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Claremont McKenna College

The role of the King in the Democratic Transition in Thailand

Submitted to

Professor Minxin Pei

AND

Dean Huang

BY

Elizabeth Van Buskirk

FOR

Senior Thesis

(2011-2012)

Dedicated To:

My Mother, Father and Sister, with all my love.

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It is my pleasure to thank those who have made this thesis possible, which includes but its not limited to Professor Pei, The People's Empowerment Foundation, Claremont Mckenna College and my family.

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The Role of the King in Democracy in Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION.

The transition towards democracy in Thailand has been one of the most unique in the world. It began in 1932 with the overthrow of the absolute Monarchy and the creation of a constitutional monarchy that eventually evolved into a parliamentary system. But today the transition remains far from complete. Thailand has created many democratic practices and institutions, but they are often ineffective and are frequently subject to undemocratic practices and traditions.

One of the main reasons the transition has been so unique and complicated is the presence and role of the monarchy itself. Historically, the monarchy in Thailand has played a large role in every aspect of Thai life - political, social and cultural. The King's place in Thai society is a very central one, and one that is deeply imbued with Buddhist ideology, which is pervasive throughout the culture of Thailand. While there are many complexities to be explained in regards to the Monarchy's relationship with the nation of Thailand, this thesis will examine the role of the current king solely in regards to the democratic transition.

Theories

There are many theories regarding democratic transitions. In this thesis, I will be evaluating the traditional role of the institution of the monarchy in democratic transitions using Samuel P. Huntington's theory of "transformation" from his books, *The Third Wave* and *Political Order in Changing Societie*s.

In *The Third Wave,* Huntington offers his theory of democratic transition.[1] In his chapter titled "How? Processes of Democratization," Huntington explains that there are three types of traditional democratic transitions from authoritarian regimes; transformations, replacements, and transplacements. A transformation occurs when the democratic transition is initiated "from above" by those in power. A replacement occurs when the oppositions overthrow the current government. A transplacement occurs when there is a compromise between those in the government and the opposition, and both parties agree to democratize.

"The three crucial interactions in democratization processes were those between government and opposition, between reformers and standpatters in the governing collations, and between moderates and extremists in the oppositions."[2] The relative balance of power between these groups determines the type of transition that takes place.

The type of transition that has been taking place in Thailand is a transformation. A transformation is when "those in power in the authoritarian regime take the lead and play the decisive role in ending that regime and changes it into a democratic system."[3] This was the situation in Thailand when the bureaucratic elite made the decision to democratize, with the forced consent of the King. Huntington states that in a transformation the balance of power is such that the government is stronger than the oppositions and thus takes the lead in initiating the transition. In this type of transition, Huntington highlights the importance of the emergence of reformers in the current regime, their motives for democratization, their ability to weaken "standpatters," or hard-

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1 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave,* (University of Oaklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 122-143
2 Ibid.
3 Id. p. 124

liners in the regime, and their ability to placate the opposition. All of these aspects shape the nature of the transition and determine its outcome.

An important aspect of this type of transition is called "backward legitimacy." Backward legitimacy "legitimated the new order because it was product of the old, and it retrospectively legitimated the older order because it had produced the new."[4] This practice gives the reformers more control over the democratic transition. This idea is especially apparent and important in Thailand's transition. The reformers in the regime implement the practice of backward legitimacy through the institution of the monarchy.

Huntington offers another theory regarding transitions in his book *Political Change in Traditional Polities*.[5] This theory more specifically outlines the role and dilemma of a monarchy in transformations. Huntington explains that modernization causes changes in society, in that "it creates new social groups and new social and political consciousness."[6] As a result, new groups of people demand participation in government. "The participation of these groups in politics seemingly could only come at the price of the monarchy."[7] The main problem he cites is the inability of a monarchy to the transfer the traditional source of political legitimacy and authority to democratic institutions to allow room for these new groups of people. Huntington argues, the more centralized power and authority is in the institution of the monarchy, the more difficult the transfer of power will be. This "tension" is especially relevant in the case of Thailand, and is the main issue the King of Thailand faces in the current democratic transition.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Samuel P. Huntington. *Political Order in Changing Societies,* (New Haven, Yale Unveristy Press, 1968) pp. 167-191

[6] Id. p. 167

[7] Id. p. 177

Combating traditional beliefs

In evaluating the transition in Thailand and comparing it with Huntington's theory, I will be challenging some commonly held beliefs about the King's role in the democratic process there.

The first is the idea that the since the revolution of 1932, the King is no longer involved in politics or remains "above politics." While many people would like to believe this, I argue that the King has been and is quite active in politics, both directly and indirectly. Direct intervention by the King will be examined and explained in more detail in three chapters below describing the events of key periods in Thai history: 1973-76, 1992, and 2006. These provide specific examples of how the King directly intervened in governmental affairs, and explain how the people and the government have perceived his involvement.

The second commonly held belief is that the King is the "protector of democracy" and that his involvement in the democratic transition is both positive and necessary. This comes really to the core of my argument. Many people believe that due to the central role the King plays in Thai society, and previously in Thai politics, the transition to democracy requires his constant involvement and oversight.. Propping up this belief are two central ideas: (1) That the King is pro democracy and will support and further democratic principles and reforms, and (2) that the King, often heralded as the symbolic "father" of the nation and the source of political and national legitimacy, is appropriately involved because ultimately he and only he can decide what is best for "his children," meaning the people of Thailand. It is often believed that no matter what the

circumstances, the King is always acting in the best interests of the nation because he is symbolic of national unity.

I contend that while certain historical events could be construed as displaying the King always in support of democracy, at the heart of those actions was not democratic progress, but desire for unity and stability in the nation in line with the King's "conservative" mentality. I do not contest the importance of the King to the Thai people and in Thai society, and I agree that up to a point his assistance in the democratic transition has been helpful. However, I do not believe that he has or will always act in the best interest of the "people" when it comes to achieving full democratization. At key points his interests have not lined up with those of democracy for the people. Under Huntington's theory of democratic transition, for democracy to truly take hold, the elite figure that plays a part in bringing about the transition must eventually cede their traditional source of legitimacy. My thesis is that the King has not done this and actually has no intention of doing so; and therefore he is not a true supporter of democracy, but actually an impediment to its full growth.

Method of Advancement

The following describes the process by which I advance my argument and offer evidence in support. These chapters discuss specific events in Thai history in which the King intervened directly in Thai politics. While many believes his intervention was "in the interest" of furthering the democratic transition, I outline these events to emphasize (1) that the King does in fact intervene in politics and (2) that his continuing actions are ultimately detrimental to the complete growth of democracy.

Chapter 1:

The first chapter provides a summary of the prominent kings in the Chakri dynasty (of which the King is the latest successor). I explain the process of modernization initiated by the these kings, beginning with Rama 4 in 1880 up until Rama 7, the last king before the revolution of 1932. This information is important in order to understand the reasons behind the decisions to modernize made by the kings, and the effects these modernizing changes had on the country. It was these reforms that eventually created the impetus for political change and eventually a call for democratic reform.

I believe it is important to understand and evaluate the role of the kings in these historical changes. It highlights the king in Thailand as the historic and traditional person guiding and initiating all change in society, due to the fact he has been the sole source of legitimacy. The development of this role of the monarchy highlighted in this history is important in understanding why the current King assumes the role as the "leader" of democratic change, and also why it has been so difficult for him to hand over that power.

Chapter 2:

This chapter outlines the critical events of 1973-76. The revolution of 1973 was extremely important because it began the end of a continual military rule that had been in place since the revolution of 1932. Also, it reflects the reemergence of the power and importance of the King in Thai society and politics at this point. It also highlights the changes that had taken place in the Thai people and society as they staged their first protest in favor of actual democratic change.

The events of 1976, in particular, highlight the King's role at this point in the very beginning of the democratic transition. His role in supporting the coup, the military, and

consequently the violence of 1976 is telling of his larger attitude towards the democratic transition. His involvement in this situation sets the precedent that allows his continued actions in the future in times of "political crises," actions often inconsistent with achieving full democracy.

Chapter 3:

This chapter addresses the events of 1992. As with 1973-76, there was a coup and a democratic protest by the people. However, society and the people had evolved much further by this point in time, in terms of economic status, education and other areas, and the military had taken a decreasing role in politics. Thus, events unfolded differently in 1992 than in 1973-76.

The role of the King was also different in this context. He is seen in a more positive light as he stepped in against a military dictator that was threatening the progress of democracy. However, I argue that again his actions were not to further the progress of democracy, but to protect his interests in a manner consistent with his "conservative" mentality.

Chapter 4:

This chapter addresses the final example of the King's involvement and the effect it had on democratic growth. The coup of 2006 was the most recent in Thai history and was very significant, because it deposed the first popularly elected prime minister and abrogated the first "people's constitution that had been in place since 1997.

The King is said to have stepped in and supported the coup that removed the "corrupt and authoritative" Thaksin (the sitting prime minister) from power. His actions were considered by some as positive and necessary to save democracy. But the point of

this chapter is, once again, to show the King's active role in politics and the debilitating effect it had on further democratic growth.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of this thesis will evaluate the meaning of these events in more detail, paying special attention to the actions of the King, his motives, and the consequences of his actions. These events will emphasize my counter argument to the commonly held beliefs I have outlined above. I then return to Huntington's theory of democratic transition through which I will ultimately evaluate the role of Thailand's king in the democratic transition.

Under Huntington's theory of democratization, the king of Thailand fills the traditional "role" but only up to a point. Fundamentally, he has yet to relinquish his traditional source of legitimacy to democratic institutions and interfered with the democratic transition such that it has not been completed.

Final Comment: Availability of sources

There is a final point to be made in regards to the research processes and availability of sources for the thesis I am advancing. This point is that I have found there is a serious lack of information in the form of any kind of analysis regarding the subject of the current king of Thailand and the political situation. The King is an extremely sensitive issue in Thai society today. Authors David Morrell and Chai-anan Samudavanija explain this issue well in their book, *Political Conflict in Thailan*d. "The unwillingness to speak or write of the monarchy in relation to political activity is due to the pejorative connotation…the king should not be touched by the vulgarity of the

political situation."[8] In this understanding, the King is essentially above politics and so should not be discussed as such. Reinforcing this belief is the current *lese majeste* law, which forbids anyone from speaking critically of the king or the institution of the monarch under threat of severe punishment, which is imprisonment of up to fifteen years. This law, one of the mainstays of continuing undemocratic traditions, is vaguely written. It gives the prosecutors a wide scope in what they consider to be "critical" writing. Kevin Hewison writes in his book, *Political Change in Thailand*, that "most Thai academics are unwilling to comment on the monarchy due to the lese majeste laws."[9] He also explains that while foreign academics would not be subject to these laws, there is still an incentive to employ self-censorship due to the issues of implicating fellow Thai scholars, fear of being banned from Thailand, and lack of willing publisher.

I have found this to be true in my research of the King. In many of the articles and books I reviewed, especially regarding the three specific events outlined hereafter, descriptions of the actions on the part of the King are non-existent, brief, or especially non critical. When I did come across a study that was done that offered more insight, it was the very topic of that article or book, placing the author's objectivity and consequent accuracy in doubt to some degree. Rarely did I find an article or book dedicated to some other topic that would offer any type of insight to the actions or motives of the King. Mostly, it was an all or nothing situation.

This being said, I am not surprised by this lack of information. Having spent the summer in Thailand before I undertook the writing of this thesis, I came to understand

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[8] David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction and Revolution,*(West Germany, Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, Inc., 1981). p. 64

[9] Kevin Hewison, *Political Change in Thailand,* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 58

first-hand the sensitivity of the subject of the King. The NGO I worked with, the People's Empowerment Foundation, repeatedly stressed to me the delicacy with which I had to treat this subject. In my interviews with various political figures it became obvious that the King could be a subject of interest, but never in a critical or questioning manner. The only revealing conversations I had about the King were behind closed doors at my work.

