Political Change in Thailand

Democracy and Participation

Edited by
Kevin Hewison

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For Thailand, authoritarian rule has been the norm since 1945 and a military *coup* the method by which to change the government. Then in 1992 in a brave show of opposition many ordinary Thai people came out on the streets and demanded reform. The result would appear to be a political transformation and a steady process of democratisation that has produced elected governments.

This book provides an assessment of approaches to studying Thai politics, the various forces reshaping the forms of political activity and their roles in the fluid contemporary political environment. Among other aspects, the book provides a survey of the more enduring and powerful institutions such as the military, bureaucracy and religion, and includes an assessment of the important, but seldom scrutinised, monarchy and its role in democratisation.

Political Change in Thailand will be of particular interest to those who require an understanding of the complex and rapidly changing political realities of contemporary Thailand.

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Foreword

Thailand, of all the countries of Southeast Asia, readily attracts simplistic conventional wisdoms about the traditional nature of its society and its degree of institutional continuity. The reasons for such generalisations are well known. Thailand is the only regional state to have escaped direct colonial rule and its disruptive effect on national institutions. Although an absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional version over six decades ago, that institution, through the role of an incumbent with over 50 years tenure, has been seen as a dominant symbol of national identity and values. In addition, the Buddhist faith has provided another strong strain of tradition and continuity among a relatively homogenous population. Thailand has not stood still, however. For example, the role of monarchy itself has changed significantly during the period of constitutional limitation. Ironically, its role was enhanced from the late 1950s by a military dictatorship which also set the country on the path of modern economic development. That development has been spectacular in recent decades with the acceleration of globalisation, bringing in its train domestic social changes with notable political effects which makes it necessary to reconsider established views of the nature of the Thai political order.

This innovative set of essays, which is edited and introduced by Kevin Hewison, addresses the changing political landscape of Thailand at the end of the twentieth century. The chapters comprise, in the main, the revised outcome of papers presented at a workshop at the Asia Research Centre of Murdoch University around the theme of changing patterns of power and democratic development. That workshop took place in the wake of turbulent and bloody events in Bangkok in May 1992 which serve as a historical reference point of a kind, to the extent that they were the prelude to a restoration of democratic rule. The essays provide a remarkably comprehensive view of Thai political life. They cover its entire spectrum and direct special attention to what one Thai contributor has described as 'new centres of influence vying for increasing access to power'. Moreover, a notable feature of these essays is that almost half of the contributors are Thai scholars whose own researches provide considerable intellectual enrichment to this joint enterprise. This volume stands at the cutting edge of research into the nature and pattern of

political change in Thailand. It makes a valuable contribution, however, not only to an understanding of Thai politics but also to the study of comparative politics among societies beset by fundamental economic and social changes.

Michael Leifer

Preface

The compiling of this collection has been a long process. It would not have been completed without the encouragement, support and patience of many friends and colleagues. Their contributions were substantial.

In 1990, the newly established Asia Research Centre on Social, Political and Economic Change at Murdoch University in Western Australia planned a workshop to examine political change in Thailand. The dramatic political events of 1991–92 in Thailand further defined the nature of the workshop, and it was decided to examine the changing patterns of power and democratic development. Funded by the Asia Research Centre, the workshop took place on 6–7 October 1993, with the title 'Locating Power: Democracy, Opposition and Participation in Thailand'.

The workshop was an excellent opportunity to gather scholars from Thailand, Australia, the United States and Europe to discuss the development of Thailand's political system. With the exceptions of Prudhisan Jumbala and Maneerat Mitprasat, all of the contributors to this volume presented papers at the workshop. Others who attended or otherwise contributed to its success included Thongchai Winichakul, Teeranart Karnjana-uksorn, Surichai Wun'Gaeo, and especially Craig Reynolds, who provided critical comments on the papers.

The generous support of the Asia Research Centre for the workshop and for various tasks involved in the editing of the collection is gratefully acknowledged. The Director of the Centre, Professor Richard Robison, provided considerable encouragement, as did Garry Rodan. Del Blakeway assisted with all of the arrangements for the workshop and the subsequent support required to complete this collection. As the collection was developed, valuable research and editorial assistance was provided by Ingrid Wijeyewardene and Scot Barmé.

The assistance, good humour and patience of all of the contributors is gratefully acknowledged. Their timely responses to each question and request for clarification from me as editor was greatly appreciated. I am especially grateful to Prudhisan and Maneerat, who provided their chapter at short

notice. I trust that the final product adequately reflects the quality of the contributions made by all of the chapter authors. The support of Victoria Smith and others at Routledge has also been greatly appreciated. The remarkable patience of Sawai Khan-o must be mentioned. She has accepted the loss of too many weekends and evenings as the final editing has been completed. This task completed, the repayments begin.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Finally, a note on transliteration. As is usual when using Thai-language sources, some difficult choices have had to be made regarding transliteration. In this collection, no rigid system has been used, although consistency has been maintained. Thai names have generally maintained the English spelling preferred by the person involved or have followed that used in Bangkok English-language newspapers. To save space in the references, translated English titles have been used rather than a transliteration. Thai-language sources are indicated by the words 'in Thai' at the end of the reference.

List of abbreviations

AAT	Airports Authority of Thailand
ASFN	Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast
BAAC	Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
BBC	Bangkok Bank of Commerce
BECL	Bangkok Expressway Corp. Ltd
BoI	Board of Investment
BP	*Bangkok Post*
BPWR	*Bangkok Post Weekly Review*
BSL	Buddhist Student League
CCPN	Coordinating Committee for PHC of NGOs
CFD	Confederation for Democracy
CIPE	Center for International Private Enterprise
CPD	Campaign for Popular Democracy
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
ECOT	Employers' Confederation of Thailand
EGAT	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
EIA	environmental impact assessment
ETA	Expressway and Rapid Transit Authority
FEER	*Far Eastern Economic Review*
GO	government organisation
IFCT	Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMET	Institute for Management Education for Thailand
IPPS	Institute of Public Policy Studies
JPPCC	Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee
KB	King Bhumibol
MMSU	Mahidol Medical Students' Union
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
MP	member of parliament
NAP	New Aspiration Party
NEB	National Environment Board

NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGDO	non-governmental development organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NGO-CORD	NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development
NIC	newly industrialising countries
NPKC	National Peace-Keeping Council
NRECS	Natural Resources and Environment Conservation Club of Surat Thani
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OPPS	Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary
PER	Project for Ecological Recovery
PHC	primary health care
PJPPCC	Provincial JPPCC
PO	people's organisation
PTT	Petroleum Authority of Thailand
RFD	Royal Forestry Department
SAP	Social Action Party
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
SES	Second Expressway Stage
SET	Stock Exchange of Thailand
SFT	Students' Federation of Thailand
TDRI	Thailand Development Research Institute
TEI	Thailand Environment Institute
ULRA	Ubon Land Reform Area
ULRAD	Ubon Land Reform Area Development (Project)
WHO	World Health Organisation
WFT	Wildlife Fund Thailand

1 Introduction
Power, oppositions and democratisation

Kevin Hewison

At the end of the 1980s, the political and economic future was looking good for Thailand, despite the economic downturn of the mid-1980s and two failed military *coups* in 1981 and 1985. The economy had again surged, with double-digit growth, and, for the first time since 1976, the country had an elected government headed by a prime minister who was an elected member of parliament (MP). Corruption was discussed, as it had been with almost all governments since 1945, but, in the context of rapid growth, it was not perceived as a major issue.

Chatichai Choonhavan came to the prime ministership following the 1988 election and after the surprise retirement of General Prem Tinsulanonda, the unelected incumbent from 1980. Prem withdrew after enormous pressure from various groups and political parties demanding that the leader be drawn from the ranks of MPs. While this may appear an unremarkable event, at the time many saw it as a victory on the path to democracy. As events unfolded, it was to prove a precursor to a major turning-point in Thailand's political development.

Although he came from the rightist Chart Thai Party, Chatichai seemed to accept that he and his government had an historical role to play in enhancing democratic development, and he challenged continually Thailand's conservative state. In particular, he took steps to move decision-making away from the civil and military bureaucracy and into the hands of elected politicians. The politicians seemed to think that their time had arrived, and pushed the military conservatives to the brink. The military rattled their swords and manoeuvred against the government, and in 1991 could stand the perceived insults and moves against its perquisites no longer. Led by Class 5 graduates of the military academy, a *coup* threw out Chatichai's government, the constitution and the parliament.

At first, many were pleased to see the end of a corrupt civilian government. However, it soon became clear that the military was not simply cleaning up politics and then returning to the barracks. Despite the installation of a respected government of business people and technocrats, demonstrations demanding the reintroduction of constitutional rule began and grew in

intensity, with the press generally supportive of these calls. Elections were brought on, but the result confirmed that the military was not about to relinquish its control, and was, in fact, further entrenching the conservative polity (see Hewison 1993a). It installed its own unelected prime minister, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, and set about establishing a constitution which gave the civil and military bureaucracy extensive powers.

The opposition movement, which had grown steadily, suddenly exploded. In May 1992 the streets of Bangkok witnessed the most extreme political violence since October 1976, as hundreds of thousands of Bangkokians—with people from all walks of life, and including business people and the middle classes—rose against the military. The world watched CNN and the BBC in horror as what had, initially, been a well-organised and non-violent confrontation co-ordinated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) degenerated into chaos as the military perpetrated violent attacks on demonstrators they branded as communists. Over five days viewers saw indiscriminate shootings and brutalities committed against ordinary people and even against medical professionals who were treating the injured. They also witnessed remarkable bravery and resoluteness in the face of fully armed troops.

As the violence peaked and a complete breakdown of political order threatened, pictures were broadcast of then Prime Minister Suchinda and one of the leaders of the demonstrators, Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, prostrate before King Bhumibol Adulyadej as he chided them and demanded an end to the disorder.

The calling of new elections and the promise of a revised constitution offered a way forward in these circumstances. However, the issues which gave rise to the events of 1992 were not adequately addressed. This has been demonstrated by the fact that the period since September 1992 has seen three elected governments—those led by Chuan Leekpai (elected in September 1992), Banharn Silpa-archa (July 1995) and retired Army Commander General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (November 1996). Both Chuan's and Banharn's governments fell amid accusations of corruption. The three elections of the period have seen money politics dominate, with up to 17 billion baht being spent during the 1995 campaign and up to a massive 25–30 billion in 1996. Parliamentary politics, while apparently established, is in danger of leading to 'revolving door' government as parties vie for their place at the cabinet table, which itself looks increasingly like a cash dispensing machine as the government parties scramble to recoup their investments in election campaigning. In addition, a pattern has emerged whereby the voting patterns of Bangkok and rural electorates appear different. Bangkok voters blame rural voters for electing corrupt governments and are increasingly likely to view the electoral system as being loaded against the emergence of efficient and clean government.

While the tumultuous events of 1992 were an initial stimulus to the chapters presented in this collection, the questions which have exercised the authors are

wider. The essential issue is whether the basic nature of Thailand's politics has been challenged and changed irrevocably. Has a new path been taken? Has the vicious cycle of politics—*coup,* handover to unstable parliamentary rule, ended by another *coup*—been broken? Has civil society developed to the stage where it acts as a counterweight to the state? What are the elements of this civil society which challenge the conservative polity? Have civilian politicians and the electoral process played a significant role in challenging the conservative polity led by the military—can they in the future? Is the elected legislature likely to become the centre of democratic politics or will it remain unrepresentative? Will it challenge the role of technocrats in policy-making? Will participatory institutions be located outside the system of electoral politics, in NGOs and social movements? Can the gap—in all senses of the word—between Bangkok and rural areas be bridged?

Questions like these have not been commonly asked by those who study Thailand's politics simply because they have not been on the theoretical agenda. Prior to examining the course of modern politics and providing the necessary backdrop for the chapters, it is appropriate to provide an overview of approaches to political studies of Thailand.

APPROACHES TO POLITICS

Until relatively recently, there has been a significant consensus in the study of Thailand's political system. Most analysts have agreed that the system could be considered a 'bureaucratic polity'. Derived from a seminal work by Fred Riggs (1966), the bureaucratic polity model used by Riggs and by his followers—both Thai and Western—is fundamentally derived from Western theories of society and politics, specifically modernisation theory and its antecedents. A challenge to the modernisation approach emerged in the early 1980s. It drew on two sources: first, a developing 'school' of analysts interested in radical political economy; and second, the recognition that the modernisation approach and the bureaucratic polity model had become irrelevant to Thailand's political and economic realities.

In developing this collection, there has been no intention to include authors from any particular theoretical position, although all have clearly recognised the limitations of the modernisation approach which has been delineated in recent years. It is appropriate to provide a brief description and critique of modernisation-influenced approaches prior to a discussion of competing models.

Modernisation and consensus on politics

Prior to the publication of Riggs's book, the major work on post-war Thai politics was by David Wilson (1962). His work provided the essential background to the model of the bureaucratic polity. While Wilson had observed a fluid political

situation in the late 1950s, he preferred to emphasise order and consensus in his analysis. He noted that there were few extra-bureaucratic inputs into the political system, and considered that the bureaucracy—civil and military—had become the totality of politics. The bureaucracy itself was dominated by competition between powerful cliques jockeying for the highest offices and their perquisites (Wilson 1962:278). The vast mass of the population was uninterested in politics; indeed, they were apolitical. Wilson explained this arrangement in cultural terms. He described Thais as individualistic and status-conscious, albeit within a loose social structure, driven by the Buddhist desire for the accumulation of personal merit and with the security of substantial natural resources (ibid.: 46–7). These factors worked against the development of community solidarity and gave little impetus to the development of political interest; hence, the politicised elite could dominate. In addition, the masses—mostly farmers—deferred to the ruling elite.

Wilson's work established a set of concerns which informed many future social and political studies: loose social structure, political passivity, military and bureaucratic domination of politics, the significance of culture and personality, the role of tradition, and weak extra-bureaucratic influences. The cement of society was to be found in traditional, powerful and pervasive patron-client relations. For example, Neher (1981:121) argues that patron-client relations play a major role in the integration of society.[1] Conflict was not a major defining characteristic of political activity, which was strongly influenced by passivity, individuality and deference.

In going beyond Wilson's approach, Riggs attempted to develop a complete structural-functional model, in line with developments within modernisation theory. Riggs establishes two ideal types of society: the traditional or 'fused' society at one end of the development spectrum and the modern or 'diffracted' society at the other. In traditional society, a single structure—a repetitive pattern of behaviour—may perform many functions, while in modern society structures are functionally specific (Riggs 1961:19). Thailand is identified as a 'prismatic' society, which lies somewhere between these two ideal types, where the bureaucratic polity is defined as a 'system of government that is neither "traditional" nor "modern" in character' (Riggs 1966:11).

Using this model, Riggs agrees with Wilson that political activity is limited to the bureaucracy, with no outside force capable of establishing the parameters of bureaucratic prerogative and action. One of the reasons for this was that while differentiation within the bureaucracy had been rapid, development outside had been much slower. Hence, there was no extra-bureaucratic force capable of overseeing the political elite, so it dominated political activity (Riggs 1966:131, 197, 319). Further, because the political elite was well developed and politically predominant, opportunities for status and wealth were seen to be correlated with high bureaucratic position rather than with business and entrepreneurship.

While Riggs established a tight and complete theoretical model, it is apparent that most analysts have relied more on his description of politics

than his theory. The use of 'bureaucratic polity' conjures an image of a powerful and unshakeable bureaucracy, and a politically involved and dominant military. Whenever there was a *coup* and each time parliamentary rule failed, this was confirmation of the existence of the bureaucratic polity.

That Wilson and Riggs are Western analysts has not prevented their work being adopted by Thailand's political and social analysts. As noted by Neher and Bidhya (1984:1), Western scholars dominated the study of politics until the early 1980s. Even with an expansion of Thai academic studies, they argue, Western frameworks have remained predominant. Additionally, many Thai political scientists were trained in the North American tradition (see, for example, Thinapan 1975; Kanok 1984; Pisan 1988). For many of these scholars, while consensus and order have been important elements of their analysis, there has also been a concern for reform. Because of the influence of the bureaucratic polity model, much of the emphasis in studies has been on administrative reform, the need for the development of extra-bureaucratic forces, and overcoming clientelist politics (Neher and Bidhya 1984:6–7).

Challenging the consensus on the bureaucratic polity

While there has been a tradition of radical scholarship (see Reynolds and Hong 1983), anti-communism and the resultant political repression from the 1950s meant that it was not until the 1973–76 democratic interregnum that there was a renewed academic interest in radical approaches to political studies (see Morell and Chai-Anan 1981: part II). While the political openness of the period was short-lived and repression strong, academic interest in radical approaches continued into the 1980s.

With notable exceptions, the critics of modernisation approaches have seldom provided a *theoretical* critique of the perspective. Some of the problems associated with the approach can be summarised here (for more details, see Hewison 1989:10–14).

A brief critique of modernisation approaches

One of the substantive criticisms of the modernisation approaches is that they prevent a full analysis of conflict, change and class struggle (Phillips 1979:438; Girling 1981b:10). The organic model of society developed by those influenced by modernisation theory stresses equilibrium within society and emphasises the delineation of structures which maintain the system. A further telling criticism has been that the approach tends to be neo-evolutionary. In particular, Riggs's work presents a neo-evolutionary typology of structural features of social and political development. There is an assumption that a universal path from traditional to industrial or

modern society exists, with development being measured at points along this path.

There is also a tendency for this approach to produce arguments which rely on cultural determinism for their explanations. There is a heavy emphasis on Buddhism as an explanatory factor for social and political action. Such explanations—essentially impossible to test—suggest that culture exists independently of people in society. This is a false assumption for, as Moore (1969:486) has argued, 'Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history'. In fact, the reverse is true: cultural values are not unchanging and are themselves influenced by the course of history. To explain social or political action by simple recourse to assumed cultural values obscures the significance of the way such values change and the broader political and economic changes taking place in society.

A final significant challenge to the modernisation perspective relates to the instrumentalist position it takes on relations between state and society. Writers in this school generally consider that there should be extra-bureaucratic influences on the state, and see such influences in essentially instrumental terms—where interest groups gain control of policy-making—thereby giving limited attention to structural factors. The lack of such influences in Thailand is usually explained in cultural terms.

Beyond the bureaucratic polity

Interestingly, these criticisms have not necessarily been the factors which have led to a move away from the models. Indeed, many of those adopting alternative theoretical approaches have tended to accept the *description* of the bureaucratic polity. It has been the perception that this model is no longer an adequate description of politics in the 1990s that has led to a move to go beyond the bureaucratic polity (see, for example, Anek 1992:4). There are essentially two paths which seek to move beyond the bureaucratic polity— first, the neo-pluralist and institutionalist approaches; and second, the political economy approach. These will be briefly discussed. A third path, represented by postmodernist approaches, is not discussed here as it has not yet established a significant body of literature (see Callahan 1993; 1994).

(i) Neo-pluralist and institutionalist approaches

Neo-pluralist approaches are well represented in the recent literature on Thailand's politics, while institutionalist approaches are only beginning to be applied. Common features, drawing together what is a diverse range of analysts, include a focus on an expanding range of interest groups and a recognition that the bureaucratic polity was an adequate representation of the situation until the early 1970s (e.g., Anek 1992; Christensen 1993; Christensen and Ammar 1993; Doner and Ramsey 1993; King and LoGerfo

1996). While it is clear that this group owes much to the modernisation approach, they are seen to represent an important path away from the bureaucratic polity model.

Prolific author and commentator Anek Laothamatas (1992), has produced a comprehensive approach to the ways in which a neo-pluralist—he uses the term 'corporatist'—model may be utilised to go beyond the bureaucratic polity. While not confronting the theoretical shortcomings associated with Riggs's model, Anek does provide a theoretically informed model of 'liberal corporatism' applied to Thailand (see Anek 1992: Chapter 7). While declaring his work a discussion of 'political economy', it has much in common with revised pluralist approaches (see Martin 1983). He argues that the bureaucratic polity has been replaced by a system of liberal corporatism which is 'marked by a high degree of autonomy and spontaneity, and by the central role of private groups in the creation and operation of their representative associations, as well as systems of government-group interest mediation' (Anek 1992:13–14). Anek contends that extra-bureaucratic influences, and especially organised business, now have greatly enhanced power over the state, even if in a 'less statist' manner than in South Korea and Taiwan (ibid.: 15). Such influence was not possible under the bureaucratic polity.

In essence, the approach is that bureaucracy and business have developed a new relationship—no longer is business dominated by bureaucracy; rather, the former is privileged (ibid.: 150). The outcome from this is that analysts must examine the organised interests and their relationship to the state and policy-making not that far from early pluralist models, but modified by a more critical approach to power.

Institutionalist analysts produce similar observations but from a different theoretical position, with one of their central questions being, in the words of Haggard and Kaufman (1994:6), 'How can economic decision making become less discretionary and more institutionalized?' Christensen (1993:1), writing on Thailand, moves the theoretical focus beyond business groups, observing that, since the decline of the bureaucratic polity, the political system has developed 'channels of influence' for a range of interest groups. He refers to urban bankers, industrialists, organised business, provincial elites and the rural majority as interest groups (ibid.: 1, 9, 11). Christensen and Ammar (1993:1) argue that these are 'single-issue interest groups lobbying for their own particular benefit'. This approach essentially reduces politics to a 'distributive game', where some interest groups gain support or subsidies at the expense of the majority. Such a situation emerges because 'independent participatory institutions…have remained fragmented and local' (Christensen 1993:19), and because policy institutions are inefficient and representative political organisations are poorly developed (ibid.: 1).

For those adopting this position, the resolution to the problem is to be found in the market, which must be made more effective. This would be

achieved with the development of efficient state institutional and regulatory frameworks which allow for the operation of the market while guaranteeing state resources. For this to develop requires the creation and strengthening of coalitions which share authority between state actors and those in the private sector. In other words, policy-making achieves best outcomes when it is not captured by any particular interest (see Hawes and Hong 1993:633, 648–9). Thus, the development of institutional capacity and co-operative strategies is seen as crucial to a functioning political system. For these theorists, this involves a search for the impediments both to reform and to the efficient operation of the market within those elements of state and society central to policy-making.

In this arena, analysts identify systemic problems with both democratic and state institutions in Thailand (Christensen and Ammar 1993:1). The theoretical conclusion is that good public policy is developed by governments that are relatively insulated from *sectional* political influence. When Thailand has had an elected government, it is noted that the legislature has been relatively unproductive 'in making laws, especially when members of parliament are elected'. Hence, the military *coup* is seen to 'perform an important function'. The junta 'assumes broad legislative powers, and… break[s] the legislative logjam developed in previous elected parliaments' (Christensen *et al.* 1993:19–20). Parliaments and governments are seen to have been dominated by patronage and rent-seeking, and it has been private-sector dynamism alone which has overcome such weaknesses (ibid.: 1–8). Doner (1992:193), writing from a similar theoretical location, draws comparable conclusions, arguing that while officials have not been isolated from 'private influence', they have had the 'space' necessary for 'greater consistency and less politicization' in policy-making.

This observation that the electoral system and its institutions are flawed is common to a range of writers. Even those who are not so theoretically driven suggest that there is an urgent need for the reform of institutions such as political parties, electoral laws and the constitution (King and LoGerfo 1996). The chapters in this collection by McCargo and by Surin and McCargo certainly make this case strongly. However, their focus is more on effective representation than on the development of policy. For institutionalists, political parties are not necessarily central, and thus their influence and significance is often discounted (Hawes and Hong 1993:649).

While institutionalists place considerable attention on interest groups—in large measure, the sum of civil society in this approach—they tend to privilege formal structures. Neo-pluralists, while somewhat broader in approach, also focus on the formal level of political activity. Interest groups are seen to have emerged only since the 1970s (Chai-Anan 1989:313–14). Both approaches tend to view the role of interest groups as sectional, issue-based and even selfish. Neo-pluralists tend to argue that interest groups provide important inputs to the political system and therefore need to be

developed within appropriate political frameworks. Institutionalists, on the other hand, note that interest groups in Thailand are not conducive to the development of good policy, as participatory institutions are identified as localised and fragmented (Christensen 1993:19; Christensen and Ammar 1993:1, 55). While there is encouragement for the expansion of civil society, this is not seen to be sufficient for the further evolution of the political system—the expansion of informal political opposition and the development of civil society tend to be viewed in problematic terms. For them, the crucial factor is the construction of 'growth coalitions' between (mainly elite) societal interest groups and the state.

Such approaches offer scope for further research, and their influence can be seen in a number of recent attempts to re-examine the relationship between business and the state, and in Parichart Chotiya's Chapter 15 in this collection, where she explains the problems faced by provincial business in dealing with central government.

(ii) Political economy approaches

The view that extra-bureaucratic influences have become increasingly significant also informs recent political economy approaches.[2] However, their initial emphasis tends to be on societal or class influences on the state rather than on the identification of interest groups. While there has been a long retreat from a reliance on crude, Marxist-derived, instrumentalist and reductionist approaches (see Poulantzas 1969; Miliband 1978, 1983), political economists argue that class relations are significant in determining the nature of domination—the distribution and use of power—in contemporary society. The nature of domination is seen to be structured by these relations and by the relationship between elements in economy, society and state.

In examining political activity, although political economists have been vitally interested in policy and policy-making (see, for example, Hewison 1989: part II), they do not view policy as neutral or as representing the outcome of a process of professional decision-making based on an analysis of available interest group inputs. Policy is, quite simply, a reflection of the nature of domination in society. In terms of policy, the issue is not to identify 'good' and 'bad' policy choices, but which policy agendas emerge and hold sway under particular political regimes. Indeed, it might be suggested that the emphasis on 'fixing' institutions in the neo-pluralist and, especially, the institutionalist approaches, while it is a factor to be considered, misses important issues of political activity. Thus, some of the important questions and issues which political economists address include the nature of domination, the growth of political opposition, the character of the state and regime, and the development of civil society. It was the expansion of civil society and oppositions which was one of the initial organising themes for this collection. Notions of opposition and civil society are closely related, as

oppositions must be conceptualised in terms of the political space in which they operate. Political economists have been particularly concerned to understand political conflict, activism and opposition. Recently, there has been a particular focus on non-formal political institutions.

While each of the authors in this collection will conceptualise civil society in different ways, they would probably agree that it is an autonomous sphere of political space in which 'political forces representing constellations of interests in society have contested state power' (Bernhard 1993:307).[3] This space of civil society can be seen to have ebbed and flowed in Thailand throughout this century (see the next section) and has existed, albeit in very limited forms, under highly authoritarian regimes. In the struggle for the expansion of political space, the activities of oppositions are central, for it is these groups who challenge and deal with the regime. Political oppositions are, by their nature, multifaceted, and will often include organised interest groups, political parties and parliaments, but also activist groups and movements such as trade unions, employer and professional associations, women's groups, student organisations, peasant and ethnic coalitions and associations, an expansive group of NGOs and a range of social movements. However, these oppositions are not conceptualised in simplistic terms when their impact on democratisation is considered. Oppositions will inevitably reproduce class inequalities of the society in which they operate, and they will not be necessarily democratic or participatory in their organisation or practice (see Wood 1991).

Political opposition is seen as important for the expansion and consolidation of political space, but its relationship to regime and government does not always require the institutions of parliamentary representation. Political space is a site of struggle as well as negotiation and agreement; it is an arena of contestation. However, this contestation is not always a challenge to the state, especially where an expanded political space is considered a legitimate part of political activity.

This perspective on the development of civil society as critical to the extension of democratisation is distinguished from the neo-pluralist approaches by its emphasis on society. While neo-pluralists and institutionalists emphasise formal institutions and organised interest groups, political economists tend to adopt a wider perspective, stressing the significance of extended political space for a range of groups and classes, and the history of the emergence and constitution of these groups and civil society.

Because not all of the authors in this collection have had the opportunity to include an extended historical perspective on civil society into their chapters, it is appropriate to briefly review Thailand's modern history from this position. There are two reasons for this. First, to emphasise the ebb and flow of political space, so that the significant political activism evident throughout much of the period of military authoritarianism is not obscured. Second, such a chronology provides a necessary backdrop for the chapters which follow.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EBB AND FLOW OF POLITICAL SPACE[4]

Many studies identify 1932 and the overthrow of the absolute monarchy as the beginning of the modern period of Thailand's politics. Others, following the dynastic approach to periodisation, might nominate one or more points during the fourth to sixth reigns of the Chakri period (1851–1925) as marking this point. For example, the 1855 Bowring Treaty, the freeing of Thais from slavery and bondage, or Thailand's participation in the First World War. These, and similar events, all warrant attention. However, the focus on major events and dynastic histories does not necessarily provide a picture of the wider spectrum of change which has taken place in society. This is especially true when political activism is considered. Indeed, as noted above, there has been a view that activism has not been an aspect of Thailand's political culture until recent years. The following overview offers a reassessment of that perspective, drawing on the political economy approach outlined above.

The discussion here begins in the 1920s, as recent research has indicated that there was a significant expansion of political space at this time (Lockhart 1990; Nakharin 1992; Copeland 1993). With a vigorous press and considerable debate concerning the nature of politics and the constitution of society, there was considerable criticism of the monarchy and its absolutism. This period of expanded political space extended from about 1918 and continued until the change of regime in 1932, despite attempts by the government of the last of the absolute monarchs, King Prajadhipok, to close the space.

Political activism expanded considerably immediately after the overthrow of the monarchy by the People's Party, led by Pridi Phanomyong. This group initially received considerable support from workers, students and other urban groups. The years 1932 and 1933 were most significant, and saw much debate and political manoeuvring, especially as conflicts between radical and conservative elements within the new government developed. These arguments concerned issues such as economic policy and political representation. Interestingly, debates in the first-ever National Assembly were especially vigorous, reflecting the broadening of political space. However, the monarchists were not finished, and in 1933 there was an armed royalist rebellion, which the government was able to defeat only after heavy fighting. Significantly, the constitutional regime received strong public support.

The combined impact of the 1932 overthrow of the monarchy, the 1933 defeat of the royalist rebellion and the founding of a parliament and constitution represented the establishment of a new government, a new regime and the embedding of a new state. Not only was the absolutist political regime and its highly personalised government—dominated by royal relatives and the nobility—thrown out, but the development of a new social, ideological, economic and political logic of power, best described as capitalist, was enhanced.

Ironically, it was the restorationist rebellion and the ongoing conflict between royalists and anti-royalists over the next decade that led to a considerable narrowing of political space and an increased political profile for the military, as the People's Party struggled to entrench its constitutional regime. Despite this narrowing of political space, debate continued within the National Assembly, but by 1938 the military was firmly in control. Some, including army leader and prime minister Phibun Songkhram, were attracted by the examples of fascist regimes in Germany and Italy, and by the expansion of Japan's militarism. Fascist thought had been attractive for some time and this increased (Thompson 1967:216–7; Barmé 1993:78, 87), and the government began to introduce policies which smacked of increasing authoritarianism.

This continued until the end of the Second World War when, with the military in decline, Pridi and his supporters reasserted civilian rule. Again, political space was expanded as civilian politicians re-established themselves. For the first time political opposition began to be expressed through competing political parties, with royalists dominating the Progressives and Democrats, opposed to a coalition around Pridi. In opposing the military, Pridi found it necessary to make concessions to the royalists. However, they had not forgotten his leadership of the 1932 *coup* or the insults the People's Party dealt the monarchy at that time. They used the political space created by Pridi's government to mount a campaign against him, and were prepared to deal with the military. When the young King Ananda Mahidol died in mysterious circumstances in mid-1946, a situation was created which allowed the military to mount a *coup* and again to restrict political space.

The period following the 1947 *coup* is usually portrayed as one of military dominance (see Girling 1981a:108–11). This is true to a degree, as the period was marked by considerable manoeuvring between various military and police leaders. However, this competition also permitted the maintenance of a limited political space, as no one group established its supremacy. In addition, parliament continued to operate and, although opposition was tame compared to earlier years, managed to articulate concerns about government policy. The press, business organisations and unions were also able to provide some opposition. However, it was in 1955 that political opposition was again able to flower. In an effort to regain the political initiative from his rivals, Prime Minister Phibun embarked on a democracy campaign which was to lead to an election in 1957. Thais appreciated the expansion of democratic space, and vigorous debates developed in the local press and at Bangkok's own Hyde Park, Sanam Luang. As the election campaign continued, it appears that Police Chief Phao Sriyanond was not prepared to take any chances on the result, and the government party won. However, there was considerable public dissatisfaction and even demonstrations against the election result.

The instability permitted General Sarit Thanarat to stage a *coup* which altered the face of modern politics. Sarit abolished parliament and the

constitution, outlawed political parties and unions, and founded a 'Revolutionary Party' and a highly authoritarian regime. Sarit's dictatorship was vigorous in repressing all opposition and, in addition to exiling political opponents, introduced summary executions of alleged communists, arsonists and others identified as opponents, while making economic development, rather than politics, the key to his rule.

Sarit also began a process which left an indelible mark on modern politics—the rehabilitation of the monarchy. While the institution had remained symbolic after 1932, the various governments had done much to raise the profile of non-royal elements of state ideology. Sarit, who declared that political activism would not be tolerated and the trappings of parliament and constitution were not to be quickly reintroduced, offered an alternative in the monarchy. Sarit used the inexperienced King to raise the regime's profile by resurrecting the monarchy as a traditional political institution which embodied a paternalistic notion of representation (see Thak 1979:309–24). Effectively, Sarit's *coup* abolished the constitutional regime, replacing it with an authoritarian regime. But it did more: the regime moulded a state which incorporated capitalist developmentalism and authoritarianism with a technocratic logic to the organisation and operation of the state apparatus. The significance of this cannot be under-estimated.

When Sarit died in 1963, his deputies, General Thanom Kittikachorn and General Prapass Charusathiarana, continued his authoritarian rule for another decade. The 1960s saw the consolidation of anti-communism as the rationale for the maintenance of repressive policies. The spectre of communism was used to tarnish virtually all opponents, including those who called for a constitution and parliamentary forms. This was reinforced internationally by the Cold War, and especially by US intervention in Indochina and its use of bases in Thailand.

As the US's commitment to the region and Thailand declined, the military's control of the political sphere began to show some cracks, and a widened political space began to be created. There were demands for a more independent foreign policy and pressure for the promulgation of a constitution increased. After a decade of 'drafting', one was finally produced in 1968. However, the elections which followed, the first since 1957, were again marred by accusations of rigging, tarnishing the government's reputation. Thereafter followed a series of allegations of corruption in high places and campaigns for increased political representation. The military attempted to once again close political space by getting rid of a fractious parliament through a *coup* in 1971. But this was unsuccessful, as much of the increased political activism was outside parliament and increasingly involved students and academics, who led the campaign against the government and its regime. Increased repression failed, and in October 1973 a student-led rebellion brought hundreds of thousands onto Bangkok's streets; the regime Sarit had established was doomed.

The 1973–76 period of civilian rule was one of great political conflict and competition as rival political groups, interests and movements jockeyed to establish positions in a political environment where the military was clearly in disarray and unable to mould political developments. The political space created was as wide as it has ever been in Thailand (see Girling 1981a; Morell and Chai-Anan 1981). Part of the reason for this was that no government could fully establish itself, especially as the constitutional and parliamentary regime was not, and could not be, entrenched. The conflicts which developed became violent as competition between right and left intensified. This overtook the ability of government to control the extensive political space which had been established. In part, the failure of government to establish such control was due to the instability of the parliamentary regime which meant 'revolving door' government and uncontrolled and unbounded political space, and which led to the military *coup* of October 1976. This meant a reassertion of authoritarianism and anti-communism, albeit through a civilian government, which lasted a year.

From late 1977 to 1988 there was an evolution of a constitutional and parliamentary regime under various governments led by former military leaders. The period witnessed a deliberate attempt by the governments of General Kriangsak Chomanan and General Prem Tinsulanonda to loosen the authoritarianism of the 1976–77 period. This included an expansion of the role of parliament and political parties. Part of the reason for this expansion of political space was that the authoritarianism of the previous government had proven divisive, driving political opposition into the arms of the underground Communist Party which was mounting an increasingly effective guerrilla war. The electoral outcome in 1989 was the formation of the elected coalition government led by Chatichai Choonhavan, discussed above. Behind this there had been a development and consolidation of party politics. However, it soon became clear that the polity established under Prem was one which appealed to conservatives, as decision-making and policy were not entrusted to popularly elected politicians. These important tasks remained with an elite of civil and military bureaucrats and technocrats. Chatichai's civilian government rigorously challenged this conservative state.

Chatichai's government presided over mammoth economic growth, but could not withstand a conservative backlash. The military threw the government out in the 1991 *coup* which targeted parliament, a civilian-and MP-dominated cabinet, and associated political space. The state, existing behind the government and regime, and its basic elements, were not threatened by the military—bureaucratism and technocratism, law, and the national symbols of Nation, Religion and Monarchy were not challenged.

It may seem odd that Chatichai's government and its parliamentary regime was seen as challenging the state. After all, it appeared to embody the capitalist development process, its values and methods, which had been set in train by Sarit. While the *coup* did not attack capitalists or capitalist values, it

was evident to conservative groups that the parliamentary regime was not simply developing capitalism as an economic system, but was fostering societal forces which were moving the state towards a new logic whereby the capitalist state could include notions of political participation. The conservatives wanted—and installed—a government which was meant to keep the lid on these new social forces (*FEER* 21 March 1991). As noted above, there were amazing scenes as huge numbers opposed the military's constitutional plans.

This outline brings the chronology up to the period where the chapters in this collection begin their interpretations. Clearly, the above discussion indicates that the emergence of political space is not a recent phenomenon. The ebb and flow of this space has been the result of political struggles and the actions and reactions of governments.

Before concluding this introduction, I provide a brief discussion of the chapters comprising this collection.

THE CHAPTERS

As noted above, there are differences in theoretical approach between the authors of the chapters. However, all agree that the basic form of politics is undergoing continuing and rapid change in Thailand. The collection attempts to chart some of these changes by focusing on the important actors, groups and classes involved.

In Chapter 2, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker provide an analysis of the dramatic political transition taking place in Thailand. They argue that political power is the subject of contest between a number of socio-political forces, some from the old political and economic elite and others being relatively new forces, and map the contest for power in the 1990s. In explaining the significance of Thailand's capitalist revolution for political and economic power, Pasuk and Baker give attention to six predominant forces at work: mandarins, metropolitan business and technocrats, provincial business, peasants, salariat, and urban workers. For each of these forces they trace the social bases of their support, their emergence, the ideas or interests which draw them together, and the institutional forms they assume. An important theme they note is the division which appears to have emerged between rural and urban people. The contests described in this chapter are at once fascinating and an important background for the following chapter, and critical for the future of Thailand's political economy and the course of democratisation.

Chapter 3, by Chai-Anan Samudavanija, illustrates well the changes taking place. Arguing that Thailand's economy and society have long been 'open', he notes, however, that the civil and military bureaucracies have been and remain closed. The state has been centralised and activist, and the military and

bureaucracy, the groups that have wielded political power, continue to block efforts to expand participation and decentralise power. Chai-Anan argues, however, that this is a futile exercise on their part, for the supporters of the conservative state are being bypassed by the social forces thrown up by globalisation. His analysis of the ethnic dimension of capital and economic power and its role in political development is an important contribution; it is an aspect of political history which has not received the attention it has deserved in recent studies.

In Chapter 4, Kevin Hewison examines the monarchy, another important element in the conservative polity. He argues that while the monarchy is constitutional, the institution has been developed in a manner which allows it to regularly intervene in the political process, making the present King an 'activist monarch'. Hewison points out that this is not the usual view of the monarchy, but that part of the definition of a conservative polity has been the re-creation of a powerful—politically and symbolically—monarchy. A conservative polity would preserve and extend the power of the monarchy. He suggests that the conservatism of the present King, who has been on the throne for a remarkable 50 years, has been important in defining the role of the monarchy and the direction of political development. Hewison goes on to suggest that the problem for the institution is that its preferred polity is increasingly challenged by the emergence of civil society. Parliament, popular elections and constitutions have the potential to move power closer to the populace and away from the conservative ideals embodied in unrepresentative institutions like the military and bureaucracy.

In defining the Thai nation and the conservative polity, the monarchy has been a central element. Closely related to it is Buddhism, defined as the state religion and a pillar of national ideology. However, in Chapter 5, Peter Jackson argues that the centralised hierarchy of Buddhism and the state-defined and controlled monkhood is increasingly irrelevant. He shows that the 1990s have seen the rise of a diverse range of movements and cults at the periphery of the state-controlled monkhood and a shift in the pattern of relations between the religion and secular political authorities. Jackson argues that rapid socio-economic change has meant that official forms of Buddhism are less significant for the state and contemporary urban dwellers. The state's loosened grip and the declining authority of the monkhood have fostered new religious trends—from reformist rationalism to supernaturalism and syncretic rationalist animism. Jackson suggests that this does not mean declining religiosity, as there is clearly a heightened interest in new religious movements growing at the margins of state control. Buddhism is now serving a wide and conflicting spectrum of political interests. However, while the role of Buddhism is hotly contested, there remains a pervasive concern to ensure that it remains an integral component of the ideology and practice of power.

In each of the first four chapters there is agreement that the remarkable socio-economic transformations which have taken place have had a significant impact on politics and democratisation. In Chapter 6, while Paul Handley concurs that this has been the case, he challenges the more optimistic assessments which have argued that a new business class has given rise to a new relationship between business and government. He suggests that in seeking and exerting power, the 'new' elite is little different from the 'old' elite. While differing from its predecessors by origin, the new elite has displayed a primary concern for the economic benefits of power and for using these benefits to enhance their power. In demonstrating this, Handley provides fascinating information regarding the centrality of fortune hunting on the Securities Exchange of Thailand—its fluctuations and centrality to political and policy decision-making. He supports his analysis with case studies of the fate of state enterprise privatisations.

