai to Lamphun to protest government efforts to relocate communities from upland watersheds.[98] The immediate impact was that the government temporarily postponed relocation efforts. Thai scholar Chayan Vaddanaphuti, a veteran activist-intellectual from Chiang Mai University, comments that, '(this) demonstration (was) the first such event in modern Thai history and indicates the frustration of the minority peoples who have not been treated justly'.[99]

93 The groups represented in this network included Akha, Dara'ang, Hmong, H'Tin, Iu-Mien, Karen/Pwakanyaw, Khamu, Lahu, Lisu, Lua/Lawa, Mlabri, Moken/Moklaen, and Sagai.

94 Inter-Mountain Peoples' Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT), '**คำประกาศเจตนารมณ์และขอเสนอของ** 13 **ชนเผ่าในประเทศไทย**' [Declaration of the intentions and proposals of the 13 tribal groups in Thailand'], *Life on the Mountain* 3, 9 (1993): 3–5.

95 Kesmanee, pers. comm., 23 July 2013.

96 IMPECT, '**คำประกาศเจตนารมณ์**', pp. 3–4.

97 Thailand Government Statement, 'Hill-tribe welfare and development', U.N. Doc. E./ CN.4/ AC.2/ 1992/4, United Nations, 12 May 1992; and Benedict Kingsbury, 'The applicability of the international legal concept of "Indigenous Peoples" in Asia', in *The East Asian challenge for human rights*, ed. Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 357.

98 See Trakansuphakon, 'The history and contemporary situation of Karen', p. 176; and Vaddhanaphuti, 'The present situation of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', p. 83.

99 Vaddhanaphuti, 'The present situation of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', p. 83.

It would take an additional three years before this expanding coalition of Tribal leaders officially adopted the label 'Indigenous Peoples', albeit solely in English and in relation to the international rather than national scene, with the establishment of 'The Assembly of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Thailand' (AITT) in 1998.[100] In Thai, however, this organisation was referred to as 'The Assembly of Tribal Peoples in Thailand' (ATT), *Samatcha chon phao nai prathet Thai*.[101] Representatives from eight Tribal groups formed the AITT in order to push for changes in government policies relating to land tenure and citizenship status.[102]

In May 1999, the AITT and IMPECT aligned with Thai academics from Chiang Mai University and the largely ethnic Thai members of several NGOs, including the Northern Farmers Network and the Assembly of the Poor,[103] in staging a large peaceful demonstration at Chiang Mai's City Hall.[104] Some 10,000 people participated, including 5,000 northern Tribal peoples.[105] Officials stationed at the usual roadblocks along the main highways into Chiang Mai prevented individuals carrying Hill tribe ID cards from joining the protest.[106] The demonstrators demanded that the government permit greater public participation in efforts to create a community forestry bill and protect the rights of individuals lacking citizenship status and residing in upland areas reclassified as conservation districts off-limits to people.[107]

While the demonstrators were shortly thereafter forcibly dispersed by Thai police and forestry officials, they were nevertheless able to push the government to agree to establish ad hoc committees to review the existing forestry laws and procedures for obtaining citizenship.[108] However, sometime later after the demonstrators reestablished themselves some 6 kilometres away on the grounds of Chiang Mai University, they were taunted by agitators using loudspeakers to convey the following: 'The Hill tribes are not Thais, they are aliens. They should have no rights as Thais. They don't pay taxes, they don't go for military conscription.'[109] Nevertheless, Sakda Saenmi, an

100 Sakda Saenmi, 'Thailand: Right to citizenship for indigenous and tribal peoples', in *Assessing the first decade of the world's Indigenous People (1995–2004). Vol. I: The Southeast Asia experience*, ed. Ann Loreto Tamayo and Bienvenido Tapang, Jr. (Baguio City: TEBTEBBA Foundation, 2010), p. 509; and Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Karan Aquino, 'Citizenship and forest policy in the north of Thailand', paper presented during the 7th International Thai Studies Conference, Amsterdam, 6 July 1999, p. 4.