II. BEFORE THE CONSTITUTION - KINGS RAMA IV-VII (1850-1932).

An evaluation of the reigns of Kings Rama 4, 5, 6, and 7 provides important background for the circumstances and changes leading up to the Revolution of 1932 that marks the beginning of the democratization period in Thailand. Each King was responsible for changing the nation in a certain way, and developing the role of the monarch, laying the foundation for democratic transition. Up until Rama 4, Siam was an under-developed country and mostly cut off from the rest of the developed world. The wave of colonization sweeping through Southeast Asia created the fear that Siam would also become colonized by imperial powers. To avoid this, Rama 4 made the decision to modernize the country to maintain independence in the face of the threat of imperial invasion.

Rama Four: Mongkut (1851-1868)

The "modern period" of Thailand really begins with Mongkut, King Rama 4. After serving as a monk for 27 years, he ascended to the throne in 1851. At the age of 47, he was well prepared to take the throne. As historian David Wyatt notes in his book, *A Short History, Thailand, the King's,* the King's "religious life had not been cloistered; indeed, he was better prepared for the throne by his monastic experience, having had the opportunity to study and read widely, as well as to travel through the country and speak with many people."[10] As he saw the neighboring countries fall under imperial power, he realized that something must be done to preserve the independence of Siam. Western powers questioned Siam's form of monarchy, claiming that it was archaic and outdated.

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[10] David K. Wyatt, *A Short History, Thailand,* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003) p. 167

As noted expert Paul Handley writes in *The King Never Smiles,* "English newspapers in Bangkok and Singapore attacked him for his assumption of deity, and for amoral antics in his huge harem, and for the royal monopolies and corruption. It was all proof, they said, of Siam's need of colonization."[11] Responding to these threats, Mongkut made the decision to modernize the country and the monarchy. He opened up Siam to international trade in 1855 with the British.

The parameters of this trade agreement changed much of Thailand's economic system. These changes, especially the abolishment of monopolies, changed the basic way the palace and government operated, in that the princes and palace officials relied heavily on these monopolies for their livelihood.[12] Not only did they have to find new sources of revenue, but also economic opportunity began to arise that existed independently from the palace and the patronage system.

In addition to the changes in the revenue system, a new openness towards westerners was created. In order to cultivate good and diplomatic relations with western powers, Mongkut opened up the country and his court to western visitors. Mongkut put a new emphasis on western education, and invited western tutors into his home for the purpose of teaching his children. Trading agreements similar to the original one with England were made with several other countries, including the United States and France. In doing this, Mongkut hoped to "avoid such suffocatingly close bilateral relationships as those between British India and Burma, or France and Vietnman."[13] Playing upon these

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11 Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles,* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006). p. 31
12 Wyatt, p. 168
13 Wyatt, p. 168

different imperial powers gave Siam the strength and protection it needed from colonization by any one particular nation.

However, despite these major changes, imperial powers were wary of the lack of modernization and changes in the government:

> "Though one might have expected major internal changes commensurate with the drastic shifts in foreign and fiscal policy, very little fundamental reform was undertaken during Mongkut's reign…The administration did not change. Government was carried on in the homes of officials as it had been for centuries, and it was characterized by Europeans as corrupt, inefficient and inhuman. Justice remained highly personalized and heavily subject to the social and economic pressures that could be mobilized by the individuals involved. The civil administration was seen to be riddled with nepotism, its officers remunerated largely by percentages of the business they transacted."[14]

The imperial powers saw a corrupt government as a direct threat to their economic interests, and so the threat of colonization still loomed. The British government imposed sanctions, such as "imitations of import and export duties and other taxation," on their trading agreement to put pressure on Mongkut to reform his "corrupt" system of government.[15]

Responding to his critics, Mongkut enacted more reforms. He saw the necessity for more modernization in response to these threats, but knew that these reforms must be enacted slowly and carefully so as not to incite a backlash from those that were used to the old system. Most importantly, he could not infringe upon the patronage system that was central to his power, as well as other powerful families he relied on.

And so the reforms Mongkut enacted were cautious and slow in nature. One of the first reforms was to increase transparency in the government to a degree. He did this by creating a "publication of a government gazette" where he allowed the laws of the

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[14] Ibid

[15] Wyatt, p. 170

kingdom to be printed. In addition he set up a system whereby his subjects could petition their grievances to him directly. He did away with old "archaic" traditions surrounding the monarchy. He allowed foreign advisers to become involved in his government. "In addition, he attempted to make some social reforms by improving the condition for slaves and allowing women to have some say in their marriage choices."[16]

It is likely that Mongkut had more reforms in mind, but in 1868 he became ill with Malaria and died. He had been preparing his eldest son Chulalongkorn to come after him as King. He had given him an education that was infused with both Thai and western elements, as well as an apprenticeship in politics so that he could learn the ways of governing.[17] However, when Mongkut died, Chulalongkorn was only fifteen years old. He too had fallen ill with Malaria, and many suspected he would not recover. When he did, he ascended the throne, but with Suriyawong as his regent. The first part of Chulalongkorn's reign as king would be overshadowed by the presence and power of Suriyawong.

Elements helping to lay the foundation of democratization occurred under Mongkut's rule. His decision to modernize was a direct result of the threat of colonization by foreign forces. To be sure, opening up Siam to the world saved the nation from colonization. Imperial countries were able to pursue their economic interests without becoming directly involved in governing the country, and no one country had a larger influence than another due to the diversification of trade agreements. Aside from these economic changes, which brought more wealth into the country, cultural changes took place as well. Attitudes towards westerners became more open, and there was an

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[16] Ibid

[17] Id, p. 171

increased encouragement and emphasis on western interaction and education. Reforms in the government were less pronounced. But the monarch did became "more human" and accessible to the public as well as to foreign visitors. The seeds of democracy were beginning to take root as a call for a change in the "corrupt" system of government currently in place began to arise, not just by foreign forces, but within the royal household as well. While the changes enacted by Mongkut were well intentioned, and were not the most radical in nature, they set the monarchy, the Thai government and the rest of the country on a path of change that would not be stopped.

Rama V: Chulalongkorn (1868-1910)

While Mongkut was seen as the more radical reformer of his day, most of his activities were in response to imperial threats, rather than acting of his on violation and motivation to change. His reforms were eclipsed entirely by those enacted by Rama V, who is said to have brought the most change to the country of Siam in all of history during his 37-year reign. Not only did he modernize the country even further, but he solidified more completely the power of the Monarch and its long lasting place in Thai society.

As mentioned early, he ascended the throne at the early age of fifteen. He did not have the experience or the following of people to be politically important at this time. In addition, his power was controlled and overshadowed by the regent, Suriyawong, who had a large and loyal following of older people in the court. The first period of Chulalongkorn's reign was thus dictated by this struggle of power, spanning from his ascension in 1868 to 1883, the death of Suriyawong.

"It was only in 1873 that the character of the new ruler began to be evidenced publicly...Chulalongkorn began a series of reforms that displayed his modern sentiments and intentions."[18] He began to modernize the monarchy by "bringing his image closer to earth.[19] He began to make more public appearances, and even allowed others to touch him. In addition, he abolished the custom that required subjects to prostrate themselves before him.

As older members of the court began to die in the 1880's, Chulalongkorn was able to fill their positions with western educated princes from his family that were loyal to him. With these princes, he created new branches of government that had "advisory, investigatory, and legislative powers" called the Privy Council and Council of State.[20] "Advised by his European counsels, he gave his government a modern bureaucratic shape. Professional schools were established for the civil service."[21] In addition to these reforms, he issued royal decrees that centralized the budget, which created a separate budget for the palace, giving the royal family more power and financial freedom.

First Mention of Democracy

The king and his brothers had effectively consolidated power for themselves. But the increase in the size and functionality of the government created new problems for the King. And "providing modern educations to a new generation of Chakris and then to non-royal service officials opened the door to new political ideas.[22] A group of young radicals began to question the King's ability to effectively and govern and control a

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[18] Wyatt, p. 173
[19] Handley, p. 33
[20] Wyatt, p. 173
[21] Handley, p. 35
[22] Ibid

rapidly changing and growing government and nation. "In a strongly worded sixty-page petition addressed to the King early in 1885, eleven young men strongly urged that the king quickly move toward a system of parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy."[23]

The King responded by stating that Siam was simply not ready for such a style of government. He agreed with "their perception of a necessary connection between domestic reforms and the maintenance of national independence," but he emphasized the need for educated men to carry out such an endeavor, of which he saw there to be a shortage at the moment.[24] He stated that "to introduce electoral and parliamentary politics would weaken the state when it was most in need of unity and direction."[25] He recognized the need for reform, but looking at his country, where "the bulk of agricultural population had little political independence of mind," and those with "any exposure to modern education" only numbering in the few hundreds, the implementation of a true representative democracy did not seem possible.[26]

The King took action in response to this petition by sending Prince Devawongse "to study and report on the organization of European governments."[27] The prince recommended "the formation of a cabinet of twelve equal ministries including the heads of the seven old ministries and five new ones, the responsibilities of each to be newly defined on functional lines… new ministries were to be created for public works, public instruction, justice, army and privy seal."[28] This was the creation of the first real

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[23] Wyatt, P. 185
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Id. p. 186

systematic bureaucracy that was set up to carrying out the King's bidding. The ministers began to form real traditions. They met regularly, recorded their meetings, and shared information and advice more freely. The national agenda finally began to become cohesive - people were working together in a procedural manner with oversight and direction coming from the King, rather than as individuals pursing tasks out of self interest without consultation.

Results of reforms

The main problem with the reforms was the haste in which they were attempted . "There was not time to proceed cautiously and deliberately with reform. Western demands for facilities and security had to be met quickly...because Siam's modernization had been so long delayed by political difficulties, the agenda of reform had been allowed to pile up while the means of dealing with it had not yet been developed."[29] The reforms were necessary, but resources such as money, institutions and qualified people, were not quite ready to deal or implement them properly.

This problem worried the King - "he often despaired at the compromise that had to be made, the work left undone, and the imperfections in the system that was being developed."[30] He was concerned that perhaps the European system of governance and ways of life were simply incompatible with the Thai values and people, and would never be able to be properly implemented. After a trip to Europe, he realized that while the compromises being made in the reforms process meant that development in Siam fell short of the "European definition of modernity," they still were still necessary and possessed utility in that they "allowed the perpetuation of the best values of Siam's

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[29] Wyatt, p. 186
[30] Id. p. 187

civilization within a borrowed structure."[31] The importance of Siam retaining its national and cultural identity while borrowing aspects of governance from European nation would come to dominate future debates surrounding democracy.

Death of Chulalongkorn

Chulalongkorn died in 1910. Many changes had taken place during his forty-two year reign. "If by 1910 Siam was not yet a modern nation, then at least it was a modernizing nation, and securely so. In the face of foreign threats and not a little domestic opposition, Chulalongkorn had created a new structure for the state that possessed a dynamic of its own, an orientation toward change."[32]

His reforms in regards to the composition and tradition of the government were sweeping. He created a bureaucracy with the main purpose to bring about change to reach western standards. He did this by recruiting men that had been exposed to western education and therefore had western expectations. With this new goal in mind, he changed the function and composition of the bureaucracy. His increased control over the government allowed him to make these changes, and with these changes "the old order simply withered away."[33] "By breaking the old social hierarchy and creating a new one," he was able to reestablish royal authority over the government in a way that had never been harnessed before."[34] He was able to stage "a revolution from above in his program of modernization."[35]

The effects of modernization were being felt through out the country. Politically, as a result of these changes, the first call for democratization began under Chulalongkorn,

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Wyatt, p. 197
[33] Ibid.
[34] Id. P. 198
[35] Ibid.

and would not die down until the Revolution in 1932. Unlike many other democracies, the cal for liberalization and democracy was coming from the top down at its inception in Siam.