In Chapter 7, Duncan McCargo examines the role of political parties in the contemporary polity. There are relatively few studies of Thailand's political parties, perhaps because analysts have not felt them significant. When studied, most authors have suggested that parties are either opportunistic or display few of the qualities expected of a professional political party. McCargo takes issue with the these positions, arguing that the search for 'authentic' or 'real' parties is misplaced. He argues that Thailand's parties should be viewed as organisations in a constant state of change, neither real nor authentic, but actual, seeking power in complex political situations. Rather than seeking an ideal party, McCargo suggests that the study of actual parties is likely to be revealing, and he provides case studies of three—the Democrats, Palang Dharma and New Aspiration—which are used to illustrate the tensions and conflicts parties face. The significance of political parties in the 1990s has certainly been advanced as the electoral system has been developed.

Electoral politics and the electoral system is the focus of Chapter 8, by Surin Maisrikrod and McCargo. Commenting on the results of the November 1996 election, *The Economist* (23 November 1996) pointed out that 'Elections…often produce the best government money can buy, rather than a good one'. Surin and McCargo note that there have been major political changes since the mid-1970s, with elections gaining increased significance as mechanisms for managing political change. However, they observe that the mass of the population remains excluded from meaningful political participation through a number of pernicious influences, including money politics, as identified by *The Economist,* amounting to a corruption of the electoral system. They suggest that a far wider political space must be created to make the political system more inclusionary. That some elected politicians regard extra-parliamentary political activity as illegitimate is a cause for concern. Utilising categories similar to those developed in Chapter 2, Surin and McCargo conclude that electoral politics is likely to be more significant

and meaningful if it is viewed as part of a wider political process which is inclusionary rather than exclusionary.

Part of the reason for the exclusionary nature of Thailand's political process and the divide that has emerged between urban and rural voters is the continued dominance of 'old' forces in rural areas. In Chapter 9, Bruce Missingham studies two Northeastern schools—representing the central government at the local level—and their relationships with the community. He highlights some of the contradictions and conflicts in the state's approach to local participation through village schools as agencies of development. He shows that while participation has become a part of government rhetoric, teachers' relationships with villages and their approach to community development is shaped by bureaucratic practices and discourses which assign status and power to officials and devalue local culture and participation. Schools, like many parts of the bureaucracy, remain oriented to hierarchy, authority and centralised control. The state, in fact, attempts to retain control, and villagers remain excluded. While people in Bangkok may feel 'free' of these controls, rural people remain dominated, and this has an impact in many areas, including the electoral system.

In Chapter 10, Andrew Brown examines one of the most consistent of opposition groups, organised labour, and its political role. He begins by noting that the emphasis on the role of the middle classes in the May 1992 events has devalued the role that the working class has played. He suggests that this is one further example of a tendency to look for particular working-class activism and ignore the realities of its oppositional role. Brown suggests an alternative theoretical perspective on labour, and follows this with a brief analysis of the history of the role of the working class in expanding political space. In examining the recent history of working-class struggle, he notes that the state and capital has long cooperated to disorganise labour in an effort to prevent it developing into a significant political influence. Brown argues that labour relations have been a microcosm of wider struggles over participation, opposition to authoritarian rule and the development of representative forms of politics. The further development of capitalism is likely to see this continue as the working class expands.

If the working class has historically been a pillar of opposition to authoritarianism, environmentalism appears as a relatively recent phenomenon which has challenged the state and its officials. In Chapter 11, Philip Hirsch observes that while environmentalism has drawn in a wide range of social, economic and political actors, it has challenged the dominant patterns of development and vested interests. Environmentalism is an oppositional force, but one that has been inclusive. For Hirsch, environmentalism signifies a change in the way in which politics is carried out in Thailand, allowing coalitions of interests to assemble to challenge centralised and elite decision-making. The chapter argues that environmentalism indicates the growing role of the middle class as a political force, but also that the participation of

peripheral interests may be enhanced, albeit on highly unequal terms. Environmentalism is not simply an inevitable outcome of middle-class expansion, but a complex political force.

Hirsch's analysis of environmentalism is followed by a study of the development of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and especially those involved with environmental issues. In Chapter 12, Prudhisan Jumbala and Maneerat Mitprasat chart the rise of NGOs as an element of opposition to the authoritarianism of the centralised state and its bureaucracy. Following this, they examine two cases of NGO activism involving local environmental issues and the exercise of political and economic power. In both cases, villagers faced attacks on their livelihoods and ways of life, and were prepared to take defensive action with the assistance of NGOs. The support of NGOs was crucial in technical areas and in providing knowledge of the political system. The resulting alliances have been significant in steering villagers to institutional procedures, suggesting that NGOs are integrating villagers into the political system. Even so, NGOs remain critical of the existing system, desiring reforms to permit enhanced people's participation. The development of local organisations suggests a potential for the expansion of civil society in provincial areas.

Like many of the contributors, Prudhisan and Maneerat suggest the significance of having a national platform for political action. Important in this is the role of the media. In Chapter 13, Thitinan Pongsudhirak examines the political role of the media, with particular emphasis on the print media. Since the events of May 1992, the media's role has been dynamic and significant, making it worthy of attention in any analysis of Thailand's politics and the emergence of civil society. Thitinan traces the transformation of the media's role from being essentially a servant of the state to its present position as a political watchdog. Part of this transformation has been due to continuing economic change and technology, but it also reflects on expanded political space. That the press can take on an oppositional role augurs well for enhanced participation and democratisation. However, it is noted that media influence will not automatically support democratic development. Because of shifting business interests, large media companies may come to act in their own corporate interests rather than continuing their oppositional role.

A unique feature of political activism in Thailand has been the high-profile role played by members of the medical profession. In the development of NGOs after 1976, in the activism of the difficult 1991–92 period, and in organisations monitoring recent elections, medical professionals have been especially conspicuous. In Chapter 14, Scott Bamber examines the forces which brought the medical profession into political activism in the 1970s, the factors which enabled the medical profession to avoid severe repercussions resulting from their political involvement, and the link between this involvement and the political activism of the early 1990s. The picture

produced is suitably complex, but suggests that the high-profile role of these dedicated reformers is unlikely to be reduced in the near future.

In the final chapter, Parichart Chotiya presents a case study of the role of provincial business in political development. While business is often considered to be one of the pivotal forces in the process of democratisation, it is clear from this chapter that business cannot be considered an homogeneous group which can clearly articulate a political or policy position. Parichart indicates considerable tension between provincial business and the state, as well as with big Bangkok business. She shows that even the development of representative business associations at the provincial level has not been able to ease these tensions. In addition, opportunism is not an unknown political quality among business people. Again, the complexity of the democratisation process is demonstrated.

Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation offers an analysis of the current state of Thailand's politics. The military *coup* has long been the usual way to change governments, and authoritarian rule has been the norm. But this appears to be changing as democratisation takes hold. Since the bloody days of May 1992, Thais have gone to the polls to install governments with elected prime ministers on three occasions. It would appear that Thailand's politics is undergoing a fundamental transformation. This collection assesses this transformation. Recognising that social and political power is being defined more broadly, the chapters examine the challenges to the conservative state. While most of the contributors are optimistic about the continuing process of democratisation and the development of civil society, none are blind to the obstacles which thwart and undermine participation. The role of oppositions, both within parliament and defined more broadly, are clearly central to the development of political systems which no longer exclude the majority of the population.

2 Power in transition
Thailand in the 1990s

Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker*

Thailand is in a state of dramatic transition. Political power is being contested by a variety of socio-political forces, both old and new. This chapter sketches a map of this contest in the mid-1990s.

Thailand is moving from a pre-modern order to a society dominated by urban capitalism. Such transitions have been the focus of political economy analysis for the last two centuries. In broad outline, Thailand's transition follows the historical pattern—the growth of industrial capitalism, the transformation of work, and a new and unstable relationship between people and the environment. But several factors make the Thai case different from the classical political economy picture developed from Ricardo to Marx. Both the starting and ending points are different, and the pace is faster.

Thailand's pre-modern order differed from the feudal systems of Europe. In brief, the ruling class consisted not of landlords but mandarins—families—who drew their income and power from service to the royal state.

This new urban capitalism is different from the classical version of mid-nineteenth century Europe. First, the dominant figures of the new political economy are not individual capitalist entrepreneurs, but large and complex multinational companies and local firms which operate in the milieu such companies have created. Second, the new urban work-force is very different from the European proletariat, with the skilled and educated portion being more significant, while the blue-collar section has been repressed. Third, the pace of development of Thailand's capitalism is faster, with many developments which occurred as stages in the history of European capitalism occurring almost simultaneously.

The result is an old society of mandarin and peasant being overlaid by a new society of capital and labour. But, as in other transitions, the result is not a straightforward victory for the new 'superior' social order. The old order fights for survival. Parts of the old ruling class adapt to new circumstances, seeking alliances which bridge the gulf between old and new. As a result, industrial societies carry remnants of the old order they supersede, and Thailand is no exception. These processes of adaptation and alliance lend complexity to the current map of political conflict.

In this chapter we sketch six forces at work. We use the term 'forces' for several reasons. First, most of these forces do not represent anything as discrete as a class interest. Many are strategic alliances of uncertain duration, while others are class interests in the process of definition. Second, most of these forces do not have a clear institutional base; a key feature of Thailand's transitional state is the extraordinary fluidity of the institutional frame. Many of these forces are engaged in attempts to create new institutions to solidify their power, while others are trying to adapt or destroy existing institutions.[1] These six forces we label as: mandarins, metropolitan business and technocrats, provincial business, salariat, peasants, and urban workers. For each of these forces we trace the social bases in which they find their support; the histories of their emergence; the ideas or interests around which they come together; and the institutional forms they assume (see Pasuk and Baker 1995, 1996).

MANDARINS

Although democratic institutions have existed since the 1930s, until the 1970s Thailand was governed by civil and military officials who were only minimally inconvenienced by these institutions. The lobby to preserve bureaucratic power and independence remains one of the strongest forces on the political map.

The pre-modern (eighteenth century to early-twentieth century) ruling class consisted not of a landowning nobility, but of mandarin-bureaucrats, who derived their status, income and power from their position in the structure of government. While some families also established incomes from land and trade, their foundations lay in the revenues—official and unofficial—derived from state service. As much as Europe's landowning nobility, the great families in this mandarinate managed to establish hereditary rights over this source of income.

The mandarinate was much more than a collection of office-holders. The core consisted of families directly related to the monarchy. Other major families boasted genealogies of service stretching back into the Ayutthaya period (from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century), and could claim royal blood or royal marital ties (Wyatt 1994:98–130). Royal titles, clan signifiers and, later, prominent *nam sakun* (family names) were the marks of identification. These royal affiliations and a culture of service to the monarchy marked off the mandarinate from the rest of society.

The mandarinate was not a closed category. Indeed, one reason why mandarinates have prevailed over such long historical time has been their ability to induct new talent and new blood. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Thai mandarinate brought in many new recruits, especially from established and upwardly mobile Chinese-origin families (Suehiro 1989:72–9,

87–90). These recruits were socialised into the ruling class through the new systems of modern elite education and bureaucratic recruitment. Often they were knitted in more closely through marriage ties. Over later decades, the growing civil bureaucracy and the army acted as avenues to draw in further new talent. The new recruits gained acceptance by honouring the core ideologies and social conventions of the ruling class, and ultimately by contributing to its endurance.[2]

Internally, the mandarinate underwent major changes in the twentieth century, as a result of both external pressures and internal developments. The balance of power shifted between palace and army, and the Ministry of the Interior rose to a dominant position among ministries. The political turning points of 1932, 1946–47, 1957–58, and 1973–76 rearranged the balance between competing factions. But despite these changes, what is striking about this period is the mandarinate's success in retaining its power. The mandarinate was not disrupted by colonial rule which annihilated the ruling classes in other Asian countries and still had the monarchy as its ideological focus. It was strengthened through new technology and systems—by borrowing from colonial administrative techniques during the reforms under King Chulalongkorn and later by aid money and modern systems during the era of US assistance from the 1950s.

From the early twentieth century, this old ruling class came under increasing challenge from new social forces developing within the modern urban economy. One theme in the 1932 revolution was a demand to qualify mandarin rule with representative institutions. In the face of this challenge, the military emerged as the defenders of mandarin rule.

The military's defence against the new urban forces went through three stages. In the first, dating from the mid-1930s, the military concentrated on monopolising the prime ministership and key ministerial posts, and using force and repression to disperse all challenges. The prime ministership became a promotion point above the army command. The generals fought off challengers with military force and the repressive artillery of governmental power. They also articulated an ideology of mandarin rule which served as a rallying point for the mandarins themselves and as a propaganda tool for raising support in the wider society. According to this ideology, especially powerful after 1957, the mandarins derived their authority from the supreme power of the monarchy, rather than from the constitution or from any democratic conception of the nation. They held a trusteeship to care for the people, and especially for the peasantry, which represented the largest element in the society. They were justified in holding power because they were impartial, while representative leaders were, by definition, partial, and hence not justified to rule (Thak 1979: Chapter 6).

A second stage began in the 1970s, when social revolts forced a partial retreat. Students protested, peasants organised, workers struck, business people formed associations and political parties. The military leadership still

concentrated on controlling the prime ministership and the key ministries of the Interior, Finance and Defence, but had to release other ministries to elected politicians. The generals could no longer repress parliament so effectively as in the past, but they planned to manage it through constitutional controls, and especially through a large, military-packed Senate (see Chai-Anan, Kusuma and Suchit 1990). In addition, several military leaders and senior civilian officials entered the parliament and served as 'ballast' for government coalitions.

In this second stage, the military began to build bases of support in the wider society. They concentrated on the peasantry, labour and the urban lower middle class—social groups potentially opposed to the business people leading the assault on mandarin power. The army set up a network of propaganda organisations in the countryside. It sponsored and controlled trade union organisations, especially among the better-organised state enterprise workers, and the generals cultivated alliances with demagogic politicians, like Samak Sundaravej, who commanded support among Bangkok's lower middle class. Further, the military made the alleged corruption of elected politicians an issue in order to emphasise the partiality and non-legitimacy that elected representatives while stressing that officials were supposedly impartial and endowed with the right to rule.

The third stage began in the late 1980s. In 1988 the military lost control over the prime ministership. The crude attempt to restore military control through the 1991 *coup* provoked strong opposition which forced the military into an ignominious retreat in 1992. In this débâcle the ladder of success leading upwards from the army command to the prime minister's office was knocked away (see Chai-Anan, Kusuma and Suchit 1990).

Mandarin politics built new lines of defence. First, bureaucrats set out to hold the line against further inroads into bureaucratic prerogative. Senior officials opposed elected ministers' orders to transfer them out of key posts and to displace them from the directorships of state enterprise boards. They pressed for key ministerial posts—Finance, Defence and Foreign Affairs—to be held by officials or retired officials. Second, they supported moves for political reform which promised a clearer separation of the legislative and executive powers, hoping to limit elected representatives to the task of legislation. Third, they reiterated the core ideologies of mandarin rule—public officials were servants of the King, while the legitimacy of elected politicians was compromised by their personal interests.

In the 1990s, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh projected himself as the new leader of mandarin conservatism. As a military strategist in the early 1980s, Chavalit had contributed to the plans for building wider bases of social support for army rule. In the mid-1980s he rose to be army head just as the ladder of succession to the premiership was knocked away. He followed a trend for political soldiers to enter parliament, and in 1989 he formed the New Aspiration Party, with a core of other retired soldiers and officials. Through

the crisis of 1991–92, Chavalit and his party appeared to be aligned to the liberal, anti-military camp. But this was a temporary illusion created by military factionalism. Chavalit came from a different military faction to the coup-makers and opposed their strategy for restoring military influence (see Hewison 1993a). After the fall of the *coup* group, however, Chavalit gradually emerged as the focus for the defence of military and bureaucratic power.

Chavalit became Minister of the Interior in the 1992–95 Chuan government, Minister of Defence in the succeeding government led by Banharn Silpa-archa (1995–96) and Prime Minister from November 1996. From these vantage points, he has mounted defences against inroads into bureaucratic power and privilege. As Minister of the Interior, Chavalit sank several proposals for administrative decentralisation, including those to make provincial governors elected and to reduce the *ex officio* powers of village headmen. He was eventually thrown out of Chuan's coalition after scuppering a decentralisation scheme proposed by the cabinet of which he was a member. As Minister of Defence under Banharn he reshuffled the military hierarchy to secure his personal support base and to prevent a resurgence of the remnants of the 1991 *coup* clique. He publicly defended army interests, particularly defence spending projects, against attacks from other partners in the government coalition.

In sum, shorn of its military vanguard, mandarin politics still rallies around defence of the mandarin right to rule. In the short term, ex-soldiers and ex-bureaucrats in parliament play a Trojan Horse role in stemming the rising tide of representative politics. In the longer term, they hope for political reforms to provide a more secure defence of their conservatism. The core concern of mandarin conservatism is the protection of the bureaucrats' right to govern (see Hewison 1993a). This idea still commands widespread support in the military and in parts of the civilian bureaucracy, especially the Ministry of the Interior. It has also solicited support among certain sections of business, among the urban lower middle class, and in the provinces.

METROPOLITAN BUSINESS PEOPLE AND TECHNOCRATS

The second force is rooted in the big business corporations of the capital. In recent years this element of business has moved towards an alliance with those senior technocrats of the mandarinate responsible for economic management. This small group derives its influence from the command of money and position. They are responsible for making and implementing economic and other policies. Metropolitan business has a well-organised lobby and acts as an almost invisible force in the political background. Their alliance with the economic technocrats has emerged around a shared proposition about the economy, its management and its future: that Thailand will develop into a modern, wealthy society through the combined rationality of efficient

technocratic management and efficient business development. The alliance is relatively new, having coalesced over the past ten years in response to the economic problems and opportunities thrown up by the boom and in reaction to the threat posed by a provincial takeover of parliament and cabinet (see the next section).

Bangkok business grew rapidly after the Second World War. Its political assertiveness developed in parallel. At first, business leaders worked with the generals as politically passive partners, but in the 1970s they took a more active role. After the anti-military revolt of 1973, they participated prominently in the development of parliamentary government. Business people formed a majority in the constitutional convention of 1974 and in the parliament and cabinet formed in 1975. Leading figures from Bangkok business groups became office-holders in political parties, while corporate interests gave the parties financial support (see Sungsidh and Pasuk 1996).

In 1975–76 and again in 1979–88, this parliamentary bridgehead gave metropolitan business a strong influence over economic policy-making. Throughout this period, the top corporations received more active governmental help than at any time before or after. They were protected from outside competition by rising levels of tariffs and other trade barriers. They were helped by rules which forced non-US companies into joint ventures with local firms. They were defended against local competition by formal and informal market policing. By 1981, the business leaders hoped to develop this government-business alignment further, on the model of Korea or Japan. They lobbied to institutionalise the co-operation between government and business along the lines of the Japanese *keidanren,* to reorganise the policy-making machinery along the lines of Japan's MITI or Korea's EPB, and to reorient policy-making to export-oriented manufacture.

This strategy failed. The bureaucracy was not yet prepared to fall into a deep embrace with business, and business settled for a semi-formal structure (the Joint Public Private Consultative Committee or JPPCC) which provided a limited and official channel for business to lobby the economic ministers and technocrats over economic policies. Through this structure, business leaders were able to guide the transition to export-oriented industrialisation (Anek 1992). But they did not achieve the control over economic policy-making, which had seemed possible in 1981. Even so, throughout this period metropolitan business developed organisational strength. The three peak business associations for industry, banking and commerce became powerful lobbies, and business leaders began to work closely with influential technocrats.

The technocracy had developed with the institutions of modern economic management—the Bank of Thailand, founded in the early 1940s, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and other bodies, created in the early 1960s. For some years the technocrats performed only as technicians and backroom experts, but during the 1970s, their role began to change.

The US withdrawal from the region after 1975 reduced the role of foreign experts and reduced the weight of American tutelage over technocratic institutions. A new generation of technocrats emerged. Trained overseas, mostly in the US and Japan, they took a wider perspective on the economy and its potential. Many had become interested in the Japanese 'miracle', and its contemporary replication in Korea and Taiwan. They helped to create a new arena of open debate over economic strategy and policy-making. While some of these technocrats came from traditional bureaucratic families, many came from the second- and third-generation Chinese immigrant families which were also the source of the major business groups. These future technocrats and the scions of the great business families had often progressed side by side through Bangkok's elite schools and American universities. These links were sometimes strengthened through marriage ties (see Hewison 1989:210–13). The tumult of 1973–76 pulled down many of the barriers which had separated technocrats from politics. For example, Dr Puey Ungphakorn, a patron and role model for many of the new technocrats, became a prominent political figure. He had served as the head of the Bank of Thailand, the acknowledged chief post of the technocracy, and during the 1973–76 upsurge he was rector of Thammasat University, the centre of student politics. He became an advocate of liberal, modernising reforms, but was forced into exile during the 1976 military *coup* (see Puey 1977).

The dramatic economic transition of the 1980s strengthened the links between technocrats and metropolitan business. The early part of the decade saw debate over economic strategy, in which new-generation technocrats and business leaders figured as advocates for change towards the 'Asian Tiger' model. The path from the recession of 1983–84, through the economic take-off of the mid-1980s and the bubble economy of 1988–90, greatly boosted the role of the technocrats, whose skills were needed to manage startling changes in economic pace and direction. In the early part of this process, the NESDB was elevated into a more prominent role in making economic policy and co-ordinating its implementation. After 1988, this role diminished and the Bank of Thailand took the lead in changing macroeconomic policy and accelerating financial liberalisation. While business people played little direct role in this policy-making, they cheered on technocrats whose views aligned with their own and whose skills kept the boom on course. This period also saw an increased migration between the technocracy and metropolitan business. Big firms lured away technocrats with packages worth many multiples of an official salary. The firms hired technocrats partly because they simply needed skilled people to handle the sudden surge in business activity, but partly also to strengthen their linkages into government (see Sakkarin 1995).

This *rapprochement* of technocrats and businessmen tightened when their growing influence over policy-making was checked. In 1988 Chatichai appointed a cabinet dominated by provincial business people. This cabinet diminished some of the institutions through which technocrats and

metropolitan businessmen had acquired greater influence over economic policy. The JPPCC was downgraded and the NESDB sidelined (*Asian Wall Street Journal* 13 July 1992). While business people and technocrats retained a role in policy-making, their growing influence and growing independence was brought to an abrupt end. Both groups found themselves locked in conflicts with provincial politicians in cabinet. Both realised that the electoral system would inevitably deliver a parliament with a heavy provincial bias.[3]

When Chatichai was thrown out in a military *coup,* the business-technocratic alliance regained its ground, with the military installing a cabinet headed by Anand Panyarachun, a key figure in the alliance. In his early career, Anand had been a Foreign Ministry official, and moved easily among technocrats. In 1979 he quit government service and moved to the chairmanship of a major textiles conglomerate. Throughout the 1980s, he took a prominent part in business associations, and became the political ambassador of metropolitan business. Installed in the premiership, he formed a cabinet of senior technocrats with a sprinkling of businessmen. Unhampered by parliament, this cabinet enacted a swathe of reforms designed to complete the transition to an economy based on export-oriented industrialisation.

This short spell of government demonstrated what the alliance between technocrat and metropolitan business could achieve through access to cabinet power. After the restoration of parliament in 1992, there were calls for Anand to enter party politics (which he refused), and some talk of founding a new business party. Some metropolitan business figures and technocrats joined the Democrat and Palang Dharma Parties, but did not become dominant influences.

Through the course of the Chuan government (1992–95), provincial politicians re-established their dominance over parliament and cabinet. With the prospect of new elections in 1995, Amnuay Viravan, a veteran of Anand's cabinet, founded a new party which aimed to revive the technocrat-business influence of the Anand era. Even more than Anand, Amnuay represented the two sides of the alliance. He began his career in government service and worked in some of the key technocratic institutions before moving to the private sector and holding positions in two of the most prominent Bangkok corporate groups (Saha Union and Bangkok Bank). His new Nam Thai Party attracted members from among retired technocrats, and drew finance and support from metropolitan business. However, the party failed in the face of electoral arithmetic. Few prominent figures in Bangkok business dared to risk face and career in an electoral contest. While it succeeded in attracting younger-generation businessmen in some Northeastern urban centres, its candidate list at the 1995 polls was mediocre. The party won only 18 seats, but not one in the capital where it had expected to do well. The party was drawn into the coalition government led by Banharn, but in a weak position. By 1996 the party was defunct, but Amnuay had joined Chavalit's government

In sum, senior technocrat and metropolitan business people have come together on the issue of rational management of the modern, globalising economy. For the technocrats, this issue represents the realisation of their professional purpose. For business, it is a strategy for sustaining the economy. They come together, also, in common opposition to what they perceive as the main threat against rational management—provincial business politicians, who are seen as ready to sacrifice long-term growth and stability to allow the provinces to catch up with the city, or just to engineer personal or sectional gain.

The alliance is sceptical of parliamentary democracy. Many technocrats feel that parliamentary squabbling gets in the way of rational management. Metropolitan businessmen initially took the lead in promoting parliament in the 1970s, but have grown increasingly sceptical as they have lost a controlling grip to provincial business people and politicians. By 1991, the alliance was prepared to work under the military after the *coup*. But the period proved to be a learning experience. Anand fell into fierce conflict with the generals who had installed him. The business associations came out in June 1992 to oppose any attempt to sustain military power at the expense of parliamentary democracy.

The alliance is not overtly anti-democratic, if only because this would align it with the old military-bureaucratic forces. Its strategy is not to overthrow parliament, but to quarantine economic policy-making from parliamentary influence. This has to be done by strengthening the core institutions of economic management (especially the Bank of Thailand and the Ministry of Finance) and ensuring they are headed by people who can resist political pressure. In 1992, the alliance welcomed the appointment as Minister of Finance Tarrin Nimmanhaeminda, a leading banker who commanded respect among both business and technocracy. In 1995 they reacted sharply against Tarrin's successor, Surakiart Sathirathai, ostensibly because he was 'not qualified', but more because he was not independent of the Chart Thai provincial politicians who appointed him.

PROVINCIAL BUSINESS

The third force is based in provincial business, which has established a commanding position in parliament and cabinet. Provincial business people became increasingly rich and powerful during the 1980s. They drew their income from four main areas.

First, from the cash crop expansion in which local merchants played a critical and profitable linking role between the agribusiness company and the cultivator. They leased tractors, sold farming inputs, provided loans, handled crop marketing. Second, from investing in trading and service businesses buoyed up by local demand. These included highly profitable

local monopolies such as distribution for local whisky, agencies for the sale of pick-ups and motorcycles, and later, hotels, large retail developments and speculation in land. Third, from government contracting for construction work and the supply of materials. Budgets for building roads, water works, dams and public buildings in the provinces increased steeply from 1960. The potential profits were large, particularly through collusion with local officials (see Ockey 1991). Fourth, from an array of semi-legal and illegal businesses including logging, smuggling, gambling, gun-running and drug-trading. While the numbers of provincial businessmen who indulged in these activities may have been few, the large profits ensured that these few were often the richest and most prominent. The term *chao pho',* which originally referred to a local 'spirit lord' with extraordinary power, came into popular usage to describe these figures (see Ockey 1991; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1992; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994: Chapter 3).

By the 1980s, in province after province, a single individual or family grew to spectacular prominence. They launched into businesses which covered all or most of the four areas noted above. Several factors seem to have contributed to this pattern of local monopoly. First, often the dominance belonged to an extensive family which generated the management resources and structure to handle these sprawling business empires. In other cases a core individual was successful at recruiting a cadre of loyal lieutenants. Second, the dominant group built effective protection systems—especially relationships with important local officials and gangs of enforcers. Third, the dominant group often had a stranglehold on the public contracting and illegal businesses which generated the cash-flow for rapid expansion. The close links with officials they developed in these business activities drew them into the political milieu.

Their wealth and business networks proved highly effective in electoral politics. These magnates were well-placed to manage the large multimember parliamentary constituencies centred on the provincial capitals where they had their business bases. By distributing their patronage around the locality, mobilising their business networks for canvassing, handing out money during elections and promising to bring central government funds into the province they dominated the local electorates. Since provincial constituencies supplied almost 90 per cent of seats, they also dominated the parliament, and eventually the cabinet.

In three major parties (Chart Thai, Social Action, Democrat) the Bangkok-based leaders who organised them in the mid-1970s were shouldered aside by the provincial influx in the mid- and late 1980s. Of these three parties, Chart Thai emerged as the most successful at representing provincial interests. Its military-business faction proved adept at accommodating the provincial influx, which tore other parties apart in the mid-1980s. As a result, Chart Thai emerged as the largest single party at the 1988 election. As the long-standing military-backed premier, General Prem

Tinsulanonda, was pushed to retire, Chart Thai emerged to lead the new coalition government.

In 1991, the Chart Thai was thrown out by the military *coup*. At the 1992 elections it had reorganised and just narrowly failed to be returned as the largest party. Banharn Silpa-archa, the very model of a provincial politician, now pushed his way past the controlling Soi Ratchakru group to become leader. In July 1995, he gathered provincial support behind Chart Thai to become prime minister, but was unable to control his coalition and, amid accusations of corruption and ineptitude, the parliament was dissolved for another election in November 1996.

Chart Thai stood for four principles which appealed to provincial magnates. They first defined politics as the pursuit of business by other means. Many magnates had entered local politics through district and municipal councils because of the access this provided to public works contracting. Many had hobnobbed with governors, local army heads, and provincial police chiefs to gain protection for more ambitious business undertakings. With elevation to the national parliament, the magnates took these strategies to a higher level. The 1988–91 ministry became known as the 'buffet cabinet' because of the scramble to control rents and patronage flows accessible to ministers and MPs. In the run-up to the 1995 election, the press recalled that Chart Thai leader Banharn, who had made his fortune through public works contracting, had once let slip that: 'For a politician, being in opposition is like starving yourself to death'. Chart Thai came to stand for access to rents, patronage, protection and business opportunities on a large scale.

Second, Chart Thai stood for the expansion of the power of parliament. As the increasingly dominant element in parliament and cabinet, provincial leaders spearheaded efforts to increase the power and status of the legislature at the expense of the bureaucracy. During the Chart Thai government of 1988–91, ministers and MPs fought a host of demarcation battles against the bureaucracy—over the budget, control of economic policy-making, the rules for promoting and stationing senior officials, the appointment of state enterprise boards and the award of public contracts. Similar disputes re-emerged during the period of the second Chart Thai-led coalition in 1995–96.

Third, Chart Thai stood for a conservative attitude towards social and political change. In the ideologically heated atmosphere of the mid-1970s, a Chart Thai leader had contested elections on the slogan 'Right Kill Left' (see Morell and Chai-Anan 1981). Against the background of political assassinations of the time, this slogan was not meant to be read too metaphorically. Through the 1980s, such divisive propaganda was suppressed, but as the debates over political development became more complex in the 1990s, the fundamental conservatism of the provincial magnates who dominated Chart Thai again became apparent. They opposed any constitutional and administrative change that would widen political participation, change electoral methods or institute more public controls over

ministers and politicians.[4] They showed no enthusiasm for proposals on administrative decentralisation, particularly if they threatened the powers of local officials who they were able to manipulate, and they opposed the liberalisation of the media. In 1988, the Chart Thai government removed an old military censorship law but then immediately proposed alternative press controls. And, in 1995, the Banharn government suppressed radio programmes, axed the television talk show *'Mo'ng tang mum'* ('Different perspectives') because it was 'uncontrollable', and harassed newspapers with libel suits (Thongbai 1996).

The fourth core principle of provincial magnate politics was the promotion of business-led provincial growth, at the expense of Bangkok business, if necessary. From the mid-1980s, provincial leaders paid special attention to the Budget Scrutiny Committee, where debates over the major allocation of the budget were held and where opportunities were available to divert funds to provincial uses. Throughout the late 1980s, provincial leaders fought with the military to shift funds from military to development uses. In the early 1990s, they supported schemes to promote growth regions which overlapped the borders with neighbouring countries. At the 1995 election, Chart Thai highlighted its platform of building six-lane highways throughout the nation as a symbol of its commitment to spur economic growth in the provinces.

SALARIAT

Export-oriented and capital-intensive industrialisation created a high demand for skilled labour. Between the 1960s and the late 1980s, the numbers in white-collar jobs grew from around half a million to around 4.5 million. Over these three decades, Thailand acquired a new, white-collar, working class (see Sungsidh and Pasuk 1993). Often dubbed 'middle class', the description 'white-collar working class' is clearer. The phrase 'middle class' trails baggage from nineteenth-century Europe, where it overlapped with 'bourgeoisie', those owning the means of production. Salarymen and women are basically workers, but their position in the industrial economy is complex. The skills and education they possess are a form of capital. They occupy a spectrum which runs from managerial employees at one end, through self-employed professionals in the middle, to small businesses and sub-contractors at the other.

Of course, this new class is a child of growing urban capitalism, and for the most part a dutiful child, too. In the urban boom, members of this new class were richly rewarded with incomes, facilities, consumer goods and the like. Naturally, they identify their well-being with the continued success of the urban economy, but their distance from business ownership gives them a measure of independence. Besides, their outlook has been shaped not simply by their relationship to the economy but by their specific historical experience. They are children of the new, globalising world. They grew up in

the period of American influence and matured in the age of global information—CNN, MTV, satellite news and the internet. They want to see Thailand as a modern nation—not just prosperous, but sophisticated and politically mature.

More specifically, the emergence of this new class was shaped by the experience of 1973–76 and its aftermath. The students who protested in the 1970s were the vanguard of this new class. They were the first to be recruited into higher education in large numbers from the more modest ranks of society, and to be channelled towards something other than a bureaucratic career. They were caught up in the enthusiasm of the worldwide student protest movement of the 1970s and played a historical role in undermining military dictatorship. In the unprecedented period of intellectual liberalism after the 1973 revolt, they studied Marxism, debated the future of Thailand, helped organise movements of peasants and workers, and exerted pressure through street demonstrations. After the bloody repression of 1976, thousands fled to join the communist rebels in the remote forests (see Morell and Chai-Anan 1981).

Within five years, most had returned under a general amnesty, disillusioned with the idea of a rural-based revolution. Many of this generation were then swept up in the booming urban economy, with some entering business and returning to politics after making a substantial fortune. Several continued as writers, journalists, lecturers—roles through which they could pass on some of the radical spirit to a later generation. Many others lived through this era at a lower intensity, but still gained a political education from the experience.

Several attempts to launch into parliamentary politics foundered on the problem that this new class is too small, isolated and fragile to mount a serious electoral challenge. Several small left and liberal parties ran in the mid-1970s elections, but all were annihilated. An attempt to create the left-leaning New Force Party in the early 1980s came to nothing. Indeed, after the 1991–92 crisis, renewed enthusiasm for electoral politics evaporated in the few weeks between the political demonstrations and the polls. But if the salariat has not been able to make its mark inside parliament, it has found the ability to dominate political debate outside. Through the 1980s, the salariat was the foundation for a new political milieu *no'k rabop* (outside the system)—through the press, the public platform, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Bangkok has a long tradition of an active political press. The urban growth of the 1980s created the material base for its expansion, and the support of the salariat moulded a role of political activism. Some existing newspapers became gradually more politically daring (see Thitinan's Chapter 13 in this volume). The salariat readership supported a new range of business newspapers and political periodicals which took a more activist stand. The groups which emerged around *Phuchatkan (Manager)* and the *Nation* became the most prominent. During the Chatichai regime, the press lobbied successfully for cancellation of press laws left over from the military period,

and then fended off an attempt by cabinet ministers to impose new controls. Through the crisis of 1991–92, when parliament ceased to exist, the press adopted the role of political opposition. During the May 1992 incident, most papers resisted military attempts to censor coverage.[5] Strengthened by this experience, the press has become stronger and more sophisticated.

Besides the press, the other main outlet of salariat politics *no'k rabop* are non-governmental organisations. The first independent NGOs were formed during the tumult of the mid-1970s, but were forced into retreat in the second half of the decade, to re-emerge in the early 1980s. They attracted many graduates of 1970s radicalism, who sought a means to pursue their political and social goals without inviting the polarisation and violence of 1976. Several NGOs worked in rural development, helping to create an alternative model which strengthened the village community rather than subjecting it to greater urban domination (see Seri 1986). Some provided social goods such as education, legal help and health care to those who were excluded from government schemes. Others worked to extend civic rights through constitutional changes, legal and judicial reform, and liberalisation of the media.

During the 1980s, NGOs evolved into a recognisable movement. While the organisations were varied and often disputative, together they came to represent a well-defined set of social and political ideologies. They opposed the excessive centralisation of the state and the uncontrolled thrust of urban-based economic growth. They wanted a fairer society, better access to government, a clearer definition of human rights and more controls on the abuse of power.

The press and NGOs threw up a cadre of 'public intellectuals' who became the mouthpieces for these ideas. They appeared often on public platforms, wrote regular columns in the press and journals, spoke on television and radio, and published books and pamphlets. Many of the most prominent were well-known graduates of the 1973–76 era. Others included medics, university professors, campaigning lawyers and talented journalists.

Thus, while most of the salariat was politically passive for most of the time, a vanguard helped to create a network of organisations and a climate of debate which stood apart from the political mainstream. When the military took power by *coup* in 1991 and then prepared to re-institutionalise military rule under a new constitution and military premier, the press and NGO networks forged a counter-movement which eventually drew 500,000 people onto the streets (Suthy 1995).

In the aftermath of the 1991–92 crisis, the role of the press expanded further. Newspapers hosted debate on political reform; publicised the abuses of power which had previously seemed part of parliamentary privilege; corralled politicians with hopelessly murky pasts; investigated scandals which ministers attempted to bury. The Chuan government (1992–95) was brought down after a campaign by *Thai rat* to expose abuses of a land distribution

scheme in Phuket. Within six months, the successor Banharn government was also put on the defensive by press allegations of corruption on arms deals, stock manipulation and land speculation.

In sum, the core of salariat politics are the radical ideas of the 1970s mellowed by the experience of the subsequent two decades. They support the drive for economic growth, but they want growth to bring a society marked by openness, transparency, fairness, rights and participation. Excluded from the formal politics of parliament, they focus on controlling the agenda of public political debate.

PEASANTS

The politics of the peasantry occupies yet another form of political space. The force of peasant politics derives from the sheer weight of their numbers and from growing resentment at the urban monopolisation of wealth and resources. But both the old rulers and the new forces of the city have conspired to exclude the peasantry from formal political representation. Hence peasant politics are the politics of agitation.

Thailand's century of agrarian expansion created a large peasantry. The first phases of industrialisation converted only a minor percentage into urban-dwellers. In the mid-1990s, some 30 million people, around 60 per cent of total population, still live in the villages.

The usual difficulties experienced by peasantries in converting their numbers into political influence have been exaggerated in Thailand by two other factors. First, by the 1990s, the peasantry has become very disparate. At one end of the spectrum, peasants have been converted into moderately wealthy, export-oriented, industrial farmers. At the other, many still practise a near-subsistence production regime in the forest fringe. Second, for decades the state has taken care to dissipate any sign of peasant political organisation. While bankers, industrialists and traders have well-recognised lobby associations, and even urban labour has federations, the peasantry has not been permitted equivalent representation.

Since the early 1980s, when the end of the communist insurgency relaxed the military's suppression of all signs of rural political expression, there has been a steady rise of peasant politics. This has been shaped by two processes, each related to the rise of the urban economy. First, the booming urban economy sucks in labour from the villages, returning it home equipped with new knowledge and ideas. Much of this labour migrates temporarily to the city for periods ranging from a few months to a few years. Migrants choose to return to the villages for many reasons—because life in the city is tough, because it offers low wages and poor long-term prospects, because firms favour younger workers and practise high turnover, because the village still offers better long-term security. Yet the experience of the city serves as a

powerful education, revealing the widening income gap and the city's growing arrogance. It often equips the migrant with a political training in urban protest or trade union organisation.

Second, the booming urban economy's impact on rural resources has created movements of defence. In the early 1980s, they opposed dams which displaced villagers and destroyed forests to provide the city with hydro-electricity (see Prudhisan and Maneerat's Chapter 12 in this volume). From the mid-1980s, another wave of conflicts arose over access to land in the forest fringe. Peasant colonists fought against plantation companies for control of land the government defined as 'forest' long after the trees had disappeared. From the early 1990s, another range of disputes has arisen over pollution and waste disposal. As industrialisation accelerates, factory sites have spread out from the Bangkok region, generating bulky and dangerous wastes, or polluting the local environment.

Most of these resource conflicts have been localised. But the involvement of environmental groups, campaigning journalists and rural NGOs elevate their significance beyond the locality (see Rigg 1995; Hirsch 1993). In the early 1980s, the successful campaign against the Nam Choan dam, which would destroy a large part of one of the largest remaining forest regions in mainland Southeast Asia, first forged this alliance between local resource-defence and a broader environmentalism. The alliance continued through a series of subsequent dam protests, and in the early 1990s began to exert pressure over waste and pollution.