101 Vaddhanaphuti et al., **กึงศตวรรษการพัฒนาบนพื้นที่สูง**, p. 39. In the original Thai script the organisation's name was written as, '**สมัชชาชนเผ่าในประเทศไทย**'. For more details on the ATT/AITT, see Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

102 IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 1998–99* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1999), pp. 224–7; and Saenmi, 'Thailand', pp. 502, 509; see also Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

103 The regional Northern Farmers Network and national Assembly of the Poor are two prominent rural-based social movements that emerged in the early to mid-1990s out of a series of ongoing demonstrations staged in response to increasing natural resource conflicts between the Thai state and rural communities. See Baker and Pasuk, *A history of Thailand*, pp. 216–20; and Bruce Missingham, *The Assembly of the Poor in Thailand: From local struggles to national protest movement* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2003).

104 Vaddhanaphuti and Aquino, 'Citizenship and forest policy'; and Supara Janchitfah, 'Broken promises and bad faith', *Bangkok Post*, Perspective, 6 June 1999, p. 1.

105 Vaddhanaphuti and Aquino, 'Citizenship and forest policy', p. 1; and Craig Johnson and Timothy Forsyth, 'In the eyes of the state: Negotiating a "rights-based approach" to forest conservation in Thailand', *World Development* 30, 9 (2002): 1597–8.

106 Chao Nawk and Thai Doi, 'Thai-style apartheid?', p. 4.

107 See IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 1999–2000* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2000), pp. 255–9.

108 Ibid., p. 258.

109 Supara Janchitfah, 'A dark memory', *Bangkok Post*, Perspective, 6 June 1999, p. 3.

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ethnic Lisu and key Indigenous leader, commented that the demonstrations were instrumental in bringing 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples together to forge a broader unity for recognition of their rights'.[110]

Two months later in July 1999, a group of Thai academics, and Thai and Tribal NGO leaders travelled to Amsterdam for the Seventh International Thai Studies Conference where they organised a special roundtable on 'Citizenship and Forest Policy' highlighting the issues bringing about the May 1999 demonstrations in Chiang Mai.[111] During the roundtable, Chutima Morlaeku, an ethnic Akha woman and prominent Indigenous leader, adorned in Akha dress from head to toe, informed the roughly one hundred foreign delegates: 'All we ask is equal rights with Thai citizens. We have long suffered discrimination because we lack citizenship.'[112]

International coverage of the special panel, including a BBC interview with Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, brought the plight of Hill tribes in Thailand to the attention of foreigners.[113] Chayan, who has facilitated numerous collaborations between ethnic minorities and the academy in Thailand,[114] is quoted as saying: 'The authorities are using citizenship as a weapon to deny forest land to people, saying they cannot give land to 'non-Thais'. This has become nationalistic in nature, highly politicized. Influential business people want the land, so hilltribe people have to move out.'[115] Nationally, however, Thai language newspapers fixated on the Governor of Chiang Mai's accusations that the participants, all personally identified, had 'betrayed the nation' by tarnishing its image abroad.[116] As a result, upon returning to Thailand several of the participants were harassed and some received death threats.[117]

It would take another eight years until ethnic leaders in Thailand were confident to begin using a slightly revised version of the Thai translation for Indigenous Peoples in officially referring to themselves and the communities they claimed to represent. However, the particular term chosen, *Chon phao phuen mueang*, has the connotation of 'Indigenous *tribal* peoples'.[118] As noted earlier, some Indigenous representatives see the inclusion of the term '*Chon phao*' or 'Tribal peoples' in this term as a compromise, given its suggestion of 'primitiveness' in addition to 'Indigeneity'.[119] Moreover, the