RAMA 6: King Vajiravuduh (1910-1925)

Vajiravuduh became king in 1910. His reign was much different than those of Rama 4 and Rama 5. He inherited a completely different country and so faced different challenges. Foreign threat had all but abated and the country was well on it way to modernization, although unevenly. His reign was shaped by the rising nationalist sentiment that sweeping the world at that time.

Despite all of his years of preparation, "Vajiravuduh was not widely known or popular nor did he have extensive networks of supporters and clients prior to coming to the throne."[36] This being the case, he decided to expand his power through the military, which previously had not been very prominent, by creating two new military organizations. "The first was a new unit under the palace royal guard and "the second was something completely new, the so-called Wild Tiger Corps, a nationwide paramilitary corps."[37]

One of his biggest contributions was the creation of Thai nation and Thai identity. Looking to countries such as Japan, England and Germany, "He endeavored to imbue Siam with the same unified, disciplined patriotic drive and sense of national duty that those countries enjoyed.[38] He believed that the nation should provide a form of identity for its people, and that these people should share a common interest:

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[36] Wyatt, p. 212
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

> "He envisioned structuring behavior and values primarily in terms of achieving the nation's goal: people should act in their personal lives in ways conducive to the nation's interest. In addition to logical concerns for national defense and the achievement of international equality, he espoused ideas of economic nationalism- freeing the economy from foreign control."[39]

When it came to constructing Thai identity, "His formula was to direct his people's loyalty not toward the geopolitical or cultural state, but on the body of the king himself."[40] Thus, he founded the Thai nation and consequently Thai identity on the idea of the "nation-religion-monarch, an entity in which all three elements were inextricably bound together. Allegiance to any one of the three meant loyalty to all three; disloyalty or disobedience or disrespect toward one meant disrespect toward all."[41] The role of this three-headed ideology in helping, or hindering democratization at different times is a subject explored in this paper.

The King's contributions to the modernization process were mostly social reforms. He put an emphasis on expanding the culture of art, literature and the theatre, not just for the royal elite, but for the whole public. He began many clubs, such as the Enhancement of Knowledge Club, to promote and produce magazines and theatricals which "espoused modern valued and patterns of behavior."[42] He also made changes in regards to women and education. He advocated for monogamy and that women should have a choice in their marriage. He also advocated for widespread modern education. He made primary education compulsory by law for all boys and girls between the ages of seven and fourteen. He created the first university in Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University, as a memorial to his father.

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[39] Wyatt, p. 216
[40] Handley, p. 31
[41] Wyatt, p. 216
[42] Id. P. 217

Problems during his reign

Despite the many positive changes Vijiravuduh made during his reign, it was also rife with complications and controversies. The most important is the first instance of a potential coup. The creation of the Wild Tiger Corps led to the first organized coup attempt against the monarch. A plot was made between twenty-two young lieutenants in the army, who felt personally disrespected by the creation of the Wild Tiger Corps and the consequent downgrading of the army. These junior military officers decided to stage a coup against the absolute monarchy on the grounds that "they considered Siam to be backward, unjust, corrupt, and even morally debased. They had come to blame their country's ills on the existing system of government."[43] Although the plot was discovered and arrests quickly made, it was the first direct challenge to the authority of the King to take place in Siam. It was the first time anyone openly cited the King and his government as the impediment to Siam's goal of modernization.

In regards to the institution of the monarch, there were additional criticisms made. "Vajiravudh apparently devoted little thought or attention to political changes. He rejected all calls for political reform as selfishly motivated, disloyal and certain to bring ruin to Siam."[44] Critics pointed out the contradiction that the King would support modernization and development in all other areas of life, but not when it came to the government.

Death of Vajiravudh- 1925

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[43] Wyatt, p. 213
[44] Id. p.220

Vajiravudh died at age forty-four in 1925 having produced no sons to inherit the throne. Before his passing he named Prince Prajadhipok, Chulalongkorn's youngest son, to be his successor.

Although Vajiravudh's reign was fraught with complication and controversy, some positive change did take place. He reduced "the preeminence of the princes, his brother and uncles," by "promoting many commoners to higher positions in the still-expanding government."[45] By doing this he was able to make the government seem more democratic and professional, because it gave the impression that he was sharing power. This was also important because it protected and encouraged the meritocratic system which Chulalongkorn had introduced earlier as means of selecting individuals to serve as officials in the government, thereby changing at least some aspects of the old patronage system, giving power to a new set of people.

In addition, his creation of "nation-religion-king" paradigm provided the Thai people with a cohesive identity they did not previously have.- expand on this p. 39 handley

Perhaps he most important aspect of Vajiravudh's reign in regard to democratization is the first occasion of political tensions. This was present in the "attempted coup" by the young officers, who directed their anger towards the monarch as the source of the country's problems. In addition there was the elite's general dissatisfaction with the lack of modernization of political institutions such as the monarch, as well as their criticism of the monarch's accumulation of too much power.

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[45] Wyatt, p. 220

They believed that "it was logically impossible for him and his indefinitely to promote change in everything but political institutions."[46]

The Last Absolute Monarch- Prajadhipok (1925-1933)

Prajadhipok was not prepared for his reign as King. He had been educated in England expecting to have a career in the army. His rise to the throne was the result of several unexpected deaths of his older brothers. He lacked governmental experience, and so was vulnerable to the opinions and positions of his older half-brothers and uncles who had more experience in politics.

Prajadhipok inherited a country and government that had many problems - the most crippling one being its financial condition. This caused much strain and turmoil within the government as they sought to find a solution. "This governmental inefficiency and semiparalysis…led a substantial segment of the urban elite...to lose, to some immeasurable extent, faith in government, and at least to begin to question, if not to challenge, the fundamental tenets of their social and political system based on the absolute monarchy."[47]

In combination with this dissatisfaction by the people was a new way to voice such a sentiment. The creation of daily newspapers and weekly magazine allowed for the publication and proliferation of this widespread discontent on a scale that had never existed before. This widespread and heavily publicized criticism of the government left the institution of the monarch more vulnerable than it had ever been.

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Wyatt, p. 223

Therefore Prajadhipok's task was to "restore confidence in the monarchy and government."[48] He did this by creating the Supreme Council of State, a "super-cabinet compromising the top-ranked and most experienced members of the royal family."[49] This council was created with the purpose of helping the inexperienced king deal with the serious financial crises. Also, it brought power back into the control of the royal family.

For the time being the situation began to improve for Prajadhipok. The economy was doing better, and so the financial pressure was temporarily suspended. But despite this turnaround, danger still existed. Prajadhipok "knew many Bangkokians resented royal privilege and monopoly on high positions, and he knew of the Thai students in Europe who openly discussed alternatives like parliamentary democracy, national socialism and communism."[50]

To deal with this issue of political development, he sought the advice of Francis B. Sayre in a memorandum headed "Problems of Siam." In this memorandum he asked many questions regarding the inevitability of parliamentary democracy in Thailand and if "anglo-saxon" parliamentary government was really suitable for eastern people. For the most part the King was open to change, but expressed some reservations over the "readiness" of Thailand for representative democracy. In a memorandum titled "Democracy in Siam" he stated the following;

> "if it is admitted that some day we may be forced to have some form of democracy in Siam, we must prepare ourselves for it gradually. We must learn and we must educated ourselves. We must learn and experiment as to have an idea as to how a parliamentary government would work in Siam…If we are to

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Handley, p. 23

[50] Handley, p. 24

> have a parliament, we must teach the people how to vote and how to elect representatives who really have their interests at heart,"[51]

To follow this goal, Prajadhipok introduced an advisory Committee of the Privy Council, as well as several experiments in municipal self-government. The Privy Council was similar to the legislative councils enacted during previous reigns. But this council worked ineffectively and was more for show than function. Members of the Supreme Council argued "it put the monarchy in a bad light because it would propose things to the throne, rather than only respond to royal requests."[52] In addition, Prajahidpok proposed a prime minister to supervise the Supreme Council of State. This suggestion was met with so much opposition that it was never created. Similar criticisms were made- one prince argued "it would dangerously suggest to the people that the king no longer rule the country."[53]

The world wide depression of the early 1930's created economic problems for Thailand like everyone else, leading once again to public dissatisfaction. Criticism and doubts of the government's ability to govern efficiently were raised once again. Receiving pressure form the royal family and members of the upper class, the King passed policies that forced the middle class and the peasantry to bear the brunt of the economic crises.

In the face of massive popular discontent and the threat of rebellion, the King made the choice to enact some sort political reform in the direction of representative democracy. He assigned the task to his foreign minister, Prince Devawong. With the help of his American adviser Raymond Stevens, they drafted a new constitution. In the

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[51] Benjamin A. Baston, comp and ed., *Siam's Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy,* rev. ed. (Ithaca, 1977), pp.48-50

[52] Handley, p. 41

[53] Ibid, p. 41

draft, the reforms introduced an appointed prime minister that would be given the executive functions of the King, and would "preside over a cabinet responsible to a legislative assembly, the membership of which would be half elected, and half appointed.[54] The King would still have the right to veto laws and policies, as well as choose the prime minister. This draft was rejected by all of the princes and was not adopted

The final fall -the coup of 1932

In the aftermath of the princes' rejection of the constitution, they "again overhauled the king's economic reforms and further insulted themselves from new taxes, while passing the burden to the middle class."[55] This appeared to be the final straw. A coup was staged by a group of "middle-level officials" consisting of new bourgeois elite, well-educated civil servants and army officers. They numbered only around one hundred. They rounded up chief officials and sent a message to the King, who was vacationing at Hua Hin, that he must agree to submit to a constitution. "The princes were seized without violence, and the revolution was over in lass than 24 hours."[56] The King, who had foreseen such an event, agreed to submit.

Aftermath of Revolution

The aftermath of the revolution was a dark time for the throne. With the throne essentially stripped of all its powers, and facing a rising anti-royalist sentiment from the bureaucratic elite and the populace at large, King Prajadhipok and the royal went into exile in 1934. The king struggled unsuccessfully with the military to come back to Thailand with the assurance he would regain some of his power. In 1935, when this did

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[54] Wyatt, p. 230
[55] Handley, p. 43
[56] Ibid, p. 43

not happen, he abdicated the throne in favor of his successor, Ananda, who was then only a boy and living abroad in Switzerland. Prince Ananda and his family, including Prince Bhumibol, his brother would become the king, did not return to Thailand until 1946. Thus marked a period of time in Thai history that is unusual in that it was "dominated not by a king but rather by a handful of the promoters of the 1932 coup."[57]

King Bhumibol

The purpose of this paper is not to summarize the events of King Bhumibol's reign, only to evaluate his actions in regards to the democratic transition. However, here I will provide a brief summary of how he came to power, the first part of his reign, and important aspects of his reign that are relevant to the democratic process.

King Bhumibol, or Rama IX, is the longest reigning monarch in the world. He came ascended the throne in 1946, and has been there ever since. He is the monarch that is the content of this paper. Eevery reference to "the king" hereafter, unless specified otherwise, is in reference to Bhumibol.

Rama IX came to the throne in interesting circumstances. Being the second eldest, he was not raised to be king. His brother Ananda was the first in line. However, Ananda was found dead in room in 1947. His death has never been explained. It was in this situation that Bhumibol, only 18 at the time, came to the throne.

Author Richard Hewison writes in his book "Political Change in Thailand," that when Bhumibol came to the throne he "inherited a position which had little political power or influence."[58] This is the result of the situation that occurred leading up to and in

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[57] Wyatt, p. 234

[58] Kevin Hewison, *Political Change in Thailand,* (London: Routledge, 1997)

the aftermath of the revolution of 1932 as mentioned earlier- the rise of the military and anti-royalist sentiment.