Local protesters have evolved guerilla-style tactics of protest. For many years, rural protesters acted by bringing their grievances to the focus of power in Bangkok. Local groups travelled to Bangkok, camped outside the parliament and attracted the attention of the local media. In the early 1990s, the protests against the *khor jor kor* land resettlement scheme elevated this technique to a higher level. The scheme was devised by the military to end the struggle over land in the forest fringe by resettling millions of peasant farmers. NGOs brought the scattered protests against the scheme together into a single meeting which resolved to march on Bangkok. The march set out along the Mitrapharp highway, the road with which US aid had first opened up the rural Northeast for concerted urban exploitation from the late 1950s, and which had high symbolic value as the artery connecting centre and periphery. The march also drew on some powerful protest theatre. The column was headed by a phalanx of village grandmothers (symbols of vulnerability) carrying pictures of the King and Queen (symbols of loyalty and a denial of 'communist' intentions), followed by groups playing the *khaen* (the musical symbol of the northeast) and dancing in the style of a northeast festival. As the march approached the escarpment marking the frontier between centre and periphery, the government despatched a junior minister to meet the marchers and negotiate a compromise which led to the abandonment of the resettlement

scheme (see Rural Development Institute 1992; Chai-Anan and Kusuma 1992).

Over the next three years, northeastern farmers' groups repeated the strategy of the Mitrapharp march three times in order to demand government action on a variety of grievances, including land settlement problems, pollution, crop price levels and debt. In 1995, Rayong farmers briefly blocked the Bangkok-Pattaya-Eastern Seaboard road to protest against plans for a waste treatment plant. This protest attracted attention by disrupting the main arteries of industry and tourism, the keys to the urban economy.

In sum, peasants have been excluded from the formal political arena, resulting in the assertion that peasant politics operates by agitation. From the early 1980s peasants reacted against the city's intrusion on rural resources of land, forests and water. NGOs helped to organise peasant protests, to forge a link with environmentalism and to help articulate an ideology of peasant defence based on the precept that the rural community and economy have a right to survive. This ideology challenged the legitimacy of the 'development theory' which lay behind urban intrusions such as hydroelectric dams, eucalyptus plantations and polluting factories. In the mid-1990s, the protests also began to challenge the underlying strategy of economic liberalisation. Rural groups demonstrated against a regional meeting on trade liberalisation on the grounds that economic globalisation increased the imbalance of wealth and power between the city and countryside.

URBAN WORKERS

Over the past decade, industrial labour has achieved a much larger role in the population and in the economy. But it still exerts a limited influence on politics. In the decade after 1985, the number of industrial workers doubled to around three million. About half of these are distributed across thousands of small enterprises, with the other half grouped in some 4,500 establishments with over 100 workers apiece. Roughly a quarter of a million workers are members of a union (*Yearbook of Labour Statistics* various issues).

Over a long period, Thailand's rulers have become skilled at undercutting the political potential of labour through two main strategies (see Hewison and Brown 1994). First, they ensured there was a large over-supply. From the early nineteenth century, this was achieved by importing Chinese labour. In the immediate post-1945 period the threat of importing revolutionary Chinese politics made this dangerous, and the demographic boom in the countryside made it unnecessary (see Chai-Anan's Chapter 3 in this volume). For the next three decades, the countryside supplied the reserve army of labour. In the 1980s, the demographic bulge had passed and the economic boom accelerated demand beyond the capacity of this source of supply. Government turned a blind eye to the illegal import of labour from

neighbouring countries, and by the mid-1990s it was estimated that there were one million illegal immigrant workers, the largest proportion coming from Burma.[6]

Second, since the 1940s, government has been skilled at suppressing labour politics. It practised divide and rule to undercut central labour federations; it used legislation to ban unions from political involvement; it deployed force against any sign of labour militancy; and it encouraged other groups (the middle class and the peasantry) to believe that worker politics were a threat to stability and economic development. This repressive atmosphere channelled union leaders into 'labourist' strategies—seeking reforms in wages and working conditions without broader political implications (see Sungsidh and Kanchada 1994).

Most labour leaders accept the basic framework of economy and government, but seek more influence and greater rewards. They believe that the trend of externally oriented growth offers them the best chance of raising levels of remuneration and social security up to international levels. They also believe that representative democracy offers them the best chance to exert political influence and seek the reforms necessary for better access to power.

Rapid industrialisation has increased reliance on the industrial labour force, but the history of repression ensures that this has not been reflected in greater political torque. Yet, by the mid-1990s, labour politics have begun to swell beneath an apparently placid surface. Three issues serve as the focus of growing labour discontent. The first is workplace health and safety. Rapid and poorly controlled industrialisation has led to a high level of accidents and large numbers of workplaces with unhealthy and dangerous conditions. The second is the ban on state enterprise unions. Public sector workers have long been the best organised and most militant. In the early stages of the industrial boom, they championed the cause of labour as a whole, but the 1991 *coup* leaders banned unions and industrial action in the public sector. The third issue is immigrant workers. In the mid-1990s, labour leaders began to agitate against the import of labour, seeing it as depressing wage levels.

Organised labour feels it has been poorly rewarded for its role in the long economic boom. These three issues provide a focus for resentment. They also gain support from other social groups in ways that wage demands and political campaigns do not. Currently labour is a muted political force, but its potential impact remains large.

CONCLUSION

Thailand's old political economy survived relatively intact up to the mid-twentieth century. Its two major classes—peasants and mandarin

bureaucrats—remain important in the political economy. The peasantry commands the sheer weight of numbers to ensure it must be taken seriously. The mandarin bureaucracy is deeply embedded in the institutional frame of the state and is entrenched in the political culture through a long period of ideological dissemination. Bureaucratic power is still defended by many state servants and others who have bought into its paternalistic ideology.

Since the Second World War, this old society has been overlaid by a new society of industrialisation. But while the basic units of this new society are capital and labour—urban business and workers—the nature of industrial capitalism at the end of the twentieth century introduces some important divergences from the classical model. First, labour is more differentiated, and the large white-collar segment plays a prominent role. Industry, wherever it is located, generates a large white-collar work-force whose emergence, aspirations and self-expression represent a significant political force. By contrast, the more traditional blue-collar work-force currently has more limited political weight, largely due to accumulated government skill in managing it. Second, capital is also highly differentiated and internally divided. Through the sheer pace of urban development, different types of capital come to exist in the same era. The new provincial barons belong to a phase of crude primary accumulation. The Bangkok conglomerates have acquired the sophistication of three to four decades of outward-oriented growth, with some moving beyond Thailand into the global economy.

A feature of this transitional period is that each of the main forces in the political environment occupies a different kind of political space:

- the residual power of the mandarin bureaucrat is entrenched in the government framework—particularly in the military and the Ministry of the Interior;
- the alliance of metropolitan business and technocrats exercises its influence through a combination of business wealth and technocratic persuasion, institutionalised through lobby associations;
- provincial business has installed itself in the new representative institutions, from cabinet to parliament and down to local government bodies;
- the vanguard of the salariat strives to define an arena of open political debate 'outside the system', in the press, on the platform and occasionally on the streets;
- the peasantry, excluded from political access, is developing ways to exert its numerical power through modern forms of agitation which exploit the media and prey on the vulnerable arteries of the urban economy;
- urban workers are also excluded from formal politics and are seeking access through agitation, negotiation and strategic alliances.

This division of political space ensures that much political conflict surfaces as demarcation disputes rather than open confrontations either in debate or in institutional forms. MPs and bureaucrats fight over the demarcation of their separate spheres in house committees and in wrangles over official appointments. Ministers and business leaders spar over the technocracy's economic policy-making role, the appointments to key technocrat posts and the role of technocratic institutions in supervising the budget. Politicians and editors clash over the power of the press. Rural protests dispute the allocation of power between central authorities and local community. Military leaders and unionists dispute the right of labour organisations to exist. Above all, the call for 'political reform' demands a rethinking of the political structure and the roles of the constituent parts.

Within this complex environment, there are two axes which define the ideological differences between the various forces. The first concerns the nature of government, and runs from bureaucratic paternalism at one end to various definitions of democracy at the other:

- the mandarinate clings to a model of paternalistic rule and is involved in a rearguard action to limit the growing significance of representative institutions;
- metropolitan business people and technocrats find old-style paternalism restrictive.

At the same time they are moving to the right, away from their old enthusiasm for representative institutions as these become more difficult for business and the technocrats to manage:

- the provincial business interest is entrenched in representative institutions and is devoted to increasing their importance;
- the salariat's vanguard in the press and NGOs seeks a broadening of representative institutions beyond their current business monopoly;
- organised labour supports the idea of parliament, but also favours political reforms which would give labour a presence there;
- rural protests articulate the ideal of a 'direct democracy' which would allow more community self-rule without the compromises of political representation.

The second axis plots attitudes to the trend of economic change, and runs from support for liberalised, outward-oriented growth at one end, to a demand for more social restraints at the other:

- the first end is anchored by metropolitan business and technocrats who believe high rates of growth can best be generated by integrating with the globalised economy;

- provincial business largely agrees with this strategy, with a proviso for evening out the roles of centre and provinces;
- organised labour supports the growth of the modern urban economy but wants a fairer share of the benefits;
- the salariat also has material interests closely tied with business growth, but these interests are balanced against the salariat's concerns over issues of the environment, equity, life quality and sustainability—achieving these ends, many leaders of the salariat believe, will require a greater degree of social regulation;
- the mandarinate has long held a distrust of unrestrained business growth, and claims responsibility for regulating the economy in order to distribute the gains of growth more evenly;
- the peasantry reacts against the city's monopolisation of wealth and resources by calling for a fundamental realignment of Thailand's growth trajectory.

These forces are neither static nor well-defined; they split, merge, ally, separate. This fluidity reflects the rapid changes in the economic structure. Over the longer term, there are trends towards clearer definition of class interests and clearer definition of the underlying conflicts. If metropolitan business can negotiate agreements with provincial business and the bureaucracy, we can expect a continued surge towards a liberalised economy coupled with controls on the extension of political representation. If, however, the struggle between metropolitan and provincial business, which has played a formative part in the politics of the last decade, persists into the future, it will provide opportunities for more complex alliances and the potential for broader political representation.

3   Old soldiers never die, they are just bypassed

The military, bureaucracy and globalisation

Chai-Anan Samudavanija

Thailand's politics and its development are best viewed not so much as pieces on a giant chessboard, but as a scattered jigsaw puzzle, with the pieces needing to be put together. This fracturing is not necessarily a weakness. As a polity, the Thai state's effectiveness in managing change and handling threats has long been evident. The economy and society have been open and liberal, although the state continues to retain its activist and centralised character, and its civil and military bureaucracy has remained a closed system. The Chakri Reformation under King Chulalongkorn in the nineteenth century resulted in the modernisation of the bureaucracy and especially the military, making the latter the dominant organisation in a predominantly unorganised agricultural society. The peasantry were largely unaffected by political changes at the top, although they suffered from large-scale wars with the Burmese from time to time.

The absence of direct colonial rule was an important factor in enabling Thailand's society to remain a relatively open social system, with egalitarian Buddhist beliefs contributing to this. Periodic shifts in power relations and political-economic alliances occurred through competition and co-operation among rival factions, without the direct intervention of outside forces.

Shifts in power have occurred mainly within elite circles, although more popular participation was not completely absent or repressed. In some circumstances, mass movements, either organised or spontaneous, helped facilitate intra-elite struggles for power. While the locus of power has not shifted away from a small group within the elite, socio-economic changes have brought new elites into being, with aims and claims not dissimilar to those of their predecessors. This characteristic of the political elite seems to negate one of the conventional concepts of political development. According to conventional wisdom, elected politicians from humble rural backgrounds and high-ranking military and civilian officers are characteristically different in many aspects, ranging from their commitment to democracy to their approach to economic and social development (Janowitz 1964). This does not appear to have been true of the Thai elite. Once a new elite has succeeded in occupying a political

space, they have tended to adjust themselves to the basic norms established by the old elite, with no significant endeavour being made to circumvent or change the rules of the game. At best, the new elite has found ways and means to prevent the old elite from recapturing power by excluding them from taking formal political office.

The rules of the game these elites used to facilitate their rule may be described as feudalistic beliefs and norms which have found their expression in bureaucratic rules, regulations and behaviour. These rules have not been replaced by constitutionalism. On the contrary, constitutional principles, first adopted in 1932, have been adapted and adjusted to follow the old rules, based on centralism, personalism, unity and solidarity, and patron-clientelism.

After the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy, the military and its civilian allies were primarily concerned with state-building rather than in consolidating democracy. Although a constitution was promulgated, this only served to guarantee that the system would not revert to monarchical rule. Throughout the so-called democratic period, from 1932 to the present, there have been no serious or continuing efforts to launch meaningful political reform.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see members of elected parliaments staunchly opposing political and administrative reforms that aim at increasing direct participation and enhancing decentralisation. As a recent example, the brief constitutional crisis of mid-1994 reflected this position, with elected politicians, the military, bureaucrats, business people and the middle class effectively opposing the call for such political reforms. Even after the 1995 election of the Chart Thai Party under Banharn Silpaarcha, which made political reform a major platform in its election campaign, it has been difficult to get party members to agree that the need for reform is urgent, and coalition partners have proved an even more difficult proposition.

In short, it is argued that political changes have not resulted in any major shift in the location of power. Economic change has had no meaningful effect on the degree of democratisation and democratic consolidation, although it has contributed to the relaxation of state power and the degree of liberalisation in matters such as deregulation, privatisation and the internationalisation of capital. It seems that 'democracy' has been used, in recent years at least, to prevent a return to the old-style authoritarianism that is seen as an unhealthy political arrangement for growth-oriented economic development.

Due to its openness, Thailand has liberalised its social and economic regimes, but fundamental changes in political power have been limited. In 1932, the absolute monarchy was overthrown and a constitutional regime inaugurated. The new power elite established a parliament and enfranchised the masses, but the right of free association, especially political association,

continued to be denied until 1950 (Chai-Anan 1989). Since then, political association in the form of political parties has not been free from controls set by the Ministry of the Interior through its control of the Political Parties Act, 1955. Until recently, the Associations Act, 1912 also prohibited registered associations from having any political objective or to engage in any political activity. Changes to this were only made under the Anand Panyarachun government in 1992, to recognise and promote the role of NGOs in development. However, the activism of NGOs is viewed by political parties, as well as by military officers and civilian bureaucrats, as destabilising. For example, in 1995, the Democrat Party moved to cut the budget earmarked for the support of the Duang Prateep Foundation in its slum rehabilitation projects (Minutes of the Parliamentary Budget Scrutiny Committee 1995). It is perhaps not so ironic that politically active NGOs have become increasingly alienated from political parties. This may be due to the historical evolution of NGOs and political parties, both of which were formerly under state control, thus preventing opportunities for them to co-operate in the past.

The Thai political system, which adopted a parliamentary model, has remained more or less the same since its inception in 1932. Socio-economic change since then has brought about a more complex and diverse set of interests, and this has meant increasing demands and conflicts outside the central political arena. The various political elites have chosen to process these diverse demands through the increasingly less responsive mechanisms of the bureaucracy. While the structure of conflict has become far more complex, the elites, both old and new, have been busy protecting their political space rather than addressing the unequal distribution of wealth and political assets between urban and rural groups. In most cases, only NGOs have been active in initiating and articulating the demands and grievances of the affected masses, while political parties have essentially been passive and reactive.

In order to understand the complexity of politics and power in Thai society, a new approach and model are required. In outlining such an approach I will argue that the military and bureaucratic elites have inherent features which are in conflict. Specifically, the Western-derived organisational structure of these groups challenges their feudal consciousness and values. I will discuss the nature of collective, organised action in society, comparing the state-centric and society-centric patterns of organisation. It will be argued that the military and civilian bureaucracy represent the Weberian, essentially Western, organisational form, while the forces outside the state have tended to adopt a form of collective organisation which might be said to approximate the secret society form. The Western form was a reaction against the threat of colonialism and the desire of the new elite of young Siam to deal with the old elite of old Siam. King Chulalongkorn's reformation involved the establishment of a standing army, a centralised bureaucracy and other modern, Western organisations, as well as the nation-state, superimposed upon the old

forms and old associations denied by the newly established nation-state (see Wyatt 1969). It will be argued that, as society did not go through the historical process of colonisation, the location of power remained intact, and those who controlled the political space were able to incorporate potential opposing forces into its structure and, in the process, mobilise and change or assimilate their values.

In building on my earlier three-dimensional state model (see Chai-Anan 1994a), it is important to conceptualise the tremendous impact the ideological aspects of modernisation have had on state-society relations. The qualitative nature of modernisation, which had been linked with the Western tradition, has been challenged. Existing concepts and values brought about by Westernisation have been questioned. Modern organisations, including the bureaucracy, the standing army and the nation-state have all been challenged by alternative models based on Marxist-Leninist and, later, Maoist forms of organisation. Such challenges have had an impact on the new structures, functions and values of the three important dimensions of security, development and participation in modern Thailand. The Chinese revolutions of 1911 and 1949 have also been major influences on the thinking of the Thai political elite due to the important economic role and status of the Chinese in Thai society; by the late nineteenth century it was estimated that the Chinese made up 1.5 million of the 6 million population of old Siam (Skinner 1957).

In this chapter I will begin by presenting the relationships between state and society in different periods before going on to discuss the impact of external change on politics and power relations. Following this, I will discuss the impact of globalisation on state-society relations, focusing on the impact of the 'new' power elites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who are now becoming 'old' elites, struggling for their survival in a rapidly changing world. Globalisation has not only brought a bridging of time and space, but also the so-called 'New World Order', with values directly threatening the core values of the military and bureaucracy (Chai-Anan 1994b). In the post-Cold War period, the military is suffering pressure for change—international, regional and internal pressures simultaneously—in all directions. The centralised bureaucracy—the most modernised sector in the late nineteenth century—is rapidly becoming a problem of its own creation. Change is required, but the pace is too slow or is being resisted. This is why I have suggested the notion of 'bypassing the state' to characterise state-society relations for countries whose 'historical legacies' are resisting the changes brought by globalisation.

In addition, I will discuss the ethnic aspect of capital and economic power in Thailand in analysing delays in the shift of power. It will be argued that there are loci of power, not a single locus, but that these loci are characteristically different from those in liberal-democratic situations, where the pluralistic nature of society influences the character of the political regime. In the end, this may mean that the concept of a three-dimensional

regime, incorporating a bypassed state, may be more appropriate than one of democratisation and democratic consolidation.

'WESTERN' AND 'EASTERN' ORGANISATIONS

In Thailand, the military and civilian bureaucracies have been the most important forms of organisation and collective action. Since the Ayudhaya period, the state has been concerned to organise methods for combining its military and civil structures and functions. At the same time it has structured the relations between the elite and commoners, and within the elite itself. This meant that there was both an arrangement of society and politics, and a system for managing state-society relations.[1] The Buddhist monkhood *(sangha),* because of its egalitarian approach to access, recruitment and internal organisation, required that the state organise a different relationship. The state was able to keep the *sangha* out of the political arena, effectively preventing the egalitarian nature of the organised community of monks spilling over into the political sphere.

Since Siam was not colonised, there was no imperative for any section of society to organise itself for collective political action. The peasantry in the past, as in the present, was spatially and socially scattered. The nature of rice cultivation lends itself to only periodic, voluntary and temporary organised action which, unlike work in industry or on big plantations, does not induce farmers to organise themselves for sustainable or regular collective actions. Moreover, the long period of slavery and corvée service required of commoners by the elite served to limit individual mobility. When these systems were gradually abolished, they were replaced by conscription for the expanding standing army.

The freed slaves and commoners without masters were the native Thai, since the increasing numbers of migrant Chinese were not drawn into this system. In earlier periods, Chinese immigrants had been under direct control of the state, which controlled and regulated foreign trade and farmed tax monopolies, but such control declined in later years. The establishment of a standing army and conscription resulted in a clear demarcation of Thai and Chinese sectors in society as the latter were not subject to military service. The Chinese were thus the most significant section of population not organised by the state in the nineteenth century. They were controlled by the Thai state, but were not organised by it, while ethnic Thais were both organised and controlled (Chai-Anan 1987).

Before the Bowring Treaty of 1855, the Chinese found that the only organisations offering collective relations and action were in the form of triads or secret societies. Although secret societies were a form of organisation growing out of agrarian societies, Chinese secret societies, as triads, were highly structured. Triads were initially formed during the latter seventeenth century, with the specific objective of struggling for the independence of the

Han from the Manchus. They were essentially ethnic organisations with a revolutionary aim. Triads were especially active south of the Yangtze River, and this form of organisation was brought to Siam with the stream of Chinese migrants during the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (Comber 1959). Thus, in old Siam, secret societies became the *only* form of secular organisation outside the realm of state power, even though their leaders were often linked to state officials who used them for a measure of control over their societies. For example, *Chaophraya*[2] Sri Suriyawongse (Chuang Bunnag), who had real power in the reign of King Mongkut and acted as the Regent in the early part of King Chulalongkorn's reign, was well regarded by leaders of Chinese secret societies, especially those in Rajburi province where he held large sugar cane plantations.

Triads continued to be active from the late nineteenth and to the early twentieth century. As organisations, they had decentralised structures but rigid rules (Suparat 1981). Since there were no 'interests' recognised in the old Siamese society (except those of Western nations), Chinese interests were not systematically represented or protected, unlike those of Westerners who were protected by extraterritorial rights. Chinese economic interests, therefore, had to be subservient to those of the nobility and Westerners. New arrivals from China, lacking connections with officials of the monarchy, sought refuge and protection with secret societies. Established merchants either chose to remain under the patronage of royal and high-ranking officials or to become British and French subjects and thereby gain access to the rights of extraterritoriality.

The young King Chulalongkorn and his followers were against the toleration of secret societies but could do little until after the death of the Regent. The King's organisation of Western-style Royal Guards when he ascended the throne may be seen as an attempt to balance the power of the Regent and his links to the secret societies. Indeed, many of King Chulalongkorn's reforms were conscious attempts to organise a state apparatus which could cope with external *and* internal threats. Western-style organisations served the dual function of pre-empting and preventing colonial penetration and curbing the threats posed by the collective activities of ethnic Chinese organised as secret societies. The latter threat was real, with a serious Chinese uprising having taken place in 1733, when 300 Chinese attacked the palace, with other uprisings reported in 1824, 1842, 1845, 1847 and 1848. These events probably set the reformists' collective mind, for in 1889, when two secret societies fought each other for two days in the heart of Bangkok, two battalions were deployed to end the violence (Suparat 1981). The newly-established standing army was also used to suppress peasant uprisings in the North and Northeast.

King Chulalongkorn was aware of the potential for Chinese interests to develop as organised political interests and of the possibility that Chinese-dominated political parties might be formed. In a letter to the Minister of the Capital in 1909, he wrote that any Chinese attempt to create a political party had to be prevented and destroyed (National Archives, 5th Reign Papers

N.8.7/8). This policy of preventing economic interests from developing into political interests and being represented by political parties was strictly followed by King Vajiravudh and King Prajadhipok, neither of whom would allow Siam to have a constitution for fear that it would lead to situations where Chinese or Chinese-supported political parties could eventually control political and state power (Chai-Anan 1980).

Through this frame of reference it is possible to gain a better understanding of the modern role of the military and bureaucracy in politics. The military and civilian bureaucracies were and are perceived as essentially *Thai* organisations, while secular collective entities were perceived as threats to the security of the Thai state. The Secret Society Act, 1897 was the forerunner of the Associations Act, 1914, which prohibited associations from having any political aims or getting involved in any political activity (Chai-Anan 1995).

It is not surprising that the only legitimate and legal organisations permitted to engage in organised collective action were the military and the bureaucracy. The role of the military in politics throughout the modern period can be analysed in this context. The development of state enterprises, bureaucratic capitalism, the commercialisation and corruption of military and civilian officials, the centralisation and 'technocratisation' of social and economic development can all be understood in the context of this combination of factors which accorded legitimacy to state organisations.

By the early twentieth century, the Chinese question was essentially seen in terms of a potential threat to state power, especially once a stronger Chinese Republic emerged after a long period of internal conflict. The republican government established by Sun Yat Sen managed to gain significant support among overseas Chinese. Those who migrated to Thailand in the late 1890s and early 1900s were very much influenced by Dr Sun's revolutionary movement (cf. Hwang 1976). Subsequently, the Japanese invasion of China had a great impact on immigrant Chinese. This was compounded by Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram's brand of pan-Thai nationalism in late 1930s and early 1940s, which linked with Japanese pan-Asian expansionism and the creation of a Thai (state) identity (Chai-Anan 1991). Thai-Chinese, who started to organise to assist their fatherland, came into conflict with Phibun's state.

By the late 1930s, the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce had become the accepted organisation for the management of Sino-Thai relations. The president of the Chamber was regarded as the unofficial Chinese ambassador in Thailand. Contacts between high-ranking officials in China and prominent Chinese businessmen in Thailand developed into strong political ties based on the common objective of fighting the Japanese aggressors. In 1939, the newly elected president of the Chamber, Hia Kwong Iam, was invited to the meeting of the Guangdong Provincial Assembly to report on the Chinese resistance movement against the Japanese in Thailand (Amporn 1994). High-ranking officials from Guangdong mobilised Chinese throughout Southeast Asia

against the Japanese in 1940, and Chinese schools became the centre for this mobilisation in Thailand.

Such activities represented a challenge to the Thai state, but changes to the regime and conflict in China reduced concern. However, with the communist victory in 1949, the perceived Chinese and communist threats to the state became intertwined. Such combined threats contributed to the increase and consolidation of the legitimacy of the state elite while limiting and constraining the emerging economic power of Sino-Thais. The military and civilian bureaucrats were able to consolidate their power by focusing on their legitimate roles of maintaining stability and security and at the same time 'developing' the nation to safeguard 'Nation, Religion and King' from communism. During the three decades after 1949 the ethnic Chinese factor came to be considered a negative political factor.

As an ethnic group the Chinese have been both assimilated and suppressed (Chai-Anan 1991). Generally, those who were culturally and economically assimilated chose not to challenge state power. Those who did, or who were not satisfied with their status, chose, in the past, to join the secret societies and, more recently, were drawn to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The CPT was not only a revolutionary party, as it claimed, but a party led by ethnic Chinese and which also appealed to other ethnic minorities, especially hill peoples and Northeasterners who considered themselves ethnic Lao (Chai-Anan 1981).

THE SECURITY-DEVELOPMENT STATE

Westernisation resulted in the formation of a nation-state organised along Western lines, but without a strong liberal-democratic orientation. There were two factors involved in this. First, the internationalisation of the competition between the socialist and liberal-democratic models strengthened the security dimension of the state. Second, the threat of communism brought a convergence and strengthening of the security and development dimensions. The result was that the state did not develop along democratic lines but emphasised security and development while resisting pressures and demands for decentralisation. In the Cold War era, the United States promoted security and development as pre-eminent values, resulting in the deepening of military power and involvement in politics, aided by developmental technocrats (Saiyud 1986).

As noted above, the development of the modern state was characterised by a dualism of power, with state and political power never effectively integrated (see Chai-Anan 1995). State power had been accumulated through the creation of the nation-state, enhancing the 'bureaucratic polity' and expanding the power of the bureaucratic elite (Riggs 1966). Political power, on the other hand, has not been consolidated. This is due to five factors: (i) the long duration of state power uninterrupted by direct colonial rule; (ii) the strength

of organisation, the solidarity and shared belief system and values of the military and civil bureaucracies; (iii) international and regional environments which made the security imperative an overriding factor in state-building; (iv) the development imperative which contributed to the expansion of the bureaucracy and its penetration into the periphery through various development programmes and projects; and (v) the threat of the CPT, which developed into an insurgent war from the mid-1960s.

The predominance of the security and development dimensions of the state over that of participation can be seen in budget expenditures from 1960 to 1970, during which period defence and internal security expenditures ranged from 21 to 27 per cent, compared with expenditures on economic activities, education and health which ranged from 19 to 29 per cent, 15 to 27 per cent, and 9 to 16 per cent respectively (Chai-Anan 1971). This level of security expenditure was justified in terms of the CPT threat. In 1969—the year in which a general election was held for the first time in 12 years—34 of 71 provinces were declared 'communist-infested' areas. From 1965–69, CPT and government forces engaged in armed clashes on some 2,000 occasions.

In this situation, the military's main strategy was to allow for very limited political participation at the national level. For the military, the power of the state and political power were different matters. The former was seen as being of a higher order and more comprehensive than the political power of politicians, which was restricted to legislative activities (Chai-Anan 1979). It is not surprising that it was relatively independent students and intellectuals who emerged to challenge state power in October 1973.

After the 1973 popular uprising, participation in politics, and especially politics outside the official parties and parliament, became increasingly significant as political competition among rival factions within the military developed. The state elites were thus confronted with another group which they had to threaten and/or co-opt. The participation dimension had thus been unleashed to counterbalance the prevailing security and development nexus. With economic development, urbanisation and globalisation, demands for liberalisation and participation have put pressure on the security-development bureaucratic complex to respond more to the grievances and demands of the masses.

STATE ELITES BYPASSED

Elsewhere I have argued that the activist bureaucratic state had been able to resist the societal forces surrounding it, and that the dominant state elites of high-level military and civilian officials have not had to relinquish their power to a new elite of elected politicians (Chai-Anan 1989). Control of political offices does not automatically lead to political power. A closer examination of substantive political issues—natural resource management,

international relations, security management, decentralisation, the proposed election of governors, and constitutional and political reforms—indicates that the senior military and civilian bureaucrats remain the centre of the decision-making process.

While there are internal challenges to the power of the established elites, with various social and economic interests and ideas struggling to gain their place in the political sphere, the greatest challenge to established groups and ideas is posed by the forces of globalisation. This is because globalisation is occurring under a New World Order which actively promotes human rights, democracy and environmental protection. The changing role of the United States, from that of benevolent patron to economic competitor demanding trade liberalisation, while reducing its security commitments, has directly affected Thailand's military. For many years, claiming security concerns, and with the support of the US, the military was able to use border areas as buffer zones and allowed non-formal trade to flourish, bringing great financial benefit to itself. The New World Order sees the Thai military now being criticised for such entanglements, and especially those with the Khmer Rouge and the military regime in Burma. Questions of human rights, corruption and the relationship between business and the military have all been highlighted. As globalisation intensifies, state elites are beginning to lose control in many strategic areas, including the border regions and in their links to corrupt business. In addition, their long-standing control of the media and state enterprises are challenged by privatisation.

As noted above, the long period of anti-communism resulted in the over-development of the state and the consequent underdevelopment of participatory organisations. The mobilisation of farmers, workers and the urban middle class was an aim shared by both the state and its enemies, including the CPT. Mobilisation did not, however, mean participation for these groups. Rather, mobilisation was to support the ideology and activities of the organisations involved. Such mobilisation actually reduced real participation by the masses.

The development decades which favoured a growth strategy created great wealth and opportunities in urban areas. But the emergent economic powers of the 1960s and 1970s had very limited opportunity to capture or share state power. In provincial areas this situation saw the growth of economic elites which developed as *chao pho',* cultivating close relationships with powerful military and police officers.[3] After 1979, when politics became more stable and elections were more regular, these local economic barons, mostly second-generation Chinese immigrants, became potent political forces. As Chinese, they have not been fully integrated into Thai bureaucratic structures even though they have been major beneficiaries of the development decades. Ironically, much of their business success has been from their links to government departments (Pasuk and Sungsidh 1992). Banharn, prime minister from July 1995 to November 1996, was this new elite's representative *par excellence.*

In the new political world of the 1990s these economic barons are convinced that the most effective way to protect and advance their economic interests is to support or 'own' political parties or factions of them. There are two types of support and ownership. In the first, an individual supports a group of politicians who may form a political party with or without that person as its leader, as in the case of Narong Wongwan, leader of the Therd Thai Party which became a faction of Banharn's Chart Thai Party in the coalition government which came to power in 1995. The second type is where there is multiple support and ownership or co-ownership. In this type there may be contributions with or without active participation in elections. The Chart Thai Party has also exemplified these kinds of contribution.

In the first half of the 1980s, the military and bureaucratic elites sought to maintain their control over these rising economic elites through a combination of strategies. They formed an effective alliance with big, established business groups under the leadership of General Prem Tinsulanonda during his decade as prime minister. They jealously guarded strategic positions in the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the Ministry of Finance, Budget Bureau, and the Ministries of Defence and the Interior. They developed a mechanism to connect with emergent economic interests through the Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee (JPPCC). This military and civilian bureaucratic alliance was broken in 1989 when Chatichai Choonhavan, leading the Chart Thai Party, became the first prime minister in more than a decade to be an elected member of parliament. Instead of relying on and consulting with the NESDB and the JPPCC, as Prem had always done when making major economic policy decisions, Chatichai preferred to establish direct links with individual members of the business community and to keep decision-making closer to his cabinet of elected politicians.

It is important to note that, while there were attempts to topple the various Prem administrations, all *coups* failed miserably. A principle reason for this was a lack of consensus on the need for a change of government. The 1991 *coup* against the Chatichai government was executed with a consensus among military and civilian bureaucrats and business interests (see Hewison 1993a). Business groups that supported the 1991 *coup* shared a common trait—they were strongly opposed to participatory politics and political parties. Nevertheless, businessman Anand Panyarachun, often seen as a liberal, accepted the premiership offered by the military junta. Generally, he was able to work cordially with them, but he did not launch any meaningful political reforms.

The May 1992 uprising against the military was an organised political movement. Unlike the October 1973 student-led 'revolution', the May incident was engineered by an alliance created from military factions opposed to the 1991 *coup* leaders, business people (generally small- or medium-sized businesses), intellectuals and students, and political parties. It may be argued that this uprising was not so much pro-democracy, as is often claimed, but

rather a movement opposed to the possibility of a new alliance of the military and business leading to a dictatorship (Chai-Anan 1993a).

The National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) military junta was a coalition between Class 5 graduates of the military academy and big business groups, especially the Charoen Pokphand (CP) group. By 1992, members of Class 5 were in control of top posts in the Supreme Command, the Army, the Navy and the Police. They also had their staunch allies and supporters in the major civilian ministries, especially the Ministry of the Interior, which controls provincial administration. The junta appointed its leaders to control major public enterprises such as the Telephone Organisation of Thailand and Thai Airways International, and rewarded business allies. Many of these enterprises were engaged in mega-projects worth billions of baht. When Anand became prime minister, one of his first acts was to review the contract on the expansion of telephone services which had been granted to the CP Group. He also moved to change members of the boards of the Telephone Organisation and Thai International. It is clear that economic liberalisation was a priority for Anand over political liberalisation and reforms. These moves reflected Anand's firm belief in free competition and his fear of convulsions within the military-industrial complex which, he believed, would be detrimental to future growth (interviews, Anand Panyarachun, 1992).

Following the May 1992 incident the military's position has changed significantly. Recent US foreign and trade policy and its support of human rights and democracy resulted in growing anti-American feeling within its leadership. The military and civilian bureaucratic elites are losing not only their influence but also their prestige and status. This is due to the rapidly declining significance of security concerns. At the same time, the development function is shifting from the public to the private sector as the internationalisation of capital and declining costs of transportation and telecommunications contribute to the rapid expansion of the private corporate sector. This increasingly means that the unreformed bureaucracy is redundant, even obsolete (Chai-Anan 1994b).

State behaviour has been heavily influenced by the challenge provided by the CPT in the three decades to the early 1980s. The CPT, with the support of China, provided a powerful threat to state power. However, as this threat declined, the relationships and alliances between the state and economic elites have become far more dynamic. The basis of the regime, led by the civil and military elites, has been shaken by the extent that new economic elites can use political parties to effectively advance their interests and demands.

Since 1992, power in society has become increasingly segmented, with the military being increasingly limited to its defence functions and the bureaucracy facing challenges from political parties and NGOs. The military has reacted by attempting to enhance its legitimacy in the security sphere by reaching out to various social groups in a more open manner, including

allowing strategically selected groups to discuss security issues. For the first time, the Ministry of Defence organised seminars and in 1994 published a White Paper which was widely distributed, suggesting a new openness (Ministry of Defence 1994).

The post-Cold War situation has enhanced the role of participation in politics. Proposals on political reform, decentralisation, the election of governors, the appointment of an ombudsman, administrative court, public hearings and a Citizens' Committee on Police, are all indicators of the desire to expand popular participation. In the past, state elites could deny these rights on the grounds of security concerns and the communist threat. Now, the remnants of the ultra-right alliance can only attempt to use the issue of the protection of the monarchy to minimise and control popular participation. For example, the proposal to elect provincial governors, proposed by the Ekkaphap (Unity) Party and supported by the Palang Dharma Party was opposed on the grounds that it was an effort to establish a republican form of government (based on interviews with numerous MPs and party members during 1995).

Future challenges to the dominance of the military and bureaucracy are also apparent in the globalisation process, through the challenges it poses for the nation-state. Whereas Westernisation and internationalisation created an entrenched security-development state in which democratic transition failed to be effectively consolidated, globalisation threatens this. Under the security-development state, collective organisation and political action was disrupted and constrained by a combination of external pressures and internal power struggles. Meanwhile, the momentum for organised economic power transforming itself into political power in Thailand was lost, first because of the Chinese republican revolution of 1911 and then with the advent of communism, which allowed ethnic Chinese business people to be politically marginalised. Different generations of state elites have been able to be selective and incremental in their responses to such challenges. They skilfully played one force against the other and successfully assimilated, accommodated, coerced and suppressed potentially threatening non-state actors.

They can no longer do so. The globalisation and internationalisation of capital have made the state a less important actor in a world where spatial and temporal dimensions have shrunk. The political space that state elites have occupied is no longer the main arena for the allocation of resources and the distribution of benefits. The nation-state—a nineteenth-century social and political creation—is being bypassed by the potent forces of information and communications. The military and the bureaucracy are the main instruments of the nation-state and its centralised organisation, but the *Thai* nation-state is finding its authority undermined by several significant developments in society and in the region.

Businesses are bypassing state boundaries, relying less on the state and building ties with business counterparts in other territories. The People's

Republic of China, once seen as a political demon, has become an important market and contacts with China are now assets, not liabilities. The increased availability of communications technology, such as mobile phones, the internet and faxes, is undermining state attempts at social control. Now, not only can ethnic Chinese move freely, but other ethnic groups in the region are moving across the borders as workers from one country migrate to the factories of another to produce goods to be exported, often to a third country. Borders are becoming positive sites of economic transaction rather than the negative sites of conflict they were during the Cold War era.

This bypassing of the state is occurring at two important levels. On the broader, macroeconomic level, the weakening of the security-development state is opening up the possibility of regional economic growth that follows trade flows rather than state boundaries. At another level, people are no longer trapped within state boundaries, as they were during the conflict-filled years of the Cold War. Now they are increasingly free to follow jobs or cultural ties and to build connections with neighbours in other states.

The role of the military in politics in this new era has been drastically reduced, both by its own miscalculated moves and by the international and domestic social and economic environments. After May 1992, the armed forces have basically been trying to safeguard their military and security interests, including arms procurements. Nevertheless, these corporate interests were curbed both by the Chuan and Banharn governments, as was seen in the scandal over the case of the request by the Navy to acquire submarines in 1995 (see, for example, *Bangkok Post* 23 May 1996).

The highly politicised leadership of the armed forces was virtually destroyed by the May 1992 incident, and while military leaders remain politically connected, they are a less politicised group. General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a former Army commander and now leader of the New Aspiration Party, installed General Viroj Saengsanit of the discredited Class 5 as Supreme Commander. However, when Viroj retired in September 1996, generational change saw the old rivalry between Class 5 and Class 7 fade as the younger members of Classes 8 to 12 began to replace the military leadership. These officers are known to be more professional and have generally been more concerned with improving the image and legitimacy of the armed forces. They are convinced that their best strategy of survival is to keep away from direct political involvement and concentrate on the protection of the military's legitimate role and corporate interests. As long as parliamentary democracy continues to provide the formal rules of the political game and conventional *coup*-making is therefore less feasible, military leaders and their cliques have to realign themselves with the leaders of political parties, and be seen to be non-political or, at least, non-partisan (interviews, Lt.-General Surayuth Julanond, Commander of 2nd Army Region, 5 April 1996).

During the period of 'de-authoritarianisation', which occurred with democratic consolidation, the role of General Prem was, and remains,

significant. Now titled 'Senior Statesman' and one of the King's trusted privy councillors, he is considered to be above party politics. However, he is closely linked with the powerful Bangkok Bank and is chairman of the New Imperial Hotel Group which is controlled by a billionaire businessman whose company has a lucrative government sales concession for local whisky throughout the country. More recently, in April 1996, Prem was appointed chairman of the Advisory Board of the CP Company. At New Year and on his birthday, commanders of all armed forces, retired high-ranking civilian officers and powerful members of the business community visit his Sisao Thewet residence and pay their respects. His influence also extends to the Democrat and Chart Thai Parties. His social connections with big business, newspaper owners and high-ranking military and civilian bureaucrats is based on the fact that he remains an effective patron, due to his charisma *(barami)* and the favours he granted while prime minister for nearly ten years.

General Prem acts as a surrogate strongman at a time when the military itself is unable to produce a strongman or a powerful military faction. One of his closest aides, General Mongkol Ampornpisith, now at the Supreme Command, currently waits in the wings for an opportunity to take a higher military position, although then Defence Minister Chavalit blocked his passage to the top in 1996.