110 Saenmi, 'Thailand', pp. 503–5.
111 See Vaddhanaphuti and Aquino, 'Citizenship and forest policy'.
112 Julian Gearing, 'The struggle for the highlands: Accused of endangering the environment, Thailand's tribespeople face eviction and an uncertain future', *Asiaweek Magazine* 25, 43, 29 Oct. 1999.
113 Ibid.
114 See Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Celia Lowe, 'The potential of people: An interview with Chayan Vaddhanaphuti', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 12, 1 (2004): 71–91.
115 Gearing, 'The struggle for the highlands'.
116 Thurakit Phumipak, '**ผู้ว่าฯระเบิดโทสะซัด** "NGOs" **รับเงินขายชาติช่วยต่างด้าว**' [The Governor of Chiang Mai explodes with anger and accuses 'NGOs' of receiving money to betray the nation and help aliens], *Thurakit Phumipak*, 21 July 1999, p. 1; and Krungthep Thurakit, '"**ผู้ว่าฯเชียงใหม่เปิดศึกกลุ่มเอ็นจีโอ**" [The Governor of Chiang Mai bursts with anger at NGO groups], *Krungthep Thurakit*, 21 July 1999, p. 1.
117 Gearing, 'The struggle for the highlands'.
118 In the original Thai script this term is written as **ชนเผ่าพื้นเมือง**.
119 Leepreecha, pers. comm., 26 Mar. 2012. Recall Kuper's argument that the very notion of 'indigenous peoples' represents a revival of the concept of primitive peoples on the part of presumably benevolent foreign actors from the global north (Kuper, 'The return of the native').

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Figure 1. The Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT) promotes awareness of Indigenous issues via supportive media such as the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The photograph above shows a forum in March 2012 on Indigenous issues, later broadcast by Thai PBS, held as part of a two-day peaceful demonstration in front of Government House, Bangkok, by several hundred Indigenous people. The forum was joined by key ethnic Thai advocates, including scholars and a human rights lawyer (photograph by Micah F. Morton).

use of the term *Chon phao phuen mueang* has evoked debate within the Indigenous movement for other reasons as discussed below (see Figure 1).[120]

Nevertheless, in 2007 the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT) was established.[121] Prasit Leepreecha notes that the establishment of the NIPT in 2007 marked the very first occasion that a group in Thailand explicitly used the label of 'Indigenous Peoples' in naming its organisation in Thai language.[122] Joni Odochao, a Karen/Pwakanyaw village headman and NIPT's first president, officially announced the establishment of the network on 11 September 2007, shortly after Thailand's first observance of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, which was

120 See also Prasit Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

121 Chon phao forum, '**งานมหากรรมชนเผ่าพื้นเมืองแห่งประเทศไทย: ประกาศตั้ง "เครือข่ายชนเผ่าพื้นเมือง แห่ง ประเทศไทย" ขับ เคลื่อน สิทธิ ชน เผ่า**' [The Festival of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand: Announcing the establishment of the 'Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand' in order to work on behalf of Indigenous Peoples' rights], 12 Sept. 2007.

122 See Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

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held on the grounds of Chiang Mai University from 8 to 9 August 2007. This was twelve years after the inauguration of the day by the United Nations in 1995.

Revealing of the unique position of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand, however, the event was officially referred to as the 'Festival of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand'. As noted above, Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are simultaneously stressing their compatibility with the Thai nation and their cultural distinctiveness. This multilayered framing of the movement is reflected in Headman Joni's remarks during the opening ceremony:

> We have a distinct way of life … that is intimately linked to nature. Our way of life is sustainable and nature friendly and has long been transmitted from one generation to the next. But now, because of state policies and modernization trends, we are struggling to maintain our traditional ways of life. The purpose of organizing this festival is to celebrate the diversity of Thai society, and, especially, promote understanding about the culture and way of life of the Indigenous Peoples in Thailand.[123]