This situation overshadowed the first part of Bhumibol's reign. During the period of 1946-1957, which was dominated by General Phibun who was staunchly anti-royalist, the king was rarely involved in politics. "It was only after General Sarit's twin coups of 1957-58, overthrowing the constitution and parliament and establishing highly authoritarian regimes, that the monarchy's positions was revived and the present king given a higher profile. His interest in politics was encouraged by Sarit."[59]

Bhumibol and the military, and conservatism

There are two main themes that dominated Bhumibol's reign; his relationship with the military and his conservative mentality. These two aspects are important to understanding his actions in the subsequent chapters.

As demonstrated above, the king owes the resurrection of the monarchy to Sarit. It was this act that began the long lasting relationship between the military and the king. The immergence and importance is summarized by David Morrell and Chai-anan Samudavanija in their book "Political Conflict in Thailand:

> "Especially after Field Marshal Sarit seized power in 1957, a definite relationship emerged between the military elite that rule Thailand and the royalty that reigned over it. Each needed the other for continue pursuit of its own objectives. Neither fully trusted the other, but each had by necessity found ways to accommodate the other's fundamental requirements. Most directly, the military's continued control over the political process- as exemplified in its periodic seizures of power- could not succeed without explicit or implicit support from the palace. At the same time, the palace has depended increasingly on the military as the guardian of national security and the continuity of the throne itself. Military leaders adeptly turned any opposition to the regime into opposition to the royal institution."[60]

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[59] Ibid.

[60] David Morrel and Chai-anan Samudavanija. *Political Conflict in Thailand,* 1981. West Germany, Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, Inc. p. 67

This give and take relationship has remained for the entirety of Bhumibol's reign. Although the military has declined in direct political power since these years, their role of "protecting the national interest and continuity of the throne itself" explains their continued presence in Thai politics in that the king necessitates their assistance. His actions in the subsequent chapters will be analyzed according to this relationship.

The second theme of Bhumibol's reign is his conservatism. Once the power of the throne had been restored, many believed that Bhumibol would be committed to the cause of change as his predecessors had. "Darling believed that the King would be a liberal and democratic monarchy, with an interest in preserving freedom; however, this optimism was misplaced..the present King's legacy has been to define a conservative monarchy, supporting stability and order, authority and tradition, developmentalism, unity and solidarity, national chauvinism, and national security and anti-communism. Because of its conservatism, this monarchy has not indicated any fundamental commitment to democratic reform."[61]

Hewison outlines the king's conservative mentality. He states that his conservatism embodies many beliefs and ideologies in relation to Thailand. First is his interest in the preservation of values and traditions that are central to society. The king believes that these values are upheld in the traditional institutions of Thailand, such as the monarchy. Therefore there is no need for radical change of these institutions. Radical change of these institutions could be detrimental to society because it would mean the destruction of these important values.

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[61]Hewison, p. 63

Secondly, Hewison states that the king emphasizes unity and discipline. "Such themes have remained constant in King Bhumibol's speeches."[62] The king stresses these qualities because he sees them as essential to being an "advanced and well-off country. The king believes that "unity prevents trouble, and where unity does not exists, subversion and crime will be the result."[63]

Hewison states that the king closely ties discipline and unity with law and order and authority. He highlights that these two are constant themes in the king's speeches over the years. The king believes that without law and order, society would "degenerate and become confused and unstable, and possibly collapse altogether."[64]

Hewison states that this conservative mentality embodied by the king predisposes him to authoritarianism. The king had a public dislike for politics, calling it a "filthy business." He also had a strong dislike for party politics, which is saw as "setting people against each other rather than uniting them."[65] His mixed view of parliamentary politics has led him to advocate not for western style democracy, but for a democracy that fits the values and traditions of the Thai people. In a speech the king states:

> "Thais..need not follow any king of foreign democracy and should try instead to create our own Thai style of democracy, for we have our own national culture and outlooks and we are capable of following our own reasoning."[66]

This conservative mentality, which is for the preservation of "traditional values" and all institutions that embody them, as well as a preference for order, stability and unity over anything else, guided the king's actions in the subsequent chapters.

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[62] Id, p. 64
[63] Id. p. 64
[64] Ibid.
[65] Hewison, p. 68
[66] Ibid. p. 68

IV. 1973-1976: THE REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH.

Many forces gave rise to the "Revolution of 1973" and the events that took place in the immediate following years. Two of the most important causes of the revolution were the rapidly growing population and the change in its composition, especially the rise of an educated and liberal-minded class of students.

"Economic and social change in Thailand have been rapid in recent years, altering the very fabric of society. This has been overwhelmingly evident in urban areas, especially Bangkok…By the 1970's the gap between some changes and the stagnant, traditional political system had become apparent."[67] In fact, the Thai population had grown rapidly from 26 million in 1960 to 34 million in 1970.[68] This explosive growth placed a strain on land and resources, and the government was slow to deal with the rising tensions.

These population changes were mostly a result of economic growth and the change in the makeup of the economy. In the 1970's the government shifted its policy "toward the export-oriented industry away from the agricultural industry, although agriculture still played a relevant and important part."[69] The shift in the economy led to opportunities for people that did not previously exist, primarily in urban and suburban areas.

The growth and change in the composition of the population, in turn, led to new expectations by people in society. More and more, they began to demand new jobs,

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[67] Morell and Samudavanija p. 75
[68] Wyatt, p. 283
[69] Ibid.

services, and land - resources that were not readily available. Thailand overall had not adapted to all these changes taking place in society, and the government began to come under attack as the increasing subject of blame.

Leading this new wave of change were the students. Education had become more widespread in Thailand and was available to a much larger segment of the population by the 1970s. This growth in education was seen as a positive change for Thailand, but along with it came new pressures and issues in society as well.

> "Government employment was not expanding as rapidly as the numbers of the university graduates, and for the first time large numbers of young middle class aspiring middle class thais had to consider entering careers in the private sector. There they found themselves more vulnerable to economic fluctuations and to judgment on the basis of their performance then they traditionally did in the civil service. They felt relatively less secure and perhaps less certain of their social standing."[70]

This lack of availability of jobs for newly-educated students was attributed as a failure of the government to respond to the needs of a changing society. Also, there was a new awareness and desire for a government that could adjust to and represent the people's needs.

1968- 1973 An attempt at a Constitution

There had been pressure for a new constitution for many years. The military rulers in place had not produced one since the take over in 1958. The pressure to do so came from many places. First, there was international pressure from the US. "The American press portrayed Thailand, after two decades and a billion dollars of U.S. aid, as led by corrupt, inept and dictatorial generals."[71] There was fear of the US withdrawing its support in the event a constitution could not be adopted.

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[70] Wyatt, p. 283

[71] Handley, p. 194

Upon returning from his tour of the United States in 1967, the King was also concerned that a new constitution should be created. He experienced the international pressure first hand, and was concerned for the stability and safety of his country in the event that the US should withdraw their support.[72] This external pressure was coupled with growing internal social pressure, expressed through dissatisfaction by the students and an emerging middle class. They were tired of military rule and wanted the type of representative democracy they had read about and that had been promised to them.

In 1968, Prime Minister Thanom proposed a new constitution very similar to the one originally adopted in 1932. It created a bicameral parliament, with the lower house comprising of elected officials and the upper house containing officials appointed by the King. But this new constitution did not last long and it did not satisfy the public's demands. "Although it was democratic on the surface, in its details the constitution essentially legitimized Thanom's military-dominated government."[73] Thanom's party won sweeping victories in the lower house, giving him full control of parliament. Despite all the societal changes that had taken place, "the new regime was unchanged."[74]

In addition, whatever its form, the new government did not work effectively. The lower house had trouble getting a budget passed in a time when the country was dealing with serious financial issues. People again questioned the government's ability to rule the country and to address the pressing issues. Student protests began to take place with regularity, bringing media attention to the issue, which attracted international attention once again. The United States representatives in their statements began to cast

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[72] Handley, p. 194
[73] Handley, p. 195
[74] Ibid.

doubt on the nation's stability. The rise of an insurgency in the countryside also threatened national security and fueled calls for military action. Feeling his control beginning to slip and the political situation on the brink of chaos, Thanom then staged a coup against his own government in 1971. "The 1971 coup abolished the constitution, parliament, and political parties, while the armed forces divided into several competing factions."[75]

This self-imposed coup led to the downfall of Thanom. In the past, a "strong man approach to political crises" might have worked; but now, "society as a whole...no longer seemed willing to accept a regime that appeared to represent only military interests in the guise of national security and the public welfare."[76] In addition, the military was not as cohesive and united as it once was. Many in the armed forces did not support the self-imposed coup and were unsatisfied with the result.

The biggest reaction, of course, came from the students who felt betrayed by this act: "They had been led to expect political evolution, and their hopes were dashed by Thanom's re-imposition of military rule."[77] In addition, due to the King's initial support of a new constitution in 1969, the students felt they had royal consent in regards to their protest. They defined their fight for democracy as defending the ideology of "the nation, religion, king."

Events came to a headon October 6,1973, when students were arrested for distributing leaflets that called for the creation of a new constitution. In response, "massive demonstration involving between 200,000 and 500,000 persons, including

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[75] Morrell and Samudavanija, p. 90
[76] Wyatt, p. 288
[77] Ibid.

university students, secondary and technical school students, and many young members of the middle class, demanded the release of the critics and the promulgation of the constitution."[78] The detainees were given the option of being released on bail, which they rejected. Continued demands were made for a constitution. In an article written by David Morrell titled "Political Conflict in Thailand," the events are outlined:

> "The number of protestors in Bangkok and other major cities swelled to nearly 100,000 as the atmosphere of tension and fear turned to violence. Antiriot police and soldiers turned on protestors, first with tear gas and within a matter of hours, with hand grenades and rifles.. By October 14th..nearly a hundred demonstrators were dead, and many hundreds had been injured."[79]

The King denounced these acts of violence and "military heads refused to send their troops against civilian mobs" (Wyatt, p. 288). Left without the support of the King or parts of the military, Thanom and his counterpart Praphas were forced to resign, and flee the country in exile.

Aftermath of the Revolution

The revolution of 1973 seemed to be a joyous occasion for Thailand. As David Morell writes," "There was great pride of accomplishment among those who had participated in the events of October. Unarmed, they had overthrown the army with all its weapons and tanks…The belief that the king, though innately conservative, had intervened on behalf of his people and against the military gave rise to the further expectation that he would continue to support the forces of reform and social justice."[80]

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78 Wyatt, p. 288

79 David Morell, "Political Conflict in Thailand" *Asian Affairs,* Vol. 3, No. 3 (Jan-Feb., 1976) pp. 154

80 Morell, p. 155

Although they did not bring an end to the military's role in politics, there was at least "a new consciousness of the necessity of sharing political power."[81]

In the immediate aftermath of the 1973 revolution, the students were considered heroic for the part they played in seemingly bringing an end to authoritarian rule and reinstating a democratic government. They had the support of most of the people, although the students' views and hopes were certainly more extreme than most. In addition, the students were believed to have the blessing and support of the King. Many Thais saw the possibility of a unified, peaceful nation moving towards a democratic future. However, problems were soon to develop that would cut this "democratic experiment" short.

Certain changes took place in the immediate aftermath of the 1973 revolution. First there was the creation of a new government and constitution. "The initial outcome was a civilian government under Prime Minister, Dr. Sanya Dharmaskati…A constitution calling for a unicameral, fully elected parliament was promulgated, and elections were scheduled for 1975."[82]

A second important change took place in society itself. There was a rise in new and more outspoken political organizations and activities formed not just by students, but peasants, farmers and workers. The democratic reforms invited a new feeling of freedom, and invited people to voice more openly criticisms of the previous government and what expectations they had from the new government. "Suddenly, demonstrations were not only permitted but pervasive. Every day, it seemed there was a new

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[81] Wyatt, p. 289
[82] Id, p. 290

demonstration against something; and strikes too, where before than had not been labor unions."[83]

On the surface these were good changes. The government was shifting away from its authoritarian traditions. People were becoming more involved in the political process - an essential component of democracy. However, in reality these political changes did not prove easy to implement:

> "The participant institutions created after the October 1973 were the strongest that Thailand had seen to date; but they were vastly inadequate to the tasks required. Formal structures established in the new constitution were quite democratic…However, it took the system so long to promulgate its new procedures (fifteen months from the uprising to the January 1975 election) that many activists were already disillusioned."[84]

In addition, the rise of social activism was causing anxiety among members of the conservative elite as well as in the monarchy.