It is not surprising that so many political roads lead to General Prem. Political parties remain weak and divided, the armed forces have not yet regrouped following May 1992, so no strong factions currently exist in the military. At the same time, politicians are not building their legitimacy as parties squabble over the spoils of office, while the powerful private sector cares only for stability and a favourable investment climate. General Prem's position is thus unique. As a privy councillor Prem is not supposed to be involved in politics, yet he is one of the longest-serving prime ministers to whom the leaders of all political parties turn—at one time or another, they have all served in one of his cabinets—while high-ranking military officers regard him as a patron.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In some ways Thai politics has not changed much. Authoritarian enclaves remain, and while they may not have formal institutional channels to exert their influence as in the past, while the Cold War is over and while CPT is now a remnant of the Cold-War era, Thailand experiences only incomplete democracy. The old style *coups* are no longer possible, but the conservative alliance of the military, technocrats and business may utilise General Prem's influence to put pressure on any government which they deem unpopular or unresponsive to their demands. For example, in February 1996 a popular television programme *Mo'ng tang mum* ('Different Perspectives') which often

challenged elite perspectives, was given an ultimatum to end. According to Dr Chirmsak Pintong, the show's host, it was General Prem who told the secretary-general of the foundation which had been supporting the programme to withdraw its support (interview, Chirmsak, 20 February 1996).

The military's role in politics has become more complex. The military has to seek new 'linkages' for itself, both as an institution and as individuals, through new patron-client networks. Institutionally, they must pledge support to democratically elected governments, while personally the military elite has been using General Prem as the link to the new power elites of party leaders.

The decline of authoritarianism and the process of 're-democratisation' have created an awkward political situation. On the one hand, democratic forces, including students, intellectuals, NGO workers, elements of the middle class and parts of the mass media, have been pushing for political reform. On the other hand, authoritarian forces within the military and remnants of rightist groups and their allies in political parties remain important elements in the private sector and media and are standing in the wings. As for the armed forces, there are no clear signs that they are moving towards *major* reform. Moves by the military appear to be reactive rather than proactive as the military learns that, in the age of globalisation, the territory and sovereignty of the nation-state are not so easily controlled. Examples of this kind of realignment may be seen in attempts to establish businesses in finance, construction, newspapers and banking. In preserving its security role and reinforcing its values in society, the roles of the National Defence College and the Strategic Studies Institute of the Supreme Command have been expanded, reaching out to the active political and economic elites.

The nation-state and the military are nineteenth-century phenomena writ large in a conflict-ridden twentieth century. While the military and bureaucratic elites remain important and will continue to safeguard their diminishing role in society, they will not be replaced; they will be bypassed.

4 The monarchy and democratisation

Kevin Hewison

[S]ince King Bhumibol Adulyadej came into world media focus, aspects of his life and thought have remained shielded by the centuries-old aura of reverence and dignity surrounding Thai kingship, as well as contemporary legal constraints. Probably nothing in Thailand can be as sensitive a subject as the monarchy, and some…have exercised a measure of self-censorship when writing about it.

(Grey 1988:6)

Any statement which touches upon the conduct of the King is liable to be interpreted as *lèse majesté*. In addition, a statement which is not strictly *lèse majesté* may nonetheless be regarded as disrespectful.

(advice from a leading Thai scholar)

The contemporary monarchy has staged a remarkable political comeback. In 1932 the absolute monarchy was overthrown and the institution stripped of its most significant powers. It is now an important and, arguably, a central institution and political actor. This return to prominence is largely due to the efforts of the incumbent monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej. This King has the ability to intervene in the nation's political affairs in a manner which has altered the course of events considerably. To consider the monarchy's political role will be insulting to some Thais. The dilemmas faced by the political scientist who examines the position and role of the monarchy are clear from the above comments. However, to not consider this role is to both miss an important element of modern Thai history and analyse political life with one of the major institutions absent. For, as *Momratchawong*[1] Tongnoi Tongyai (1990:154), the King's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, explains, 'we Thai…feel that any study or attempt to understand our country would not be complete… unless you take the role of the monarchy…into consideration'. Unfortunately, this is not a call for critical academic analysis. Rather, it is part of a statement which suggests that the monarchy is the key to understanding Thailand, and that any observation of the monarchy should essentially be uncritical. Tongnoi (ibid.: 158) states that 'anti-monarchists, the sceptical or

the plain jealous' should know that the position of the monarchy is one of the 'facts of life', and 'one has to accept it'.

Most Thai academics are unwilling to comment on the monarchy due to *lèse majesté* laws or because of a genuine belief that the monarchy is above criticism (Streckfuss 1993).[2] Foreign academics, however, none are unlikely to be subject to the *lèse majesté* law, but there remain four reasons for not scrutinising the monarchy. First, like their Thai colleagues, many appear to believe that the monarchy is above criticism. For example, Copeland (1993) has indicated that foreign academics have chosen to neglect critical material on the current dynasty (see, as examples, Vella 1978; Batson 1984). Second, there is a fear of being banned from Thailand if comments on the monarchy are construed as criticism. While few, if any, foreign academics have been banned, journalists have, and this has led to self-censorship. Third, there is an unwillingness to offend or endanger Thai colleagues who may be held responsible, by association, for any critical comments. And, fourth, it is extremely difficult to find a publisher for anything that might be critical of the monarchy, as major international publishers are aware that the government can act to reduce their sales in Thailand.[3] In addition, should research be conducted, a major problem is that the present monarch's reign has been so long—50 years in 1996—that he has been responsible for defining the modern monarchy. This means that any critical comments can be interpreted as sleights against the present King.

However, an understanding of modern Thailand's politics and the future of democratisation must consider the position of the monarchy. This is not to suggest a 'great person' theory of politics or history. Rather, it is to indicate that an important political institution has been ignored, and that it should be the subject of academic analysis. While there have been regular anonymous attacks on the royal family in recent years (see, for example, a brief report in the *Bangkok Post (BP)* 9 December 1987), these will not be examined here. Instead, attention will be on the monarchy as an institution and the way this institution has been shaped and changed as constitutional political forms have developed. This chapter begins with a brief explanation of common perspectives on the monarchy. This is followed by a discussion of the political philosophy of the present King and some of his closest advisers. The emphasis is on their definition of the constitutional monarchy and its role in democratisation.

THE 'STANDARD TOTAL VIEW' OF THE MONARCHY

This section briefly summarises the 'standard total view' of the monarchy.[4] The present King is seen to be a truly great man. One popular account states: 'His Majesty…is a man of many versatile interests and abilities which have brought him international acclaim and recognition together with the pride and

devotion of his own people' (Rosenthal 1988:9). Some go further, with Nation Publishing (1988:11) stating that the King has 'expertise in virtually all fields of human endeavour'. The adoration for and popularity of King Bhumibol has become an important element of the monarchy's public image. This image is 'protected by jealous courtiers against comment that most monarchies might shrug off' (Kulick and Wilson 1992:60–1). Indeed, the penalties for *lèse majesté* have been increased in recent years, and few who are charged escape penalty (Streckfuss 1993). Nevertheless, the popularity of this King is seen to be due to his own hard work and his occupation of the throne at the end of a long line of other multi-talented monarchs (see Van Praagh 1989:17–21).

Indeed, the version of history promoting this view draws a direct link between the present-day monarchy and thirteenth-century Sukhothai. For example, Tongnoi (1990:156) states that Thailand has 'continuously' had a king on the throne since the earliest historical times (Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary [OPPS] 1987:7–8). To this is added the assertion that Thailand's avoidance of direct colonialism was due to the talents of 'good' kings (ibid.: 7). Good kings are divine, even magical, and this is supported by the monarch's religious role, and by the King's sponsorship of Buddhism (see Kukrit 1988:4–5; OPPS, 1987:51). Well-known royalist and adviser to the King, Thanin Kraivixien (cited in Heiecke 1977:31) notes that Thai kings are a mixture of father figure and God-king.[5] Above all, the King must be virtuous, upholding the ten virtues of the good Buddhist monarch (*Phaya*[6] Srivisarn 1954).[7] As an official memoir (OPPS 1987:7) explains, kings rose and fell 'mainly through how righteously and…well they ruled for the benefit and happiness of the Siamese people'.

This leads to the observation that the monarchy is 'natural', and that the country is deeply monarchical (Blofeld 1960:17). Some argue that human nature leads people to want the 'best' person as their leader (Poon 1977:a), and that the King has always filled this role. Further, this natural leadership has survived and prospered because it has always been 'democratic'. King Bhumibol considers himself an 'elected king', arguing that if the people are unhappy, they 'can throw me out' (cited in Grey 1988:54[8]). He also sees Sukhothai as the model, stating: 'I call that [Sukhothai] democracy,…that anybody can have justice, and that is seven hundred years ago, and all through history, we have this same sense of justice and liberty' (King Bhumibol [KB] 1974:646).

In line with this, the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy is nowadays portrayed, not as a defeat for the monarchy, which it clearly was, but as part of an historical process of democratisation fostered by the Chakri dynasty. King Prajadhipok is credited with having 'presided over Thailand's historical transformation from absolute to constitutional monarchy' (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM] 1979:126).[9] Indeed, Tongnoi (1990:156) assures readers that the monarchy's strong connection to the common people was not lessened by the events of 1932 (OPM 1979: 117). The present King is seen as the logical

successor of this line, providing the stability required to steer Thailand along its path to constitutional democracy (see Grey 1988:171). This role is seen to be greatly enhanced by the King's supposed egalitarianism and his direct links to 'the people' (Neher 1985:143–5).

King Bhumibol is portrayed as a true constitutional monarch and as a force for democratisation. Tongnoi (1983:19) explains that, because of its popular base going back hundreds of years, the Thai Monarchy takes to democracy like fish to water',[10] and Paul (in Grey 1988:134) describes the King as the 'architect of…his country's…rendezvous with democracy'. It is usually added that this involvement is constitutionally correct, being 'cautious' and avoiding 'excessive palace involvement in politics' (*FEER* 10 December 1987). Surin explains this common perspective further, also indicating the political centrality of the monarchy:

> Although the King does not have any political or administrative power under the system of constitutional monarchy, his role in times of political crises has been crucial. The Thais view the King as sacred and as a spiritual leader who serves as a symbol of unity…. Because of this, the monarch remains above all conflicting political groups. Support of the monarchy remains an indispensable source of political legitimacy. A political leader or regime, even a popularly elected government, would not be truly legitimized without the King's blessing.
>
> (Surin 1992:334)

In other words, the monarchy is seen as crucial to political stability (see also Kukrit 1988:4; OPM 1979:123), and the paramount institution of the nation, country and people. The King is often viewed as the nation personified. For example, the King's memoir states:

> The King and 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 inconsisten-cies of politics.
>
> (OPPS 1987:52)

The current Crown Prince has used similar words in describing the role of the monarchy (in Grey 1988:174).

The monarchy is increasingly seen as the 'sole source of unity and strength' in the nation (OPPS 1987:11), a role reinforced by the identification of this monarchy as a working institution, with the royal family's regular trips to 'meet the people' being cited in almost all reports and assessments.[11] The monarchy is thus seen as having played a crucial role, being both a dynamic and modernising institution and a force for stability and tradition. As Wright (1991:59–60) summarises it, 'the King is a force that spiritually binds the

Thais together as a nation and links their heritage to the future. The supreme national symbol, his prestige attaches to him the aura of legitimacy'.

The linking of the traditional and modern is personified in the royal family. The King carries considerable traditional baggage, and the symbols and pageantry of the past have long been created and recreated. Princess Sirindhorn is the official patron of cultural heritage, Princess Chulabhorn is promoted as a leading scientist, while the Crown Prince, who attended Australia's military academy, represents Thailand's martial tradition. The Queen is both a symbol of tradition and a modern environmentalist. All in all, a perfect family for modern Thailand (see *Kinnaree* April 1989, January 1993; KB 1990:11–7; Chang 1976).

This total standard view is powerful, emotive and convincing, perhaps even for the King himself. Asked about his faults, he acknowledged some:

> Everybody has faults. That is one thing I see in the comics (I read comics, Superman and all that) where the people want to always find faults. Take Superman, he is as fallible as all superheroes…. A leader should not be fallible. He should be a superhero. But as he becomes a leader…there are always people who want him or her to be fallible.
>
> (Grey 1988:135)

While the monarchy has indeed been promoted as something greater than human, it is also seen as central to the future development of democratic institutions. This view has been enthusiastically and uncritically adopted—and heavily promoted—by foreign observers, with the US press having been especially powerful (ibid.: 7). An influential Australian journalist has summarised the common perspective:

> If there was a contest among royal families of the world to determine which is the best, the most exemplary in their private conduct, the most beloved by their people, the most judicious and restrained in their political activities, the most effectively concerned for their people's welfare, the Thai royal family would win hands down…. If they wrote textbooks on how to be a monarch in a constitutional democracy, this [king] would be its central chapter.
>
> (Sheridan 1992:11)

The total standard view is indeed powerful in its imagery, both in terms of the hold it appears to have gained on commentators and in the legal sanctions it applies to those who challenge it (see Streckfuss 1996).

Democratic politics in Thailand is usually defined as having to do with parliamentary representation, while the position and powers of the monarchy are seen as constitutional. It is now appropriate to turn to the relationship between the total standard view of the monarchy and its constitutional and democratic position, as articulated by the current monarch, his family and senior officials.

THE CONTEMPORARY MONARCHY AND DEMOCRATISATION

The total standard view portrays the present King as a popular, egalitarian, 'elected' and constitutionally correct monarch, vitally interested in the democratic transition, and as the architect of democratic development, while being cautious and avoiding excessive palace political involvement. The current monarch and his family have an important stake in the development of the political system and the manner in which the position of the monarchy has, and will be, defined will be critical to the path of democratisation.

That the present King, his family and advisers should have attempted to shape both the institution of the monarchy and the course of political development is unremarkable. What is interesting is that, after a period where the institution was relatively unimportant (1932–57) and where royalists were often a conspiratorial opposition, the monarchy is now seen as the most important national institution and, arguably, the most politically significant.[12] In this section the monarchy's political philosophy and its definition of democracy will be examined.

Conservatism and the monarchy

Coming to the throne following his brother's tragic and still unexplained death in 1947, the present King inherited a position which had little political power or influence. Personally, King Bhumibol did not have much involvement with Thailand until after his coronation in 1950. While he and his family were able to bargain some concessions for royalist politicians, the King himself was described as 'unsmiling', 'formal', 'shy' and 'aloof from his people' (Grey 1988:40), and there was certainly no love lost between the anti-royalist Prime Minister Phibun and the royal family (*Momratchawong* Seni Pramoj, cited in van Praagh 1989:100–5). It was only after General Sarit Thanarat's twin *coups* of 1957–58, overthrowing the constitution and parliament and establishing a highly authoritarian regime, that the monarchy's position was revived and the present King given a higher profile. His interest in politics was encouraged by Sarit.

Darling (1960:360) believed that the King would be a liberal and democratic monarch with an interest in preserving freedom; however, this optimism was misplaced. As will be shown, 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. Interestingly, there is a remarkable similarity between these positions and those adopted by Sarit to define his regime (see Neher 1974:40–4). Because of its conservatism, this monarchy has not indicated any fundamental commitment to democratic reform. The monarchy has only been prepared to support reforms which have been congruent with its conservatism and have not

challenged its increasingly pivotal political position (Morell and Chai-Anan 1981:68).

Conservatism might be considered a natural political position for any monarchy in the modern industrial world (Nairn 1988:229–64; Schwarz 1986). However, as noted above, this is not a part of the total standard view.[13] The following discussion will emphasise the present King's conservatism and the impact this has for political activity.

One of the major philosophical elements of conservatism is the opposition to the idea of radical change and a preference for the *conservation* of values and traditions considered essential to society (O'Sullivan 1976:9; Viereck 1962:36). For others, there is a desire to conserve particular social and political institutions (O'Gorman 1986:2). These elements are well-represented in the monarchy and its relationship to Buddhism (see Tambiah, 1976:255, 390–2, 501). The King has indicated a strong opposition to revolutionary change, arguing that if all members of society know their roles, then radical change will be unnecessary (*Bangkok World* 16 March 1970). He has also noted the importance of existing institutions, especially in political life, stating that he opposed the idea that

> the destruction of old established things for the sake of bringing about the new would lead to entirely good results, since surely there must be some good in the old-fashioned things, which, according to the theory, must be destroyed.
>
> (KB 1974:60)

This position was carefully displayed in 1973, when the King praised the right-wing Village Scout movement for safeguarding 'all that is worthwhile and has helped to sustain our nation' (ibid.: 75). He has consistently argued for the application of 'reason' to creativeness, and has emphasised the need for indigenous solutions to problems, building on national heritage and progress in order to maintain order and 'national harmony' (see ibid.: 97–103). Of course, the monarchy is also seen as the institution which is the binding force in society.

Conservatives also emphasise *unity and discipline,* with the latter being necessary because humans are imperfect and need controls (O'Sullivan 1976:14–5). Such themes have remained constant in King Bhumibol's speeches. Following the Sarit *coups,* he expressed the opinion that unity and harmony were essential, and on returning from one of his overseas trips in 1961, he stated that one of the lessons he had drawn was that countries which were united and disciplined were the most 'advanced and well-off' (KB 1974:8). Following the October 1973 uprising—giving support to the disgraced military—he again took up this question:

> One of the important marks of a soldier is discipline. At present, discipline is viewed by some quarters as being virtually meaningless…. As a matter of fact…discipline…is highly essential, for it is the major cause why the

rules and regulations that exist for the orderliness of men, organization, society or country are not rendered useless.

<div align="right">(KB 1974:88)</div>

This theme re-emerged repeatedly during the turbulent 1973–76 period, as political activism moved far beyond the established political institutions. The King feared that uncontrolled political activity meant disunity and was damaging the nation and threatening to its security. In 1992, when people again took to the streets against the military, the King returned to this theme, saying that political conflict would lead to the 'utter destruction of Thailand. It will mean that the Thai Nation which the Thai People have built up for so long will turn into an insignificant country' (KB 1992a: paragraph 2). He argued that unity could only be maintained through compromise, and urged that 'Everybody must "know how to treasure Unity"' (KB 1992b:1, 12). The King's view is that unity prevents trouble, and where unity does not exist, subversion and crime will be the result (KB 1974:64–5, 91; 1992b:28–30).

In the conservative mind, discipline and unity are closely linked to *law and order* and *authority* (Scruton 1986). These themes are common in the King's speeches over a long period. He has often spoken on the need for law and order to avoid 'chaos', and argued that law is the 'pillar of national existence for the sake of good order, progress and justice for every one' (KB 1974:61, 72). Indeed, on the day of the overthrow of the military dictatorship in October 1973, usually considered a turning-point in Thailand's modern history, the King referred to a 'day of great sorrow', criticised the violence of the previous few days, and called for a return to order (cited in Piansri and Peterson 1974:73). As Morell and Chai-Anan explain, the King's

> fundamental political interests are aligned with stability rather than change, with law and order rather than the political noise of representative processes. Although he has demonstrated his interests in social and economic reforms, his model of change is that of very gradual, incremental modifications.

<div align="right">(Morell and Chai-Anan 1981:271)</div>

Many have found this position difficult to comprehend. For example, Seni Pramoj, speaking of the 1976 overthrow of his government, 'agonised' over the King's role in his downfall. He says that he came to understand that the King did not change sides, but was always on the side of 'law and order' (cited in Van Praagh 1989:176). Responding to the turbulence of the 1973–76 period, King Bhumibol (1974:112) told an audience that harmony and unity would only come about if responsibilities and duties were taken seriously. If not, society would 'degenerate and become confused and unstable, and possibly collapse altogether'. This fear has caused him to support the forces of stability—invariably including the military and bureaucracy—rather than change.

Conservative political philosophers place great emphasis on an *organic model of society,* viewing society as a functioning organism, being far more than the sum of its parts. Political activity is seen to be most efficacious when it is directed towards the growth and development of this complex body, and individuals must be committed to it (O'Gorman 1986:2). This has been a theme in King Bhumibol's speeches. For example:

> A nation is made up of various institutions in the same way as all the organs which make up a live body. Life in a body can endure, because the organs, large or small, function normally. Likewise, a nation can endure, because its various institutions are firm and are fully discharging their respective duties. You must all realize that the nation is the life, the blood and the property of everyone…. To uphold and safeguard the nation is the duty…of every party. Each and everyone must work together…sharing common aims and objectives. Should any group fail in its duty…the entire nation may collapse and be destroyed.
>
> (KB 1974:49)

In this speech, the King stresses that no person is separable from the societal whole, and this is related to the idea of the *common good.* Especially in times of crisis, the King has been keen to link notions of authority, discipline, duty and allegiance to a seemingly objective national interest or common good (ibid.: 44–5, 58–9, 103). Following demonstrations against the military-backed government in late 1991, the King again stressed the need to resolve political differences by focusing on common aims and in the national interest (*BP* 1 January 1992). Again, he was supporting those who claimed to uphold order.

Like most conservatives, King Bhumibol sees duties as being more significant than *human rights* (see O'Sullivan 1976:24). He has argued that the rights of one should not impinge on those of others and must be limited (KB 1974:14), stressing that individual freedom can only go as far as it serves the interests of the 'common weal' (ibid.: 44–5). In any case, as Tongnoi (1983:17) explains, it is the institution of the monarchy which provides the protection of the rights of individuals.

Conservatives are generally hostile to *social welfare,* arguing that it reduces personal responsibility, extends the role of impersonal and potentially corrupt government, expands until it eventually threatens the economic order and assigns tasks to the state which are rightfully those of family and community (Nisbet 1986:58–9; Scruton 1991:21). King Bhumibol has adopted this perspective. Taking the US as his example, he has argued that millions are spent on welfare, stating that access to welfare is a 'constitutional right' in that country, but that this has several negative aspects:

[T]hese jobless individuals will not be willing to work; they can apply for public welfare and they get it. These people refuse to work…. The… individual on welfare will be a useless person for the community and even for himself. Furthermore, he will be a ponderous burden on society.

(KB 1992b:26)

Then, turning to Thailand, he argues that to allow the development of a welfare system would cause suffering:

We would be squandering our national budget by giving charity from the money earned by hard-working people from whom taxes are levied, to those who make it a point not to work. Thailand is not like that. Everybody works, some more, some less, but everybody works.

(ibid.: 29)

The conservative also has a strong brief for *private property* (Nisbet 1986:55–6). The King, through the Crown Property Bureau's investments, the Royal Household and the royal family's personal investments, is one of the largest corporate groups in the country (Gray 1988:107–8; Hewison 1989). From the 1950s, the King has given great support to national development based on the expansion of private property. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the King spent considerable time meeting foreign and domestic investors and promoting industrial development (see *Siam Rath Weekly Review* 19 March, 27 August 1959; *BP* 20 January 1961).

The transformation of the monarchy's own financial position has been remarkable for, as the King noted—exaggerating somewhat—on coming to the throne, 'We had nothing' (Grey 1988:109). His support for private property is clearly related to the expansion of his family's and the monarchy's wealth and business empire and also to his opposition to communism (ibid.: 53). While the royal family has done well, the King has been keen to demonstrate that he puts his wealth to good use—for example, the royal development projects receive remarkable, wholly uncritical press coverage. He has also resolutely opposed public greed, and while close to many wealthy business people, the King has been critical of capitalists who ruthlessly exploit villagers, arguing that this threatens unity (KB 1974:26). Wealth brings responsibilities, and the King has indicated that the linking of Buddhism to capitalism can moderate greed (see Gray 1991:55).

These concerns define a monarchy which is solidly conservative. While it is no surprise to find that the monarch is a conservative, the significance and impact of this for the pattern of political development needs to be examined. Because the monarchy has become so influential, the King's conservative outlook has been significant in the development of Thailand's constitutionalism and the course of democratisation.

The monarchy and democratisation

It is worth recalling that the present monarch came to the throne in political circumstances that were electric. Intense political competition revolved around two axes: first, between royalists and anti-royalists; and second, between civilians and the military. Royalists were in the minority and had been largely ineffectual in parliament—*Phra*[14] Sarasas (1950:181) described them as a 'court in miniature [which] lingers on in a corner of parliament'. At the time, the royal family feared republicanism, and it is clear that this has been a concern for the present monarch, especially in his early years on the throne (see Morell 1974:790; Van Praagh 1989:178). The King has often expressed his dislike for the cut-and-thrust of politics, stating that when he was 18 he learned that 'politics is a filthy business' (Grey 1988:53). This did not predispose the King to support parliamentary politics. That the monarchy has played a central role in determining the path of parliamentary politics and in defining the role of the constitutional monarchy is clear. It is to these aspects that attention is directed.

In addition to his conservatism and personal dislike of party politics, the King has identified party politics as divisive, setting people against each other rather than uniting them (*BP* 26 June 1956). It is no surprise, then, that the King would view authoritarianism as potentially attractive. On one occasion he stated: 'If…a dictator is a good man, he can do many things for the people. For a short while, Mussolini did many good things for the Italian people' (KB 1974:52). His strong support for Sarit's strict authoritarianism can be understood in this context, with the King providing Sarit with legitimacy and receiving the 'veneration and honour' the monarchy needed in return (Sukhumbhand 1988:22; Thak 1978: Chapter 6). The little enthusiasm the King has had for party politics has been limited to the view of parliaments and constitutions as a means to restore order after authoritarian governments have failed (see *Bangkok World* 12 April 1969; KB 1974:81–6; KB 1992a:14, 18).

Reflecting the conservative desire for organic growth in society, the King has urged that democracy not be defined in 'foreign' terms, stating that:

> [W]e Thais…need not follow any kind of foreign democracy and should try instead to create our own Thai style of democracy, for we have our own national culture and outlook and we are capable of following our own reasoning.
>
> (cited in OPPS 1987:47)

The King has argued that democracy needs to be modified to meet Thai customs and values (cited in Kulick and Wilson 1992:xvi).

This perspective is also applied to the constitution. While the King has not been vocal on this topic, his trusted servants have a clear position. Put simply, constitutions are foreign implants. For example, Tongnoi (1983:15–8)

challenges the idea that 'democracy is represented by having a constitution', implying that these are unimportant documents. In Thailand, he contends, constitutions have been the 'brain-children' of 'French-centred' civil servants and US-influenced political scientists, and are therefore 'French in foundation and American in ideal'. He goes on to claim that an unwritten constitution would be best for Thailand, but that the people are not yet 'sophisticated enough to understand' this kind of arrangement (ibid.: 18). When constitutions have been written, he suggests, this has been to address short-term circumstances, and not to match the needs and understanding of the people. Reflecting a quite cynical view of politics, this palace official adds that if there is a constitution, even an 'autocratic' one, elections 'now and then', the press is not 'too harshly' dealt with, and 'some MPs are appointed to cabinet', then the 'people will…consider themselves free and democratic' (ibid.: 18).

The King has commented that there are many ways to organise government, and that even in democratic countries there are unelected heads of government (KB 1992a:44).[15] He has also expressed a view on 'real democracy', pointing to the 1973 National Convention with its 2,346 representatives from all parts of the country and all walks of life as a useful example. Interestingly, none of the representatives was elected, and this notion of an unelected but 'representative' assembly follows the approach of a number of authoritarian regimes. During the constitutional debates of 1992, King Bhumibol (ibid.: 38) agreed that representation was important in government, but that the system of elected representatives 'usually…does not work…because the system is deficient'. Despite this less than enthusiastic approach to elections and political parties, the monarchy remains a constitutional one.

As noted above, like 'democracy', there is a view that constitutions need to be adapted from their Western origins to more carefully match Thai values. Indeed, one official document, reflecting on the passage of constitutions from 1932, states that:

> The initial introduction of such an alien concept as constitutional government necessitated a long process of refinement and reconceptualization. Each change of detail in the successive constitutions has marked another attempt to successfully adapt the democratic system to the specific needs of the Thai nation.
>
> (OPM 1979:139)

This appears progressive when compared to the views of royal advisers Tongnoi and Thanin Kraivixien, both of whom question the need for a written constitution.[16] The latter has argued that it is unnecessary for a king to follow the constitution, for it is merely words on paper (cited in Heiecke 1977:29–31). Tongnoi concurs, seeing the constitution as a 'lifeless' document, changing so much that its basic tenets are unknowable, meaning that the only constant in politics is the monarchy. For him, 'the Thai monarch stands on a

par with…the constitution in the United States or Marxism in communist countries'. Lumping politicians, military *coups* and constitutions together, the royal adviser suggests that people have become disillusioned with corruption and the system of government and must place their trust in the monarchy (Tongnoi 1990:155–6).

Such views are reflected in King Bhumibol's ambivalence towards constitutionalism. For example, the King gave exceptional support to unelected Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda during the Young Turks' challenges to his prime ministership. While 'palace sources' portray this as support for constitutional government (*FEER* 10 December 1987), when elected MP and Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan was overthrown by the military in 1991, there was no hint of support from the palace. The King is said to have thought that Chatichai's cabinet reshuffles were 'comic', that the prime minister was personally responsible for not controlling the internal situation, and is reported to have supported the 1991 *coup* (Kulick and Wilson 1992:xxii, 8). One of the differences between Prem and Chatichai was that the former 'showed unswerving loyalty to the monarchical institution. His defence and reverence for…[the institution] have gained him trust and admiration' (Likhit 1992:220). While Chatichai might have tried to develop this personal and political relationship, he was unsuccessful. A second difference was that the Young Turks did not seek the King's approval for their attempted *coups* against Prem, whereas the perpetrators of the 1991 *coup* appear to have sought this.

Following the 1991 *coup,* the draft constitution was faxed to the King in Chiangmai, and was returned in the same manner, reportedly with some minor alterations (*FEER* 14 March 1991). This nonchalant attitude was also reflected in the King's reaction when the constitution was challenged. He pointed out that while the draft was 'not…fully adequate', it should be promulgated because it was 'reasonable' *[mi khunnaphap pho' chai dai]* and could be 'gradually amended…in a "democratic" way' (KB 1992b: paragraph 4). In other words, the principles embodied in the constitution were not particularly important, but its promulgation was necessary so that instability could be avoided (KB 1992a.: 46). When conflict persisted, leading to the May 1992 demonstrations, the King chose to interpret this as a personal conflict between Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, who had a pivotal role in the demonstrations, and General Suchinda Kraprayoon at the head of the military-dominated government (KB 1992b: para 1). The King's approach to these matters has been consistent over the years. For example, Morell notes that while the King apparently pushed for a constitution prior to 1968, once gained, and for the following 41 months until a military *coup,* the

> King and royal family did little to enhance the legitimacy and status of the elected parliament, participant politics as an activity, or the institutions created to implement Thai-style democracy…. He made no commitment to

the success of the transition experiment, leaving the parliament exposed and vulnerable to attack by the military.

(Morell 1974:803–4)

Morell (ibid.: 824) also notes that following the 1971 *coup,* which the King reportedly supported, his lack of commitment to constitutional rule was demonstrated when he celebrated Constitution Day less than a month after the *coup* which had torn up the constitution. It might be that the King's attitude reflects his belief that when a constitution is abrogated, 'the people's mandate returns to me' (cited in Kulick and Wilson 1992: xviii).

As noted above, Tongnoi (1990:159) does not believe that the trappings of democracy matter too much: '…when a cabinet falls or parliament is dissolved, the general public hardly cares. In fact, the people rather enjoy the changes'. Further, he argues that 'Thai-style' democracy is intimately related to the monarchy: 'Democracy is essentially a method of government in which the rights of an individual citizen should be as fully protected as possible' (Tongnoi 1983:16). Not surprisingly, he sees that the answer to protecting rights is to be found in the monarchy. He states: 'Our Monarchy is far too deep-rooted and thoroughly involved in the protection of the individual's rights to be done away with…and…continues to grow in usefulness and involvement in democratic times (ibid.: 17).

If constitutions are relatively unimportant, then it is interesting to consider the position of the constitutional monarchy. Prudhisan (1992a:124) argues that Thailand is fortunate in that its traditional institution's considerable influence is, 'constrained by the constitutional nature of the monarchy'. In a related article he adds that it is the constitution which sets the limits and conditions under which the monarch operates (Prudhisan 1992b). As was noted above, the monarchy's position is defined as acting through the executive, the courts and the parliament (see Department of Local Administration 1993). But this is not exactly how the King and his advisers define a constitutional monarch.

When asked to comment on the role of the constitutional monarch, the King stated that the basic principle is that the monarch can do no wrong, and that his position is symbolic of the nation as a whole (cited in Grey 1988:134–5). In this respect, the Thai monarchy is often compared to its English counterpart (e.g., Blofeld 1960:49). However, as Heiecke (1977:28) notes, this is a false comparison, as the Thai monarch has far more real power than the English counterpart. This has often been demonstrated, with the King's political interventions during the 1973 and 1992 events and his role in a border dispute between Thailand and Burma in 1992 (see Surin 1992:347) being well-known examples.

The King himself is clear that he has greater power than the constitution permits. When asked about his role in 'choosing' political leaders, he replied that:

In the constitution it is written that the king appoints the prime minister. This is a system in which, perhaps, the experience of the king can be of use in looking for people who would be suitable for prime minister. The president of parliament will come and have a consultation, but the king may have more power because the people have faith in their king. That is one aspect, but in principle it is exactly the same as any constitutional monarch when there is a constitution which says the monarch or chief of state appoints the prime minister *[sic]*. If the chief of state is no good they will make him into a rubber-stamp. But if… [he] is better they will perhaps ask for his opinion because the opinion is respected—that is the difference. But how can I have the respect of the people? It is because I don't use the power…. [sic] *If there* is a rule I go by the rule. But if there is no rule then my opinion would be heard.

(cited in Grey 1988:135)

In this context it is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the King's highly publicised Thai-language translation of *A Man Called Intrepid* (Stevenson 1989). While an unexceptional book, the King's attraction to it may be due to its message that parliaments cannot always be trusted to act in the national interest. It suggests that serious damage would have been done in both the US and Britain if strong leaders had not acted *against* elected parliaments. Britain's King is portrayed as an ardent nationalist who was prepared to act without the knowledge of parliament or the prime minister, often through his direct links to military and civilian security organisations. No doubt Thailand's King can identify with arrangements that provide the monarch with such independence.

Certainly, the King and his advisers feel that he *should* intervene in the political process. While continually affirming that the monarch 'does not take part in the day-to-day administration of the country', it is often added that he is 'privy to all decisions made by his cabinet…. He has far more knowledge of the working of statesmanship than any political or military leader' (*Asiaweek* 23 April 1982). Further, it is acknowledged that the King does not merely sign orders, laws and decrees, but 'acquaints himself with all subjects…and makes observations wherever appropriate, requesting clarification from the relevant officials wherever necessary' (OPM 1979:17). In addition, he

appoints his own Privy Council, an august body of distinguished advisers who possess exceptional experience and knowledge of state affairs. The Privy Council reviews all draft laws and makes germane recommendations to His Majesty. Additionally, it meets twice weekly to ponder unusual or complex issues…before forwarding recommendations for King Bhumibol's consideration.

(OPM 1979:123–4)

With this advice, the King is not a

> mere Seal or Signature. His views, instead, become of great importance and the Government of the day has come to place great value on the King's advices *[sic]*. High officials are known always to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the subjects at hand whenever they have to go into audience with the King in order to be prepared…and people in all walks of life eagerly seek Royal opinions on matters of vital concern.
>
> (ibid.: 19)

Thus, the King is not simply approving legislation, but is taking a role in the legislative process. In addition, at least under Prem, as *Asiaweek* (23 April 1982) reported, ministers spent much of their time in attendance at court. More significantly, as noted above, the King regularly intervenes in the political process, even to the point of consulting MPs beyond the cabinet, as in 1992, when he conferred with the leaders of all political parties during the constitutional crisis (KB 1992b: paragraph 3).

The King often appears to be acting outside the limits usually considered appropriate for a constitutional monarch. This propensity to be involved in the political and legislative process is, for example, not seen in the English monarchy. Norton (1982:6) points out that the English monarch's royal prerogative is determined by convention. Conservative Lewis Namier (1952:3–4) argues that the basic elements of a constitutional monarchy are that the sovereign should be above parties and politics; the prime minister and government appointed from parliament should be received rather than designated by the monarch; the civil service should be apolitical, show allegiance to the crown, but should be subordinated to party government; and the prime minister is the undisputed head of the executive, with the monarch having no role in the choice of the chief minister. This does not appear to be the case in Thailand.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has attempted to do two things. First, to outline a total standard view of the monarchy, indicating the 'constructed' version of the monarchy. This view is powerful and emotive, and to challenge it risks sanction. Second, it has endeavoured to define the political philosophy of the present monarch and link this to the process of democratisation.

While not all aspects of the total standard view have been fully addressed, this chapter has indicated that, as might be expected, it is a glorification of the present monarch and his family, and places them at the centre of the political process. In addition, it provides a monarchy-centred definition of democracy, which has become a most powerful discourse, threatening all other political definitions. In his approach to politics, the King is inherently conservative,

and from this position he has attempted to define a conservative polity. Such a polity would preserve and further extend the power of the monarchy. To do this, the King has had to become increasingly involved in politics. Far from being 'above politics', this King is intimately involved. His involvement means he is an 'activist monarch', quite an innovation when it is considered that most other constitutional monarchies have increasingly been withdrawn from direct political activity over the last century.

Indeed, nearly a century ago, in the most famous of all publications on the English constitution, Bagehot (1909:71–5) summarised the three rights of the constitutional monarchy as the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn. He added that a sensible and mature monarch would want no others, and argues that a wise monarch will err on the side of inaction, allow parliament to take its course, and be responsible. He continues:

> So long as parliament thinks it is the sovereign's business to find a government it will be sure not to find a government itself. The royal form of ministerial government is the worst of all forms if it erect the subsidiary apparatus into the principal force, if it induce the assembly which ought to perform paramount duties to expect some one else to perform them.
>
> (Bagehot 1909:71–2)

Clearly, this is advice the Thai monarchy could well consider. However, it appears that this King is unlikely to remove the monarchy from politics until a conservative polity is established. The process of entrenching such a polity is, however, challenged by the emergence of civil society. Parliament, popular elections and constitutions have the potential to move power closer to the populace and away from the conservative ideals represented in such unrepresentative institutions as the military and bureaucracy (see Hewison 1993a). While the powerful discourse of the total standard view allows this King to be interventionist and to influence the development of the polity, it is unlikely that his successor will have the necessary credentials to continue this (see Sukhumbhand 1988). A developed constitutional system can protect a weak or unpopular monarch. However, this King has not supported the development of such a system. It the short term this may well prove to be to the detriment of the dynasty and the institution.

5 Withering centre, flourishing margins
Buddhism's changing political roles

Peter A.Jackson

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s one of the most notable religious phenomena in Thailand has been the rise of a diverse range of movements and cults at the periphery of the state-controlled *sangha* (the Buddhist monkhood) and a shift in the pattern of relations between Buddhism and secular political authority (see Jackson 1988a, 1989; Taylor 1993a).

The formal organisation of the *sangha,* the forms of religious ritual and the interpretation of doctrine propagated by the order of celibate monks have been important in legitimating the exercise of state power of Thai kingdoms since at least the Sukhothai period in the thirteenth century (see Ishii 1986). I have argued that Buddhism's political importance as a system of legitimating practices and discourses explains the intensification of state control that was exercised over the *sangha* in this century through a series of efforts to restructure the monkhood in the image of the secular political order (Jackson 1989). State-initiated and enforced *Sangha* Acts—in 1902, 1941 and 1962—decreed that the national organisation of the monkhood should have a form that mirrored the changing structures of secular power—from absolute monarchy, to popular democracy and subsequently to military dictatorship. Throughout this period state control over clerical organisation and practice was closely monitored by an arm of the secular bureaucracy, the Department of Religious Affairs within the Ministry of Education, and heterodox religious movements were periodically quashed because of their subversive character (see Jackson 1988a).

However, in the 1990s this historical situation has been transformed. While a semblance of state control remains in the form of the *Sangha* Act, administered by the Department of Religious Affairs, practical state control over Buddhism has declined markedly. Since the 1980s a rapid weakening in politicians' interest in controlling forms of Buddhist religiosity in Thailand—except to eradicate monastic corruption or counter clerical immorality—has permitted the rise of a range of religious movements which, in earlier decades, would have incited political and legal intervention to enforce normative practice and teaching. However, declining state interest in enforcing control is

not sufficient to explain the widespread popularity of new religious movements such as Wat (Temple) Phra Thammakai, Santi Asoke or of charismatic monks such as *Luang pho'* Khoon.[1] A range of additional factors are turning increasing numbers of Buddhists away from the state-sponsored religion. In particular, the perceived irrelevance of the central Buddhist hierarchy, the *Mahatherasamakhom* or *Sangha* Council, and intensive media reportage of moral scandals and corruption among sections of the *sangha* are encouraging a decentralisation of religiosity and an exodus from institutional Buddhism, often to personality-focused religious movements.

A declining interest in institutional Buddhism should not be mistaken for a necessary decline in religiosity. Some individuals are indeed leading increasingly secularised lives in Thailand's rapidly developing socio-economic order, but many others are shifting their affiliation from the state-sponsored religion to new movements. While the historical centre of Buddhism, the *sangha,* is suffering organisational decline, there is a flowering of religious expression at the margins of state control. In this chapter I explore some factors that appear to have led to this state of affairs, and consider a number of widely expressed concerns and anxieties about the health of institutional Buddhism in the final decade of the twentieth century. I also describe the ways in which Buddhism retains a political currency and relevance in the 1990s.