Representatives from 24 ethnic groups participated in the first festival — namely Akha, Dara'ang, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Kachin, Karen/Pwakanyaw, Khamu, Lahu, Lisu, Lua/Lawa, Mabisu, Mlabri, Moken, Moklaen, Mon, Oraklawoi, Shan, Song, Tai-Khoen, Tai-Lue, Tai-Yawng, Tai-Yuan, Thai-Song-Dam, Thai-Yong and Yahagun.[124] However, during the 2007 festival representatives from only 14 of these groups actually aligned themselves with the NIPT — namely the Akha, Dara'ang, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Kachin, Karen/Pwakanyaw, Lahu, Lisu, Lua/Lawa, Shan, Song, Tai-Lue, Thai-Song-Dam and Thai-Yong.[125] Furthermore, representatives from each of the 10 so-called Hill tribes (Akha, Dara'ang, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Kachin, Karen/Pwakanyaw, Lahu, Lisu, Lua/Lawa, and Shan) in the north have been the main promoters of the Indigenous movement in Thailand.[126] It is no coincidence that each of these groups is represented within IMPECT, which has received financial and advisory support from AIPP and IWGIA.

Headman Joni Odochao also publicly read a document entitled the 'Declaration of the intentions of the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand'.[127] Similar to the ONTP's declaration in 1993, the NIPT's 2007 declaration began by referencing UN efforts on behalf of Indigenous Peoples. The NIPT went further, however, in explicitly calling on the Thai government to 'create policies and actively work to protect the human rights' of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand according to a series of international agreements that it had already ratified.[128]

The NIPT's declaration further called upon Thailand and other nations to ratify what was at the time referred to as the 'Covenant on the Rights of Indigenous

123 Kalpalata Dutta and Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, *Reclaiming rights in forests: Struggles of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand* (Bangkok: IWGIA and Highland Peoples Taskforce, 2008), p. 9.
124 Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT), 'The Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', Public relations document, 5 May 2012.
125 Chon phao forum, '**งานมหากรรม**'.
126 Vaddhanaphuti et al., **กึงศตวรรษการพัฒนาบนพืนทีสูง**, p. 42.
127 Chon phao forum, '**งานมหากรรม**'.
128 The international agreements referenced in the statement include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and Convention on Biological Diversity (1992).

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Peoples'. In the final clause of the declaration, the NIPT announced the establishment of the 'Council of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand' (CIPT) in order to 'safeguard the rights, dignity and humanity of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand'.[129] Over the next four years the Indigenous leadership would shape the CIPT into a largely urban grassroots coalition working to represent Indigenous Peoples nationally while pushing for state recognition of Indigenous Peoples.

Starting in 2011, the NIPT began to, first, publicly call for the Thai state to officially recognise and fund the CIPT,[130] and, second, work more closely with both the Thai state via the EAI and a growing coalition of Indigenous Peoples from regions beyond the north. Later, in 2012, the NIPT modified the council's title to 'The Council of *Ethnic* and Indigenous Peoples of Thailand' (CEIPT). The NIPT made this decision in the interest of building a larger national coalition of Indigenous *and* ethnic (*chatiphan*) peoples, a key part of which entailed being more inclusive so as to not convey the notion that they were pursuing *special* rather than equal rights relative to other Thais.

The years 2006 and 2007 were watershed ones for the Indigenous movement internationally and nationally. In 2006, a coalition of Tribal NGO staff members, upland Tribal leaders, Thai scholars, and leading human rights advocates from Asia joined a seminar at Chiang Mai University during which they addressed three main issues.[131] First, they discussed developments taking place within the international Indigenous movement. Second, they considered the possibility of organising a national-level celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Last, a smaller forum was held during which participants debated the actual words in Thai that they should use to refer to their movement.[132]

The participants eventually agreed to use the phrase 'Indigenous Peoples in Thailand' (*Chon phao phuen mueang nai prathet Thai*) to refer to the movement. Further revealing of the unique position of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand, they defined the concept of Indigeneity in a broad manner so as to be inclusive of not only 'groups that had had the label of Hill tribes imposed upon them' but also various 'ethnic groups' (*klum chatiphan*) and 'local cultural groups' (*klum watanatham thongthin*) residing throughout Thailand.[133] Second, as noted earlier, in 2006 the government established the EAI to:

> support and push forward equitable and just social policies … to end all forms of discrimination on the basis of race, skin color, ancestry or national and ethnic origins … according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which Thailand ratified in January 2003.[134]

129 Chon phao forum, '**งานมหากรรม**'.

130 Tribal Center, '**คำประกาศเจตนารมณ์เครือข่ายชนเผ่าพื้นเมืองแห่งประเทศไทย**' [Declaration of the intentions of the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand], Tribal Center, 9 Aug. 2011, http://tribalcenter.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_8700.html (accessed 9 Sept. 2012).

131 Vaddhanaphuti et al., **กึงศตวรรษการพัฒนาบนพื้นที่สูง**, p. 42.

132 See Katharine McKinnon, 'Being Indigenous in northern Thailand', in *The politics of Indigeneity: Dialogues and reflections on Indigenous activism*, ed. Sita Venkateswar and Emma Hughes (London: Zed, 2009), pp. 145–71. See also Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

133 Vaddhanaphuti et al., **กึงศตวรรษการพัฒนาบนพื้นที่สูง**, p. 42.

134 Ganjanaphan, **รัฐชาติและชาติพันธุ์**, p. 3.

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The EAI was a larger and expanded version of both the earlier Hill Tribe Welfare Division and the Tribal Research Institute that were dissolved in 2002, thereby addressing, in principle at least, the lack of discrete attention that had been paid to Hill tribes in the intervening years. Under the EAI, however, Hill tribes were reclassified alongside numerous other 'ethnic groups' as 'ethnic highlanders', thereby only partially reframing the former upland–lowland ethno-spatial division.[135]

The larger ministry (MSDHS) under which EAI operated has played a crucial role in financing each of Thailand's Indigenous Peoples' festivals. In addition, beginning with the second festival held in Chiang Mai in 2008, the EAI between 2007 and 2012 came to play an increasingly significant organisational role. A key result of the latter was the decision to hold the sixth annual festival near Bangkok in Nonthaburi and revise the official title of the festival from that of the 'Festival of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand' to the 'Festival of *Ethnic* and Indigenous Peoples in Thailand'.

Several other significant events occurred nationally and internationally in 2007. Most importantly, on 13 September 2007 — just two days after the inaugural Indigenous Peoples' festival in Chiang Mai — the Thai government ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) alongside 142 other nations.[136] Earlier, however, during the first Indigenous Peoples' festival, a government representative affirmed the Thai state's 'commitment to the standards enshrined' in UNDRIP while further stressing that any 'benefits flowing from (UNDRIP) would be based on the laws and Constitution of Thailand'.[137]

In the coming years the NIPT would repeatedly stress the Thai government's lack of progress in adhering to not only UNDRIP but also Articles 4, 66 and 67 in the 2007 Thai Constitution relating to Thailand's 'international obligations' and the closely related cultural and land rights of 'traditional communities'. The NIPT and its advocates have further brought repeated attention to the government's persistent lack of recognition of Indigenous Peoples by virtue of the latter word's absence from the Constitution.

Just one year later, in September 2008, the Thai government reiterated at the United Nations that there were no Indigenous Peoples in Thailand.[138] The statement copied below was issued in response to allegations brought to the UNPFII by US human rights activist Matthew McDaniel. McDaniel, who was expelled from Thailand in 2004, had worked since 2003 to bring international attention to the Thai government's seizure of the 'ancestral lands of the Akha indigenous people living in Hooh Yoh, Pah Nmm, and Pai ah Pai villages in Chiangrai Province' in order to make way for a Royal Project.[139]

135 Ethnic Affairs Institute, **อัตลักษณ์ชาติพันธุ์บนพื้นที่สูง**.

136 United Nations, General Assembly resolution 61/295, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 13 Sept 2007; undocs.org/A/RES/61/295.