Problems begin to Arise

The fragility and inefficiency of the political system began to show with the 1975 elections. The rise of new political organizations and an increase in the amount of parties led to serious fragmentation. "Forty-two political parties had been formed, espousing unclear and overlapping platforms."[85] This "confusion and complexity was far more than the voters could comprehend."[86] As a result, no party won a clear majority. Kukurit Pramoj, leader of the moderate Social Action party, formed a shaky coalition government. The instability of the new government just two years after the revolution led many to begin to doubt the democratic reforms, and others to withdraw their support.

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[83] Morrell, p. 164
[84] Morell and Samudavanija, p. 131
[85] Morell, p. 164
[86] Morell and Samudavanija, p. 131

A second problem involved changes in the student movement. The movement was mainly responsible for the overthrow in 1973 and many had supported the students in their efforts. However, after 1973, the student movements began to become radicalized and fragmented and much more aggressive in the pursuit of their goals. "Before a week had passed, student groups were factionalized, fragmented, and out of control due to personal rivalries, petty jealousies and lack of agreement on what to do with their new-found power."[87] In addition, their focus was becoming scattered, with many student leaders breaking off from the main movement sending their own teams to "the most remote, poverty-stricken rural part of the country, while other students, in their group concentrated their efforts on slum dwellers in the capital."[88]

This change in the student movement combined with the rise in political activists and creation of labor organizations ultimately constituted the rise of the "leftist" movement in Thailand. It came at a time when fear of communism was high in the world. Long allied with the United States, Thailand historically was staunchly anti-communist. As a result, many began to characterize the actions of the students and other leftist activists as communist, and therefore a threat to national security and the conservative tradition of the nation, embodied in the "nation, religion and king." "The monarchy, the urban elite, and much of the middle class had become frightened by the radicalism of the students, whom they viewed as either communist directed of inspired. Their support soon swung to a variety of new organization of the right wing, most of which had backing in the military and bureaucracy."[89] The loss of the support of these

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[87] Morell, p. 162

[88] Morell and Samudavanjiji, p. 150

[89] Wyatt, p. 192

segments of society of people was a huge blow to the "leftist movement." Rightist organizations that were created in reaction to the leftist movements now began to gain momentum and power.

Mobilization of the right:

Things began to back away from the promise of real democracy:

> "By mid-1975, the forces of the right had recovered quite well. They still had plenty of money and bureaucratic power. ..Threatened by the new forces of change, the right and the so-called silent majority began to strike back at the left, and especially at the students. A variety of new rightist organization emerged, principal among them the Red Gaurs, Nawaphon, and the Village Scouts..such mobilization on the right..led quickly to a sharp polization in society at large."[90]

These rightist organizations mobilized on a scale never seen before.[91] They cleverly connected their organizations with the ideology of "nation, religion, king," and so while these organizations were mostly agents of elite power, by using this mantra they attracted Thai citizens from every social standing. With this "ideology" they were able to "convince many Thais that the student-farmer-labor movement was indeed dedicated to destruction of the institutions and values they held dear."[92]

Thus, rather then a society moving together towards democracy, there was developing polarization of the left and right, sowing instability and fear. This situation was exacerbated the already struggling government. "By 1976, political assassinations…were commonplace. Police harassed the electioneering of leftist parties, and even active moderates were afraid for their safety. Violence, vituperation and incivility were now part of public life as they never had been before in Thailand."[93]

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[90] Morell and Samudavanjiji, p. 238
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Wyatt, p. 293

In just three years, the popular opinion of the student movement, once heralded as bringing democracy to the country, had completely turned around. They were now perceived as enemies in many quarters and received the lion's share of the blame for the current state of chaos. A magazine at the time reported the Buddhist extremist Kittiwutho as stating: "such a killing is not killing persons because whoever destroys the nation, religion or the monarchy, such bestial types are not complete persons. Thus, we must intend not to kill people but to kill the devil; this the duty of all Thai."[94] By 1976, the attitude of many people was one bordering panic and a desire to go to great lengths to rectify the situation.

Coup of 1976

The government was simply too unstable and ill equipped to deal with all the issues at hand. "Polarization of the leftist and rights movements resulted in frequent and random violence. "People in Bangkok were afraid. They recalled the haunting refrain that a nation with problems cannot afford democracy. No, they did not want Praphas and Thanom back; but yes, the present unstable situation was unacceptable."[95]

The catalyst leading up to the student protests at Thammasat University was the re-entry of the previously exiled Thanom and Praphas. Praphas returned under the premise that he needed specific medical attention, while Thanom returned to live his life as a Buddhist monk. Both of these returns were supported and welcomed by the right wing and were given military protection. The royal family also approved of their return, even visiting Thanom at his monastery . Of course, their return caused great turmoil in Bangkok. "The university students were outraged at this reception of one held

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[94] Morell and Samudavanija, p. 247

[95] Morell, p. 164

responsible for the violence of 1973, and daily demonstrations began, especially at Thammasat University."[96]

The right wing was quick to respond, bringing attention to the protests and mobilizing "true patriots" against the "communist" students that were trying to bring ruin to the country. The sentiment expressed by the extremist monk embodied their mission, which was that violence was acceptable when it was against one who was an enemy of the country. The final straw was when the students, in one of their protests, staged a mock hanging. An ultra rightist newspaper published a photograph of the events, claiming the person being hung was meant to represent the Crown Prince Vairalongkorn. The students were then accused of "lese majeste" and declared enemies of the crown, making them enemies of the nation. In the aftermath of this event, "Massive assaults were launched against Thammasat University, in which Village Scouts, Red Gaurs, the police and other engaged in an orgy of violence. Students were lynched, burned alive, and beaten.."[97] "Female students were raped, alive and dead, by police and Red Gaurs."[98] After several hours the violence finally abated. At this point the previous "democratic" government was dissolved. In its place, a military junta was installed, with royal endorsement, calling themselves, the "National Administrative Reform Council."[99]

The rationale for the 1976 coup was that it would restore peace and order. The military, supported by the monarchy and other rightist groups, felt that "the public at large, dissatisfied with the results of an open political system since October 1973, might be willing to forgive and quickly forget - if domestic stability appeared a likely reward

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[96] Wyatt, p. 292
[97] Ibid.
[98] Handley, p. 296
[99] Ibid.

for the sacrifice of representation, and if a coup could restore stability without violence."[100] The violence horrified many, but was seen as necessary and justified by the ruling order to save the nation from "the communist threat." Furthermore, "the generals who seized power declared...the takeover of power…is aimed at safeguarding the institution of the monarchy. The king and the royal family are being protected."[101] And so the democratic experiment that began in 1973 with great promise --but no sufficient foundation or infrastructure --came to a violent end just three years later.

[100] Morell, p. 174
[101] Handley, p. 237

V. **THE COUP OF 1992 AND ITS AFTERMATH**.

While the coup of 1991 and later events bear some similarities to the 1973-1976 period, in most ways they are very different due to developments that took place in the post-1978 era. The constitution put in place in 1978 lasted until the coup of 1991. A new political awareness had taken hold in the people.

According to the scholar Sukhumbhand Paribatra in his article, "State Society in Thailand: How Fragile the Democracy?," what took place in the post-1978 era was "liberalization without democracy:"

> A mixed system with significant liberal characteristics, including relatively high degrees of political and personal freedom, but without substance of Western-style democracy, It was a system where society became more equal to, but was still a large extent dominated by the state and those in control of the state apparatus."[102]

Paribatra reports, first, that political parties were able to grow and benefit from the rapidly growing economy. They were able to exist outside of the traditional bureaucracy, garnering support from many "extra bureaucratic groups" and became effective and important in "policy-implementation and policy-making."[103]

Second, there was an expanding role for the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[104] These organizations were important because they often represented the needs of people who were over looked in the traditional policy making process. Usually, this meant poor people who did not have a strong affiliation with any party, lacking the money to invest and represent their interest.

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[102] Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand: How fragile the Democracy," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 33, No. 9 (Sep., 1993) pp. 879-893

[103] Paribatra, p. 883

[104] Ibid.

Third, growing "liberalization" was reflected in an increased freedom of intellectual expression in the media.[105] "The stated continue to control radio and television, but there were increasing sign of independence, not only in selection and production of programs but also in coverage and presentation of news stories."[106]

A fourth change was the liberalization of the armed forces.[107] According to Paribatra here was a "newer generation of officers that were much more exposed to ideas and perspectives from the outside world than their predecessors."[108] They were more accepting of having a less direct role in politics, and of the "principle and practice of popular political participation."[109]

These changes were indicative of larger social and economic changes that were taking place in society post-1978. The economy grew in "an unprecedented manner, reaching double digit growth rate at the end of the 1980's. Also unprecedented was its integration into global trade, investment communication and informational systems."[110] The level of education rose at an unprecedented rate and the number of people with higher education in the 1980's was up to 15% from 2% in the 1960s.[111]

Liberalization does not mean Democratization

Although there were liberalizing changes, as described above, they did not result in actual democracy. Despite the changes, the political parties failed "to institutionalize

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[105] Paribatra, p. 883
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

themselves as true representative of the people."[112] The old ways of influencing policy, such as through the bureaucratic system of patronage, still held sway. This left out the majority of the population, meaning those who did not have money or connections. The political parties mostly formed ties and were accountable to "big businesses" or "local magnates," who they could depend on for electoral success.[113] They did not put much effort into establishing "grass roots" organizations to connect with larger amounts of people, because they did not need their support for "electoral success" or "political achievement."[114] As a result, they were not accountable to the majority of the people. And because this type of relationship between business and politician proved to be lucrative, elections were rarely fair or clean.[115] This type of electoral system did not "promote, either in quantitative or qualitative terms, voluntary political participation."[116] The failure of these political parties led to the continuation of the strength of certain state structures:

> "The political changes that had begun in the early 1970's left largely unaltered the organizational attributes of civilian and military bureaucracies with their capacity, buttressed by a vast body of laws, decrees, and legal or administrative precedents, to preserve for themselves extensive areas of responsibility in policy formulation and implementation, especially in rural areas."[117]

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[112] Paribatra, p. 884
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Id. p. 885
[117] Ibid.

These bureaucracies insulated themselves from change by condemning politicians and voluntary political participation as corrupt and inefficient, while claiming that they represented and protected the nation's "true" interests."[118]

The most powerful enduring bureaucracy remained the military. While it is true that they had liberalized in some respects, their interest in remaining in power was the same and at odds with objectives of democracy. They justified their continued presence in politics by claiming they alone could protect the "Nation, Religion, and Monarchy," and thus were the protectors of national security.[119] They reserved the right to intervene politically whenever they saw the need. "All of this suggests that the military rejected the underlying ideals and political consequences of Western-style liberal democracy, and preferred bureaucratically guided liberalization expressed in terms of limited, controlled participation that emphasized consensus over competition, a minimally active legislature over an active and potent one, appointments over elections, and centralization over decentralization of power."[120]

1991 Coup

The idea that elections would not result in efficient and honest government was still widespread, not just among the military, but among proponents of democracy as well. There was fear that "there was no guarantee that free elections would bring competent, honest people to the legislature" and that "political parties were basically no more than "trading companies," corrupt and bent on pursuit of power and self-

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[118]Paribatra, p.885

[119] Ibid.