THE RISE OF CAPITALISM AND DECLINING STATE INTEREST IN CONTROLLING RELIGIOSITY

In an earlier work (Jackson 1989), I proposed that there may be a cor-relation between the form of Buddhism a Thai adheres to and their socio-economic position. This is because different doctrinal and ritualistic formulations of the religion have historically supported the political and economic interests of different sections of the polity. I argued that in earlier decades of this century karmic and Brahmanically influenced forms of Buddhism were politically important for the monarchy and the civilian and military bureaucracies, while reformist rationalist interpretations of Buddhist teaching and practice were congruent with the oppositional political and socio-economic position of middle-class urban groups who were in conflict with the historical and the more recent forms of autocratic state power. I suggested that karmic Buddhism and Brahmanism constituted a religion of justification, providing legitimisation for established and entrenched power by teaching that those with wealth and power deserve their privileges because of their greater store of religious merit *(bun).* In contrast, reformist Buddhism constituted a religion of opposition, providing ideological support to those sectors which sought a rationalisation of social life, that is, the regularisation of markets and the intro-duction of a meritocratic social order in which socio-economic

advancement was determined more by individual skill and effort than by association with entrenched power.

In the middle decades of this century in particular, debates over what constituted the correct forms of Buddhist teaching and practice tended to follow lines that mirrored broader political and economic divisions within society. Furthermore, the politically charged significance of Buddhism meant that throughout this century competing sections of Thai society jostled to control the *sangha* and to define its internal organisation and relations to the state. For example, in 1941, Phibun Songkhram restructured the *sangha* along more democratic lines that paralleled the new parliamentary form of civilian government. However, in 1962, after Sarit Thanarat had entrenched the authority of his autocratic military regime, the *sangha* was again restructured, abolishing democratic clerical organisations and instituting a centralised form of monastic organisation that mirrored the military-dominated state of the time and which closely followed the centralised structure that King Chulalongkorn had imposed on the *sangha* in 1902.

But the schematic correlations which I used to describe the relationship of Thai Buddhism to state power no longer appear valid in the 1990s. In particular, it is no longer possible to make a strong claim that any particular religious form is politically crucial as an ideological justification for a given sector's position or role in society. This is because, in the 1990s, the state relies considerably less on Buddhism for its political legitimacy than in past decades. Legitimacy in Thailand, as in most capitalist countries, is now framed largely in terms of instrumental values, that is, the state's capacity to deal effectively with social, economic and ecological problems and to increase the material well-being of the population.

The partial severing of the link between the state and organised Buddhism in the 1990s is shown by, among other things, the lack of organisational reform of the *sangha* to follow a more democratic administrative structure, despite repeated calls for such reforms since the 1970s. This failure to reform the *sangha* cannot be explained solely by institutional inertia or conservatism. As already noted, there have been major organisational reforms of the *sangha* administration throughout this century when they were required for state purposes. Rather, the lack of reform indicates that the religion has become increasingly separated from state political processes. For political actors in the 1990s it is increasingly irrelevant whether or not state Buddhism is reformed to mirror the contemporary forms of secular power, and so it can be said that, to an extent, the polity has been secularised in recent years.

The decline in state interest in enforcing control over Buddhism is also demonstrated by the indeterminate outcome of the legal prosecution of the renegade monk Phothirak. In this century state control over the *sangha* has ensured that the monkhood has not developed as an alternative site of

political power or activism. However, the emergence of new movements outside the effective control of the state bureaucracy periodically raised concern about the possible development of destabilising religious-based political activism. One of the movements about which considerable concern has been expressed in this regard is the Santi Asoke movement founded by Phothirak in the 1970s. After a series of disagreements with *sangha* authorities, Phothirak seceded from the state-controlled monkhood and set up Santi Asoke as an independent ascetic Buddhist movement. Phothirak's radical move raised fundamental questions about the definition of clerical authority, in particular whether a monk's authority derived from following the Buddha's directives in the scriptures, as Phothirak claimed, or from obeying non-scriptural state laws governing clerical conduct, as the *sangha* hierarchy maintained.

The fact that Santi Asoke operated outside the organisational structure of Buddhism, and that it attracted large numbers of often influential followers, including Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, founder of the Palang Dharma Party, raised suspicions about the heterodox movement's possible political motivations. Santi Asoke became a focus of heated political debate in the second half of the 1980s when senior members of the *sangha* hierarchy questioned the legality of Phothirak's administrative secession from the state-controlled monkhood. In May 1989, after several years of official vacillation about determining the legal status of the movement, the government of Chatichai Choonhavan was pressured to lay charges against Phothirak after a unanimous decision by the *Sangha* Council to defrock the outspoken monk.

However, the history of the subsequent trial reflects the rapid decline in the nexus between Buddhism and the state. After a sensational start in 1989, which portended a major confrontation between state-imposed religious order and a new heterodox movement, the prosecution of Phothirak lost momentum. In a face-saving compromise, Phothirak agreed to change the colour of his robes from brown to white, symbolically dissociating himself from the status of an ordained monk, but he refused to undergo a formal defrocking. The legal efforts to quash Santi Asoke created considerable public sympathy for Phothirak, and many saw the trial as a conflict between a corrupt *sangha* seeking to uphold its entrenched power and an ethically strict Buddhist renunciate aiming to purify and revitalise a moribund religious order. In late 1995, Phothirak was found guilty of the charges laid, but received only a suspended sentence. In effect, he has been allowed to continue his independent religious path relatively unhindered by state authority because, in the 1990s, it is largely politically irrelevant whether he bows to the *sangha* authorities. The changing character of Buddhism's relationship to the state is clearly shown by the fact that a greater political cost now attaches to quashing a heterodox movement such as Santi Asoke than to allowing it to continue.

Lee (1993) proposes an alternative model of the relationship between religion and society in contemporary capitalist Southeast Asia, maintaining that political legitimisation is no longer of focal importance and instead describing religion in commercial terms as a product that is marketed and consumed. Lee states that,

> Religion in late capitalism may be conceptualised as an international salvationary market. As suggested by proponents of the secularisation thesis, the declining public power of religion frees individuals to privately select from a wide range of religious services without necessarily responding to institutional pressures…the buying and selling of religious ideologies must be examined within the context of competitive pluralism. In short the religious market thrives on ideological variety.
>
> (Lee 1993:35, 37)

Lee proposes that religious diversification has occurred in capitalist Southeast Asian societies because no single organisation can offer all the religious services for which there is a demand in the spiritual market place. As a consequence, there are many organised faiths, each specialising in meeting the requirements of a segment of the market. Lee's comments are intended to describe religious diversity in Malaysia in the 1990s but appear equally applicable to Thailand. This market model provides a useful description of the diversification of religion in contemporary Thailand, in particular, the disintegration of a centrally organised, overarching religious system and its replacement by a mass market of segmented religious forms. Nevertheless, as discussed below, the commercialisation of Buddhism and the intensive marketing of religious ideas, products and spiritual figures is one of the more problematic features of religious expression in the 1990s.

The secularisation hypothesis that underlies Lee's market model also provides a pertinent account of the growth of religious diversity in modern Thailand. Following a neo-Weberian account of the secularisation process, Lee proposes that social systems, but not individuals, are secularised in the process of capitalist development. In many late-twentieth century capitalist societies religion continues to be an important feature of many people's everyday lives, but is no longer integrated within the policy-making institutions of society. Under this form of secularisation, the number and form of religious movements increases because religion is freed from its historical function of providing a general explanation of social order to become more simply a system of personal explanation. In this context, the number of religious forms expands to fill the number of social niches that require different explanations of the individual's place in the natural and social orders, and in a diversified industrialising society there will be an expanding number of such niches.

According to this model, an increasing range of religious options can exist because previously marginal or deviant religious forms are no longer

threatening to state objectives of maintaining national security and establishing cultural integration. Secularisation thus leads to privatisation or de-politicisation of religious adherence and growing pluralism. Furthermore, rather than leading to a decline in religiosity, institutional secularisation may be accompanied by a renewed public but non-political influence of religion, that is, the growth of religion as a social phenomenon reflecting the increasing diversification of social and market sectors, rather than as an integral component of the strategies of a centralist state seeking to establish and maintain its power.

However, capitalist development and institutional secularisation do not mean that Buddhism becomes irrelevant to the political process. Rather, the relations between religion and politics are reconfigured. Lee (1993:39) also provides an apt description of the relationship between Buddhism and politics that now appears to obtain in Thailand: 'Secularisation in late capitalism continues to exclude religious bodies from dominating political decisions and actions but permits the marketing of religion to promote certain political visions and to launch political careers' (Lee 1993:39).

The assistant abbot of Wat Phra Thammakai, a new Buddhist movement based just north of Bangkok, confirms this view when he summarises the symbolic relations between Buddhism and politics in these words, 'monks can by no means put any pressure on the politicians. But when a monk has charisma *[barami],* politicians run to him' (cited in Apinya 1993:177).

MONKS, SCANDALS AND COMMERCIALISM—PUBLIC DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE *SANGHA*

The society-wide impact of market-oriented development perhaps explains why the state has increasingly withdrawn from its historical role of exercising direct control over the *sangha,* and why a political space for the efflorescence of a diverse range of new religious movements has come into being. However, additional factors have also driven the rise of religious movements that are not aligned with the state-monitored *sangha* hierarchy. A long series of much-publicised moral and corruption scandals within the clergy and a perception of the increasing commercialisation of the religion have together created widespread popular disenchantment with the established monkhood and fuelled a search for alternative, less tainted forms of Buddhism.

While clerical obedience to the *sangha* administration is of decreasing interest to the state, in the 1990s, the moral integrity of individual monks is increasingly subject to monitoring and criticism by the laity, and especially by the often sensationalist press. In an institutionally secularised society in which religion becomes a personal rather than a state concern it follows that, while the importance of organisational obedience may decline, greater significance

may be attached to monks' personal integrity. Indeed, the focus of public concern about Buddhism in the 1990s is not the organisational position of monks relative to the state-controlled hierarchy, but rather monks' personal ethical positions relative to the moral principles of the religion. The organisational relationship of the heterodox monk Phothirak to the *sangha* is no longer a pressing religious issue. Rather, the alleged sexual indiscretions of monks such as *Acharn* Yantra and *Phra* Bhavana (see p. 82) now dominate public concern for the religion.

There is widespread public anxiety about a perceived decline in ethical standards of monks. However, the perception of a moral crisis in Buddhism in the 1990s also indicates a general concern to retain an author-itative position for Buddhist ritual and discourse within the polity. In this regard, the moral purity of individual monks is important for both traditionalist and rationalist Buddhists. In traditional interpretations of Buddhist doctrine a morally pure *sangha* is essential for the layperson to be able to acquire religious merit, as only ethically strict monks are believed to participate in supernatural power and to have the capacity to transfer that power to the laity to augment their store of religious merit. By contrast, in rationalist and reformist formulations of Buddhism personal ethics is regarded as the practical expression of the principle of reason underlying *dhamma* (the impersonal principle of righteousness that guides the cosmos and which is often identified with the law of nature as identified by modern science). For reason to be effective in progressively transforming the world there must be a congruence between theory and practice, and only morality, that is, action consistent with the rational principles of Buddhism, is believed capable of transforming the social, political and economic domains. Consequently, for their separate reasons, both traditionalists and rationalists are concerned to uphold the ethical purity of the *sangha,* and instances of clerical misconduct often become the focus of intensive press and media coverage.

The large number of clerical scandals in recent years is perceived as undermining the moral standing of the *sangha* (see Tasker and Handley 1991). Fairclough (1994:22) reports, 'lapses in discipline have become so widespread that the government's Religious Affairs Department last year [1993] assembled a special 200-member monk police force to monitor behaviour'. Some notable recent religious scandals include:

- The royal decorations case—in 1987 the deputy abbot of one of Thailand's richest monasteries was arrested and charged with forging application forms for royal medals, which are awarded annually to people regarded as having worked for the public good.
- The 'Yellow Saudis' case—in 1988 it was revealed that residents of a poor northeastern village had been donning yellow robes and disguising themselves as monks in order to solicit money in Bangkok. This exposure

revealed laxness in procedures for ensuring correct ordination. The pseudo-monks were called 'Yellow Saudis' because of a comparison to the rural poor who sell their labour in Saudi Arabia.

- The case of *Acharn* Suan of Phanom Sarakhan in Chachoengsao Province—in 1989, a controversy erupted over this traditionalist monk's distribution of phallic-shaped protective charms, a practice many rationalists criticised as animist and inconsistent with Buddhist teaching.
- The *Phra* Kittiwuttho case—in May 1994 the controversial abbot of Chittaphawan College in Chonburi was arrested on a charge of swindling money from a 7.2 million baht sale of land in Ratchburi. He was subsequently released on bail of 6.9 million baht, and the case was settled without extensive court proceedings.
- There have been numerous cases of monks breaching their vows of celibacy, including a much-publicised case of a monk caught sexually interfering with a corpse during funeral rites, and a woman taking a famous and popular Chiangmai monk, *Phra* Nikorn, to court to claim support for the child that she maintains he fathered. In 1994 *Acharn* Yantra Amaro Bhikkhu, a prominent monk within the rationalist tradition of Buddhadasa, was accused of having had sex with four female followers and of fathering a daughter. After much public debate Yantra abandoned his Buddhist robes and left the country. In a more recent and even more sensational case, *Phra* Bhavana Phuttho, famous abbot of a monastery in Nakorn Pathom province, was arrested and defrocked in September 1995 on charges of having raped several underage hill tribe girls who were being cared for at his monastery.

While the large number of scandals is undermining the institutional authority of the *sangha* and contributing to the weakening of Buddhism's ideological importance to the state, there is a parallel search, among political conservatives and progressives alike, for respectable, ethically strict monks. As public esteem for and patronage of the central institution of Buddhism declines, sects and charismatic individual monks on the fringe of the official *sangha* are tending to become strong focuses of popular devotion. Expressions of popular devotion for some individual clerical figures have become so intense that Sanitsuda (1994:29) has called *Acharn* Yantra and other charismatic monks such as *Phra* Phayom Kallayano[2] 'superstar monks'. Fairclough (1994:23) observes that with some monks' increasing use of the mass media to convey Buddhist messages and promote their popularity, it is becoming difficult to draw the line between a religious figure and a mass media icon, causing tensions in defining appropriate clerical behaviour and in distinguishing the sacred from the profane. However, the growing prominence of charismatic clerical figures can also be seen as marking a return to the historical emphasis placed on individual ascetics as sites of sacral power, a traditional form of religiosity that was often suppressed in earlier decades

this century as part of the state's attempt to institute a centrally controlled religious structure.

Commercialised Buddhism

While the spread of the market economy has created a space for the emergence of new expressions of religiosity outside the orbit of state power, the penetration of the market into religion has also problematised the spiritual character of some religious movements and contributed to the undermining of public respect for many forms of Buddhism. Indeed, its perceived commercialisation is one of the most commonly cited factors seen as contributing to the declining public respect for organised religion. As Tasker and Handley comment,

> Side-by-side with venerated monks performing ancient rites they [Thais] hear of politicians consulting members of the official clergy, or *sangha* to have their fortunes told and exorcise political bad luck. Along with monks lecturing against greed and materialism on television, they see wealthy Thai businessmen shoring up their commercial good fortune by donating large amounts of money to equally wealthy temples run like businesses.
>
> (Tasker and Handley 1991:21)

One of the most businesslike monasteries is Wat Phra Thammakai. Apinya (1993:153) describes Thammakai as revitalising 'Theravada belief and practice through accommodation and consumerism'. The movement presents itself as modern and technologically sophisticated, and has established a large religious centre on 780 acres of land with plans for an ecclesiastical university, a Buddhist museum, a large lotus-shaped pagoda and a residential area for lay followers. Thammakai packages merit-making for easy consumption and in 1988 the movement won an award from the Business Management Association of Thailand for its religious market planning strategies (ibid.: 168).

Commercialised Buddhism is derogatorily labelled *'phuttha phanit'* ('Buddhist business') by critics, and includes a range of commercial activities such as: (i) the trade in high-priced blessed amulets and other religious relics such as phallic symbols (e.g., *Phra* Suan, *Luang pho'* Khoon); (ii) the commodification of clerical personalities as media superstars, whom the faithful 'consume' by purchasing 'religious products' associated with these personalities (e.g., *Acharn* Yantra before his fall from grace); and (iii) the perceived commercial greed of some monks and monasteries involved in shady financial dealings (e.g., Wat Phra Thammakai; Kittiwuttho).

The commercialisation of Buddhism and its perceived undermining of the religion's spiritual authority has become a political issue. In November 1993 Samphan Thongsamak, then Education Minister and Minister for the Department of Religious Affairs, publicly stated that he was,

concerned by the growing influence of 'commercial Buddhism' within Thailand. The business of selling Buddhist amulets for worship is not in accordance with the teachings of the Lord Buddha, and he said he had asked Deputy Education Minister, Pramote Sukhum, who oversees the Department [of Religious Affairs], to solve the problem.

(*Bangkok Post Weekly Review [BPWR]* 12 November 1993:5)

One much-publicised traditionalist monk, linked both with supporting the careers of individual politicians and the commercialisation of Buddhism is *Luang pho'* Khoon Parisutho. Born in 1923, Khoon Chatponla-Krang was ordained in 1944 and lived alone in the forests of Northeast Thailand for several years, developing a reputation for possessing supernatural powers. He began casting amulets in his own image in the 1950s and is now abbot of Wat Banrai in Dan Khun Thot district of Nakorn Ratchasima province. *Luang pho'* Khoon achieved national prominence after the collapse of the Royal Plaza Hotel in Nakorn Ratchasima in 1993, when the press focused on disaster survivors who reputedly wore protective amulets blessed by the monk. Writing in the *Nation,* Nithinand Yorsaengrat (1994:C1) reported that, 'Today some of his more famous followers include Gen. Chatichai Choonhavan, Supreme Commander Air Chief Marshal Voranart Apicharee, and Permanent Secretary for Labour, Sawai Bhramanee'.

Nithinand also reported that in 1994 *Luang pho'* Khoon's monastery received 100,000 baht each weekday and one million baht on weekends from the sale of blessed amulets. Khoon's most famous amulet reportedly sold for 400,000 baht, and these high prices had spawned an active trade in fake *Luang pho'* Khoon amulets.

The name 'Khoon' literally means 'to multiply', and folk mythology has it that a donation to *Luang pho'* Khoon will be returned multiplied, either in the form of religious merit for the donor's next life or hard cash for this life. In October 1994, a minor scandal erupted when replica 100, 500 and 1,000 baht banknotes were printed and sold to the faithful from markets and other locations in Bangkok with the portrait of King Bhumibhol replaced by a colour portrait of *Luang pho'* Khoon holding wads of real banknotes. An inscription on these high-quality replica banknotes read, 'Incantation to call in money' followed by a Pali text. When authorities complained that replacing the King's picture on replica banknotes might constitute a breach of the country's *lèse majesté* laws and banned their sale, *Luang pho'* Khoon replied that the printing had taken place without his permission.

Some rationalist Buddhists and reporters have criticised *Luang pho'* Khoon as being part of a well-orchestrated public relations programme involving many lay people associated with Wat Banrai whose main or sole source of income is derived from the sale of his amulets. However, *Luang pho'* Khoon's supporters retort that the monk does not use any money

from amulet sales for himself but rather donates the proceeds to charitable projects.

THAI BUDDHISM AND POLITICS IN THE 1990S

Is a wholly secular Thai state likely to emerge? Is it conceivable that with further market-oriented development and progressive undermining of the religion's authority the politico-bureaucratic structure will divorce itself totally from the ritual, symbolism and discourse of Buddhism? The answer appears to be no. Somboon (1993:7) believes that Buddhism continues to fulfil a residual legitimising role for the state, and he sees politicians as attempting to associate themselves with Buddhist monks and religious movements in order to secure and maximise their legitimacy: 'This can enable them to build a government with sufficient popular support to carry through their political plans which, they envisage, will, given time, legitimise their rule through instrumental values'.

In the 1990s political legitimacy is achieved through an interplay of historical religious values and more immediate instrumental values. Buddhist concepts and arguments no longer constitute the core of Thai discourses on the right to govern, but judicious and timely recourse to Buddhist ritual and doctrine can still bolster governments and the careers of politicians. Buddhism is still marshalled to construct emotive arguments in support of political action. For example, Taylor (1993a:74) notes that conservative religious support for General Suchinda Kraprayoon in early 1992 was in part justified by a claim that he sought to save Thailand from the supposed 'enemies of Thai Buddhism', namely, opposition leader Chamlong Srimuang and the heterodox monk Phothirak. Indeed, one reason Suchinda gave for assuming the premiership in March 1992 was to stop a 'certain political leader [i.e., Chamlong] from setting up a new religion' (ibid.: 76). Buddhism thus provides legitimising authority to certain types of political discourses and to the political process. Importantly, Buddhism also lends legitimacy to counter-discourses critical of the government of the day, the power of the centralist state bureaucracy and the expanding influence of capital. Rationalist Buddhism, in particular, provides a framework for a discourse of political criticism often aimed at supernatural beliefs and the political affiliations of monks who reputedly possess supernatural powers.

The discursive plasticity and continuing political utility of Buddhism are shown by the fact that in the 1990s the religion's teachings are being used to justify markedly opposed rationalist and supernatural conceptions of the relations between religious and secular power. In rationalist Buddhism, best exemplified by the work of Buddhadasa (see Jackson 1988b), rationally guided ethical action is posited as the source of legitimate secular power. This power is immanent in ethical action and is believed capable of transforming

the social world for the better. It is universally accessible to all ethical individuals and is thus decentralised, becoming manifest wherever an individual chooses to act ethically and to place reason above unreason. The ultimate source of both religious and secular power in this formulation of Buddhism is *dhamma.* In contrast, in supernatural formulations, participation in or association with a metaphysical realm is posited as a source of religious power, *saksit,* which it is believed has the capacity to affect the exercise of secular power. This *saksit* power is transcendent, its source lying beyond the individuals who manifest it, and it is focused through the religious professional who is believed to establish contact with the power through his ascetic practice, either conducted in this or a past life.

Furthermore, while the institution of Buddhism is widely seen to be in decline and to have reduced political relevance, the search for charismatic spiritual figures means that many individual monks remain important as political opinion leaders. There are several ways in which a monk may exercise authority in the political domain. Intellectual rationalist monks often present detailed arguments on social, political, cultural and economic issues in books and in press and media interviews. For example, *Phra* Thepwethi (Prayut Payuttho, former clerical title *Phra* Ratchaworamuni) is widely regarded as one of the most articulate and insightful of Thailand's rationalist philosopher monks, having written extensively on Buddhism and social issues (e.g., Ratchaworamuni 1987, 1988). However, rationalist monks generally remain apart from day-to-day party politicking. They may attempt to influence the direction of social and political debate but do not intervene in political contestation. In contrast, traditionalist supernatural monks are commonly sought out by individual politicians in order to woo popularity with their electorate. These monks are commonly perceived as lending support to political players but, unlike rationalist monks, they rarely express views on social, economic, political or other policy issues. In rare instances individual monks also intervene politically, whether by commenting on political events or, less often, by becoming directly involved in political activism.

In the remainder of this chapter I consider examples of each of the three above forms of political involvement by Buddhist monks in the first years of the 1990s. I first review the links between the traditionalist monk *Luang pho'* Khoon and politicians and then examine the continuing political relevance of the reformist ideas of the late Buddhadasa. I conclude with an account of the political activism of the former environmentalist monk *Phra* Prajak.

'Magic monks', politicians and rationalist critiques

The way in which popular monks can act as propagandists for politicians who become known as such monks' *luk-sit* or followers is shown by the case of

Luang pho' Khoon. Nithinand reports the links between *Luang pho'* Khoon and some prominent politicians:

> According to Khru Job [a clerical follower], Luang Phor Khoon understands everybody, 'That's why many politicians who need emotional support have faith in him. When politicians are attacked, Luang Phor gives them courage with his good thoughts and amulets'.
>
>   Recently, Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Minister of the Interior and leader of the New Aspiration Party, visited Luang Phor to ask if he would ever become Prime Minister. Luang Phor's reply was 'Yes'.
>
>   In the last general election in 1992, Luang Phor told Nakorn Ratchasima people that Gen. Chatichai Choonhavan, the leader of the Chat Pattana Party, was a good politician because Chatichai and his people had done good things for people in the province.
>
>   'Did I say something wrong?' said the monk. 'Chatichai really has done good things for Nakorn Ratchasima people and Chavalit really will be Prime Minister if he wants to be'.
>
> (Nithinand 1994:C1)

However, *Luang pho'* Khoon's perceived support for some politicians, and those politicians' interest in seeking supernatural support for their careers, have been stridently criticised by rationalist monks, academics and other politicians. *Phra* Thepwisutthimethi (former clerical title *Phra* Panyananda), a well-known pro-democratic follower of Buddhadasa, stated that, 'politicians who pay regular visits to popular monks for mystical purposes are spiritually weak and lack a proper understanding of Buddhism. All the monks who practice magic are idiots. So are the politicians who visit them' (*Nation* 10 March 1994). In particular, he criticised monks who teach supernaturalism because they do not instruct people about the *dhamma,* the doctrinal and soteriological aspect of Buddhism. At the same time, Social Action Party deputy leader Dusit Sopicha warned superstitious political colleagues that they could lose credibility if they continue to flock to well-known monks such as *Luang pho'* Khoon. He stated:

> Buddhism teaches rationalism, yet many politicians visit famous monks simply to get amulets and to ask for an oracle regarding their wish to become ministers…some politicians pay homage to respected monks simply for political reasons, to become popular with their electorate who respect the monk.
>
>   Amnuay Suwankhiri (Democrat, Songkhla), Chairman of the House Committee on Religious Affairs, said that top national leaders' fallacious religious beliefs could affect social values because those leaders are watched by the public….
>
>   He said the Lord Buddha's teachings have been distorted…where many believe that their lives depend on fate….

Amnuay admits that some politicians have manipulated monks to work as their political canvassers because monks can guide the people in local areas.

Guthep Saikrachang (Palang Dhamma Party, Srisaket) said visiting famous monks is the 'cheapest way for politicians to promote themselves'.

He said politicians, unlike most Thais, do not have faith in particular monks. 'Politicians tend to visit any monk who is famous at the time', he added.

(*Nation* 10 March 1994)

Speaking on the same issue, psychologist Wittaya Narkwatchara interpreted some politicians' interest in 'magic monks' in less mercenary terms, observing that some politicians depend on monks psychologically to suppress their fear of losing power, 'Politicians are highly competitive in seeking money, power, fame…. They believe [magically empowered] amulets can help them achieve their goals in a short time' (*Nation* 10 March 1994).

Journalists Thanu Watcharajinaphan and Prajuap Wang-Jai have made a similar point when explaining the popularity of a northern monk, *Khru-ba* Bunchum Yansangwaro,[3] among senior military figures such as General Suchinda and Air Force chief Kaset Rojananil. Thanu and Prajuap write:

As for the reason that so many famous Thai people have faith in *Khruba* Bunchum, we think that it shows that Thai society no longer has anything that you can hold fast to or which can build up confidence in the people. The society is swinging [in the breeze]. So everyone is looking for a monk as a symbol of something steadfast.

(Thanu and Prajuap 1993:16)

Buddhism and the cultural politics of national identity

The tensions between the opposed rationalist and supernatural formulations of Buddhist doctrine and practice inform much debate about Thailand's social and cultural direction in the 1990s. The state is no longer aligned with any one of these two formulations of Buddhism and, unlike the situation in the 1950s and 1960s, debate about the 'true' and 'correct' form of Buddhism no longer has an immediate relevance to issues of state power or national security. Nevertheless, Buddhism continues to play an important role in the construction of contemporary notions of cultural and national identity. Rationalist and supernatural Buddhism, respectively, support opposing conceptions of Buddhist identity and of the ideal structure of the polity.

Supernatural formulations of Buddhism form a central plank of the state-sponsored discourse of Thai identity (*ekalak thai*—see Jackson 1993a, 1993b) which is promoted through official organs such as the National Identity Board within the Office of the Prime Minister, and which aims to create an

integrative national ideology. Cults of semi-deified monarchs like King Chulalongkorn, local heroes such as *Thao* Suranaree in Nakorn Ratchasima, the honouring of the national and protective deity *Phra* Sayamthewathirat, and participation of the state-sponsored *sangha* at national events, are used in the construction of a largely backward and inward-looking interpretation of national identity. This conservative view of identity focuses on neo-feudal notions of the people as subjects of a long line of great and powerful monarchs, and emphasises notions of obligation to serve the state for the common good.

Rationalist Buddhism, in contrast, is used by middle-class intellectuals largely outside the state bureaucracy to construct a more forward- and outward-looking notion of Buddhist identity in which political democracy *(prachathipatai)* and ideas of modernity *(than samai),* progress *(kaew no),* internationalism *(sakon)* and globalisation *(lokanuwat)* play a key role. One recent rationalist formulation of identity has been proposed by Chokechai Sutthawet (1993), a lay follower of Buddhadasa. Chokechai reads Buddhadasa as providing a Buddhist basis for the rationalisation of the bureaucracy, polity and economy; conditions he regards as important requirements for the further development of Thailand's capitalist economy. He extends Buddhadasa's religious reforms into a broad-based critique and 'radical reform' of traditional values in order to develop a Buddhist basis for the country's integration into the global economy and culture. While Chokechai's views are not representative of the majority of Buddhadasa's followers, they show how the monk's ideas are being taken up in the 1990s and why Buddhadasa is likely to have a continuing impact on intellectual life.

Chokechai states that Buddhadasa's legacy is a 'method of radical reform' that has the capacity to effect significant social and cultural change in Thailand. He identifies reason *(het phon)* as the key feature of the emerging global economic and political order, and locates this reason in the core of Buddhist culture. According to Chokechai, it is therefore possible for Thailand to participate in the global culture of reason on an equal footing with the West. In other words, Thailand can move forward from its Buddhist cultural roots and embrace the global culture of reason while remaining characteristically Thai. For Chokechai, Buddhadasa's ideas are used, on the one hand, to support cultural irredentism and nationalism and, on the other hand, to support the country's integration into the global economic and cultural order. Significantly, in this account Thailand's 'globalisation' is not only considered possible without the loss of cultural identity, but is also represented as a return to the supposed rational roots of Buddhist culture.

However, Chokechai's rosy views on the impact of globalisation are not shared by all of Buddhadasa's followers, and Santikaro Bhikkhu (private communication 1994), a Western clerical follower of Buddhadasa, believes that Chokechai has 'wandered quite far from *Acharn* Buddhadasa's message'.

Presenting an analysis of Buddhadasa similar to that developed by Taylor (1993a:4) and Suwanna (1990:107), Santikaro says,

> [Buddhadasa] never argued for the integration of Thailand into the global economy. Rather, his criticisms of materialism, consumerism, and capitalism—as well as Marxism—should lead thoughtful readers to think of getting disentangled from the global economy…. [He was]…highly critical of the capitalist project and the unbridled indi-vidualism and selfishness it has fostered.

The conflicting pro- and anti-capitalist readings of Buddhadasa show that it is not possible to characterise his intellectual impact in terms of a single, neatly definable political position. Taylor (1993a:4) states that the 'activist theological orientation' of Buddhadasa's supporters is 'decisively counterhegemonic', but he describes only one thrust of this activist Buddhist ideology, namely, grassroots environmental activism. Buddhadasa was indeed counterhegemonic, to use Taylor's term, but there are now numerous sites of political opposition, not all of whose interests coincide. One tendency amongst the counterhegemonic groups that look to Buddhadasa for inspiration is anti-centrist and pro-local, and supports the interests of the uneducated poor against the political and economic centre. But another counterhegemonic tendency is pro-democratic and anti-military, and supports the interests of the educated professional and commercial middle class, which is now increasingly a part of the political and economic centre that stands in opposition of the urban and rural poor.

In the 1970s and early 1980s key sites of opposition to state authority were among the educated middle class who struggled against entrenched bureaucratic and military power. At that time, sections of the middle class turned to Buddhadasa for a Buddhist basis for democracy and the rationalisation of social and economic life. Chokechai represents a recent development of this middle-class appreciation of Buddhadasa. However, with rapid economic growth and a widening income gap between rich and poor, new sites of political opposition have arisen among the urban and rural poor, and Buddhadasa's ideas have also been appropriated by middle-class advocates for these marginalised groups, and by the environmental movement, in order to support anti-capitalist grassroots activism. In this context, the increasingly wealthy middle class is a part of the economic and political establishment that stands in opposition to the poor and relatively disenfranchised majority of the population. Indeed, some members of the middle class who support the earlier, anti-military forms of activism based on Buddhadasa's ideas are now likely to be among the capitalists opposed by the NGOs and grassroots activists who also look to Buddhadasa for inspiration.

There is thus a disjuncture in the political usages to which Buddhadasa's rationalist formulation of Buddhism is now applied. On the one hand, Buddhadasa's writings are used by sections of the middle class in their con-

test to achieve a position of power within the central organisation of the state and, on the other hand, they are used by intellectual supporters of the marginalised poor in their struggle against state authority. One of the most prominent Buddhist grassroots activists who were inspired by Buddhadasa was *Phra* Prajak Khuttajitto, and his environmental activism in Northeast Thailand is discussed in the following section.

The political activism of Phra Prajak

In the 1990s, the oppositional dynamic of rationalist Buddhism has expanded into new areas of political concern, moving beyond the struggle for democracy to embrace local political issues of concern to specific sectors of the population. The declining importance of Buddhism to the legitimisation of the centralist state has permitted sectoral and regional religious movements to lend support to local political struggles. That is, the weakening of the nexus between the state and Buddhism has, to an extent, allowed a relocation of the focus of the religion's political functions from issues affecting the political centre to those of a local or sectoral concern.

In some ways this trend towards a localisation represents a return to the pluralism of regional religious forms that existed before the integration of Buddhism as a national church under King Chulalongkorn. However, unlike the historical situation, the new religious pluralism is not only geographically based, although there is often a local component to new movements. Some new movements within Buddhism are issue-based, rallying support from people with similar interests who are located in different geographical regions. For example, *Phra* Prajak's environmental activism which was focused in Buriram in the northeast drew support from environmentalists around the country.

Taylor has described the conservationist activities of *Phra* Prajak and the opposition that this monk aroused from logging companies, the military and police in Buriram province in the early 1990s, noting that the monk

> gained national attention by taking a stand against the civil and military bureaucracy and related capitalist interests in a nationwide plan to resettle Thailand's frontier villagers. This plan was called the Land Redistribution Project for the Poor in Degraded Forest Areas, known in Thai…as…*Khor Jor Kor*.
>
> (Taylor 1993b:3)

The aim of the now abandoned *khor jor kor* programme was to replant the vacated areas with commercial monoculture eucalypts. If fully executed, the programme would have involved relocating up to 2.5 million people, mostly in northeastern provinces. *Phra* Prajak and his supporters resisted the military-led evictions and replanting and were accused of being subversives who hindered national prosperity and development. *Phra* Prajak was

concerned to preserve from logging the Dong Yai forest reserve, an area of 101,000 hectares covering parts of the three provinces of Nakorn Ratchasima, Prachinburi and Buriram.

Taylor (ibid.: 5) says that 'Prajak has taken up the cause of the forest settlers in opposing the state's support for monoculture commercial forest as part of its new export-oriented development policies', and that the monk called for 'a decentralisation of power structures, local and more equitable resource management, and the use of sustainable cultural practices leading toward a new self-reliance'. Prajak was arrested in April 1991 for encroaching on the Dong Yai forest reserve, and again in September 1991 after a confrontation with the army and police during which the army had beaten up villagers and destroyed their cassava crop planted within the forest reserve.

While influenced by Buddhadasa's rationalist ideas, *Phra* Prajak also referred to local animistic beliefs in tree spirits to support his conservationist goals, 'ordaining' trees by wrapping a yellow cloth around them and laying a sacred thread around a sanctified area. After such an 'ordination', which Taylor reports as having a long history in the northeast, local people believed that the tree's spirit would be able to protect it from being felled. Significantly, contemporary environmentalist monks such as *Phra* Prajak combine two distinct formulations of Thai Buddhism which have historically functioned as separate sites of opposition to centralised political authority, namely, karmic-animist Buddhism and contemporary rationalist Buddhism. Local syncretic forms of karmic Buddhism and animism have historically formed the basis of many millenarian rebellions (see Jackson 1988a) and, as noted above, rationalist Buddhism has a long history of supporting political opposition movements in this century. While doctrinally opposed, in the contemporary context these two formulations of Buddhism share a common oppositional dynamic which has facilitated the establishment of political alliances between karmic-animist villagers and rationalist monks and urban NGO advocates. In the practical context of his political struggle, *Phra* Prajak emphasised this common oppositional dynamic of karmic-animist and rationalist Buddhism and downplayed their theoretical differences.

Referring to the history of 'extra-political' killings, in which critics of established state and bureaucratic financial and political interests not uncommonly disappear, Taylor (1993a:81) opined in 1993 that if Prajak 'had been a lay person, he would surely have disappeared by now'.[4] In 1994, in what appears to have been a set-up aimed at stymieing his environmentalist activism, Prajak was accused of having a financial involvement with logging companies, and in the aftermath he gave up his Buddhist robes. Upon leaving the monkhood, Prajak lost the spiritual authority that had previously been associated with his activism, and he has ceased to be political figure and no longer has a public profile.

The Prajak case demonstrates the great difficulty that monks face in taking a directly interventionist role in politics. Clerical activism has a problematic position in Buddhism, historically not being sanctioned by either the state or the *sangha.* In times of extreme political crisis monks have become directly involved in political activism, such as when clerics participated in demonstrations against the military dictatorship in the early 1970s. However, monks who take on leadership roles in secular political activities are widely perceived as tainting their spiritual authority and as transgressing the proper role of a Buddhist renunciate. Prajak's activism contravened long-established traditions in Thai political and religious culture, and his effective silencing was not an unusual or even unexpected development, as Taylor foreshadowed before circumstances forced the monk to disrobe.

CONCLUSION

Rapid socio-economic change has meant that official forms of Buddhism have become less important to the state and has also led to the state-sponsored religion being seen as increasingly irrelevant to the lives of contemporary urban dwellers. The state's loosening of its historical grip over expressions of Buddhist religiosity and the decline in the authority and standing of the *sangha* have together fostered an efflorescence of new religious trends—from the reformist rationalism of Santi Asoke to the supernaturalism of *Luang pho'* Khoon and the syncretic rationalist animism of *Phra* Prajak. In this dynamic situation the political balance of Buddhist teachings and practices has also been significantly transformed.

However, given the doctrinal and practical plasticity of contemporary Buddhism, and the rich variety of purposes that Buddhist discourses and ritual practices can serve both in support of and in opposition to the state and capital, it seems unlikely that political life will be wholly secularised in the near future. Such a radical secularisation of politics would deprive political actors of all persuasions of a complexly nuanced body of political discourses and practices. In the mid-1990s Buddhism is being mobilised to serve a broad spectrum of often conflicting political purposes, and even though the precise role and function of the religion in contemporary society is hotly contested, there is nevertheless a pervasive concern across the political spectrum to ensure that the religion remains an integral component of the ideology and practice of power in Thailand.

6 More of the same?
Politics and business, 1987–96

Paul Handley*

Some analysis argues that the 1987–96 period saw the rise of new political thinking and motivations in Thailand through the shift of political power to a new class of political actors. These new actors are said to be qualitatively different from the political players of earlier periods. In contrast to the overwhelming venality of the past, which left voters apathetic and saw elite politicians held in disdain, the new generation is allegedly more committed to democracy, to the rule of law and the long-term needs of the country and people. Seen as most representative of this change is the overwhelming public rejection, heavily middle-class-based, of the government of non-elected Prime Minister General Suchinda Kraprayoon in May 1992 (see *FEER* and the Thai-language media, May-August 1992 period).

But are these actors and their motivations truly different from those of the old elite? The answer presented in this chapter is that while there may be a new set of actors gaining access to power, none of this 'new breed' has yet shown substantially different behaviour from that of their predecessors. In seeking and exerting power, most have displayed a primary interest in reaping the economic benefits of that power, while employing these benefits to enhance and prolong their power.

The new contenders for power differ from their predecessors by origin—there was a shift towards private sector capitalists and away from retired civil and military bureaucrats—but by their methods and motivation, they closely match the old-style political elite. What appears to have been the major factor governing thinking in the 1987–96 period was the economic boom and the general increase in urban wealth. Underscoring the formation of political attitudes was a conservatism founded on the accumulation and protection of wealth as a means to reach various goals: a palatial home, the rapid expansion of a small company into a big one, or a position in the government for oneself or one's party.

By extension, this interest in accruing wealth became a central determinant of policy and political position and of who one's allies and opponents were. Evidence for this is reflected in two areas of the economy which significantly occupied the attention of policy-makers, capitalists and the public during the

post-1987 economic take-off—development of the stock market and the privatisation of state enterprises.

Until 1987 the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) was the province of a small business elite. However, it soon became a phenomenon that attracted the participation of a huge number of middle- and upper-class investors. The market's remarkable growth generated a widespread infatuation with stock trading which extended to and appeared to dominate the thinking of politicians and bureaucrats.

Also, beginning in 1987, the country embarked on the economically and politically weighty process of privatising infrastructure projects and state enterprises. While the general public was excluded from this process, at the level of political decision-makers implementation was frequently determined and often undermined by the personal financial benefits available to political decision-makers. Policy-makers' understanding of the SET, based on a personal involvement in stock trading, had a crucial bearing on the enactment and outcome of privatisation policy.

Following an outline of key developments during this era, the chapter will identify various types of actors regarded as 'new blood' in political circles. Following this, it will show how their behaviour was closely tied to SET and project interests, and how public policy toward these was affected by private interests.