137 Dutta and Khongkachonkiet, *Reclaiming rights in forests*, p. 9.

138 See also Nasir Uddin's article about Bangladesh in this volume, 'The local translation of global indigeneity: A case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts'.

139 S. James Anaya, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, S. James Anaya — Summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received', HRC 9a 8/15/2008 A/HRC/9/9/Add.1, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 15 Aug. 2008.

> 473. The Royal Thai Government stated that it does not recognize the existence of indigenous peoples in Thailand. It maintains that the Hill Tribes peoples in Thailand are migrants to the country, who by nature and historical background are not indigenous to the country.[140]

Regardless of the government's official stance, however, the NIPT remains steadfast in its efforts to gently push for the official recognition of Indigenous Peoples by the Thai state. Towards that end, in Chiang Mai in January 2010, NIPT representatives, in collaboration with AIPP and IWGIA, submitted a 'Report on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand' to James Anaya, then UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People.[141] Apart from detailing the continuing injustices faced by Indigenous Peoples in Thailand relating to citizenship and land rights, the report concluded with a 'request' for Anaya to 'recommend' the Thai government to officially recognise them as Indigenous Peoples.[142]

Notably, in the report's introduction, NIPT argues that 'many Indigenous Peoples living in remote highlands and forests' in Southeast Asia were divided from each other as a result of the 'drawing of national boundaries … during the colonial era and in the wake of decolonization'.[143] Earlier in 2009, the NIPT publicly declared that, 'Our ancestors were residing in their traditional territories before the emergence of nation states and the (infiltration) of the international capitalist system.'[144]

These claims, while generally perceived as valid with respect to certain Indigenous groups in Thailand, such as the Lua/Lawa, Karen/Pwakanyaw or Suay/Kui, are seen by some as more problematic in reference to others such as the Akha, Dara'ang, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Kachin, Lahu, Lisu, and Shan. In reference to the latter groups, these particular claims of Indigeneity seem to rest more squarely on the newer concept of Indigeneity as referring not simply to autochthonous groups, but also colonised peoples, regardless of where they live, or how long they have lived there.[145]

Further developments and debates within Thailand's Indigenous movement

Between 2010 and 2013 the Indigenous coalition gradually expanded to include non-Hill tribe groups such as the Tai-Phuan, Lao-Wieng and Phu-Thai from the northeast, as well as the Kayong from the north. The latter group's representatives have raised a number of questions regarding not only the meaning and scope of

140 S. James Anaya, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, S. James Anaya — Summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received', HRC 9a 9/10/2008 A/HRC/9/9/Add.1/Corr.1, OHCHR, 10 Sept. 2008.

141 NIPT, 'Report on the situation of human rights and fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', submitted to S. James Anaya, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous People, NIPT, 19 Jan. 2010.

142 Ibid., p. 17.

143 Ibid., p. 1.

144 *Prachatai*, 'เครือข่ายชนเผ่าฯเดินรณรงค์พร้อมประกาศเจตนารมณ์ – ยื่นหนังสือถึงมาร์ค-เลขายูเอ็น' [The Network of Indigenous Peoples holds a public demonstration to declare their intentions and submits a report to UN Secretary Mark], 10 Sept. 2009, http://prachatai.com/journal/2009/08/25398 (accessed 5 Nov. 2012].

145 See *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*; and Baird, 'The construction of "Indigenous Peoples" in Cambodia'.

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the label Indigenous Peoples in its Thai manifestation, but also its applicability or appropriateness to Thailand.