[120] Id. p. 886

interest."[121] This was the rationale of the military leaders who led the coup in 1991. In accordance with the right they reserved for themselves in politics, they declared that in order to protect the national interest, they needed to intervene and put a new government in place. The existing Chatichai government was seen to be highly corrupt. With the blessing of the King, the coup was carried out by a the military junta – called the National Peacekeeping Council - led by General Suchinda.[122] The author David Van Praagh describes in his book, "Struggle for Democracy" how the NPC "dissolved the legitimate government and the parliament and imposed martial law…the high command abolished the 1978 constitution as amended in 1983 to limit military influence." [123]

This coup was regarded as a huge set back for the growth of democracy. This was the first time direct military intervention had taken place since 1978. At this point in time, Thai society, especially the middle class, had developed to the point that it would no longer be acceptable to have prolonged military control of the government. Many tolerated the justification for the coup, but they expected the military to hand back power as quickly as they could.

At the onset, the military made promises reassuring the public they would not be in power for long. They scheduled elections to take place in the following year, and General Suchinda promised he would relinquish power and not run for the position of Prime Minister. They also put in place an "interim" constitution and government, approved by the King, just five days after the coup. The new government was led by the appointed Prime Minister Anand, who was "nonpolitical" and was known for his work in

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Paribatra, p.887

[123] David Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy,* (New York 1996)

the "Thai foreign ministry as ambassador to the united states, the united nations, Canada, and West Germany."[124] His interim government was filled with "technocrats and businessmen" and was mostly non-corrupt and fairly progressive in trying to implement social and economic reforms.[125]

Aftermath of the Coup

While on the surface it seemed that power would be back in the hands of civilians after the next elections, changes were enacted by the military that began to cast doubt on their original promise. The junta began to consolidate their power in a number of ways. As Van Praagh reports, they "stacked the interim legislative assembly to draft a new constitution and pass laws, with 148 military officers making up a majority of 292 members."[126] To get rid of labor unrest, they outlawed labor unions; and in their investigation of "corrupt" official in the previous government, they "announced that the inquiry into corruption in high places would not extend to well-to-do military officers."[127] Suchinda, despite his promise not to become involved in politics, set up a political party called the "Justice Unity Party" that was set to run in the upcoming elections.[128] The junta also promoted changes to the new constitution that would further consolidate their hold on the government, by supporting "an appointed senate equal or greater in power to an elected lower house."[129]

The public was alarmed at the changes taking place. The fear that the military junta was not just temporarily removing a corrupt government, but would remain in

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[124] Van Praagh, p. 227
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Id. p. 228
[128] Ibid.
[129] Id. p. 229

power, was becoming more real by the day. The public felt that the military was staging a "constitutional coup."[130] As a result, a significant protest against the interim constitution took place, harkening back to the events of 1973, but now almost 20 years later. Numbering around 100,000 people, this protest was called the "largest pro-democracy protest since October 1973 student-led march."[131]

The reaction by the military was split. They got rid of some pro-military tenets, decreasing the power of junta-appointed senate. However, many of the provisions stayed. One faction wanted to get rid of all democratic provisions; to create an appointed senate that was more powerful than the lower house and to allow that the prime minister not be an elected MP.[132] The protestors saw the weakness in this indecision by the junta and decided to schedule another protest.[133] At this moment, the King decided to intervene. On his birthday broadcast, he told the Thai people "that compromise had gone as far as it could for the time being, and further pressure on the military might cause another coup and deeper division in Thailand."[134] As a result, the second protest was called off, and the new constitution, with the "retrogressive" provision for the senate, was ratified.[135]

Elections of 1992 and Aftermath

The importance of the creation of the military's political party became apparent after the 1992 elections. Their party was able to create a pro-military coalition that captured enough seats to become the majority, thus allowing one of their own to become

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130 Van Praagh, p. 234
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 Id. p. 235
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.

prime minister. After a few days of debate, Suchinda emerged as the man they wanted to represent their coalition and to be the prime minister.

These events were the final straw for the people. They were outraged at the results of the elections, which they saw as clearly manipulated in favor the military. But what was even more upsetting was that Suchinda had gone back on his word. His justification for the coup was to displace the current corrupt government, and to give power back to the people so that they could create a truly democratic government. "Not many had mourned the overthrow of the Chatichai government because of its alleged corrupt practices; nor did many voice their opposition to the forceful dissolution of the 1978 constitutional system that was perceived to have made such a corrupt regime possible."[136] Suchinda had promised that the military would step aside, and that he personally would not attempt to become prime minister. But with this final act, it became "evident to many that the junta took over for the sake of monopolizing power," and that Suchinda had positioned himself so that he may stay in power as prime minister.[137] In all of these actions, the King had not stood in the way.

Protests Begin Again

In May 1992, just after the elections in March, the peaceful protests began. The public was outraged by the military's blatant attempt to stay in power despite their earlier promises. Academics began writing opinions that Suchinda was unlawfully occupying the office of prime minister and should step down immediately. Suchinda responded by refusing to step down. The main leader of the protests, Chamlong, sat outside the parliament building, claiming that he would refuse to eat until Suchinda stepped down.

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[136] Paribatra, p. 888
[137] Ibid.

Soon, more than 80,000 Thais joined him in peaceful protest. But Suchinda continued to remain adamant that he would not step down.

The composition of the protestors was much different than that of the student-led protests of 1976:.

> "Whereas the anti-military movement of the early 1970's was led by and consisted of students and the more radical elements of Thai society, the anti-suchinda movement was very broad based both in leadership and rank-in-file participation. Prominent among the leaders were elected politicians, former bureaucrats and military officers, NGO leaders and 1970's-vintage student activists, many of whom were now involved in successful careers in the private sector."[138]

The protests began to escalate due to lack of response on the part of the Suchinda regime. People were arriving in larger numbers and the atmosphere was beginning to turn from one of peace to one of tension and hostility. Suchinda called in parts of the armed forces and riot police to contain the growing crowd. Suchinda promised not to carry out acts of violence against the protestors, but did reserve the right to counter-attack in the event that the protestors became violent. The presence of the police and armed forces added to the hostile environment, as the protestors became fearful of being provoked into violence. Furthermore, because the state controlled the media, most of the coverage of events was "sharply slanted" towards the military-led government and "conveyed the impression that the protestors were troublemakers threatening law and order."[139] This unfair portrayal enraged the protestors even more.

The activists appealed to the King to help resolve the crises.[140] They sent him a petition asking to dissolve the lower house of parliament and to hold new elections. Rather than take such bold action, the King responded by calling both members from the

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[138]Paribatra, p. 888
[139] Van Praagh, p. 248
[140] Ibid.

government and opposition to come to some sort of compromise. They agreed that there would be amendments made to the constitution, "including a requirement that the prime minister be an elected MP," which would call for the resignation of Suchinda.[141] However, the leader Chamlong "called for a bigger rally than ever…if Suchinda and his allies did not keep their promise by then to go along with the constitutional changes that first and foremost, would force the prime minister to resign."[142]

The deadline came but no amendments had been agreed upon. The protests resumed, in larger numbers than ever before. "Students and teachers, business and professional people, and workers and political activists" took to the streets and shouted "We will respect...the three institutions of nation, religion, and king!"[143] The security forces reacted immediately, soaking the protestors with dirty water from water cannons. This act was said not so much to injure the crowd or prevent violence, but to provoke the middle class as this was highly disrespectful, and it had the intended effect - the protestors responded by throwing rocks at the police.[144]

The violence that erupted for the next three days was "the most violent use of force against civilians in the history of Bangkok."[145] Police and armed forced were allowed to fire directly on civilians. Many instances of beatings and clubbings took place. This level of violence was similar to that of 1976, but this time the violence lasted for three days. The protestors, despite the extreme brutality, gave no sign of giving up.

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[141] Van Praagh, p. 249
[142] Ibid.
[143] Id. p. 254
[144] Ibid.
[145] Paribatra, p. 889

In fact, "its participants appeared ready to withstand more until the King's intervention on the fourth night of the crises."[146]

The King's Intervention and Aftermath

The King came on television with both Suchinda and the protest leader Chamlong at his feet. It was said he "lectured Suchinda and Chamlong as if they were errant school boys."[147] The imagery of the scene conveyed just as much meaning as the words the King spoke. He was seated above the other two, signifying that the monarchy remained above politics and any political figure.[148] Both Suchinda and Chamlong were seated at the same height, signifying that both the military and the democracy movement were of equal status.[149] In his speech the King said;

> "I would like both of you to talk face to face, not to confront each other, because this is our country. They country belongs to us, not to two people…If this goes on, it will put the country in great danger, making Thailand a meaningless country."[150]

The King's statements supposedly encouraged constitutional liberalization and amounted to a rejection of the military's presumptions and tactics.[151] The King also let Suchinda know that he could resign before or after the amendments were made, but he made clear "that fulfillment of the first demand by the democracy movement was only a matter of timing."[152]

With the King's intervention, the violence ended, and Suchinda finally resigned his office of Prime Minister. In his place, Anand was again set up as interim Prime

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[146] Paribatra, p. 889
[147] Van Praagh, p. 264
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

Minister, and with the aid of technocratic government, he "successfully restored political tranquility and behavioral decency," to Thailand's government.[153] In addition, they "transferred the top members of the junta to inactive posts...and organized a relatively clean and orderly general election." [154]The new elections brought the Democrat party to power, "winning the most seats and leading to the appointment of their leader, Chuan Leekpai."[155]

[153] Paribatra, p. 889
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

VI. COUP OF 2006.

The coup of 2006 is the most recent in Thai history and it is also the coup in which the King's influence was most present. But it was much different than the previous coups in 1976 and 1991. Rather than a confrontation between military powers and a civilian movement, the impetus for the 2006 coup was a political figure, then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his party. Thaksin was elected into office in 2001 and remained there until the coup in 2006. His party, their rise to power, and his tenure in office marked an important new era in Thai politics.

Thaksin was not a member of the traditional bureaucratic elite, nor did he have close personal relations with the King. He came to power by unprecedented means in Thai political history, through open elections. The ideology embodied by his political party Thai Rak Thai (TRT) was a mixed one, which relied on the success of appealing both to the business elite and the rural masses. Drawing support from these two demographics, he was able to achieve a sweeping victory in the 2001 elections. Essentially, there were three main reasons for the rise of Thaksin and his party: the changes that took place under the 1997 constitution; the economic crisis of 1997; and the creation of the TKT and its unprecedented populist policies. Each of these factors is explored briefly below.

Constitutional changes

The 1997 constitution marked a significant moment in Thai political history. As Scholar James Klein states in his article, "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997," during the "first 60 years of Thailand's constitutional history, there were no serious attempts to reform the political process and its associated problems of

inefficiency and corruption."[156] The 1997 constitution was thus the first real attempt to establish meaningful constitutional authority and initiate reforms that could lead to a more accountable and democratic government. "It establishes the constitution as the basis for all law, thereby reducing the bureaucracy power to subvert constitutional intent. For the first time in Thai history, it establishes a judicial review process independent of executive branch control, thereby enhancing both government accountability and the protection of civil liberties."[157] In addition, it was the first constitution to be written directly "by the people," with a "99-member Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) was composed of two indirectly elected groups: 76 members representing each province, and 23 recognized political, administrative, and legal experts."[158] Also unprecedented, the process was open to the public, allowing debate on many of the issues.