SETTING: THE ECONOMIC TAKE-OFF

The year 1987 was an important turning-point for Thailand's economy. The country had survived the region-wide recession in 1984–86, and government fiscal conservatism had kept national finances on an even keel, while foreign debt was low compared to other developing countries and the budget returned to surplus in fiscal 1987–88. GDP growth rose from 4–5 per cent in 1984–85 to 9.5 per cent in 1987, 13.3 per cent in 1988 and continued in double digits until 1991 (Bank of Thailand, *Monthly Bulletin* various issues).

Spurring the end of this recession was the sharp rise in the value of the yen against the US dollar (to which the baht is closely tied). This, and subsequent revaluations of the Korean won and Taiwan dollar, forced an exodus of industry from those countries to cheaper operating environments. During 1987–90, Thailand was the most popular site for the relocation of production facilities from those countries (*FEER* 7 July 1988; 3 May 1990). This rush of foreign capital resulted in a period of sharp asset revaluation in Thailand. In the same period, the market value of land and shares rapidly inflated, sometimes ten- and twentyfold. The new money made thousands of Thais instantly wealthy, and further stimulated economic growth. Likewise, salaries for skilled workers and university graduates grew quickly, in some cases quadrupling in a two-year period. This created a huge pool of surplus cash, which could be spent or invested.

This coincided with the end of Prem Tinsulanonda's tenure as prime minister. Never standing for election or joining a political party, Prem had been able to remain in power by balancing the interests of the political elite from 1980 to 1988. Towards the end of his era, a surge of confidence in the private sector accompanied a growing disenchantment with Prem's style of government. He was seen as unwilling to give up power and its benefits in favour of elected politicians; he seemed increasingly aloof and distant from the people; he remained reliant on the army; and his government appeared to neglect problems of rural poverty and development. Under Prem, only the elite were seen as getting rich. Many politicians and business leaders felt that Prem's political and fiscal conservatism and lack of democratic spirit was no longer appropriate for the country (Pasuk and Baker 1995:346–9). The resurgent economy and the disappearance of external and internal security threats emboldened these actors to push Prem out of office in April 1988.

With the election of Chart Thai Party leader Chatichai Choonhavan as prime minister, leading a coalition of mostly rural-based parties, a new era of democracy was proclaimed: one in which the omniscient military and civilian bureaucracy handed the reins over to the people's representatives; and one in which MPs and ministers elected by the public were to serve their constituents.[1]

The economic boom served this idea well. The next 24 months of Chatichai's government were characterised by explosive growth, especially in the stock and property markets. A strongly *laissez-faire* approach by the government allowed many people to accrue benefits, visibly increasing the size of Bangkok's middle class. A frenzy of personal consumption resulted, with department store sales growing at 20 per cent annually for three years and automobile sales at more than 30 per cent (Bank of Thailand, *Monthly Bulletin* various issues; Hewison 1995).

The economic surge created the need and opportunity for the bureaucracy to undertake important long-term policy initiatives. The first was to develop the local capital market, focusing on the SET. Deepening the capital markets was essential to sustain growth while preparing the ground for the privatisation of state enterprises and related infrastructure developments. State enterprises, the largest recipients of government capital investment, were seen as inefficient and unable to meet the needs of the expanding economy (*FEER* 10 March, 14 July, 29 September 1988). They were considered a burden on the state and a threat to fiscal stability. The solution was to use privatisation to introduce efficient, corporate-style management and operations. The privatisation programme for state enterprises—through corporatisation, public listing or the granting of infrastructure concessions to the private sector—was launched in earnest in 1987–88.

Both initiatives became important foci for increasing the financial power of political actors in the period. State enterprises had long been a source of rents for the political elite and their commercial supporters, in part accounting for

their inefficient and corrupt image. Battles between groups in the military, politicians, bureaucrats and contractors for control of state enterprises were decades old (see Riggs 1966; *FEER* 27 June 1991; Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994).

The SET, on the other hand, represented an entirely new source of capital in the economy, and was open to a broad range of participants. Moribund for most of the decade prior to 1987, it attracted the savings of a large number of the urban middle and upper classes as it began to rise. This was fuelled by funds gained from real estate sales and rising salaries. The market was driven by excess local liquidity; a surplus of funds without other places to go, as bank deposits offered unattractively low interest rates.

The SET rose rapidly in the 1987–90 period. But it was not a completely reliable generator of profits. Its ups were followed by sharp declines, and the losses by investors in those declines were often compounded by the widespread use of margin financing—loans leveraged on share holdings—to fund further stock purchases.

The importance of both the SET and the state enterprises in generating incomes for particular participants in the political process meant that any policy that adversely affected those incomes was bound to run into opposition. The intense politicisation, rooted in vested interests, of both capital market development and state enterprise privatisation, was practically inevitable and unavoidable.

POLITICAL ACTORS

Traditional players

Given the gradual nature of the changes during the Prem period, it was not surprising that during the post-Prem years the bureaucracy and the military retained substantial political power (see Hewison 1993a). Within the civilian bureaucracy the essential economic powers of budget, fiscal and monetary policy remained firmly in the hands of a group of mostly Western-educated technocrats who held politicians in disdain. Administrative power was likewise unchanged within the very powerful Ministry of the Interior. Among, or allied to, the civilian bureaucrats, were Bangkok's elite upper-class professional families and landed gentry. This group protected itself by its support for the concentration of power in the military and civilian bureaucracies, and toleration of the presence and power of the big Chinese capitalist groups (see Morell and Chai-Anan 1981; Hewison 1989, 1993a).

The military retained its pre-eminent position despite the shift from a career military man—Prem—to a career politician—Chatichai—as prime minister. They controlled the appointed Senate, many state enterprises and, through martial law, retained direct control of many administrative districts. In addition, the military retained a significant political power rooted in its historical willingness to seize power extra-constitutionally. Prem's successors

as army commander, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and General Suchinda, each made clear their interest in becoming prime minister without having to go through the electoral process, although the former often stated that he rejected the *coup* as a means to the top job.

Big business also remained a centre of political power, with firm alliances to the military and bureaucracy. This group, principally the main banking families, and traders and industrialists involved in monopolies and oligopolies, had a strong interest in preserving the *status quo,* protecting the position of the military and civilian bureaucrats who had assisted in delivering their privileged positions (see Hewison 1989; Suehiro 1989).

The 'new' players

Working against this cosy relationship were groups trying to pull the reins of power from the hands of the old elite. Some were long-established politicians, but many more were perceived as a promising generation of 'new era' political actors: increasingly powerful and independent civilian-based political parties; young capitalists, independent of the old business groups and the military; and relatively young, well-educated private sector employees and business owners, sometimes identified as the 'new middle class' (see Sungsidh and Pasuk 1993a; Anek n.d.).

Many in this new class—in fact, by most measures, many could be considered upper class—appeared to feel significantly empowered by the surge in economic growth and wealth in 1987–89. Both young capitalists and the university-educated white-collar office workers benefited significantly from the rise in land prices and share prices, and the surge in the economy. For the first time, private sector salaries overtook government pay levels, making private sector employment far more attractive (*FEER* 8 February 1990).

The new capitalists were particularly confident. These were business people who found that, for the first time, they could thumb their noses at the big banks, which they saw as part of the control apparatus of the old elite, monopolising capital. The changes in the economy allowed them to tap non-bank resources for the expansion of their businesses. This included investment funds from foreign lenders and investors, from the disposal of newly valuable assets like land, cashing in on the exports boom and, most importantly, from the SET.

There was strong support for the Chatichai government among this new middle class. They considered that the previous power-holders had served the old elite, resulting in an inefficient economic framework—poor infrastructure, overregulation and bureaucratic corruption, inefficient state enterprises and monopolistic business practices. Thus, they favoured the new government's approach which they perceived as deregulation to enhance and spread the benefits of the private sector.

This also saw traditional-style political players recasting themselves as progressive, liberal and democratic. Many of the MPs in the Chatichai government were veterans of military-led governments which they had willingly supported in the past. However, with the economy growing strongly, they appeared set to leave the military and bureaucrats behind and tap a new power base. Chatichai and his Chart Thai Party-led government took strong measures to reduce the power of the bureaucratic elite. He attempted to move the military out of its non-military roles, including the control of state enterprises, and reduced the influence of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), which had been powerful under Prem. Such moves gave it the image of a 'can-do government', that did not allow the bureaucracy to hamper growth. Even military strongman Chavalit insisted that he be seen as one of the new breed, announcing his rejection of the *coup* as a means to power, pointing out that he formally left the military to enter politics as a civilian (*FEER* 12 April 1990). He did not, however, stand for election at this point, with Chatichai appointing him to the cabinet.

Many of these groups appeared allied with the public in bringing down the Suchinda government in the May 1992 events, implying a collective identity. These new liberal and democratic actors supposedly risked their new-found wealth and security to take a political stand and support the May demonstrations. They allegedly understood the constitutional issues involved, and wanted the changes demanded by the leaders of the demon-stration. In pursuit of these goals, this new group was strongly supportive of the Democrat and Palang Dharma parties in the September 1992 elections (see Sungsidh and Pasuk 1993a). Among some of the more prominent of those who laid claim to being representatives of the new generation of political actors were:

- The BMS group. This network of elite, foreign-trained economists spanned government, universities, banks and business. Members and associates included Tarrin Nimmanhaeminda and Olarn Chaipravat of Siam Commercial Bank, economists at the Bank of Thailand, and Akorn Hoontrakul, then owner of the Imperial Hotels Group.
- Pairoj Piempongsarn and colleagues. A clique of companies, mostly real estate related on the Eastern Seaboard, which counted on its strong political connections with Chatichai and Amnuay Viravan, earlier of the Bangkok Bank and, later, a leader of the New Aspiration and Nam Thai Parties. The Pairoj group included the Ban Chang, Starblock, Eastern Star, Hemaraj, Country, and NTS Steel companies, all highly popular among speculators on the SET.
- The Shinawatra group. Thaksin Shinawatra, scion of a Chiangmai business family and former police officer turned businessman, earned his new elite credentials by obtaining some of the country's first private telecommunications concessions. His hugely successful paging, cellular telephone and subscription television services gave him a 'can-do' image.

Listing these on the SET provided over US$2 billion, a fortune which he used to move into politics as the head of the Palang Dharma Party in 1995, saving the party from electoral oblivion. While still party leader, his withdrawal from the 1996 election race saw the party decimated.

- Song Vatcharasriroj (usually referred to as *Sia* Song). In his thirties, Song was at the head of a huge stock-market investment group lionised by many of the smaller investors of the market. Unheard of before 1990, by 1992 his fortune was estimated in the tens of millions of US dollars.
- The Group of 16. Younger MPs, led by Newin Chidchob, Suchart Tancharoen, mainly associated with Chart Thai and, later, with the Chart Pattana Party.

NEW BUSINESS: DEPENDENCY ON THE SET

The new capitalists found the fortune-building characteristics of the SET liberating. For many, insider trading was a quick way to shore up their fortunes. But a more important method of tapping the market was a process called chain-listing, employed by several groups. Chain-listing involves a business owner floating a relatively new company on the market, and following that up by listing subsidiary or related companies, with share prices bolstered in each successive flotation, through a book-keeping exercise where assets and profits are 'transferred' from one company in the group to the one being listed. Meanwhile, the earlier listed company would often begin to report poor earnings and even losses. But by this time, speculators had made more than enough money on the stocks to care.

This 'creative' approach to book-keeping was a crucial factor in helping launch young, untried companies on the SET. Sold to the public in a rising market, the shares could double or triple in price, making the owners hugely wealthy. According to knowledgeable brokers, company owners and listing advisers/underwriters would conspire to artificially increase the price to high, often unsustainable, levels in the first weeks of trading. Then they would sell off some of their shares for a personal profit, buying them back, if need be, when the price collapsed (various interviews, 1989–90).

This depended on two factors: excess money chasing a shortage of shares on the market, and the creation of the belief that the shares would be pushed high. So in the initial offering, shares would be placed with big market players and well-connected members of the elite, such as the military, politicians and business people. As primary investors they too benefited when the share price rose in early trading, and this would be repeated with each stage of the chain-listing. It is important to note that no one, and no authority, in the 1987–92 period attempted to interfere with this practice—it was considered 'normal'.

Both the Ban Chang clique companies and the Shinawatra telecommunications group appear to have followed this pattern, using the process to enhance their political clout: through the allocation of shares they built alliances with important political actors prior to the listing, and used the money to enhance their own political power through their support of politicians and parties.[2] Other notable 'new-era' groups following this pattern were the Manager or M group of media companies, the Finance One group and the Wattachak media group.

After the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in May 1992, the rules for listings were slowly changed and chain-listing made more difficult. This, in turn, had a negative affect on the plans of some of these and other groups hoping to pursue the practice and its resultant economic and political benefits.

THE STOCK MARKET AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

All of the above-mentioned actors took an active interest in the SET, so much so that, under their influence, public policy was significantly modified to respond to the fluctuations of the market, rather than the principles of democracy or economic development. They responded to investors who opposed any policy which might make the market fall. And they appeared to resist initiatives that would govern the behaviour of SET participants and establish rules of fairness and transparency.

Because of a much stronger demand for stocks than supply, any new stock issue was pursued avidly and prices rose sharply. For young business people, in particular, the stock market was a liberating, bottomless well of easily accessed funds. It was seen to mean freedom and, somehow, democracy. Going public on the SET put them in a similar league to establishment money overnight. For politicians, the military, bureaucrats and the sizeable urban middle and upper class, the SET was a place to get rich quick. It offered a far greater—and seemingly certain—return on one's money than the low savings account rates given by the elite banking cartel. Higher returns were assured by manipulating stocks, or following manipulators, and obtaining inside information.

Importantly, those most 'inside' in the market could, as noted above, use their positions to build up political and business alliances. For politicians the market became, in a sense, a cleaner and more sophisticated source of funding than traditional graft, which was becoming increasingly difficult to conceal. Taking commissions for projects was widespread, but still understood as wrong, while taking preferential stock allocations and inside trading information was not (see Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994).

It is important to note that virtually all actors agreed on the acceptability of preferential stock allocations, inside information and manipulation of the SET for wealth creation. The only consistent complaint came from small investors

who wanted a better share of new issues. SET-derived and property market wealth helped to overcome traditional barriers to economic and political mobility. For a time, the winners appeared to believe that this wealth, in the MTV phrase, helped 'free their minds'. To the contrary, there is evidence that this wealth committed its owners to a path that was little different from that of previous generations. The actors, except in certain circumstances (such as during the events of May 1992), were committed to the protection of their personal wealth. When their new source of wealth was threatened, the result was conservative and old-style responses. The link to the SET can be best noted in the sharp downturns during the period.

Typical of emerging markets, the SET was highly volatile, and sudden falls in the market often wiped out earlier paper gains. Short-lived falls were sometimes related to local politics, but in each case of a protracted SET downturn, there were strong, fundamental economic and financial reasons to explain it. Yet each sustained fall soon became a political issue, with investors and speculators blaming the government for their losses. Market falls hit all players, but especially speculators who were heavily leveraged. However, when the stock market rose, it funded a huge consumption boom. Confident of further rises, countless investors borrowed money to buy more stocks, purchase cars, houses, holiday condominiums, jewellery and other luxury goods (see Hewison 1995). This is evident from data showing that in the early 1990s, despite sharply rising incomes, personal savings plunged and personal indebtedness rose. According to the Bangkok Bank, personal savings as a ratio of net income fell from 20.3 per cent in 1989 to 12.3 per cent in 1993, and was estimated to be just 8.2 per cent in 1995 (*BP* 9 August 1994). This represents immense consumer purchases and credit card payments in the 1987–93 period. The fallout came in 1996, when the moribund stock and property markets combined with high consumer debt to depress consumer markets to near-zero growth levels.

When the market fell, investors had to make good on margin loans taken out for stock purchases. This forced a cutback in general consumption, especially of luxury goods and services; it also made it difficult for investors to repay the loans they had taken out to finance their spending (*BP* 9 August 1994). That might explain, then, the strong public reaction against the government or authorities at each of those junctures, for when the market was rising, investors were happy to ignore political events that seemed to threaten democracy. A series of specific sharp and sustained market falls illustrates this.

During 1989, the SET index rose by 127 per cent. In this boom environment investors seemed impervious to such things as: the politically inspired April 1989 removal of the country's respected chief planner, Dr Snoh Unakul, head of the National Economic and Social Development Board; the June crisis over control of the state power monopoly, which nearly led to a government-military stand-off; and a bitter fight over fiscal and monetary policy between Minister of Finance Pramual Sabhavasu, and central bank and

Ministry of Finance technocrats, with the latter wanting to tighten monetary controls to prevent economic overheating, while Pramual, backed by the cabinet, refused this. In this environment of uncontrolled growth and cheap investor credit, a concerted share ramping operation by the small broker Chao Thai Securities sent the SET rocketing. On 10 January 1990, financial authorities shut down Chao Thai for conduct seen as potentially threatening the whole financial system. Immediately afterwards there was strong criticism of the government; on the one side, for being too heavy-handed, causing losses for everyone; and on the other, for waiting too long to crack down. Yet there was still no criticism of Pramual for lack of controls on the economy (*FEER* 19 October, 14 December 1989; 25 January 1990).

Nevertheless, the market recovered, rising 50 per cent in six months, and the complaints receded. During this time, however, the coalition government's stability was always in question, with the finance authorities periodically warning that the SET could overheat. Army commander Suchinda was constantly in the news, loudly criticising the government's behaviour, which led political analysts to suggest that a *coup* was a distinct possibility (*FEER* 19 July 1990). Yet all of these presumably negative signs were ignored by investors. The market only began to fall in July when foreign investors decided that the SET had overheated. In August, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the market crashed by 50 per cent over a few weeks, more than any other market in the world. Investors repeatedly called for the government to support the market and ease their repayment commitments on margin investments. While investors did not direct blame to the government for this fall, there was widespread, at times illogical, criticism that foreigner participation in the stock market should be controlled because their selling pulled the market down, despite the fact that they were also the key investors contributing to market rises. In response to investor demands, the Ministry of Finance pushed brokers to form the market support fund 'Ruam Pattana', a controversial move not supported by the central bank and ultimately ineffective in shoring up the SET.

It took five months for the market to recover. The upturn came during January 1991 as the US-led alliance moved against Iraq, with positive results for world stock markets. The SET's rise came despite the fact that the Chatichai government had entered its most unstable period, rising thirty per cent before the 23 February 1991 military *coup* which established the National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) junta.

Following the *coup,* the market fell steadily for six months, back to the level of the end of 1990. This was curious given the NPKC's appointment of the widely respected Anand Panyarachun to lead a government of capable technocrats. In fact, there was significant grumbling regarding the Anand government's attempts to reduce the more outrageous activities around the SET. Investors reacted with demonstrations against the government and in support of SET president Maruey Phadoongsidhi, whose light-handed

shepherding of the SET's expansion over several years made him something of a folk hero among investors and those hoping to list their companies.

The market did begin to recover in the run-up to the March 1992 elections, but fell sharply after the election, in reaction to the furore over the appointment of Suchinda as prime minister. The March-May 1992 period displayed the purest political expression of the post-Prem era. During the anti-Suchinda demonstrations many protesters complained of the effect Suchinda's appointment had on the SET. Newspapers also made this connection. The link between the end of the stock market boom and NPKC rule was juxtaposed with the belief that the Chatichai period equated with economic prosperity, conveniently forgetting the corruption label pinned to it.

The *BP's* editorial immediately following the King's intervention to diffuse the street violence of May 1992 reflected the priorities of the middle-class protesters. In the second sentence of the editorial, immediately following applause for the King's action, the paper proclaimed that 'the Stock Exchange of Thailand Index [had] hurtled to dizzying heights and jubilation swept through the Kingdom' (*BP* 22 May 1992).

Although these political oscillations did cause short-term market fluctuations, the fact is that the period from August 1990 to mid-1992 revealed, with hindsight, a market that was quiet due to fundamentals: higher interest rates, poor profits in listed firms and a slowing of growth. Foreign investors were less enthusiastic and local investment alone could not drive prices up. In mid-1992, though, interest rates began to fall and the market recovered. This coincided with the end of the NPKC and the election of Chuan Leekpai's government in September 1992. The market rose again, until the end of 1993, when a rise in interest rates and slight economic slowdown put the SET into another prolonged slump that carried on until the end of 1995.

But from September 1992 until mid-1993, there was one market setback which clearly indicated the political heart of the middle class. This was when the newly founded SEC cracked down on several overlapping share manipulation syndicates, which together controlled as much as US$800 million in investment funds (various interviews, SEC officials, 1993). This was the infamous *Sia* Song case.

The shutdown of the *Sia*[3] Song syndicates caused big losses for a large number of local investors and important establishment political figures. Heavily dependent on margin loans to play the SET, small investors felt the impact of the market's fall to a greater extent than most. As a result, protests were held, rallies were organised in support of Song, and the authorities were subjected to trenchant criticism. Song himself went on a speaking tour, financed by business newspapers popular with small investors. One of the themes developed in his speaking engagements was that the SEC crackdown was a manifestation of the bureaucratic elite

trying to prevent the new generation from enriching itself. Song pointed out that while members of the elite used insider knowledge to help them profit from their share-trading activities, they were never caught. This, he argued, was totally undemocratic.[4] Newspapers, many of which championed the pro-democracy fight against Suchinda, lionised Song and repeated his attacks on Minister of Finance Tarrin as an example of someone who drew up rules and regulations, but did not abide by them himself. Tarrin, linked to the politically active BMS group, was accused by some opponents of being a major inside player on the market. In addition, the protesters demanded the resignation of the SEC management, the Bank of Thailand Governor, and even the prime minister.

Thus, rather than praise the authorities for enforcing rules and protecting them from a larger SET collapse (the SEC pointed out the 75 per cent collapse of the Taiwan stock market in the same period due to poor supervision), people attacked their elected government, and called for a return to the 'anything goes' days of the Chatichai period. Many smaller investors were frustrated at having their expectations thwarted by the rich and powerful (*FEER* 29 October; 3 December 1992). However, much of this was forgotten in the sharp market revival in late 1993, driven by a renewed inflow of foreign funds.

Then, at the beginning of 1994, with the economy again threatening to overheat, monetary controls were tightened, sending the SET down 33 per cent by April 1995 from its November 1993 levels. Coincidentally, this slump paralleled the steady fall in popularity of the Chuan government. Despite a recovery in late May 1995, this was insufficient, brokers said, to allow local investors to retire their old debts on trading losses, and few were happy with the Chuan government, which fell in April 1995.

Stock prices and personal incomes featured in the ensuing political campaign. For example, members of Chatichai's Chart Pattana Party used posters and billboards to remind voters that land and stock prices were highest under the 1988–91 Chatichai government. And Thaksin, the new head of the Palang Dharma Party, was particularly popular, perceived as having the same origins, experience and motivations as the new middle and upper classes of Bangkok.

But it was Banharn Silpa-archa who headed the new Chart Thai Party-led government which took power in July 1995. The investing public was less than sympathetic towards the new government. The market declined, and by the last quarter of 1995; fell to a two-year low. This reflected a fairly tight money situation, with investors protesting against stiff margin lending policies and a lack of government support for the SET. In November, the troubling nature of market developments was underscored when a suicide attempt by a protesting investor at the SET offices was broadcast live on television. When the market finally did begin to climb again at the beginning of 1996, the protests ended. Following the resignation of the Banharn

government, the SET continued its climb, but dipped soon after the 1996 election.

To sum up, the expectations brought about by the 'easy money' period under Chatichai were at times turned into the basis for political expression by this 'new breed' from the middle class. It also influenced whether they felt negative or positive about a government.

'SET WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY': THE POLITICAL ELITE AND POLICY RESPONSE TO INVESTORS

If the political opinions of business people and general investors were shaped by fluctuations of the SET index, politicians and bureaucrats encouraged this. Actions on the part of officials were often responses to investor complaints, frequently disregarding government policies but reflecting the personal interests of officials in the SET. An early example was the struggle, towards the end of 1989, between Ministry of Finance officials who wanted to slow the economy, and the Chatichai cabinet, particularly Minister of Finance Pramual, who wanted to maintain rapid growth. In a showdown, the cabinet chose to back Pramual, in part because tightening economic controls would pull down the SET and property market (*FEER* 19 October; 14 December 1989). The result was the damaging Chao Thai Securities case, which revealed a variety of elite interests in the SET (*FEER* various issues, December 1989–February 1990). Informed sources said the brokerage had intimate links with the Suchinda military clique. Its owners, the Bulakul family, also had a deep involvement in the Pairoj-Ban Chang group. These links might explain why minimal punitive action was taken against the principals of Chao Thai. In the wake of this case the government took measures, such as getting mutual funds to support the market, in order to keep investors happy. This was only partially successful, but demonstrated that appeasing investors was a government's priority.

As noted above, until the market collapsed following the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, it rose steadily as speculators ignored various political crises. One of the reasons for this was the known SET interests of the political elite. An example was General Suchinda, then army commander. In an atmosphere of heightened political tension between the military and the Chatichai government, the general told reporters that he had to act carefully 'or stocks might fall'. He explained his knowledge of the SET came from playing stocks, and cited the 43 per cent profit he made on the sale of Imperial Hotel shares that he received when it went public (*FEER* 19 July 1990).

The government took controversial measures to shore up the SET with support funds following the August 1990 Kuwait invasion. These were mostly futile, however, and disappointed a large sector of the urban middle class. For the next four months, infighting over various supports to the market and

economy saw a decline in public support for the Chatichai coalition. It could be inferred that the 1991 *coup* leaders acted, in part, from a recognition of an economy- and SET-related turn in sentiment against Chatichai, even though the SET had begun to recover by January 1991.

Although headed by more traditional political leaders—military strongmen—the NPKC junta was reasonably SET-wise, both as individuals and as a group. General Suchinda's Class 5 group, in particular, had its own investment managers, and the military used intelligence sources for market research (various interviews, 1992). This may explain the NPKC's inordinate attention to the SET. Immediately after the *coup,* they ordered mutual fund managers, banks and brokers to support the market. The NPKC's Kaset Rojananil, the air force commander, made repeated statements encouraging confidence in the SET. Not many other *coup* leaders have shown such sensitivity to a stock market.

Over time, as the public perception of the junta declined, the market slumped and anti-NPKC politicians pointed out that the economy and SET performed better under Chatichai. This was an overture of middle-and upper-class voter preoccupation with their incomes. The market began a recovery during the run-up to the March 1992 elections. While somewhat cyclical in nature, the short duration of the rise also gives credence to the argument that it was deliberately pumped up by politicians raising money for their campaigns. Brokers and political sources pointed out that the NPKC-backed Sammaki Tham Party used the SET to raise its political funds. During the election campaign this party was one of the biggest spenders, buying MPs and votes to have them re-elected.

A popular theme of the 1992 campaign from those opposed to the junta and its allies was to play on the middle-class preoccupation with incomes. Campaign slogans and speeches argued that, under Chatichai, everyone got rich, while this was not the case under the NPKC. Urban voters rejected the NPKC alliance, but the rural-based parties led by a Chatichai-less Chart Thai and Sammaki Tham formed a coalition that eventually chose Suchinda as prime minister. This sparked massive demonstrations.

The SET remained a preoccupation for some politicians even during the protest movement against Suchinda. Typically, to a crowd of 60,000 protesters at Sanam Luang, Solidarity Party leader Boonchu Rojanasatien attacked the Suchinda government for mobilising millions of baht from commercial banks to shore up the SET. He pointed out that it clearly was not working, and stock prices had continued to fall, for no one had faith in the Suchinda government (*BP* 5 May 1992).

Following the May riots and Suchinda's resignation, the market again rose sharply, with the main force being the above-mentioned share manipulation schemes linked to *Sia* Song, and underpinned by still-loose controls on margin financing and low interest rates. Whether this was also related to raising financing for the September elections is unclear, although the eventual crackdown exposed links between Song, other share syndicate manipulation

principals, politicians and the political and economic elite. The SEC's list of some 130 individuals and businesses charged in the case implicated persons with direct links to Kaset, New Aspiration Party leader Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and, surprising to many, senior Democrat Party politicians Bhichai Rattakul and Supachai Panitchpakdi. In addition, newly elected Palang Dharma Party MP Akorn Hoontrakul was directly implicated and charged, soon resigning his BMS-supported seat. Furthermore, according to some well-placed observers, Song's links spread to all corners of the urban elite, while he himself was an important contributor to political parties.

In the wake of the crackdown, Song embarked on a tour, whipping up anti-government sentiment, accompanied by some politicians, notably MP Newin of the Chart Thai Party and a leading member of the supposedly 'new era' Group of 16 young MP alliance. This involved, as noted above, attacks on the government and Minister Tarrin in particular. As a former commercial bank president he was seen to be part of the 'old elite', preventing the rise of a new group, while playing the SET as insiders themselves. Indeed, most bankers are significant investors on the SET, a role underpinned by the fact that they have better access to inside information than nearly anybody else. It is also true that the wives of many of the men who dominate the business and political elite are heavily involved in the market. Seen as being possessed of unparalleled inside knowledge, these women are frequently emulated by budding investors. The appearance of Akorn on the *Sia* Song case list did little to reduce this impression. The BMS group of which Akorn was an organiser included several technocrat economists and bankers. Further raising suspicions of an 'old elite' plot was the revelation that no significant member of the financial community was named or punished in the scandal. Defenders of Song rightly pointed out that he could not have managed the amounts of money nor placed market orders without the knowledge and assistance of the banking, finance and stockbroking community. According to SEC sources, lobbying on behalf of the scores of people named in the case came from all sides, including leaders and political actors with reputations as defenders of the law and propriety.

After the 1995 election, the SET's slump became a fixation for the Banharn government. As investors complained, the government moved to form another market-support fund. This was rejected by the commercial banks and the SEC, forcing the government to look to other measures. When, in November 1995, an investor attempted suicide at the SET, Banharn promised intervention to support the market, even though market fundamentals appeared to offer little incentive to investors. This fixation culminated in the early 1996 collapse of the Bangkok Bank of Commerce. The collapse was triggered by bad, under-collateralised loans made to, among others, members of the Group of 16, including Newin and Suchart, and the Ban Chang Group's Pairoj. The loans were made over the previous two years to allow investment in stocks and land, which were then leveraged for further loans. At the time of the collapse,

Newin was Deputy Minister of Finance. This, amongst other factors, resulted in both he and Minister of Finance Surakiat Sathienthai being forced to resign (*BP* and *Nation* various issues, April-May 1996).

At the same time, pressure was brought to bear on central bank governor Vijit Supinit to resign. Vijit had forced respected SEC chief Ekamol Kiriwat from his job in December 1995, and Ekamol later asserted in court that the two fell out over several issues, including Vijit's lack of action on the Bangkok Bank of Commerce (BBC) crash and on Vijit's personal share holdings and a personal line of credit from the bank. In late 1996 opposition politicians revealed that BBC had provided substantial funds, raised through stock market speculation, for the Chart Thai Party's 1995 election campaign (*Nation* various issues, August-September 1996).

THE SET AND STATE ENTERPRISE PRIVATISATION

Three examples show how the infatuation with the SET by political and policy-making leaders determined the path of privatisation of state enterprises. These are Thai Airways International, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) and the expressways.

One of the greatest challenges during the post-1986 boom has been keeping pace with the demand for infrastructure development. Before the mid-1980s infrastructure services were almost completely supplied by state enterprises, often in monopoly positions. These enterprises operated under various ministries and departments, but nearly all of the country's state enterprises answered to the Ministry of Finance on their financial performance. Historically, state enterprises in infrastructure and utility services were known for their slow and expensive development, inefficient management and corruption. In addition, they were frequently used as political tools or as sources of funds for politicians and the military. The military's influence in, and use of, state utilities and companies is well known (*FEER* 27 June 1991).

In 1984 government planners decided on a programme to privatise state enterprises responsible for infrastructure development or to privatise the infrastructure projects themselves. From 1987, privatisation became a central political focus. Privatisation included various options: issuing shares on the SET and slowly reducing government control; granting concessions to own and operate infrastructure services (permanently or temporarily); or corporatising the enterprise and its management. The leadership of state enterprises saw privatisation as a threat to the way they had done business in the past, and staff saw it as a threat to the job security. Thus, they allied themselves with bureaucrats, politicians and military leaders to resist or redirect the policy. Because privatisation was necessary to sustain growth, in each case discussed here, compromises were eventually found. Most

frequently, the compromises involved the SET, enriching many, but limiting progress towards the original goals of privatisation.

National carrier Thai Airways is an example of the process. By the late 1980s, air force control and political interference had contributed to a deterioration of management and a rise in corruption, bringing a sharp profit fall after 1989. Despite Ministry of Finance control of the company's equity, its air force and political bosses resolutely resisted privatisation (*FEER* 2 February 1992). This—though not the airline's financial performance— changed in 1990, when the SET-wise Kaset became Royal Thai Air Force commander. With the agreement of the Communications Minister Montri Pongpanich, also said to be a SET player, arrangements were made for listing a small portion of the airline's shares. Public listing did not necessarily make the company more open to outside scrutiny and control, and the airline's accounting methods were altered to make a 1990–91 loss appear as a substantial profit, to enhance the listing *(FEER* 12, 26 March; 25 June; 6 August 1992).

Officially, the goals of the Thai International listing were: first, the introduction of private and foreign capital to force the management to become responsive to shareholders and operate more efficiently; second, improved management to permit further share issues to the public and reduce the airline's reliance on the Ministry of Finance; and third, allow a blue chip state airline listing to enhance the further development of the SET. The 1992 listing was, however, a failure with investors who noted poor profits, suspect book-keeping and still-politicised management. In the offering, brokers said that they were under considerable political and airline pressure to underwrite the issue, and had to accept that they themselves might lose money on the listing.

A significant portion of the new shares were designated for sale to foreigners, but rather than being allocated directly and formally, as is normal practice, foreign brokers began to receive indirect offers of shares at a 30–40 per cent premium on the official price. Those making the offer, brokers suggested, were Kaset's assistants. Few foreigners were willing to take the shares, and on listing the share price collapsed, leaving investors contemplating losses. Up to early 1996, the stock traded 10–30 per cent below the initial offering price, and foreign investors indicated little interest in it. Air Force control remained unchanged, low morale and corruption continued, and the airline was no longer able to issue shares and raise funds from the SET. Ministry of Finance dependence was not reduced and, in this sense, the policy failed to achieve its stated goals.

A less controversial case, but one that equally perverted the privatisation process, was that of the PTT, the market-dominant oil and fuels distributor. PTT was to corporatise its management and operations in preparation for public listing and to reduce its reliance on borrowings guaranteed by the Ministry of Finance. One of the more efficient state enterprises, but under strong army influence, PTT barely went through the motions. A compromise

was reached in 1993 when it took a corporatised subsidiary on to the SET, its capital-intensive exploration and production arm known as PTT E&P. It had significant assets in oil and gas reserves, which should have given the share's high price. However, the handling of the listing suggested that it was used mainly to enrich those who obtained share allocations early, rather than to earn the government a fair price for its hydrocarbon assets. The shares were priced at 33 baht (US$1.30) to the public, but according to brokers many were allocated to board members, management, selected senior bureaucrats, military men and politicians. One underwriter argued that the underlying asset value of the shares was deliberately and grossly understated to benefit initial (and inside) subscribers to the share issue. Only after the shares were placed with those who could get them, did PTT steadily release information on the extent of assets, hydrocarbon reserves and future earnings potential. The result was that the share price quickly doubled, to start trading on the SET in August 1993 at over 70 baht. Within one year, the price topped 240 baht, eventually to climb above 300 baht (US$12). This was not a speculative bubble: in 1995 foreign brokers valued the assets of PTT E&P at over 250 baht a share, seven to eight times the initial offering estimate, despite the fact that there were no surprising additions to the company's assets after listing (various interviews, 1995).

In sum, the PTT management was not reformed and the state did not reap the value of its valuable assets. However, those investors with inside access to information and stock did profit. There was no public, political or bureaucratic objection to this. PTT E&P is still virtually controlled by PTT, which means its finances are still implicitly guaranteed by the Ministry of Finance.

A third case, which also subverted privatisation policy to potential gains on the SET, was that of the Expressway and Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (ETA), Bangkok Expressway Corp. Ltd (BECL), and the Second Expressway Stage (SES) in Bangkok. In 1988 ETA granted a 30-year concession to Japanese construction giant Kumagai Gumi to build and operate the 36-kilometre SES on a for-profit toll basis prior to its return to the government. Kumagai formed BECL for the job, itself holding 65 per cent, with banks and the Thai construction firm Ch. Karnchang holding the remainder. All seemed well, except that the BECL concession implied a threat to the ETA's barely scrutinised monopoly. BECL appeared set to show how inefficient, and even corrupt, ETA was, encouraging other toll road privatisations, which could have heralded the end of ETA (interviews, 1992–4; also see *FEER* 27 July; 5 August; 9, 16 September; 11 November 1993; 24 February 1994).

Between 1988 and 1993, BECL believed that ETA had repeatedly contravened the BECL contract and did not intend to honour the word or spirit of the concession. This was further complicated by a cabinet decision in February 1993 to lower the contracted tolls for the road, also in violation of the contract. Discussions between the government and BECL did not resolve

the situation, and in September 1993 the government forcibly took over the road. To avoid being accused of nationalisation, the government organised a consortium of Thai companies and banks to buy Kumagai's BECL shareholding.[5]

The key to this outcome was that the politicians who made the decisions realised that BECL was a valuable company and that the SES would make a lot of money over the long term. In order to persuade the companies to buy out Kumagai, and inject some new capital into BECL, the politicians guaranteed that the shares could be quickly sold to the public and listed on the SET. Documents prepared at the time of the March 1994 takeover forecast that a sizeable profit would be made on the shares for the investors who were helping the government out of a difficult situation. Prior to the deal being done, underwriters for the listing were arranged and the listing was planned for the end of 1994. On this basis a number of key political players took part, even borrowing money to do the deal.

Those who decided on the takeover of the SES included General Chavalit, then Minister of the Interior, Deputy Prime Minister Amnuay, Minister of Finance Tarrin and Siam Commercial Bank president Olarn Chaipravat, the latter two associated with BMS. Those brought in to take shares included major banks, the military-linked Ch. Karnchang, several of the members of Pairoj's clique, Amnuay and Thaksin. Bureaucrats involved in the management of ETA were also allocated shares. None were interested, according to insiders, in the long-term prospects of BECL, and all hoped to make a quick profit (interviews, 1994).

In the event, the listing took a year longer than expected, forcing some of those insiders who took up Kumagai's shares, like the Ban Chang group, to sell early, with a smaller profit than expected. Upon listing, the share price sagged, as more insiders sold their shares and buyers were few, given the continuing dispute between BECL and ETA. The more important result was that ETA and politicians had defeated highway privatisation: subsequent toll roads were developed by ETA and no local or foreign companies showed interest in ventures like Kumagai's. ETA's next two large road contracts were awarded directly to Ch. Karnchang.

In none of these cases was enterprise management reformed. Nor was the power of the enterprise curbed, corruption reduced or efficiency induced. Despite this, government agreed to the listing of state enterprise shares. The listings raised significant funds, enriched those who were allocated shares at a low price (enterprise managers, politicians and bureaucrats), and control was retained by the government authority which originally had it. The principal goals of privatisation were lost in the enthusiasm for the SET as a solution to all problems and as a source of personal wealth. The question, then, is whether government technocrat-planners have had an overly simple understanding of and faith in the SET as a remedy for the challenges facing the state. In pushing enterprises onto the market, arguably the only goal achieved was to increase

the sources of funds for the capital-hungry state sector. Yet the value of these assets as they were floated accrued, not to the state, but mainly to speculators and especially insiders of the elite. Moreover, given the poor impression BECL and Thai International have left on investors, their ability to raise money a second time has been left in doubt.

CONCLUSION

The role of the SET in capturing the attention of political actors is often overlooked as researchers try to understand the events of the post-Prem period. As this chapter has argued, the SET was a stronger determinant of political behaviour than the supposedly 'purer' goals of political reform and democratisation. The SET became the basis of political stances and policy formulation, and in fact became an end rather than a means of policy implementation. The broad range of participants in this process suggests that the SET was more a widespread basis for political and ideological thinking and policy-making than any other framework. The SET became, as in the BECL case, a convenient panacea for all problems facing government. This is not a unique response, having been seen in a range of developed and developing countries.

   Of course, the fixation on stocks was not the only political force at work during this period, and given rapid economic growth and remarkable increases in personal wealth, the period may have been atypical. Indeed, with the economy and SET calming in 1995–96, it appeared that many had turned their attention from the stock market. But the eight-to-nine-year period after the Prem government was the era of the politics of money.

