

Transnational Non-Communist Strategies and American Cultural Propaganda in the Cold War Period: On Asia Foundation in Thailand (1954-1963)

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Abstract

From the perspective of “embedded autonomy,” this research explores non-communist strategy, generally, and, in particular, a book program employed by the Asia Foundation in Thailand during the Cold War to disseminate cross-regional cultural works via Thai Buddhist organizations. This article uses multiple historical materials, such as the National Archives of the United States, the Hoover Archives of Stanford University, and the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to examine specific changes in American power from island nations in Southeast Asia to Thailand, and the implications behind the changes in power. The study finds the following. First, the US propaganda institution in Thailand was a state-private network that integrated transnational anti-communism and capitalism. Second, using multinational capital, the Asia Foundation was enmeshed with Thai Buddhist organizations, played midwife and husbandry roles, and thereby demonstrated embedded autonomy in their program. Finally, the Asia Foundation relied on fieldwork by American anthropologists to give Thai bhikkhus “new knowledge of non-communism” in an attempt to make Thai Buddhism a cohesive force against communism.

Key Words: U.S. Information Service, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, anti-communism, Buddhist organizations, embedded autonomy