ABSTRACT

In the mid-19th to early 20th century, the ancient ethnocentric concept of Chinese Civilization was challenged by European — and Japanese — imperialist conquests. The West, in particular, came with the mission of bringing enlightenment; “civilization” seemed no longer seated in the Middle Kingdom for “all under heaven” to come and admire. Even the Chinese were leaving China in great numbers to seek wealth in foreign lands and Chinese rulers felt the need to reestablish the confidence of their people — at home and in faraway lands — in the worthiness of Chinese Civilization. This is a study of the conflict between the KMT and Siamese governments over the development and control of Chinese education in Siam during the early 20th century. It will investigate how Chinese nationalism, as manifested in the KMT policy toward overseas Chinese education, infringed upon Siam’s sovereignty, and how Siam, through its own desperate attempt to avoid being colonized by the Europeans, was making its own claim on Civilization through the establishment of a modern educational system for its own citizens and the overseas Chinese minority.