7 Thailand's political parties
Real, authentic and actual

Duncan McCargo*

> It may be no earth shattering revelation for you to know that desperate efforts to set up a new political grouping in Thailand doesn't necessarily signal a new platform to tackle a certain issue. It simply means that a group of people have failed to convince others in the old party to come round to their way of thinking. Or that they have refused to come around to the others' way of thinking. Or that they have found a new source of funding which they wouldn't want to share with others. Or that their leader has decided to side with the other faction. Or that they have decided to side with their leader…. Anything but a well-thought out plan to pursue a different policy towards national problems. The real reason for secession or a noisy declaration of independence among politicians in this country has always been the search for a new name, a new leader or a new financing project—never a serious, new professional approach towards a different set of platforms, to draw up new objectives or divergent strategies to get things done.
>
> (Suthichai 1995)

Suthichai Yoon's typically vitriolic commentary on recent developments in Thailand's party system offers a useful starting point for the discussion which follows. Implicit in his argument is a twofold typology of political parties: opportunistic parties based upon 'a new name, a new leader or a new financing scheme', and parties with a 'serious, new professional approach' involving 'a well-thought out plan to pursue a different policy'. These contrasting ideas of the Thai political party, here termed the 'authentic party' and the 'real party', will be examined. The two terms correspond to alternative models of the political party: the 'natural systems' model, and the 'rational' model. Drawing upon the work of Panebianco (1988), it will be argued that these two models are not mutually exclusive. Thailand's parties should be seen as organisations in a constant state of evolution, torn between the pursuit of rational goals and the desire for selective incentives. Three actual parties—the Democrats, Palang Dharma and New Aspiration—will be examined briefly in order to illustrate these tensions and conflicts. The frequent emergence of new parties testifies not simply to instability in the political order, but also to a continuing dynamism. Ironically, given the crises which many traditional

political parties are currently experiencing across the world, Thai parties are becoming increasingly typical of political parties in general.

The first Thai political party, the People's Party, was established in 1932 by the clique responsible for the end of the absolute monarchy (see Murashima 1991:1–20). Post-war parties, such as the Democrat Party (founded in 1946 and first led by 1932 *coup* 'promoter' Khuang Aphaiwong), were often set up by elite groups who had been displaced as a result of military *coups* or other power struggles.[1] The military have generally viewed parties with a mixture of suspicion and contempt, seeing them as illegitimate and unrepresentative. Chai-Anan (1981b:8) notes that the military have regularly intervened when civilian politicians went beyond their narrowly prescribed legislative function to engage in 'mass mobilisation, grievance articulation, or interest aggregation'. Historically, the military feared that wealthy groups (such as royalists and the Chinese) would use political parties to buy their way to power. Political parties were banned from 1933 to 1945, and again by the regimes led by military leaders Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn from 1958 to 1968. Ironically, political parties were revived in 1968 in an attempt to curtail growing popular pressures for more representative politics.

THE IDEA OF THE 'REAL' POLITICAL PARTY

Kramol (1982:39) argues that according to Western definitions of the political party, Thailand's parties are 'not real political parties' but 'political cliques' or 'political factions'. The search for a 'real' party may be traced back to *Luang*[2] Wichit Wathakan's book on the comparative study of political parties, published in August 1932 (see Murashima 1991:13). Parties such as the British Labour and Conservative Parties are frequently cited as appropriate models of the 'real' party (interview with then Palang Dharma Deputy Leader Suthep Attakorn, 30 September 1991). Among the features of 'real' parties mentioned by various academics are mass membership, sophisticated administrative structure, local branches, representative leadership, ideological cohesion and concrete policy platforms. Scholars working on parties have expended much energy in their dedication to the pursuit of the loose baggy monster known as the 'real' party. This has often involved cataloguing the deficiencies which disqualify parties from the epithet 'real'. Perhaps the most comprehensive checklist is that provided by Kanok (1993:327–9), based on a review of previous studies. He offers the following ten-point summary of the failings of Thai parties: (i) lack of principles; (ii) unclear and similar policies; (iii) predominance of personalities; (iv) indiscipline and disunity of party members; (v) lack of stability among parties (partly because of military *coups*); (vi) lack of real support from the public; (vii) conflict between parties and state officials who look down on parties; (viii) too many parties, producing unstable

coalitions; (ix) need for substantial funding produces overreliance on, and excessive influence of, party financiers; and (x) misunderstandings by both politicians and the public concerning the role of parties. As may be seen, only the first four of these weaknesses actually come within the direct control of parties themselves; the other shortcomings arise primarily from wider problems in the political structure.

A preoccupation with creating 'real' parties has typified the various political party laws (enacted in 1955, 1968 and 1981) and relevant constitutional stipulations. These represent legislative attempts by the state to address the perceived shortcomings of political parties. Several of these legislative changes have been made in consultation with political scientists. Kramol (1982:38) sees the creation of mass parties as a 'theoretical problem' for political scientists, since attempts to nurture 'real' parties by legislative means have generally foundered. The 1981 Political Parties Act and the 1991 constitution (as amended in 1992 and 1995) represent the latest stage of this process: stipulating, for example, that parties must have 5,000 members in order to register, that these members must be drawn from across the different regions of the country, that parties must contest at least a quarter of the available seats in a given general election (98 in 1995) and that all MPs must remain members of a party in order to retain their parliamentary seats.

The irony of this legislative approach to the creation of 'real' parties is that countries such as Britain (the supposed models) have far less stringent legal requirements controlling their parties. The desire of Thai scholars for 'real' parties may sometimes go beyond purely political concerns; in terms of comparative social science, the existence of such parties would place the country on a par with the West as a subject worthy of academic study. One virtue of 'realness' in terms of political parties is that it creates the preconditions for comparability. The task of working to create 'real' parties gives political scientists a role in advising the government of the day, drafting policies intended to refine the party system. More importantly, however, it gives them licence to become involved with the work of political parties themselves.[3]

The idea of the elite-led mass party—one with the outward trappings of a 'real' party—has a long but largely undistinguished history in Thailand. In 1932–33, the People's Party Association began establishing a national base by recruiting government officials across the country, starting with provincial governors (Murashima 1991:12). In 1968, the Thanom regime set up the ill-fated United Thai Peoples' Party in the hope of incorporating political opposition. General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's New Aspiration Party adopted similar rhetoric when it was established in 1990. It is notable that each of these parties was preoccupied with the pursuit of organisational complexity as an end in itself. For example, Kramol points out approvingly that the United Thai People's Party:

intended to build a strong party system and attract mass membership. The evidence for this was the party constitution which spelled out the details of the party structure patterned after the pyramidical structure similar to that of the Kuomintang Party of the Republic of China. For example, while the upper structure was divided into three organs, namely, the party assembly, the central executive and the political council, the lower structure consisted of party units which could be set up at the district levels.

(Kramol 1982:19)

Such parties illustrated the centralising mentality of the bureaucrat: a Bangkok-based core organisation was envisaged, which would then set up local units across the country. The strategy was one which Panebianco (1988:50) calls 'territorial penetration' (centre out), rather than 'territorial diffusion' (development from spontaneous germination), and was commonly associated with 'mass bureaucratic' rather than 'electoral professional' parties. Panebianco argues that mass bureaucratic parties (such as traditional European socialist parties) are characterised by a central bureaucracy, mass membership, collegial leadership, financing through 'membership and collateral activities', and a stress upon ideology which gives a prominent role to 'believers'. 'Electoral professional' parties (such as some European centre parties) are run by 'careerist' professional specialists, are linked primarily to voters rather than members, give prominent personalised roles to their public leaders, are financed through interest groups or public funds, and emphasise campaign issues (ibid.: 264). Academic and popular thinking in Thailand about the desirable form of political parties has tended towards the ideal of the mass bureaucratic party.

The assumptions behind this quest for the 'real' party are open to serious question. Mass parties, whether state-sponsored or the captives of particular interest groups (such as organised labour), are in crisis across the world. Left-wing parties such as the Japan Socialist Party and the British Labour Party are modifying both long-standing ideological policy stances and relationships with trade unions. Closer to Thailand, Singapore's Peoples' Action Party and Indonesia's Golkar (both products of particular historical circumstances) are finding increasing difficulty in sustaining previous levels of legitimacy. In 1989, supposedly mass parties in the former Soviet bloc collapsed overnight. Many contemporary parties are suffering from declining membership, and significant electoral successes have been achieved by politicians operating largely outside traditional party structures, ranging from Ross Perot and Silvio Berlusconi, to Morihiro Hosokawa and Miriam Defensor Santiago. The continuing Thai fixation with the mass bureaucratic party thus seems increasingly anachronistic: no mass bureaucratic party has ever been successfully created in Thailand, and many such parties are not doing particularly well elsewhere in the post-Cold War world.

THE IDEA OF THE 'AUTHENTIC THAI' PARTY

Rather more beguiling than the idea of the 'real' party, is the notion of political parties which are in some way authentically Thai, characterised by the dominance of personalities, and the influence of money—a view which underlies Suthichai's article. Examples of 'authentic' parties would include Chart Thai, Samakkhi Tham and, in recent years, Social Action. Students of the authentic party (for example, Nakharin 1991; Ockey 1994) seek to explain parties primarily in terms of resource allocation: parties exist to marshal funds and appropriate power. Their studies emphasise the role of factions, the importance of regional groupings *(sai)* and the close links between politicians and financiers from the business sector. Just as 'realness' is a function of comparability, so authenticity is a function of the perceived appropriateness of this model to the socio-economic order. The idea of the 'authentic' party, run by colourful personalities, and linked to local and regional *chao pho'* ('godfathers'), often appears exotic and fascinating to both journalists and academics. Those arguing for the creation of 'real' parties claim that 'authentic Thai' parties are not parties at all; whilst for the enthusiasts of 'authentic' parties, the 'real' party is simply an unrealistic irrelevance.

This debate has clear parallels with those over the nature of parties in other countries. Panebianco (1988:8–9) has argued that, in practice, there is no clear distinction between 'rational' (real) and 'natural system' (authentic) models of the political party. In the rational model, parties are assumed to be working primarily for the realisation of specific goals (as in Kramol's [1982:3] definition of the political party, 'an aggregation of individuals who share a common belief and are committed to the pursuit of power'), whereas the natural systems model sees the party organisation as a 'structure which responds to, and adjusts itself to, a multitude of demands from various stakeholders, and which tries to maintain balance by reconciling these demands' (Panebianco 1988:7).

On first examination, the 'authentic' model seems considerably more appropriate to the Thai context. Its weakness lies in its failure to account for many of the internal conflicts which characterise parties. If party politicians were overwhelmingly concerned with electoral success and retaining their grip on resources, then they would not act in such a way as to jeopardise these objectives. Why, for example, would the Democrat Party's January 10 group have brought down their own government in 1988? Why would Montri Pongpanich's Social Action Party, always known as a government party, have so provoked the Democrats in 1993 that Prime Minister and Democrat leader Chuan Leekpai was obliged to eject it from the ruling coalition? Why would the New Aspiration Party have left the same coalition in December 1994 following a dispute over minor political reforms? None of these conflicts may be explained solely in terms of the quest for resources.

The idea of the 'natural system' itself implies a rational order of action which is rarely present in Thai politics. If the internal conflicts within coalitions and within parties are about more than simply control over resources, then the idea of the 'authentic' party as a loosely structured trading company dealing in votes and contracts—the negative stereotype beloved of bureaucrats and the military—will not suffice. Simply because party politicians often seem awash with money does not mean that money is their dominant concern, that politics is, to paraphrase Clausewitz, the continuation of business by other means.

Panebianco disputes the existence of two distinct kinds of party. Rather, parties are seen to pass through various organisational phases, beginning with rational conceptions of themselves which are then put under increasing strain by circumstances and political realities. Rather than a crudely teleological notion of political development—a progressive refinement and rationalisation of the party political order—this argument suggests that political parties are likely to undergo periodic crises, and face the serious possibility of long-term decline. Using the term 'ideology' in the very broad sense of official aims and beliefs, Panebianco argues that the primary function of party ideology is maintaining the identity of the organisation in the eyes of its supporters—which may involve considerable dissimulation. The pretence that official aims matter must be kept up at all costs, so that morale is maintained:

> So now we can understand why the 'official goals', prescribed by the organizational ideology, are never purely and simply a facade, for the organization must always engage in at least some limited activities aimed at their realization; party activities which blatantly contradict the official goals often result in unacceptable organizational costs.
>
> (Panebianco 1988:11)

In other words, however implausible (arguably even meaningless) the official goals of individual Thai political parties, those goals remain salient to the successful functioning of the organisation. The degree to which conflict within parties relates to official goals varies considerably, yet even the most rudimentary parties practice significant dissimulation. Thai politicians routinely disavow their real ambitions. Even the Samakkhi Tham Party (an *ad hoc* collection of ex-MPs, led by some figures close to the National Peace-keeping Council, the military group responsible for the 1991 *coup*), for example, never explicitly declared an intention to put forward General Suchinda Kraprayoon for the premiership in 1992. Its official policy platform was almost identical to the manifestos of the opposing Democrats and Palang Dharma Parties, both of which were mass membership parties with considerable organisational complexity. Similarly, during the 1995 election campaign, the Chart Thai Party presented its leader, Banharn Silpa-archa, a provincial machine politician, as an ideal premier, a man of vision who was

dedicated to political reform and the decisive tackling of social ills. The myth of the 'real' Thai party was sufficiently potent that lip-service must always be paid to it: even parties such as Samakkhi Tham and Chart Thai have tried to pass themselves off as complex organisations with detailed policy programmes.

Thai parties are not static entities, but fluid organisations in a constant state of transformation. Labels such as 'devil' and 'angel' parties, used by the media following the events of May 1992, are obfuscations which fail to acknowledge the dynamism of the process. There is a constant hankering for the good new party. In recent years, at least one significant new party has emerged to contest each general election (1986, Rassadorn; 1988, Palang Dharma; March 1992, Samakkhi Tham and New Aspiration; September 1992, Chart Pattana and Seritham; July 1995, Nam Thai). In part, this reflects a process of power play, the shifting of political resources from one group to another. But another motive force is a real sense of dissatisfaction with the existing party order, and the enduring hope, however forlorn, that the mould of politics may be broken by a new realignment. For all their complaints about the fickleness and fecklessness of politicians, both the media and the electorate are usually quick to cheer new challengers to the established parties.

During the 1970s, there were a very large number of political parties: 42 parties took part in the January 1975 elections, for example, 21 of them winning seats. Prizzia (1985:88) described parties during this period as resembling clubs or parties of 'individual representation', and most were either the 'personal followings of individual leaders, or fronts for the autocratic cliques who control political power'. The institutionalisation of the faction system which was apparent in most parties by the 1980s was only partly the result of the increasing influence of the business class in politics. Importantly, the 1981 Political Party Act meant that small parties were no longer viable: faction bosses were forced to take their supporters under the shelter of larger organisations, always reserving the option of switching parties in pursuit of political and economic advantage.

A useful indicator of the role of financiers in a party is the relationship between the party leader and secretary-general. According to Nakharin (1991:80), during the post-1976 period, 'it was the increasing power and influence of the secretary-general which can be seen as a new phenomenon in Thai politics'. Whereas the leader was expected to be well educated and present a favourable image to the public, the secretary-general was chosen by regional faction leaders *(hua na sai)* and had to co-ordinate the activities of the various factions. In more 'authentic' parties, the secretary-general was often a wealthy financier with a poor public image, like Montri Pongpanich or Banharn Silpa-archa. In more 'real' parties, such as the Democrats, the secretary-general had a better-defined professional managerial role. In smaller personality-based parties—Palang Dharma or Muanchon, for example—the secretary-general was entirely eclipsed by the party leader. Nakharin's

arguments suggest that parties have a two-tier structure: presentable professional politicians 'fronting' the organisation, with faction bosses and financiers lurking behind them. In other words, most parties are neither 'real' nor 'authentic', but a shifting mixture of the two. Switching parties or establishing a new party might give a professional politician the opportunity to re-negotiate existing relationships with business interests. Such changes should, therefore, not be regarded simply as negative developments which undermine party stability. Only through creating new parties can the party system strive to renew or reform itself.

One paradox is that parties are distrusted as political actors; popular unease about their role makes them effectively neutralised, even depoliticised, in terms of extra-parliamentary activity. The limited participation of political parties in the 1992 protests over the premiership of General Suchinda Kraprayoon demonstrates this point. Somchai Homlaor, Secretary-General of the Campaign for Popular Democracy, explained that at times of political crisis, peoples' groups were more effective than political parties in mobilising popular opposition: 'Political parties aren't trusted by the people, since they might have some political motives' (interview, 10 August 1993). This mistrust encourages party leaders to confine themselves to the parliamentary context, rather than seeking to establish mass organisations. Somchai's observation aptly illustrates the dilemma of political parties: if they initiate or support popular movements for change, they are liable to be accused of having acted with a political purpose, and thus of having impure intentions. Yet political parties which do not pursue political goals may be criticised for being opportunistic, self-serving organisations. However, popular perceptions often fail to distinguish between pursuing genuine political objectives, and the quest for personal advantage. A clear example of this is Palang Dharma's partial fall from grace following Chamlong Srimuang's prominent role in the May 1992 protests: the party founder became vulnerable to the charge of having acted out of private ambition, rather than in the public interest. The distinction between real and authentic parties would not hold up in practice: Chamlong's 'ideological' motivation was certainly not a sufficient credential to demonstrate the integrity of his party's actions. The notion that parties should confine their activities to the parliamentary sphere places tight limits upon them as institutions of civil society. Relegated to the status of untrustworthy outsiders, it is little wonder that Thai parties often indulge in disreputable behaviour. Distrust of political parties is one part of a wider distrust of mass participation in politics felt by the military, the bureaucracy and the elite.

SOME ACTUAL PARTIES

Actual Thai parties do not conform to the ideal types of the 'real' or 'authentic' party. Rather, they represent uneasy composites of both the 'real' and the

'authentic'. Arguably the most interesting parties of recent years were the three which formed the core of the government coalition from September 1992 to December 1994: the Democrat, Palang Dharma and New Aspiration Parties. A closer examination of the conflicts and tensions within these parties will illustrate the relevance of Panebianco's theoretical approaches to the Thai context.

The Democrats

One of the most striking posters produced during the September 1992 general election campaign showed Chuan Leekpai taking part in a lower house debate. Beneath the picture was the caption, 'I believe in the parliamentary system'. It was a slogan which neatly captured the ambivalent stance of the Democrat Party. On the surface this was not a negative message, but an affirmation of a commitment to parliamentary democracy. Yet, as most Bangkok voters knew, that affirmation had a special poignancy in the wake of the March 1992 election, the unelected General Suchinda's elevation to the premiership and the violence surrounding the huge demonstrations which eventually ousted him. In declaring their reasonableness, their sense of responsibility, Chuan and his colleagues were also placing limits upon their own political role, and implicitly criticising those politicians and activists who had taken the struggle onto the streets, notably Palang Dharma leader Chamlong. The Democrats were opting for compromise, for working within the prevailing order rather than challenging it. The slogan implied a collusion with the latent public distrust of parties as actors for change.

A similar stance has characterised the Democrats at many points in their history. Prizzia (1985:89) characterises the Democrats in 1969 as a loyal opposition', a view echoed by Girling's (1981a:166) description of Democrat leaders as 'people of wealth, standing and integrity: they were royalists, supporters of a *laissez-faire* economy, long-time advocates of the American alliance, and proponents of constitutional government and honest administration'.[4] Although the party established 66 provincial branches in the mid-1970s in an attempt to broaden its support, it proved unable to sustain mass membership. In the 1980s, the party made a further attempt to build a popular base through a movement known as the 'Young Democrats' *(Yuwa prachatiphat),* which sought to train a new generation of political activists and potential leaders. However, this organisation was moribund after 1987 (interview, Democrat Party official, 18 August 1993).

In 1993, the Democrat Party claimed a membership of over 300,000; by 1996, the party's Bangkok headquarters employed around 30 people, whilst there were 152 local offices across the country, most of them with full-time staff. Statistically, the number of branches was impressive but, as Ockey (1994:273n) argues, they were in fact 'established as a means of enhancing power within the party rather than as effective local organisations'. Overall,

the Democrats have experienced mixed results in their attempts at 'territorial penetration'. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the party can claim to be a complex organisation with a substantial membership. Its relatively high degree of internal democracy allows capable individuals to rise rapidly through the ranks. As a result the Democrat Party is not the private property of a particular politician or factional group, and in this respect may plausibly claim that it is the most 'real' of parties.

During the 1980s, the Democrats were torn between two competing tendencies: a desire to keep the party ideologically pure, and an opposing wish to expand as much as possible (Ockey 1994:273–5). The party did succeed in consolidating its provincial base in the South, in addition to its original Bangkok stronghold. Apart from expansion of mass membership, the party sought to build links with a wide range of social groups, including Islamic groups, students, intellectuals, traders and ex-military men (Noranit 1987:160). It also found room for a number of highly electable but not entirely respectable political figures, some of whom would have been equally at home in purely money-oriented parties such as Chart Thai. This trend was illustrated by Sanan Khachonprasat's election to the post of Secretary-General in 1987. Torn between preserving a collective identity and pursuing the selective goals which go with office-holding, the situation facing the Democrats encapsulated the problems commonly facing political parties during the institutionalisation process. In this case, the party could not achieve power (in the sense of becoming the major partner in a coalition government) without expansion, yet bringing in expansionist elements was likely to undermine the Democrats' principal selling-point, their image as a party of deep-rooted principles and integrity. When the Democrats faced a no-confidence debate over a land reform scandal in May 1995, the party's respectable reputation contributed to the downfall of the coalition government: the public was fully aware that Chart Thai and other opposition parties were profoundly corrupt, but expected higher standards from the Democrats.

A serious problem faced by the Democrats throughout recent decades has been a propensity for damaging splits. One of the most serious involved the so-called January 10 group (see Ockey 1994:274n). In 1988, some 40 rebel Democrat MPs expressed their dissatisfaction with party leader Bhichai Rattakul by voting against a government-sponsored Copyright Bill; in the aftermath Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda proceeded to dissolve the parliament. Noranit (1987:159) attributes this split to frustration on the part of Democrat MPs with the party's lack of achievement over the previous years as a member of successive Prem-led administrations. Yet the split conformed to a pattern of personal and self-interested conflicts which had plagued the party's history (see Niroj 1990).

Writing of the 1973–75 period, Girling argued that at a time when political parties were gaining in importance:

> This was the dilemma facing liberal reformers: to do little or nothing (beyond voicing good intentions) would preserve immediate consensus, based on stability, while social problems would get worse; yet to attempt to push through effective reforms was bound to antagonize those whose power and authority were basic to Thai society.
>
> (Girling 1991a:195)

Although socio-economic conditions changed dramatically over the following two decades, the 'liberal dilemma' has remained the same: do little, claiming that you are thereby promoting 'democratic principles', or attempt to push through effective reforms? From 1992 to 1995, Chuan's Democratled administration chose the former path. This inactivity was in stark contrast with the often antagonistic reforming zeal of the elected Chatichai Choonhavan and appointed Anand Panyarachun administrations which preceded Chuan's government. Ironically, in spite of their long history and a plausible claim to being a 'real' party, the Democrats under Chuan proved a less impressive force for change than the previous two administrations which had virtually no mass support or base. The Democrats made a successful transition from 'loyal opposition' to 'loyal government', a government which refrained from challenging a privileged bureaucracy and a self-important military. When defeated in 1995, the Democrats cautiously reverted to a stance of loyal opposition, failing to attack the new Chart Thai-led coalition until it could be done through a parliamentary no-confidence motion. The loyal opposition role brought an electoral profit, as the Democrats were only narrowly edged out as the largest party following the November 1996 election.

Sukhumbhand Paribatra (1993:884–92), describing the 1978–91 period as one of 'liberalization without democracy', has argued that the failure of political parties to institutionalise their roles was a crucial factor in accounting for the country's limited democratisation. Yet in the case of a party such as the Democrats, it is not entirely clear how the organisation could promote territorial diffusion (which is an inherently spontaneous process) rather than centre-led territorial penetration. Nor is it clear that a larger membership would make the Democrat Party a more effective force for change, given the Democrats' tradition of principled passivity. To argue that the Democrats ought to become a 'real' mass party would be to miss the point; the institutionalisation of supine parties would not strengthen civil society.

Palang Dharma

Formed in 1988 from an organisation known as the Ruam Palang group, the Palang Dharma Party has long experienced divisions between the idealistic members of the Santi Asoke Buddhist sect who form the core of its founders

and followers (the so-called 'temple' faction),[5] and more pragmatic secular members referred to as the 'people outside the temple' (see Sombat 1989; McCargo 1993: Chapter 5). Palang Dharma was established by then Bangkok governor Major-General Chamlong, a religious ascetic who has renounced material possessions, eats one meal a day and has taken a vow of celibacy.

Whilst Palang Dharma had a strong political base in Bangkok, without expanding into the provinces it cannot hope to become the major party in any future coalition government. Palang Dharma has a complex organisational structure, with over 30 staff working full-time at its main office, including an eight-member 'policy and planning' team which works closely with ministers, MPs and city councillors. The party claims around 60,000 members, and during 1993 reorganised its local branches with a view to establishing a network of over 100 district offices.

Like most parties, Palang Dharma is vitiated by factionalism—but its factionalism is unusual in that it does reflect substantive disagreements about the policies, direction or principles of the party. At a basic level, the conflicts are between 'believers' and 'careerists' (Panebianco 1988:25–30).[6] The believers, a 'hard core' of whom, like Chamlong, are members of the Santi Asoke movement, argue for a party which completely eschews money politics, but advocates principles of self-sacrifice, diligence, honesty and morality. If this means that Palang Dharma must remain a small party, outside the government and crying in the wilderness, the believers are willing to accept this. The careerists, by contrast, argue that in order for Palang Dharma to influence the future direction of the country, the party must expand its electoral base, bringing in capable people from the business and professional sectors. Only by joining a government coalition can Palang Dharma play an effective role. The believers are deeply suspicious of the careerists, viewing them as opportunists who are capitalising upon the good reputation of the party and its founder for their own pragmatic ends. The careerists are similarly uneasy about the stance of the believers, whom they regard as naive, unrealistic and also—perhaps crucially—unelectable in their own right.

The factionalism within Palang Dharma is usually portrayed as a source of weakness, evidence of failure to develop into a 'real' political party. In fact, however, this factionalism was actually orchestrated and even exacerbated by Chamlong during the 1988–95 period. By playing opposing groups off against one another, Chamlong was able to retain tight personal control over the party power structures. He used plausible, electable professionals as the public face of the party, whilst the 'temple faction' played the role of party conscience, restraining MPs from the pursuit of ambition. Chamlong regularly manipulated elections to the party executive for his own ends, and resorted to threatening resignation from the leadership when faced with challenges to his authority (see McCargo 1993: Chapter 5).

Periodic rebellions by Palang Dharma MPs against the authority of Chamlong and the party executive (notably in August 1990 and in mid-

1994) revealed Chamlong's inability to work effectively in a parliamentary setting. Chamlong operated in two ways: as a public figure, appealing directly to people and voters through the media and at mass rallies; and through personal relationships, manipulating events from behind the scenes by placing loyalists in key positions. He originally formed the Palang Dharma Party somewhat reluctantly, knowing that he would face conflicts in working with others. Having set up the party, he shunned the parliamentary arena himself for four years; shortly after being elected an MP in March 1992, Chamlong took an active role in the anti-Suchinda protest movement. He proceeded to resign from the leadership of Palang Dharma, and refused cabinet office after Palang Dharma joined the Democrat-led government coalition following the September 1992 election. Although Boonchu Rojanasatien took over as party leader in January 1993 following a highly irregular, Chamlong-devised selection procedure, Chamlong continued to hold meetings with party ministers every Tuesday morning at his Bangkok home. He described himself as the 'co-ordinator' of Palang Dharma (interview, 5 August 1993), and was referred to by the Bangkok English-language press as Palang Dharma's *de facto* leader. Chamlong used the political fallout from the May 1992 events to justify his taking a back-seat role in the party, yet it was actually a position with which he felt extremely comfortable. He resumed formal leadership of the party in September 1994, becoming a deputy prime minister shortly after.

Some party members had sought to build up the institutional structures of Palang Dharma so as to counterbalance the dominance of Chamlong within the party. One such figure was deputy leader Suthep Attakorn, who established a 'political engineering' programme to train party activists, cherishing a vision of a mass membership party which would span the entire country. Despite his success in producing more than 8,000 'political engineers', Suthep found his ambitions blocked by Chamlong, who feared that Suthep could use the training programme to challenge him for the party leadership. Chamlong was mistrustful of the mass bureaucratic model for Palang Dharma, preferring an organisation which he could dominate with his strong personal following. The displacement of Suthep and his supporters by a new wave of careerists in 1992 reflected the eclipse of the mass party ideal within Palang Dharma.

Leading party members who had been important beneficiaries of Chamlong's patronage in the past began to turn against him once they attained high office, whilst newcomers, many of whom, like hotel tycoon Akorn Hoontrakul, had joined the party at the height of 'Chamlong fever' in early 1992, became frustrated and disillusioned with the party. The best example of stalwart-turned-adversary was then Communications Minister Vinai Sompong, who had worked devotedly for Chamlong throughout his Bangkok governorship, but then became a major political figure in his own right after September 1992. Chamlong found that he no longer had sufficient leverage to control his former subordinates: ministers such as Vinai and Prasong Soonsiri

believed (wrongly, as it turned out) that they could pursue their political careers in other parties. They would act to resist any plan which deprived them of cabinet posts. Chamlong had failed to preserve the original character of the party as a 'personal faction' (Pomper 1992:152), but nor had he been willing and able to institutionalise it into a complex organisation. This was a classic problem of parties based upon charismatic leadership, and only partly reflected the decline in Chamlong's popularity following the May events. Palang Dharma fell victim to long-standing structural problems, which had their origins in strategies pursued by Chamlong for his own ends.

Following Palang Dharma's withdrawal from the Chuan coalition government in May 1995, major changes took place inside the party. Dissident former ministers and their supporters, known as the 'Group of 23', including Vinai, Prasong and Suthep, left the party. Chamlong made another strategic withdrawal from the political fray, handing over the party leadership to telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin's image as a bright young technocrat found favour with Bangkok voters, whilst his vast personal wealth helped revive the party's flagging electoral fortunes. Thaksin took a new approach to the campaign process, seeking to appeal to voters through advertising and the media rather than through membership ties, playing down Palang Dharma's hardline moral stances, marginalising the role of the Santi Asoke 'believers', emphasising leadership and seeking backing from interest groups on specific issues such as the traffic problem. Thaksin was one of the first Thai politicians wholeheartedly to embrace the ideal of the electoral professional party.

Nevertheless, Thaksin's role as Bangkok frontman for the unpopular Banharn government from mid-1995 to mid-1996 undermined the credibility of the party, precisely because it had been established to oppose the kind of money politics represented by Banharn and the Chart Thai Party. The Bangkok electorate punished the party in the November 1996 election, leaving it with just one MP.

New Aspiration

In 1990, recently retired Army Commander-in-Chief General Chavalit founded the New Aspiration Party (NAP), with the explicit goal of recruiting a million members. As Surin (1992:8) has observed, 'The party took a high profile from the very beginning, appearing to be very sophisticated, and projecting itself as the next government'. Chavalit's decision to form the party attracted considerable acclaim from journalists and intellectuals. In part, this reflected approval for Chavalit's apparent adherence to the 'rules of the game': he had kept his promise not to stage a *coup* while he headed the military, and now he was entering mainstream politics in a very transparent fashion. This interpretation glossed over certain inconvenient details, however. Chavalit's brief tenure as deputy premier in the Chatichai government had

ended ingloriously, following outspoken politician Chalerm Yubamrung's description of Chavalit's wife as 'a walking jewellery box'; Chavalit would not be the last general to call in vain for Chalerm's ouster from the Chatichai cabinet. This entertaining yet disconcerting episode illustrated two points: Chavalit had been more than willing to enter politics by the back door, hoping that Chatichai would later hand over the premiership to him, and the former Army chief remained uncomfortable with the cut and thrust of civilian political life.

The creation of NAP was Chavalit's Plan B, an alternative route to power which he hoped would allow him to achieve the premiership on his own terms, backed by a huge Golkar-style party machine, and completely independent of upstarts like Chalerm. Chavalit was seeking to recreate the hierarchies, the command structures and the certainties of military life in the civilian political arena. During the early months at the NAP, more than 30 serving army officers worked full-time on establishing the party, having quite simply decamped with Chavalit. The NAP's first target membership group was village headmen and local officials in the Northeast; to assist in this task, Chavalit had appropriated databases from the Internal Security Operations Command and the 'Green Isan' project. Long before the NAP had a single MP, 80 full-time staff were working at the party's extensive Bangkok headquarters. The party produced large quantities of glossy literature, including a monthly newspaper replete with photographs of the leader. NAP also adopted an eye-catching sunflower logo. The party's ten-point policy statement was revealing chiefly for its palpable attempts to rebut popular charges against Chavalit and the NAP. Point One was an affirmation of the party's commitment to a democratic system including a constitutional monarchy—clearly a riposte to those who accused Chavalit of harbouring republican sympathies. Point Two earnestly declared that the NAP was not based on the personality of any particular individual.

The foundation of the NAP did represent a distinctive attempt to establish a new kind of political party, one with a far more elaborate organisation than most of its rivals. Nevertheless, Chavalit seemed to regard organisational complexity as an inherent virtue, apparently believing that he could ensure electoral and political success by recruiting large numbers of exbureaucrats, retired military men and former provincial governors to work for his party. Shortly before the March 1992 general election, NAP secretary-general Prasong Soonsiri resigned from the party over the policy of expansion at all costs, claiming that New Aspiration had admitted some *phu mi itthiphon* ('influential people', a euphemism for powerful, 'godfather' criminals). Prasong's resignation was linked to a personality clash with former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior Phisan Moonlasartsathorn, who subsequently became secretary-general of the NAP. The Phisan-Prasong power struggle symbolised a broader conflict over the identity and direction of the NAP: not so much a

clash between idealists and realists, as one between pragmatists and ultra-pragmatists. Phisan and the ultra-pragmatists proved the victors and Prasong joined Palang Dharma.

In practice, however, the NAP's combination of organisational sophistication and ultra-pragmatism was not always able to deliver in electoral terms. The NAP won 72 seats in the March 1992 general election, but was out-performed by the Samakkhi Tham Party (79 seats) and the Chart Thai Party (74). In provincial areas, it was not party organisation but substantial funding and local political connections which delivered parliamentary seats. Samakkhi Tham won out largely because it had succeeded in recruiting highly electable individuals, winning them over with sizable 'transfer fees': the so-called '3–5–7' system (one-off payments of 3, 5 or 7 million baht to prospective candidates, the size of the fee depending on the candidate's perceived chances of winning a seat). The NAP was also hindered in March 1992 by a general sense that the political tide was running against Chavalit, who was at daggers drawn with the National Peace-keeping Council.

The NAP's anti-Suchinda stance during the May 1992 events meant that it was able to present itself as an 'angel' party during the months that followed. Yet in the September 1992 election it gained only 51 seats, damaged by substantial defections of MPs to newly formed Chat Pattana, led by Chatichai. Ironically, following this disappointing result, Chavalit became Minister of the Interior in the subsequent coalition government. Despite his poor performance in this post, and the virtual collapse of the NAP's remaining credibility as a 'real' political party, it was able to use its influence over local officials to strengthen the party's power base. The extent to which the NAP had become captive to the interests of Ministry of the Interior officials was clearly seen in December 1994, when the party withdrew from the Chuan coalition in a controversy over local government reforms opposed by Ministry bureaucrats. The improved performance of the NAP in the July 1995 election, when it won 57 seats, had very little to do with Chavalit's 'new aspiration' of a mass party and a great deal more to do with the old-fashioned exercise of *amnat* ('power') and *ittiphon* ('influence') (Tamada 1991). Like other provincial-based parties, the NAP is heavily engaged in 'money politics' and abuse of the electoral system, especially through vote-buying (see Callahan and McCargo 1996). Nevertheless, the rhetorical value of the quasi-idealism which accompanied New Aspiration's founding persists. Unlike its main provincial-based rivals, the NAP does represent part of a political grand design, however flawed and faded that design may now be. The partial realisation of Chavalit's ambitious political project testifies to an underlying dynamism in the party system, fed by a latent discontent with the prevailing order.

The collapse of the Banharn government was clearly Chavalit's doing, and the NAP was skilful in having numerous Chart Thai politicians defect to NAP.

NAP spent heavily in the election campaign, and was just able to edge out the Democrats as the largest parliamentary party after the 1996 election.

CONCLUSION

Of the three parties examined here, all have some claims to the elusive status of 'real' party: the Democrats have some of the history and character of such a party; Palang Dharma has some of the principles; and New Aspiration has a great deal of the requisite organisation. At the same time, all three bear some of the hallmarks of the 'authentic' party: the Democrats lack any clear political direction; Palang Dharma is plagued by factionalism; and New Aspiration is deeply immersed in 'money politics'.

The creation of the Nam Thai Party by former deputy premier Amnuay Viravan in mid-1994 and its collapse in mid-1996 illustrated that the process of the party system's simultaneous renewal and regression was proceeding apace. Amnuay's party contained a fine mixture of the real (a credible, technocratic leader and a team of quality defectors from 'angel' parties) and the authentic (a willingness to dump large sums of money during provincial 'campaigning').

There is very little prospect of mass bureaucratic parties with large memberships and fully developed local branches emerging successfully in contemporary Thailand. Much more likely is the gradual rise of electoral professional parties which are dominated by professional politicians and technocrats, have small memberships, tend to be characterised by personalised leadership, are funded by interest groups and campaign around particular issues. Such parties would carry little ideological baggage, travelling light on the helter-skelter of Thai politics. Although they would not qualify as 'real parties' according to definitions based on the mass bureaucratic prototype, they are about as real as parties are likely to get nowadays. The Democrats possess certain characteristics of the electoral professional party, as do Solidarity and Seritham. Under Thaksin, Palang Dharma appeared to be adopting an electoral professional approach. NAP, by contrast, has been slow to throw off its 'dinosaur from the Cold War era' approach. However, the 1996 election revealed that it had moved to a rural machine model and had established a wider support base, albeit at great expense.

The clamour from the Bangkok middle classes for Anand Panyarachun to enter party politics represented a demand for a true electoral professional party (see, for example, *Bangkok Post Weekly Review [BPWR]* 11 December 1992), a demand which Amnuay and Nam Thai hoped to exploit. Such a party would base its voter appeal upon the perceived competence (especially economic competence) of its leaders, rather than upon any ability to represent the population at large. However, given the limited appeal of such parties in the provinces, any new-style party of this ilk needs to form strategic alliances

with old-style faction bosses who could deliver upcountry parliamentary seats—either by installing such faction bosses 'in house' (one as secretary-general?) or bringing them into a government coalition. Such strategic alliances carry within them the seeds of power struggle, and thus of organisational conflict. Thaksin's personal and financial links to the Chat Thai Party's Therd Thai group, and Amnuay's continuing close relationship with the NAP, are examples of alliances which seek to cross the questionable divide between 'real' and 'authentic' parties. Such alliances perpetuate the elite tradition of parliamentary politics, since electoral outcomes are largely determined by a combination of Bangkok voters, and provincial vote-buyers.

    Suthichai Yoon (1994) concluded his article with a rhetorical question: 'Since when have we recognized the gathering of disillusioned, frustrated, broken-hearted and naive, aspiring politicians with no clear platform to speak of as a political party?' Sadly, the answer is that the political parties of today's 'advanced democracies' are all too recognisable in Suthichai's description. Given the obsolescence of the mass bureaucratic model, the identity crisis faced by Thailand's parties resembles that faced by parties all over the world. The electoral professional party, with its shallow social roots and chameleon-like policy positions, is both a real and an authentic alternative. In the case of Thailand, urban electoral professional parties such as Palang Dharma have worked with rural machine parties such as Chart Thai, forming pragmatic and highly unstable alliances characterised by considerable tensions.

8 Electoral politics
Commercialisation and exclusion

Surin Maisrikrod and Duncan McCargo

Thailand's politics can no longer be seen in terms of a straightforward conflict between military officers and bureaucrats on the one hand, and emerging civilian forces on the other. Major changes in the political order began with the fall of the Thanom-Prapat-Narong regime in 1973, having important implications for the electoral process. These changes have seen both fragmentations and realignments of political elites. Elections have gained increasing importance as mechanisms for managing political change, but power remains the preserve of the few. The mass of the population continues to be excluded from a significant say in the way the country is governed. Before discussing the nature of the changes in electoral politics, the relevant social, economic, political and historical contexts will first be examined.

LOCATING ELECTIONS

Crisis-generated elections

In more stable parliamentary systems, general elections are a regular occurrence as part of a normal cycle of political change. Even though they might take place before the full term of a parliament has been reached, elections are typically held when a government's popularity is high or when a government believes it has the best chance of securing another term. In other words, calling an election is often a political ploy by a government hoping to extend its term of office.

In Thailand, however, the circumstances which give rise to an election are usually different. During the period from 1958 to the late 1970s, elections often formed part of what Chai-Anan (1982:1–5) has termed a political 'vicious cycle', in which a political crisis gives rise to a military *coup,* followed by the promulgation of a new or revised constitution, an election, and then a return to parliamentary politics which eventually ends in another political crisis. Indeed, the March 1992 election can also be seen as having conformed to this pattern.

Even where, as has generally been the case since 1973, parliament is dissolved by a civilian premier rather than by the intervention of the military, this typically occurs to halt a political crisis or to break a serious political impasse. Dissolving parliament is usually an act of political weakness rather than a show of strength. Elections tend to be crisis-generated. Indeed, they are essentially a means by which political normalcy is restored, like the re-starting of an engine. Instead of elections functioning as part of a continuing democratic process which allows the political system to develop by increments, Thai elections usually mean going back to square one. Of the twenty elections to the end of 1996, seven took place in the aftermath of *coups,* and at least six were held following a political crisis of one sort or another. For example, despite Chuan Leekpai's strong desire to be the first premier to see out a four-year term of office, he was obliged to call an election in May 1995 when his government collapsed over a land reform scandal (see King and LoGerfo 1996:102–17).