These reforms were spurred by the events of 1992. The public was clearly displeased with the nature of politicians and government before the coup of 1991; and with the restoration of civilian government in 1992, they had high expectations for a new and reformed system. It was clear they would not stand for going back to the corrupt practices of the past. Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand summarize the people's attitude towards the government at this time in their book, "The Thaksinzation of Thailand," as follows:

> "Public dissatisfaction with the quality of Thai politicians and of the political system had produced growing demands for reform in the wake of May 1992…Political parties were much-critized as factionalized alliances of interest groups, divorced from the concerns of the electorate. Practice such as candidate-buying (encouraging electable politicians to switch parties by using financial

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156 James R Klein, "The Constiution Of The Kingdom Of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint For Participatory Democracy," *The Asia Foundation,* (March 1998).
157 Id, p. 16
158 Id, p.14

> inducements), vote-buying and the corruption of government officials made the electoral process wide open to manipulation and abuse."[159]

The Constitution of 1997 was meant to address these issues by enacting liberal reforms that would change the system to increase public participation and put in place restrictions so as to decrease corruption and create a more accountable government. Scholar Sombat Chantornvong summarizes in Duncan McCargo's book, "Reforming Thai Politics," many of the changes that were made in the 1997 constitution. Among these were the changes in election of the house to single-member constituency, the creation of a party list system, a new directly elected senate with increased powers as well as new restrictions, the creation of an Electoral Commission and other independent agencies such as the National Counter Corruption Commission, a Constitutional court, and a National Human Rights commission and new limitations making it more difficult for candidates to change parties.[160] These changes were intended to create a stronger and more professional senate, free and fair elections, and to give more power and control to citizens over the government and bureaucracy. While many of these changes proved difficult to fully implement and were far from successful, they did drastically alter what had been the traditional make-up of the political scene and the process of political life in Thailand.

Economic crises of 1997

The second factor contributing to the rise of Thaksin and his political party was the economic crises of 1997 which came about, in part, due to massive speculation in regard to the Thai baht. The party in power at that time, the New Aspiration Party,

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[159] Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinzaiton of Thailand, (*NIAS press, 2005)
[160] Duncan McCargo and Sombat Chantornvong, *Reforming Thai Politics, (*NIAS press, 2005) p. 127

refused to devalue the baht which led to the economic crises. This crises helped bring about Thaksin's rise to power in two ways: it led to the downfall of the Democratic Party, which had taken over, and it caused many "business" families to become directly involved in politics.

The Democratic Party took over as the economic crises set in. As written by Kevin Hewison in "A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup," the Democratic Party came to power in 1998 when the previous party failed to solve the financial crises.[161] The Democratic Party's solution was to accept an offered IMF bailout. The measures imposed by the IMF involved "financial restructuring, accelerated privatization, massive state and corporate reforms and huge inflows of foreign investment."[162] However, these measures drove Thailand further into recession and the Democratic Party suffered significant loss of support as a result. They were "accused of destroying domestic capitalism and ceding sovereignty over economic policy to outsiders and engaging in the fire sale of Thai assets to foreigners."[163] This situation helped clear the way for Thaksin, a self-made billionaire with significant business experience, and his party that supported the rights of the business elite, to rise to power.

The second cause was the effect that the crises and the IMF policies had on the "big business families" or the business elite. Previously, the business elite had remained behind the scenes, influencing policy indirectly by donating money to political parties. This changed after the economic crises of 1997 when they realized they could benefit and protect their interests if they were more directly involved in politics. In addition, the

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[161] Kevin Hewison. "A Book, a King, and the 2006 Coup," *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* Vol. 38 no. 1 February 2008 pp. 201
[162] Ibid.
[163] Id. p. 202

liberal reforms that took place under the new constitution lowered the barriers of entry into the political scene. As cited by Patana Tangpianpant in her thesis "Thaksin Populism and Beyond:"

> "Thaksin and his close allies…took advantage of the situation…and created a new party that was composed of primarily big business families. This party was called Thai Rak Thai (TRT)…Their objectives were to use political power in order to rid the country of the IMF, to stop foreign firms and investments from taking over local businesses, and more generally to direct economic growth their way. Thaksin's party represented the rise of the businesspeople as politicians."[164]

The rise of TRT

The third reason for the rise of Thaksin has to do directly with the message and success of his political party. The constitutional reforms had altered the political system that paved the way for the emergence of TRT. The economic crises gave purpose to creation of Thaksin's party and for his entry into the political scene. But another change took place that was perhaps the most significant. "Thaksin recognized that the 1997 constitution demanded a different politics. Previously, political parties relied on vote buying and influential local figures to deliver voters and power. TRT hit on a different strategy, deciding to get its votes by appealing directly to voters."[165]

This was the first time that broad populist policies were promoted by a political party in Thai history. In the 2001 elections, TRT played on the problems which existed as the result of the economic crises - they promoted the rights of the business elite, but they also promised to "pour government money into rural areas," in the form of social programs such as "universal health care, soft loans for every community, a three year

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[164] Patana Tangpianpant, "Thaksin Populism and Beyond: A study of Thaksin's Pro-poor Populist policies in Thailand," (BA Thesis., Weslyan Collge, 2010) Chapter One: Background, p. 23
[165] Hewison, p. 205

debt moratorium for farmers, and a "peoples" bank."[166] No one had ever appealed to the rural masses in such a way before, and the result was very clear. The support of the rural masses combined with that of the business elite led Thaksin to a resounding victory in the 2001 elections, capturing 12 million votes, or around 40 percent of the total vote. "The 6 January 2001 elections completely reshaped the political landscape in Thailand: on 9 February 2001, 339 of the 500 MP's in the new lower house voted for Thaksin to become prime minister. This was an unprecedented parliamentary majority."[167]

Time in office and rise of the opposition

Thaksin came into office riding a wave of popular support. However, his regime got off to a tumultuous start when he was accused of concealing assets prior to his election. "In 2000, the NCCC voted 8:1 in favor of punishing Thaksin…Nevertheless the case was never brought to trial."[168] Once he got into office the issue was brought before the Constitutional Court. Thaksin rushed his populist policies through, recognizing that he as long as he maintained popular support the courts could not condemn him or risk massive protests.[169] As a result, the Constitutional Court voted Thaksin not guilty.

Despite this initial setback, Thaksin and his party were successful in the early years in office. "The economy recovered and domestic capital was strengthened."[170] Thaksin and his party enjoyed another landslide victory in the 2005 elections, winning 42% of the vote.

Nonetheless, opposition began to surface in a number of different places to Thaksin's regime. First were the enterprise unions, who had previously supported the

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[166] Hewison, p. 207
[167] McCargo and Pathamanad, p. 14
[168] Tangpianpant, p. 23
[169] Ibid.
[170] Hewison, p. 207

TRT due to their opposition to the IMF regulations. However, as the government began to privatize, these unions began to organize rallies and "accuse Thaksin and his allies as benefitting by the sale of the state enterprises."[171]

Second, the public at large began to grow wary of Thaksin's regime. By 2006, his regime had become increasingly repressive, relying on tactics such as censorship of the media and political imprisonment to silence people who opposed his rule. In addition, while many members of the middle class had originally supported his "war on drugs" in southern Thailand, as huge human rights violations began to surface, many became horrified and withdrew their support. "There were more than 2000 extra-judicial killings in an anti-drugs campaign and sometimes brutal efforts to control southern separatism. A number of human rights activists also disappeared or were killed in this period."[172] The autocratic nature of his regime was alarming to many who had supported his rise to power.

Perhaps the most dangerous and influential opposition came from the bureaucratic elite and the monarchy. Thaksin's reign and newfound power challenged the traditional bureaucratic elite that had been in power since the 1932 revolution. Thaksin used his position to reallocate positions of power within the government by promoting friends and family that were loyal to him and his party, while displacing those that were not.

As for the King, he "appeared to personally dislike the arrogant Thaksin."[173] He made statements that openly criticized Thaksin and his party. In addition to the attack on the power of the bureaucratic elite, which the King relied on to protect the interests of the

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[171] Hewison, p. 208
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

throne, Thaksin had tread on another significant source of the King's support, the rural masses. Kevin Hewison states in his article "Thai-Style Democracy" that:

> "The most significant political contest was for the hearts and minds of the masses. A central ideological component of the monarchy's position is the portrayal of the king as the champion of the poor..The palace has portrayed the monarchy as the savior of the poor peasants, through notions of suffiecny and palace charity. Thaksin offered a different approach to the same constituency."[174]

The appeal and power Thaksin had over the rural masses as result of his populist policies posed a direct challenge to what had previously belonged to the King. This fear was heightened as Thaksin coasted to another sweeping victory in 2005. While many had begun to withdraw their support from Thaksin, it was clear the rural masses still supported him.

The sale of Shin Corporation

A diverse opposition was gathering against Thaksin. The anti-Thaksin movement was given cause to rally against him when he sold the Shin Corporation in January 2006. "The Shinawatra family sold 49.61% of its shares to Temasek Holdings, a Singapore government investment company, for 73.3 billion baht, (US $ 1.7 billion)."[175] Large-scale protests began when people found out the Thaksin family had paid no tax on the sale. In addition, just days before the sale was completed, the telecommunications law had been changed to allow foreign ownership to extend from 25 to 49 percent, allowing Thaksin's family to sell more of their shares. Demonstrations began as a result. There was considerable "middle class moral outrage" as many people saw this act as

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[174] Kevin Hewison. "Thai-Style Democracy," *Prachatai* (2007)

[175] Tangpianpant, p. 24

representative of the "nepotism and cronyism of the Thaksin administration."[176] Middle class led NGO's became the main orchestrators of the demonstrations against Thaksin.

As the demonstrations drew large numbers, an opposition party was formed, identified as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). They charged Thaksin with corruption and called for new "free and fair" elections. The old bureaucratic elite joined the movement as well, but by appealing more to nationalist sentiments and arguing that Thaksin was disrespectful to the monarchy, and thus a threat to the nation as a whole. Conditioned by decades, People began to call on the monarch to intervene and "save" the country from this immoral and corrupt figure.

Thaksin, seeing his power slipping, called for a new election in April 2006. Elections were held, but the PAD boycotted, allowing TRT to coast to an easy victory. It was at this point that King Bhumibol stepped in and declared that the elections were undemocratic due to allegations of electoral fraud. He decided to send the issue to the judiciary for judgments, annulled the results of the elections, and rescheduled new elections for September 2006.[177]

September 2006

The King's actions had potent ramifications. It became very clear that the palace wanted Thaksin out of power, and so it would only be a matter of time before a coup took place. Therefore, "the anti-Thaksin campaign then became a struggle for control of the military," as their support would be instrumental in implementing a coup.[178] As a result, people who had formally been political enemies came together in their mutual opposition

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[176] Hewison, p. 208
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.

to Thaksin. The wariness of military involvement that had been present since the 1976 coup broke down.

On September 19, 2006, with the consent of the king, a military group led by General Sonthi imposed a coup against the Thaksin regime. The junta named itself the "Administrative Reform Group under the Democratic system with the King as the Head of State."[179] In article titled "Thailand: Military Coup 2006," the Asian Human Rights Commission outlined the following actions of the military upon seizing power: "Within hours of taking power, the army abrogated the constitution, banned political assemblies, commenced extralegal arrests, and authorized censorship."[180] The new leaders organized a Council for Democratic Reform that issued a statement explaining their reasons for the coup and stating that they would return the government to democratic rule in one year. In addition, there would be an investigation into the suspect activities of TRT during the previously annulled election.

Aftermath and Consequences

As we have seen, coups have been an important element in Thai politics. Many people have supported them and seen them as a means to restore government on its rightful path towards democracy. They believe that if the intentions of the coup are for the good of the people and nation, than the coup can be justified, despite its inconsistency with a truly democratic process. It cannot be doubted that the monarchy, too, has had a role in these events and this thinking.