During a meeting at IMPECT in March 2012, CEIPT representatives appointed Surayuth Kaenphongthong, an ethnic Kayong representative, as chair of the committee to develop draft legislation for establishing CEIPT, replacing the Karen/Pwakanyaw leader Joni Odochao. As noted earlier, it was also in 2012 that NIPT representatives decided to revise their official labels of self-reference to include 'ethnic(s)' in addition to 'Indigenous Peoples'.[146]

The NIPT's decision to amend their label of self-reference in a more inclusive manner stemmed from both their increasing collaborations with the state via the EAI and also the closely related factor of the expansion of the Indigenous movement to include more diverse groups. The movement's members, moreover, have expressed different ideas regarding what term of self-reference to adopt, with some arguing for the more inclusive term 'ethnic(s)', and others advocating for the more exclusive term 'Indigenous Peoples'. Thus, initial efforts by the early Indigenous leadership to redefine the Thai manifestation of Indigenous Peoples in a more inclusive manner as noted above failed to resonate with their expanding membership.

In general, NIPT members from each of the Hill tribes represented within IMPECT tend to favour the term 'Indigenous peoples' while non-Hill tribe members prefer the term 'ethnic(s)'. Those arguing against the use of 'Indigenous Peoples' in its Thai manifestation claim that it creates ethnic division that could lead to conflict and discrimination.[147] Those arguing for it state that it is necessary as they are faced with particular problems that other ethnic groups are less likely to encounter.[148] As Yongyuth Seubtayat, an ethnic Hmong Indigenous leader put it: 'We prefer the term "Indigenous Peoples" because many people continue to face particular problems associated with citizenship, land rights and access to natural resources, issues that are not as important for those who prefer the term "ethnics".'[149]

In particular, hundreds of thousands of Hill tribes people remain without Thai citizenship, and many face serious problems related to land and resource tenure. As Kittisak Rattanakrajangsri stressed, 'We prefer the term Indigenous Peoples because we are facing particular problems that are different from other groups.'[150] Chupinit Kesmanee further stated that while many Thai academics prefer the term 'ethnic minorities', most of the Indigenous movement's representatives reject the term 'minority'.[151] In 2015, however, it was decided to revert to just using the term '*Chon phao phuen mueang*'.[152]

Yet another layer of complexity can be found when considering the degree of receptivity or lack thereof towards the concept of Indigeneity and the larger Indigenous movement among divergently positioned individuals and communities in the rural and urban north that have not been directly involved in the movement

146 See also Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.
147 Surayuth Kaenphongthong, pers. comm., 25 July 2013.
148 Rattanakrajangsri, pers. comm., 24 July 2013.
149 Yongyuth Seubtayat, pers. comm., 25 July 2013.
150 Rattanakrajangsri, pers. comm., 24 July 2013.
151 Kesmanee, pers. comm., 23 July 2013.
152 See Leepreecha, 'Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Thailand', this vol.

Figure 2. In 2010, the Vejjajiva government issued two decrees calling for the 'revitalisation' of the 'ways of life' of the 'ethnic' Moken and Karen. The decrees contain sections on land management, citizenship, culture, and education, etc., and call for 'Special Cultural Zones' for the Moken and Karen/Pwakanyaw. The photograph shows Indigenous representatives presenting a petition to government spokespersons in March 2012, calling on the administration of Yingluck Shinawatra to follow through on the decrees, and include other Indigenous groups. The petition was part of a two-day peaceful demonstration by hundreds of Indigenous people in front of Government House, Bangkok (photograph by Micah F. Morton).

per se. The interests and strategies of the largely urban-based ethnic leadership behind the movement have not always reflected those of the communities that they have claimed to represent.[153]

Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the Indigenous movement arose out of an earlier pan-Hill tribe movement to claim the basic rights to citizenship, land and mobility that they had been increasingly denied in 1980s and 1990s Thailand. Each of these issues, particularly land rights, continues to be pertinent for many Hill tribe communities in the north. As such, the Indigenous leadership is working to frame their movement to push for political recognition as Indigenous Peoples, in conjunction with the ongoing and far from complete movements for not only full legal citizenship status and land rights, but also 'cultural citizenship' or 'the right to be different and

153 For a discussion of this matter in reference to the Iu-Mien in Thailand, see Jonsson, 'Presentable ethnicity', pp. 239–47.