Such was the mindset of the majority of Thai's towards the 2006 coup. To many, it seemed apparent that Thaksin was no better, if not worse, than the previous corrupt

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[179] Hewison, p. 209

[180] Asian Human Rights Commission, "Thailand: Military Coup 2006," A collection of statements marking one month of rened military rule in Thailand, (Hong Kong, 2006) p.1

self-seeking politicians. "The Thaksin government was a civilian autocracy. It did not respect human right, the rule of law or democratic principles. It manipulated the media, intimidated its opponents, and played with legislation and public institution for its own advantage."[181] There is no denying the undemocratic nature of the Thaksin regime. But the ramifications of the coup were not limited to the removal of this particular person from office. The consequences really like are in regards to the motives of the coup, the constitution of 1997, and the general uncertainty of the democratic future in Thailand.

The motives behind the coup highlight the sentiments of the bureaucratic elite. Thaksin's reign posed a threat to the old bureaucratic elite and to traditional sources of power. Because of this, he was a threat to the support base of the King, including the King's position as champion of the poor. It was really for these reasons, and not because he was a corrupt politician, that actions were seen as necessary to remove him from office. The understanding that the bureaucratic elite would outwardly support democratic growth, but not if it came at the risk of a direct challenge to their power, was demonstrated by the 2006 coup.

The constitution of 1997 was the most important in Thai history. It was the first real attempt to move power away from the traditional bureaucratic elite and give it to "the people." It was not just that institutional changes that took place with it, but that this constitution "marked a great advance in the thinking of people in Thailand on constitutional issues and the management of their society."[182]. When the military took over in 2006 and removed the first popularly elected prime minister in Thai history, and then dissolved the constitution that mandated it, it was a serious setback for the

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[181] Asian Human Rights Commission, p. 1

[182] Id, p. 11

democratic movement. The work and effort that had gone into initiating these reforms and changes, beginning with the events of 1992, had now been erased. The political ramifications were clear with the new constitution written in the aftermath of the 2006 coup, shifting some of the power back to the bureaucratic elite. But the psychological consequences felt in society were perhaps the most damaging part of the 2006 coup. They future of their democratic growth was now uncertain as ever. And the monarchy, while beloved by the people, had a clear role in the setback.

VII. CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter will proceed in the following manner. First, I will analyze the three "key event" chapters in terms of the King's actions. Second, I will discuss the consequences of his actions in regard to how they affected the democratic transition process. Third, I will consider Huntington's theories in connection with the role of the king in Thailand. Lastly, I will offer my predictions for the future of democracy in Thailand.

Events of 1973-76, 1992, and 2006.

The events of 1973-76, 1992, and 2006 provide unmistakable evidence of the direct role the King plays in Thai politics. They also underscore the motives behind the King's actions in each case - that is his conservative mentality and long-lasting relationship with the military, and not his supposed support for democratic reform.

The actions of the King during 1973 and 1976 on the surface seem contradictory. In one example, he sided "with democracy," and in the other he acted against it. In 1992, he stepped in again, this time ostensibly in favor of democracy. In 2006, he supported a coup that deposed a "corrupt and immoral" politician. On the surface some would argue this is an undemocratic action, but many thought of the coup as positive and necessary for democracy in that it was essential to rid the government of a corrupt ruler and set Thailand on the path back towards democracy. I contend these were not actions taken to further democracy. Rather, the King's actions are explained more by his conservatism. Conservatism stresses the perseveration of the old order that embodies the traditional values and customs of Thailand, as well as the importance of stability and unity above all

other things. In all of these circumstances, conditions of upset were threatening the stability of Thailand, as well as challenging the security of the "old order."

The King's intervention in 1973 was in response to mass protests that resulted in violence. In 1976, the radicalization of the student movement became a destabilizing force to society. In 1992 social tension had risen in the form of mass protest that resulted in violence once again. The year 2006 presented a similar situation, with rising social tension due to popular dissatisfaction with the regime of Thaksin. Consistent with the King's conservative objectives, the purpose of his intervention in all of these circumstances was to restore stability and unity to society, not necessarily to further democratic reforms.

The second critical element in evaluating all these events is the King's relationship with the military. The King and the military enjoy a "symbiotic relationship" in Thailand.[183] They rely on one another to further their own objectives. The military needs (at least tacitly) the support of the King in their political objectives. The King needs the military to protect "the continuity of the throne" and "national security."[184] In the event that a threat is posed to either of these things, the King will support the military to intervene on his behalf.

I recognize it is fair to say, as is shown by the events of 1973 and 1992, that the King will sometimes side against the military. The reason for this is due to concern for the debilitating effect military rule would have on society at that time. If his ultimate goal of stability and unity come at the cost of siding against the military, then he has done

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[183] Morell and Samudavanija, p.64
[184] Ibid.

so. But this is not necessarily to encourage full democracy at the expense of the military in its place.

The relationship between the King and the military is reflected in the key events of 1976, 1991 and 2006. In 1976, the radical student movement was challenging the "old order" and "traditional" values of Thailand. In 1991, corrupt politicians were destabilizing the functionality of government, which resulted in social turmoil that threatened national security. In 2006, Thaksin challenged the old order and the values embodied in the traditional elite. The King supported the military at times in these events to protect the national interest, to protect these traditional values, and to restore or maintain the continued influence of the throne.

Consequences of actions

While the King's actions were guided by his sense of conservatism and his relationship with the military, they were also guided by his sense of divine right. The King sees himself as the father of the country, and therefore believes that he alone knows what is best for the people in the end. Many in the populace also see his role from this perspective. In addition, because the institution of the monarchy has always been the unifying symbol of Thai society, the King believes he must carry on the tradition of upholding the values, customs and traditions that are so central to Thai life. From this perspective, the presence of the king in Thai politics is crucial, in that he provides political stability. As Hewison writes, "The King and the People become one. The Throne and the Nation become one, and a profound meaning is thus given to the Throne. It becomes the personification of Thai nationhood, the symbol of the Nation's unity and

independence, the invariable constant above the inconsistencies of politics." [185] The King's continued presence in politics is therefore seen not only appropriate, but is also expected and necessary. This role he plays in Thai society is another justification for his interventionist behavior.

It would be extreme of course to say that the King's interventions are always negative. My argument is that his interventionist behavior as a pattern is detrimental to the growth of democracy in the long run. It can be helpful in specific situations. For example, in 1973 and 1991, the King did represent and respond to the requests of his people. In answer to their protests, he protected their interests and sided against the military. No other figure could have done this in Thailand at that time, and the popular protests were not going to overcome the military.

This was especially the case in 1973 when the military was all-powerful and had been ruling for many years. Despite the initial revolution in 1932, the democratic transition had really progressed very little. There were no representative institutions that could channel the needs of the people, let alone bring about any dramatic change. Whatever his intentions or motivations, at this point in time the King did help the democratic process. However, with the coup in 1976, only three years later this success was short lived.

In 1991 a similar situation unfolded. It is true that circumstances were much different at this time. The military was less powerful and had taken a back seat politically since the civilian government had been in place. In addition, the people had developed a greater political consciousness due to the rise of a new middle class and

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[185]Hewison, p. 61

increase in wealth and education. These were not just radical students protesting- it was a significant and respectable portion of the Thai population. One would say that these circumstances gave more democratic hope to the situation than the circumstances of 1973.

Despite the liberalization that had taken place, democratic institutions were still struggling. The violent response by the military to the 1992 protests signified the need for an intervention. The King again played an important role in this situation, standing up for the people, when there was no one else that could do so. But that did not mean that democracy was at hand or that democracy was the King's goal

2006 offers a much different situation. By this time Thailand had produced the first "peoples' constitutions," and had held, voted and successfully placed in office the first popularly elected government. In the constitution was the creation of new institutions of accountability to increase transparency in the government and to decrease corruption. While these democratic institutions were far from perfect, they were important because they reflected the desire of the people for a truly representative government.

Due to these circumstances, the intervention by the King and the support of the 2006 coup is a contentious issue. The argument that his intervention was "in the interest of the people" or "for the sake of democracy" does not stand the same way it arguably did in the 1973 and 1992 conflicts.

First and foremost, while there was massive opposition to Thaksin, there were still many who supported him. It would certainty not be in their interest to have him removed. Second, while it appears rue that Thaksin was a corrupt and authoritative

ruler, the justification for the coup, which was to restore Thailand on the rightful path to democracy, does not hold because he was removed via undemocratic means. In addition, the democratic institutions created by the 1997 constitution were all dissolved. This would not strengthen democracy nor does it represent the people's interest.

I believe an important reason these interventions do not contribute to the overall growth of democracy is because the King's aim in the end is not to further democracy. He intervenes only in times of crises, and when he does, it is to restore the status quo, whatever that may be. While in the aftermath there was some progress, it was only a matter of time before undemocratic actions resumed. The King's political agenda is shaped by the sentiment that what is good and necessary for the country foremost is the survival of the monarchy, because only the King can truly act in the people's interest in critical moments. The King points to these times of crises as examples of why this sentiment is true.

Indeed, I argue it is the absence of stronger democratic institutions that is the reason for these interventions. And while this was understandable in the early stages of the transition before these institutions had time to grow, there comes a point where it is no longer acceptable. The continuation of the King's interventionist behavior prevents democratic institutions from truly evolving and so the people continue to rely on him.

Theories Revisited- Transformation and the Role of the Monarchy

Transformation

Under Huntington's theory of transition, Thailand's democratic transition is considered a transformation because the transition was initiated by the regime that was in power at that time. Consistent with Huntington's theory, the reformers within the regime

initiated the transition. At the time there was little existence of organized opposition. In addition, while there were "standpatters" in the regime, mostly in the royal family, they had lost much of their political power and popular support. The reformers did not meet much resistance from either party. These conditions allowed for the transition to be initiated in Thailand with relative ease.

The reformers were members of the bureaucratic elite and the military. They advocated for a change from the absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. Their desire for political change resulted from problems in society that had been created due to modernizing changes. These changes put pressure on the political system of the absolute monarchy. The government was unable to address or solves these tensions and problems, and as a result popular dissatisfaction grew, and doubt was cast on their ability to govern. This situation called for the need to reform.

For quite some time the transition was halted, as the military reformers consolidated power for themselves in the time period from 1933-1956. Eventually the process began again. It was in this period that Huntington's theory of "backward legitimacy" was implemented. As was evidenced in the "history of the king's" chapter, the monarchy was the traditional source of legitimacy in society, and therefore played the role of initiating and directing change. Sarit resurrected this source of legitimacy for Bhumibol, and used it to legitimize the current democratic process. The transition would move forward, but only with the consent of the King as the legitimizing force. Democratic reform was thus tied inexorably with the King and his actions and motivations. It was through this method that the standpatters could be appeased, and the reformers in the regime could maintain some level of control over the process.

The Role of the Monarchy in Transformation

Using the King as a source of legitimacy to further the democratic transition can work, but only up to a point. As with the problem of interventionist behavior, the success of the transition necessitates the King's involvement in the beginning, but then democratic institutions and practices much be allowed to evolve and take hold. In order for democracy to succeed, the King must transfer his source of traditional legitimacy over to these institutions. This has not happened. I maintain the role and actions of the King have prevented real democracy from being able to grow and mature, due to his continued hold over traditional legitimacy and authority.

The Future

"The future of existing traditional monarchies is bleak."[186] This is the situation the institution of the monarchy in Thailand must face. The current King has reigned for 64 years. It seems that kind of change in regards to the monarchy's position in Thailand will not take place before he dies. However, because the institution of the monarchy has become so personalized to him due to the longevity of his reign, it is possible his death many bring about real changes.

If the democratic transition is to proceed to maturity, it is inevitable that the monarchy must hand over the traditional, ultimate source of authority. As British scholar Vernon wrote, "Constitutional monarchy" is a "contradiction in terms, because, by definition, monarchy is an absolutist system of government."[187] Constitutional monarchies work in other countries because there the monarchy has given up his traditional source of legitimacy. The democratic transition in Thailand will continue to

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[186] Huntington, p. 191
[187] Handley, p. 46

suffer until this full transfer of power takes place and society can turn away from the King as the institution of ultimate resort.

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