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to belong in a participatory democratic sense'.[154] In this manner, the Indigenous leadership is striving to frame the movement as an amalgamation of these multiple and shifting interests and thereby promote greater receptivity of the concept of Indigeneity and their movement among the general population.

Conclusions

In this article, we provided a chronology of the challenges and growth of the concept of Indigeneity in Thailand and analysed the particular ways in which the global Indigenous movement has taken root in the country. In Thailand, transnational support networks along with the opening of political associational space played key roles in facilitating the growth of, first, a regional, and, later, a national Indigenous movement during the 1980s and early 2000s, respectively. In asserting their Indigeneity, Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are drawing on a new concept of 'Indigeneity' being promoted by the United Nations and other international advocacy organisations that identifies Indigenous Peoples not only as first peoples, but crucially as colonised or oppressed peoples.[155]

Indigenous Peoples in Thailand are simultaneously asserting their cultural distinctiveness as Indigenous Peoples and their compatibility with the Thai nation.[156] In this manner, the Indigenous movement in Thailand differs from those in 'liberal democratic settler states' such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, where Indigenous Peoples 'must perform their cultural difference in order to maintain political recognition', and who in turn face the accusation of being 'not culturally different enough' when actually exercising their political rights.[157] In Thailand, rather, Indigenous Peoples must address the accusation of being 'not Thai enough' in their efforts to gain any political recognition whatsoever.

Although the Thai government has at various points since the 1990s denied the relevance of the concept of Indigeneity to Thailand, it is clear that the Indigenous movement is continuing to grow. In spite of this denial, however, state policies between the 1950s and early 2000s contributed towards the scaling-up of a pan-Hill tribe identity among the core groups associated with the Indigenous movement. While these policies have been geared towards controlling and rendering upland spaces and communities legible, they have clearly had other consequences as well.

In addition, the state via the EAI implicitly supported the employment of the Indigenous Peoples' label in its Thai manifestation by endorsing and funding each of the post-2007 annual national festivals of '(Ethnic and) Indigenous Peoples' held between 2007 and 2012. The EAI further recognised Indigenous Peoples as a particular target group in its 2011 draft 'Strategic Plan for the Development of Ethnic and Indigenous Peoples in Thailand'.[158] Finally, government decrees from 2010 designed

154 Renato Rosaldo, 'Cultural citizenship and educational democracy', *Cultural Anthropology* 9, 3 (1994): 402.
155 Erni, *The concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia*.
156 Jonsson, 'Mimetic minorities', pp. 108–9.
157 Jessica R. Cattelino, *High stakes: Florida Seminole gaming and sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 8; and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The cunning of recognition: Indigenous alterities and the making of Australian multiculturalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
158 Kittisak Rattanakrajangsri, 'Update 2011: Thailand' (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2011), http://www.iwgia.org/regions/asia/thailand/898-update-2011-thailand (last accessed 15 Nov. 2013].

to protect the cultures of the Karen/Pwakanyaw and Moken suggest that the Thai government is becoming more receptive to giving certain ethnic groups particular rights and protections, although the government still seems far from adopting the concept of Indigenous Peoples (see Figure 2).[159]

It is not entirely clear if and in what ways the Indigenous movement in Thailand will develop in the coming years, but it seems to be gaining momentum, even as it also continues to face setbacks. Most importantly, the concept of Indigeneity is gradually being localised in Thailand, particularly by Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists and intellectuals amongst Thailand's upland minorities, which may be the most significant change taking place, even if Indigenous Peoples are likely to continue evoking Thai national identities as well, depending on the context.

159 Ministry of Culture, **แนวนโยบายและหลักปฏิบัติในการฟื้นฟูวิถีชีวิตชาวกะเหรียง** [Policy trends and key practices in revitalising the Karen way of life] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2011).

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