The electoral process as a bureaucratic function

It is significant that the origins of elections were based more on bureaucratic initiative than popular demand. Riggs (1966:312) argues that the early years of the post-1932 period were driven by a need to get commoners into the seats of power, replacing those appointed by the monarchy. The electoral process, therefore, has its roots in bureaucratic practices which stress mobilisation over participation. Parties and other non-state political actors were compelled or encouraged to adopt 'acceptable' behaviour which did not threaten bureaucratic dominance (see Girling 1981a:162–75). In other words, the electoral process has not always been explicitly democratic.

From the time of the first elections in the 1930s, bureaucrats had the power to prescribe electoral regulations and define the electoral discourse. Paradoxically, the Ministry of the Interior—regarded as a conservative, even anti-democratic, and most intractable of bureaucratic institutions—has been entrusted with overseeing popular elections. For Ministry of the Interior officials, holding elections is simply an extension of the bureaucratic functions of the Ministry rather than building democracy. In fact, the role of its bureaucrats has often gone beyond simply administering elections. There are instances when they turn elections to their own advantage. They have played an important part in influencing voters to support particular candidates or particular parties, which then reward the officials for their backing. Some studies, such as Sombat's (1993:147–54) have shown that for a candidate to win a parliamentary seat, he or she needs to gain the support of government officials, who influence voter choices as well as casting their own votes.

The bureaucratisation of elections has been perpetuated through the centralised provincial administration. Provincial governors—the most

important officials in each province—are not elected, but appointed directly by the Ministry of the Interior in Bangkok. Moreover, provincial governors, who take their orders from this ministry, are empowered to dismiss local-level elected administrators under their jurisdiction. In the provinces, the most significant elections in terms of policy issues and public administration are those held for municipal councils. Provincial and municipal elections are becoming the preserve of local business people, for whom political connections are often an essential prerequisite for securing lucrative business (see Turton 1984:32; Arghiros 1993:154–6; Hewison and Maniemai 1993). Although village elections arouse considerable interest among voters, such elections have limited impact on the wider political stage, since village heads, *kamnan* (sub-district chiefs), and members of the *tambon* (sub-district) council have few real powers beyond the local level. At elections for village heads, voting often takes place by a show of hands (Arghiros 1993:119); this may allow influential figures in the locality to monitor the voting process and control its outcome. Nevertheless, the results of such elections are important in determining the nature of villagers' political relations with the wider world, since village heads and *kamnan* increasingly need to cultivate relations with government officials and political and business leaders in the province. Although local elections of all kinds are often unrepresentative, and play little part in creating local democracy, they are important building blocks in the creation of structures and networks of power. A number of MPs have begun their political careers as municipal or provincial councillors.

An important consequence of the bureaucratisation of elections is that officials place more emphasis on the technical aspects of elections, especially the maximising of voter turnout. The Ministry of the Interior even rewards those districts which are able to mobilise the highest percentage of the population to vote. This perspective is also prevalent in the academic community, with many academics echoing the bureaucratic view that high voter turnout indicates high levels of political participation. It also means that voting is reduced to a kind of ritual act where the fact of voting is more important than the nature of the vote cast. Such bureaucratic routinisation of the electoral process means that elections cease to function as a forum where public interests and views are represented, or where conflicting interests can be reconciled.

Elections as a source of fear

For many people in rural areas, elections are times of tension and fear, rather than welcome opportunities to exercise democratic rights. Discussing an election for the position of *kamnan* in a central province, Arghiros writes:

> The election was a sensitive subject for everyone…. This was particularly
> true for poorer, more vulnerable residents. In conversation, close informants
> among the poor would indicate who they were talking about with a nod in the
> direction of the candidate's home. Views would be given elliptically.
> Villagers with whom I did not have an established rapport were
> understandably reluctant to talk about the conflict. People had reason to fear
> the consequences of demonstrating 'inappropriate' allegiance. Vote brokers
> were menacing. Core faction members and vote brokers were armed.
>
> (Arghiros 1993:133–4)

Election-related violence is widespread. It is relatively common for those
involved in elections, particularly the chief canvassers for the rival candidates,
to carry firearms, and every general election sees a number of deaths and
injuries.

Ideology, ethnicity and policy issues

Ideology, religion, ethnicity and policy issues have generally played a minor
role in the electorate's voting behaviour. The only occasion on which political
ideology appeared to play a substantial role in voting decisions was in the 1975
election, during which socialist-inclined parties won a total of 37 seats out of
269 (Prizzia 1985:90–2). Regionalism, often related to questions of ethnicity,
has influenced voting decisions, especially in the South, where the Democrats
have a strong popular following. During the 1995 election, party leaders
standing for seats in the Northeast (Chatichai Choonhavan, Amnuay Viravan
and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh) urged voters to select an 'Isan prime minister',
reviving memories of Northeastern regionalism of earlier decades. Religion has
played a role in elections. Muslim voters have an organised voice in some
Southern and Bangkok constituencies, and the Palang Dharma Party has used
Buddhist rhetoric in its campaigns, especially under the leadership of Chamlong
Srimuang. Policy issues have sometimes been salient, but outside Bangkok
these are typically issues of direct local concern: should another bridge over the
Mekong river be built in Nakhon Phanom or Mukdahan, for example?

'MONEY POLITICS' AND THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Voting behaviour, especially in rural areas, involves questions of patronage.
This is not, however, a traditional mode of patronage according to which
powerful individuals lord it over their social inferiors; it is a patronage based
upon money, where even rank outsiders can win parliamentary seats if they
spend both heavily and wisely. The electoral success of candi-dates depends
on how many local patrons they can win over to canvass on their behalf.
Canvassers are the key to electoral victory. The most crucial link, therefore, is

not between the politician and the voters, but between the politician and the canvassers. In fact, direct contact between politicians and voters is limited. Their relationship is usually mediated by these 'influential people', referred to as *chao pho'* (or 'godfathers'), including local village heads, business people or government officials. Because of this, the politicians' most important objective is not to win loyalty from the electorate as such, but to win and maintain the loyalty of the 'influential people'. This makes it possible for someone from outside a constituency to win a parliamentary seat, where the candidate is able to enlist support from people with local influence.

The rise of business-based political actors—working in some cases in collaboration with *chao pho'*—has significantly altered the shape of elections and the way in which they are contested (see Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994:51–97). This changed political landscape has seen the rise of 'money politics'. Public criticism of 'money politics' is far from new, with the monarchs of the late absolute period fearing that if elections were permitted, they would be controlled by Chinese (see Chai-Anan's Chapter 3 in this volume). In the recent period, attempts to regulate campaign spending were first introduced in a 1979 election law which placed a limit of 350,000 baht per candidate on election spending. In 1992 the law was amended, and the limit raised to one million baht. Both figures have proven quite unrealistic, and the law is flouted by virtually all serious candidates. Ironically, Somrudee (1993:172) dates the rise of money politics from the time of the 1979 law, arguing that 'the 1979 election began a new phase of electoral politics' in which parties started 'a new form of vote collection by adding financial benefits to the conventional means of administrative hierarchy'. Legislation has proved ineffective in checking the rise of money politics which increasingly characterises provincial, municipal, district and village elections as well as general elections.

The structure of the parliamentary electoral system promotes high spending by encouraging competition between candidates of the same party, as well as between parties. The multi-member constituency system (most constituencies elect two or three MPs—based upon a ratio of one MP per 150,000 people) allows voters to cast votes for candidates on an individual basis, rather than on a party slate. This means that many people cast votes for candidates from different parties, and makes it likely that the available seats in each constituency will be shared among the parties. A typical three-member constituency in the 1992 and 1995 general elections was contested by at least five (and sometimes as many as eleven) parties, resulting in ballot papers listing fifteen or more names. In practice, a considerable number of candidates were so-called 'stunt men' who had been nominated merely to fulfil legal requirements. Normally only one or two of each party's candidates in a given constituency are regarded as serious contenders for election. Parties are obliged by law to field

candidates for a quarter of all available seats (98 out of 391 in July 1995), and this requirement leads to numerous token candidacies. Parliamentary elections are therefore a colourful and confusing spectacle for the voter, as a large number of competing candidates seek to promote themselves. Conflicts between different members of the same party slate are common, leading to poster and leaflet campaigns featuring only a single candidate— a violation of the spirit of the election laws.

Money politics has various electoral manifestations, including: high-cost campaigning, candidate-buying, canvasser recruitment, vote-buying and corrupt relations with government officials.

High-cost campaigning

Election campaigning became more sophisticated during the 1980s, with new technology and techniques being used to gain electoral support. Methods used in marketing, advertising and public relations are now being applied extensively in political campaigning. New tactics to catch the attention of voters are widely used, including: distributing colour photographs of candidates; putting up large cut-out boards showing candidates wearing official uniforms and decorations; printing of brief policy statements and slogans; distributing cassette tapes containing speeches by party leaders; and handing out calendars with photographs of candidates. Other methods included door-to-door campaigning, the bulk mailing of postcard-style election leaflets and the use of opinion polls by parties to gather information on voting trends and likely outcomes. The July 1995 election saw television campaign advertising legalised for the first time. Television advertising campaigns were extremely expensive, and so beyond the reach of less well-endowed parties. Their effectiveness, however, is open to question: in 1995 the Nam Thai Party did not win a single seat in Bangkok despite its high spending on airtime, and Prachakorn Thai won 12 Bangkok seats (up from two in the previous election in September 1992) without the help of television advertising, as against the 16 seats (down from 23 in September 1992) won by the heavily advertised Palang Dharma Party (see LoGerfo 1995).

Candidate-buying

The announcement of a general election invariably ushers in a period of horse-trading, where former MPs and other prospective parliamentary candidates with good electoral prospects are offered financial incentives to join or switch political parties. Major new parties have emerged in nearly every recent election, and typically seek well-known political figures for their candidate lists. During the run-up to the July 1995 election, it was widely reported that well-established politicians could expect 'transfer fees' in the region of 10–20

million baht for changing party. These payments were said to be supplemented in some cases by monthly retainers, and perks, such as luxury cars.

Canvasser recruitment

Constituencies are large; in provincial areas, they may include hundreds of separate villages. While individual candidates take part in campaigning, typically by addressing election rallies and touring the district, the main groundwork of the campaign is carried out by *hua khanaen,* a term probably best translated into English as 'canvasser'. Parliamentary candidates seek to recruit prominent local individuals to act as their canvassers: these might include government officials such as village heads or teachers, since these officials are legally barred from campaigning, it is often more advisable to recruit close relatives of local officials—including their wives—or other individuals of good standing in the community. Other groups likely to be recruited as canvassers include those with good connections to local 'influential figures', either through legitimate businesses (such as traders who purchase crops) or illegal businesses (such as agents for underground lotteries). At election times, networks established for business purposes are often commandeered for campaigning purposes: for example, special election 'lotteries' are often held. Some candidates adopt a strategy of 'saturation recruitment', hiring virtually every important person in a constituency as a canvasser; others employ a more selective recruitment strategy, but make higher payments to their canvassers. In the majority of constituencies, the primary function of canvassers is to help administer the vote-buying operation. Many candidates fail to win election, not because they use insufficient campaign funds, but because they select the wrong canvassers, without the necessary status or networks.

Vote-buying

As an editorial in the leading popular newspaper *Thai rat* (28 October 1990) noted:

> The practice of using money to buy votes, without regard for the nation's laws, has spread epidemic-like down to local elections. It has spread throughout the country like fire spreads through a field…. The power of the country will fall into the hands of capitalists whose supporters are local 'dark powers'. The democratic platform will become dominated by economic power and vested interests.
>
> (cited in Arghiros 1993:154)

Prior to 1979, rival candidates would engage in a relatively low-cost form of campaigning by holding election rallies featuring popular films and traditional entertainers. When the use of free entertainment in election

campaigns was outlawed by the 1979 election law, long-established irregularities such as vote-buying became more widespread (Callahan and McCargo 1996). Although vote-buying exists throughout the country, including Bangkok, it operates most successfully in rural areas, and appears to be especially well-entrenched in areas of relative economic deprivation such as the Northeast.

There are many ways of buying votes. A common one is the straightforward handover of cash to voters by *hua khanaen* or agents of the candidate, typically on the night before the election (see Arghiros 1993:138). Sometimes payments are made in two stages, with the second payment depending on the election results. The amount of cash varies widely. In some rural areas, 100 or 200 baht per household might be sufficient, but in fiercely contested constituencies some candidates may be prepared to pay more than 1,000 baht per voter. Candidates disburse cash unevenly across their constituencies, investing most heavily in marginal districts, where a relatively small number of votes could have a decisive impact on the outcome.

In some areas, villagers engage in a form of collective bargaining, where a whole village will vote for a specific candidate in exchange for some particular development project such as a new road or a well; however, this kind of trade-off only takes place where relations of trust exist between village heads and national politicians, and between villagers and their heads (see *FEER* 29 June 1995). Some votes are bought in kind with gifts such as ducklings, bottles of fish sauce or sacks of rice. Other, more ingenious methods of vote-buying include the sale of election 'lottery tickets', whereby voters win cash prizes if particular candidates or teams of candidates gain election. Another common practice is to 'hire' voters' identity cards for the day of the election, with stooges working for the *hua khanaen* then casting votes using the cards.

Informed estimates are that a successful candidate standing in a typical Northeastern constituency in July 1995 would be likely to spend 20–25 million baht, with perhaps a third or a quarter of this going directly to vote-buying. Many unsuccessful candidates would have spent similar amounts, and some may have even spent up to 100 million baht. Not all of this money was coming directly from the candidates themselves; most of the main political parties received large secret donations from banks and major corporations, whilst at the local level hoteliers and important business people donate large sums to well-placed candidates.

Official corruption

Vote-buying and other abuses of the electoral system are common knowledge and are well-known to government officials such as provincial governors and police officers. Nevertheless, there are remarkably few

arrests or prosecutions for such offences. The simple fact is that many government officials, at best, deliberately ignore violations or, at worst, collude with those who perpetrate them, often participating in illegal activities themselves. Some election candidates 'buy' polling station officials (including those responsible for counting the vote) and their superiors. Other candidates are so influential, or so close to influential figures, that government officials do not dare challenge them. Sometimes government officials are the business partners of influential political figures in their district or province.

Because money now plays a crucial role in elections, the electoral process has effectively excluded many people who may have the potential to become effective politicians, but who lack the financial means to contest elections. Another negative aspect is that money politics has widened and deepened the scale of political patronage and further encouraged corruption and abuses of power. This, in turn, has led to an undermining of the legitimacy of governments which have come to power through elections. The commercialisation of the electoral process means that politicians with the greatest fund-raising abilities often have first pick of important cabinet positions when a new coalition administration is formed. The selection of ministers based on the patronage resources at their disposal, coupled with a stress on seniority rather than ministerial capability, has further damaged the democratic process.

THE CHANGING TERRAIN OF ELECTORAL CONTESTATION

With a couple of notable exceptions, elections prior to 1973 were generally token exercises, part of a ruling group's strategy to disguise its dictatorial nature. Moreover, competition was often between parties which were dominated by the military and those backed by the military's civilian opponents. Opposition groups sometimes treated elections as an opportunity to challenge the military establishment, but did not envisage taking on the business of government themselves. The range of political actors was very limited, and was confined mainly to local leaders and intellectuals, especially schoolteachers and lawyers.

By contrast, elections since 1975 have seen considerable changes both in terms of rules and of actors. Competition is no longer predominantly between the military-run parties and a limited number of progressive intellectuals and local leaders, having shifted to contests among members of the business community of different political orientations. The efforts of politicians-cum-business people to form alliances with other strategic groups such as government officials, local influential people, and members of the middle class and intellectual communities has intensified political competition.

New political actors: legitimising the marginalised

In the 1990s, business people have been the largest group in parliament. For example, almost 46 per cent of the 360 MPs elected in March 1992 were members of the business community (Ministry of the Interior 1992:307).[1] In addition, because most of those with business backgrounds are of Chinese descent, a new political phenomenon has emerged, where MPs include many whose parents and grandparents were politically marginalised. By contrast, the new generation of business people of Chinese descent, particularly those in their forties, are at the forefront in the shaping of public policy. Adding to their claim to a policy-making role, MPs are well educated, with just under three-quarters of the 1995 cohort holding at least a bachelor's degree, up from two-thirds from MPs elected in March 1992 (Matichon 1995:56). Electoral politics has facilitated the entrance of these new actors onto centre-stage.

The electoral process has also enabled the emergence of another group of people who were also previously marginalised: the *chao pho'* and other local 'influential people' who are often involved in various forms of illegal business, such as smuggling or gambling. By canvassing on behalf of politicians—especially the more prominent ones—these local influential people have been able not only to secure political protection for their business networks, but also to influence politics at the national level. One obvious example is the Khon Kaen *chao pho' Sia* Leng, who is said to have used his influence over MPs in his province to spoil a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda in April 1987 (Somrudee 1993:177).

Although the quest for material reward appears to be the primary factor behind the influx of these business people into politics, and the rising influence of *chao pho',* their appearance on the political stage has also raised the stakes in elections to greater levels. Success in elections has become not simply economic capital, but also political and social capital. Newcomers see the electoral process as an opportunity to gain legitimacy in a bureaucratically oriented social hierarchy. This is particularly useful for people such as *chao pho'*, who find this an ideal opportunity to repackage themselves as respectable, socially recognised local citizens. A number of local *chao pho'* who were previously marginalised have used the electoral process to rise to ministerial positions which would never have been open to them otherwise. Elections offer a means of empowering new social groups. However, this empowerment is a mixed blessing, given the nature of the electoral process has become increasingly corrupt.

Another group which has attempted to use the electoral process as a way of maintaining power and respect are retired civil servants and military officers seeking to maintain positions of power following retirement. Long well-represented in the unelected Senate, many have recently sought election to lower-house seats, whilst others obtained cabinet seats under party quotas

without themselves winning an election. Examples include former Army Commanders-in-Chief Arthit Kamlang-ek and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, either of whom might have earlier expected to gain power through a military *coup,* but in the changed conditions of the 1980s were obliged to seek high political office by entering party politics. A number of former permanent secretaries also sought political office in the late 1980s and 1990s, including: Phisan Moonlasartsathorn (New Aspiration Party) previously permanent secretary of the Ministry of the Interior, who became Minister of Science and then Labour; and Kasem S.Kasemsiri (Nam Thai Party) formerly permanent secretary of the Foreign Ministry, becoming Foreign Minister. Many former government officials found homes in parties such as New Aspiration and Nam Thai. Unfortunately, most of these former military officers and bureaucrats proved to be political dead wood; although they easily won elections in rural constituencies, they were generally unable to compete effectively in the political arena either with rural machine politicians (such as Banharn Silpa-archa and Montri Pongpanich) or with Bangkok technocrats with private sector experience, including Dr Amnuay, Dr Thaksin Shinawatra and Dr Supachai Panichpakdi.

The political rise of 'metropolitan business' leaders such as Thaksin has brought about changes in the character of the electoral process. Bangkok technocrats are now forming alliances with rural politicians. For example, the 1995 election saw the emergence of a grand coalition between large, provincial-based parties with numerous MPs (based around Chart Thai and New Aspiration), and smaller parties (especially Nam Thai and Palang Dharma) led by technocrats acceptable to the Bangkok electorate. Whereas previous administrations derived legitimacy from the respectable credentials of well-bred party leaders and premiers, such as Kukrit Pramoj, Chatichai Choonhavan, and Anand Panyarachun, the military background and palace connections of General Prem, or the personal integrity of Thammasat-trained lawyer Chuan Leekpai, the Banharn administration has had problems being accepted in the capital. Metropolitan business people, such as Thaksin, Amnuay, and Sudarat Keyuraphan, constitute a tiny minority of coalition MPs, but are conspicuously placed in prominent government positions in an attempt to legitimise the Banharn administration. Just as the military's National Peace-keeping Council had appointed Anand premier in February 1991 after their *coup,* in an effort to retain the confidence of the business and international communities, so Banharn needed Nam Thai and Palang Dharma for reasons which had little to do with the quest for a parliamentary majority.

New campaign styles: the role of media

Another development in campaigning has been the role of the media, particularly the broadcast media. Use of the media has proved effective in

creating a 'fever' of interest in particular politicians. The high media profile has been utilised by party members contesting local elections. Both former Palang Dharma leader Chamlong Srimuang and ex-government spokesman Abhisit Vejjajiva have created such intense media interest. Leading political figures from various parties have been invited to debate issues in front of the television cameras; in the September 1992 and July 1995 elections, academic and broadcaster Chermsak Phinthong hosted special showings of the popular discussion programme *Mong tang moom* ('Different Viewpoints'), in which the leading prime ministerial aspirants took part. Television and radio stations gave a great deal of airtime to election news, including the views of prominent politicians on various issues. Thailand's politicians are now emulating their western counterparts by offering 'sound-bite' utterances to the media, so as to promote their electoral messages. These new techniques and technologies are helping to change the shape of electoral politics.

The July 1995 election saw the publication of more detailed party policy statements than had previously been the case. Both the electronic and print media sought to emphasise policy issues, analysing the differences in policy between the different political parties. *Sayam pot (Siam Post),* for example, regularly printed tables and charts setting out rival party policy platforms on its front page. This media interest in policy was partly an attempt to pin down the parties to specific manifesto pledges against which their subsequent performance could be judged. In the event, the exercise achieved little: the seven-party coalition formed after the election was clearly an alliance based upon personal connections and the sharing of political spoils, rather than a meeting of minds on policy questions.

THE BANGKOK-BASED CONSTRUCTION OF PROVINCIAL POLITICS

Although Bangkok sets most political trends, and political leaders have to depend upon the support of Bangkokians for their political legitimacy, the capital city has not always been a good place for political investment. The electorate in Bangkok is unpredictable (as the Democrats found to their cost in March 1992, when they won only one Bangkok seat); by contrast, political investment in the provinces yields attractive returns. Ninety per cent of parliamentary seats are in provincial areas, and many of these seats can be won even by outside candidates, given sufficient money, a good campaign organisation and the necessary local connections.

Yet despite the fact that they have the voting power to install political leaders, rural people lack the vocal power to make policy demands. It is people who are Bangkok-based, possessed of wealth and well educated, who make the loudest and most effective demands of the government, and receive the greatest response. Rural voters are less able to package policy demands

than better-off, better-informed and better-connected Bangkok voters. Furthermore, this imbalance between an ability to empower politicians—by electing nine-tenths of the country's MPs—and an inability to gain control over resources has played against rural people in a number of ways. First, the Bangkok-based salariat constructs rural people as agents of political misbehaviour. In their collective mind, rural voters are associated with such deviant political practices as vote-buying and with indifference to national policy issues. This social construction of rural people further impairs their capacity to participate effectively in the political process. It also creates a situation where rural people elect political leaders who are rejected by the well-educated middle class in Bangkok on the grounds that locally-oriented provincial politicians lack vision, leadership, and administrative abilities (Anek 1993:19). Superficially, electoral politics appears to have empowered rural people, although the same process has also disempowered them, given Bangkok's low opinion of rural voters. This is a paradoxical situation which is sapping the legitimacy of elections. The 1995 election saw a truly provincial elected politician gain the premiership and promise to develop rural areas through a programme of highway construction and infrastructural investment. Yet, as the Banharn government demonstrated, both the political will and the administrative capacity of provincial politicians to empower the rural people they purport to represent remain in doubt.

Regionalised political parties

Regionalisation began to re-emerge at the time of the 1992 general elections (Surin 1992:45–6). Major political parties—such as the Democrats, Chart Thai, New Aspiration, Chart Pattana, Palang Dharma and Social Action—are divided along regional lines. In both elections, the Democrats dominated the South, Chart Thai dominated the Central region, Palang Dharma was the largest party in Bangkok, and Chart Pattana and New Aspiration were strongest in the Northeast.

   The 1995 general election results suggested that regionalisation was becoming a long-term trend, which might have a number of adverse consequences upon the political order. First, it could militate against the emergence of effective national political parties, and so contribute to the perpetuation of a multi-party coalition system where instability is high and political legitimacy problematic. Second, this trend might lead parties to concentrate their campaign resources in particular areas of strength, further reinforcing party regionalism. Parties with strengths in areas containing large populations and large numbers of parliamentary seats could gain at the expense of parties based in smaller regions (for example, parties based in Bangkok and the South could lose out to those based in the Central and Northeastern regions). Third, as parties in power seek to reward supporters in their home regions, so political bias will influence budgetary allocations, further increasing divisions in

the country. Such divisions will provide justification for permanent officials to claim for themselves the role of 'uniting' the nation, allowing the bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Interior to resist calls for administrative decentralisation,

THE EXCLUSIONARY CHARACTER OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Since the 1930s the electoral process has been progressively established, at least at a procedural level. Ironically, though, the institutionalisation of the electoral process does not always lead to more substantive democratisation and popular participation. Elections have become the domain of a broad coalition of three strategic political groups: veteran politicians (across all parties), bureaucrats (particularly from the Ministry of the Interior) and provincial business people.[2] This political-bureaucratic-business 'iron triangle', or rather 'vicious triangle'— which is essentially conservative in its political orientation—is making the electoral process increasingly exclusionary. In the long term, the conservative coalition is causing the parliamentary system to lose its legitimacy, and in turn leading to the emergence of other forms of oppositional politics.

What makes this three-pronged coalition possible? Three factors may be suggested here as contributing to the symbiotic relationship existing between these three actors: political incumbency, bureaucratic power, and political protection. Because bureaucratic power tends to favour incumbents, veteran politicians feel obliged to preserve the power and prestige of bureaucrats in return. The bureaucrats, particularly the provincial ones, further repay the politicians by helping engineer their re-elections. Local business tycoons— whose businesses often include illegal activities, and who act as canvassers for politicians—need both bureaucratic and political protection to obtain greater recognition, or a better place in the social hierarchy. They can also probably expect greater material rewards as well.

Although these three groups are brought together at election times, they are not equal in terms of their resources, power or prestige; considerable tensions always exist between them. A member of the alliance with greater power than the others will try to block any change which might be to its disadvantage. One of the greatest threats to bureaucratic power would be any move to decentralise the Ministry of the Interior's control of provincial administration, since this would reduce the power of ministry officials, and might increase the power of local tycoons. By contrast, political reforms which reduced the role of money in elections could benefit professional politicians at the expense of provincial business.

Although electoral politics appears to function as a means of redistributing power and bringing new participants into the political arena, it can easily become a vehicle for consolidating the power of the conservative triumvirate. Hence, there has been successful bureaucratic resistance to the

decentralisation of the Ministry of the Interior's stranglehold on provincial administrative power. In this respect, there has been little to choose between the major parties. The Democrat Party made little headway in the direction of decentralisation during the 1992–95 Chuan administration, and even very modest proposals to elect all members of local administrative councils provoked a defiant rebellion by Ministry of the Interior officials, and led to the New Aspiration Party leaving the Chuan coalition in December 1994 (Kusuma 1995:194–7). Significantly, powerful politicians such as then Minister of the Interior Chavalit preferred to preserve the existing structure of the bureaucratic privilege.

OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS

In response to the entrenchment of conservative forces, the more internationally-oriented capitalists, the middle classes, the mass media, technocrats and intellectuals have formed themselves into another loose alliance. Because they sometimes tend to be more liberal in their political orientation, and are out of sympathy with the military establishment, these groups could be described as broadly reformist. At the same time, it must be stressed that the distinction between conservatives and reformists, like the distinction between 'angel' and 'devil' parties, widely touted at the time of the 1992 general elections (see Surin 1992:26–7),[3] is not a hard and fast one. The July 1995 election led to the emergence of a coalition government containing both conservatives and reformists, both angels and devils, as seen in the close links between 'conservative' Chart Thai and 'reformist' Palang Dharma. The oppositional wing includes a large number of former leftists, some of whom are now in parliament, and who have a considerable stake in the capitalist system. It is hard to calculate the size of the oppositional groups, especially since memberships of each sub-group overlap with those of the various conservative blocs. Oppositional groups are generally supportive of reform and political change, and favour 'good government', which includes clamping down on corruption, promoting administrative efficiency and ensuring financial transparency. They are generally sympathetic to economic liberalisation, such as the deregulation of investment and production (Pasuk and Baker 1995:406–12). They advocate an 'enlightened' internationalisation of the economy.

Tensions between the reformists and the conservatives have emerged over various policy issues, such as in the areas of deregulation and economic liberalisation, foreign policy, economic planning, provincial administration, education and the management of natural resources. In terms of electoral politics, reform-minded people are trying to launch an offensive against the conservatives, or 'vicious triangle'. Unfortunately, however, because reformist oppositional politicians do not really have a strong base—meaning a loyal

political constituency—their attacks have been sporadic and sometimes self-defeating. As members of political parties which compete in elections, reformists have to play by the same rules as the iron alliance, in a game already dominated by conservatives. Alternative parties quickly find that they have little political future unless they adopt the practices of the dominant parties which they were established to displace. They face a stark choice between extinction and adaptation.

Meanwhile, those reformists who have been unable or unwilling to participate in the electoral process prefer to engage in extra-parliamentary oppositional activities. They include political activists such as veteran hunger-striker Chalard Vorachat, and NGOs such as the Small-scale Farmers' Federation of the Northeast and the Confederation for Democracy (Pasuk and Baker 1995:367–94). Another extra-parliamentary political body is PollWatch, a government-established, semi-autonomous organisation which was engaged in election monitoring and education work during the March and September 1992 and July 1995 campaigns (Callahan and McCargo 1996:389–91). Much of the initiative behind (and leadership of) PollWatch came from NGOs such as the Campaign for Popular Democracy and the Union for Civil Liberties.

Other elements of civil society which sometimes assume an extra-parliamentary oppositional role include environmental groups and the mass media, especially the Thai-language daily press. This growing civil society amounts to a challenge to the elite dominance of the political order, and reflects dissatisfaction with quality of parliamentary politics by a coalition of the salariat, intellectuals and 'enlightened' members of the business community.

CONCLUSION

The electoral process is becoming increasingly exclusionary, and has therefore triggered new forms of political resistance. If political space is not created in time to neutralise these tensions, they could lead to a breakdown in the parliamentary system as presently constituted. These tensions are different—both quantitatively and qualitatively—from previous conflicts between military and civilian forces. These are complex tensions between a group of competing elites. Whereas political tensions in the past usually ended up with a military takeover of state power, the events of February 1991 to May 1992 illustrate that the new tensions can no longer be defused so readily. In the post-'May events' period, political resistance is also increasingly directed away from the military, which no longer constitutes the sole target of dissatisfaction, and towards the alliance of bureaucrats, politicians and provincial business people. There are already signs that elected politicians—rather than military officers—are now regarding extra-parliamentary political activity as illegitimate and denouncing it accordingly.

If extra-parliamentary political movements are regarded as a healthy development in a democratic system, there could be fewer grounds for pessimism. But the reality is that politicians are becoming increasingly arrogant, believing that elections give them a form of absolute legitimacy. This belief may lead elected figures to regard all extra-parliamentary political activity as illegitimate, and so produce an increase in political tension. Former premier Chuan exemplified this tendency; despite his reputation as a clean political figure, Chuan quickly lost touch with popular sentiment after becoming prime minister in 1992, complaining bitterly about the way he was criticised by intellectuals and members of the middle class whom he had regarded as his friends. Chuan seemed to believe that his status as an elected premier rendered him immune from public criticism, an error of judgement which ultimately led to the Democrats' loss of power over a land reform scandal in May 1995.

It is not possible to analyse Thailand's politics in terms of a crudely two-dimensional conflict between bureaucrats and a rising middle class. Despite the erosion of the power of the bureaucratic elites, an 'iron triangle' of alliances unites key political actors and limits popular access to power. The disreputable element of provincial business has now enlisted respectable metropolitan and international business as a partner, an alliance clearly seen in the Banharn coalition government of 1995–96 (see Pasuk and Baker's Chapter 2 in this volume). Nevertheless, these new alliances are characterised by two principal faultlines. The first concerns the role of bureaucrats; sooner or later, old elites such as the military may seek to reassert some of their former political influence, at the expense of elected politicians. A second faultline may emerge between the 'traditional' provincial business people who populate parties such as Chart Thai, and the internationally minded Bangkok business community allied with parties such as Palang Dharma and the Democrats. Electorally, both business groups need each other, yet their visions of the country's economic and political future are poles apart. It is difficult to envisage how the huge rifts illustrated by Thailand's money-dominated electoral politics can be bridged. Yet if these rifts cannot be bridged, the country may grow increasingly ungovernable.

9 Local bureaucrats, power and participation

A study of two village schools in the Northeast

Bruce Missingham

There is an emerging orthodoxy in development studies, based on discourses of 'bottom-up' planning, 'grassroots' development or popular participation (Uphoff 1991; Thomas and Potter 1992). In Thailand, the notion of popular participation has become influential and has been adopted by NGOs and, increasingly, in government development policy and planning documents. This chapter explores issues of participation and power in rural Thailand through a focus on state policies and practices of local development. The first section reviews current theoretical perspectives on participatory development and issues relating to its implementation in Thailand. The second section highlights some of the contradictions and conflicts in the state's approach to local participation through a case study of village schools as agencies of development in the rural Northeast.

PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The current emphasis on participation grew out of a concern that technocratic, top-down approaches to development were proving ineffective, costly and, ultimately, were not sustainable. There are now many critiques of the top-down approach, demonstrating that it usually fails to meet the needs of the poor, largely because 'the decisions are made by experts far removed from the people and their needs, and implemented through structures intended to be more responsive to central direction than local reality' (Korten and Alfonso 1983:2). In spite of this it is still the predominant approach to development taken by governments and international organisations (Hall 1986:99; Porter, Allen and Thompson 1991). Top-down development is being challenged, however, by more participatory approaches.

According to the United Nations, participation requires:

the voluntary and democratic involvement of people in (a) contributing to the development effort, (b) sharing equitably in the benefits derived therefrom and (c) decision-making in respect of setting goals, formulating

policies and planning and implementing economic and social development programmes.

<div align="right">(Midgley 1986:25)</div>

This approach recognises that participation must be enacted through local organisations which provide opportunities for rural people to speak and act collectively. The call for participation, therefore, has an important political dimension: it is a call to relocate power over the resources, planning and implementation of rural development to local people who have been previously excluded from such power. It means a transformation in the relations of power between bureaucratic agencies and local communities to give local people greater access to state resources, technical knowledge and other forms of support, and implies a form of democratic decision-making.

In Thailand, policies of decentralisation and popular participation were introduced in the Fifth National Development Plan (1981–86), reflecting the analysis of Thai intellectuals over the previous decade and the changing policies of international organisations such as the World Bank. By that time it was widely recognised that a large proportion of the population, particularly in the rural Northeast, had failed fully to share in the benefits of economic growth (Demaine 1986:103). The Sixth Plan (1987–92) extended the notions of decentralisation and participation further with the inclusion of 'local organisations' at the village and sub-district *(tambon)* levels in the development process (Rigg 1991:200).

The Seventh Plan (1992–96) continued the emphasis initiated a decade before, while calling for greater co-operation between government agencies and NGOs. The approach to rural development advocated in the Seventh Plan emphasised:

> decentralisation of government authority to the regions and local levels…, activities which will increase incomes, and upgrade well-being and quality of life of the poor in rural areas…[and] measures to support the role of people's organizations, non-governmental organizations and private business enterprises to effectively participate in rural development.
>   (National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB] n.d.: 15)

Although the rhetoric of participation seems to have acquired currency throughout the development bureaucracy, there is little evidence that such policies have been successfully implemented in rural Thailand (Demaine 1986; Rigg 1991; Hewison 1993b). Political elites and state bureaucracies have proved resistant to calls for the decentralisation of power and authority to grassroots levels. Indeed, Hall (1986:99) argues that 'state-directed participation is a contradiction in terms', as centralised planning and hierarchical bureaucracies are incompatible with local participation and control of development. Here 'participation' essentially means 'mobilisation'

of people for state-defined ends. What is intended by 'popular participation' is quite different, and 'inevitably challenges existing bureaucratic structures' (Oakley 1991:90). It is not surprising that there is often state and elite resistance to participation strategies which are seen as a form of democratic development.

Historically, the state's approach to rural development has been one aimed at national integration and political and social control. The development of infrastructure and extension of administrative and bureaucratic structures has incorporated local communities into state systems of political and ideological domination and regulation (Chayan 1984; Hirsch 1989, 1990). In the Northeast, for example, it was only in the 1960s, when the region came to be perceived as a potential threat to national security through, first, separatism and then the growth of a communist insurgency, that steps were taken to invest relatively large amounts in infrastructure development and social services designed to ameliorate conditions of poverty and legitimise the role of the state (London 1977; Demaine 1986). The provision of schools was important in this for they became key local agencies for disseminating state ideology and culture (Chayan 1991; Keyes 1991). This incorporative process was explicitly designed to meet the perceived needs of national political elites rather than those of rural communities.

An important constraint to state-initiated participation is the complex and heterogeneous nature of the state and its bureaucratic apparatus. Ministries and departments tend to work independently of each other, with little history of effective co-operation between them in supporting local-level initiatives (Demaine 1986). The central planning authority, the NESDB in the Office of the Prime Minister, has little power or influence over other government departments to ensure that national development plans are implemented in a systematic fashion. A World Bank study in 1980 (quoted in Rigg 1991:20) concluded that: There is little evidence that Thailand's development plans systematically guide or govern the actions of departments or, for that matter, the cabinet itself, in the day to day conduct of government affairs'.

While there is a poor record of co-ordination and co-operation between departments, several commentators have also argued that pervasive patron-client relationships within departments create a hierarchical and paternalistic culture that is incompatible with grassroots participation (Demaine 1986; Rigg 1991). Hewison (1993b:1702) recently pointed out that too much emphasis on patronage relations leads to a static analysis that cannot account for conflict and change in society. He does agree, however, that given the highly complex and top-heavy structure of the bureaucratic apparatus, development 'is never really intended to be other than "top-down"'. Recently, a national conference on development planning concluded that 'traditional bureaucratic power, red tape and

corruption' are the 'big obstacles' to sustainable social development (*BP* 8 April 1995).

In the face of such criticisms NGOs are seen by some as providing a viable alternative program of small-scale activities to support grassroots participation and empowerment (e.g., Gohlert 1991). This alternative paradigm sees NGOs as better able to work with communities to analyse local conditions and the causes of poverty, and support public action to gain access to resources and political power (Poulton and Harris 1988; Holloway 1989). However, the limitations on the NGO-based grassroots approach to effect development on a large scale are also the subject of critical analysis. Thomas (1992) argues that NGO strategies are unlikely to bring about popular participation and social transformation on a large scale without state support or intervention. He argues that 'Many of the constraints on local small-scale development are structural and attempting to overcome them implies action at a broader level' (ibid.: 145). As Holloway (1989:2) notes, 'NGOs have the commitment and the experience; national governments have the means and the resources'.

Therefore, although the state has adopted the rhetoric of popular participation in development processes, there remain significant political and structural constraints to the implementation of effective grassroots development by the bureaucracy and local government institutions. The remainder of this chapter explores the contradictions and conflicts in state approaches to participation through a case study of the role of village schools in rural development.

CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFLICTS IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: TWO NORTHEASTERN VILLAGES

Schools are among the most visible and influential state institutions in rural communities. The human and material resources found in schools represent one of the largest ongoing state investments in village development. In terms of their interactions with local people, teachers are often the most prominent bureaucrats in village communities and have considerable influence in local governance. In spite of this, village schools and their teachers are often given little attention in discussions of local politics and development (with some important exceptions, such as Gurevich 1975; Chayan 1984, 1991; and Keyes 1991). The case study presented here is based on ethnographic research conducted in two villages in Northeastern Thailand during 1992 and 1993 (for details see Missingham 1994).

Local political power and bureaucracy

The villages of Ban Na Haeng and Ban Huay Lek are located within the Ubon Land Reform Area (ULRA), originally an extensive area of forest, in southern Ubon Ratchathani Province. The history and development of villages in the

ULRA can be characterised as a process of incorporation of previously remote and isolated settlements into broader political and economic structures of the region and nation (Hirsch 1989, 1990). The state has been the principal sponsor of this process through the provision of basic infrastructure, public services and local administration.

In Ban Na Haeng and Ban Huay Lek the establishment of the village primary school during the 1960s represented the arrival of the first state institution and the first bureaucrats. Apart from the teachers, the only other bureaucrats who currently live and work locally are the nurses who run the Tambon Health Station. The other state officials with local responsibilities, the Tambon Public Health Officer, Development Officer and Agriculture Extension Officer, make regular forays into the villages but have offices and live in the district town.

Village administration is the responsibility of the village head (*phuyaiban*), who is a villager elected or selected by his or her fellows and often assisted by deputies. The head, who chairs the Village Development Committee, is paradoxically and often irreconcilably, the representative of the community and also represents the state in the community, having responsibility for collecting statistics, broadcasting state announcements over the public address system and implementing state directives.

Arguably the most significant body in local government and development is the Tambon Council. It is the lowest administrative level (subdistrict) which receives funds directly from the state for local projects determined by the Council (Prasert 1985). The Tambon Council is composed of the village heads and one elected representative from each village in the Tambon, the Tambon Health Officer and one school teacher who acts as secretary. An appointed district official acts as supervisor (Chaichana 1990:11). The Tambon chief *(kamnan)* is elected from among the village heads. Tambon administration is being reformed by the national government, with the introduction of more democratic and autonomous Tambon Administration Organisations, but by mid-1995 only about 10 per cent of Tambon throughout the country have been upgraded to this level (*BP* 4 June 1995).

Studies of local political processes point to significant institutionalised limits to popular participation in local government and local decision-making processes. Turton (1987, 1989) found that Tambon Councils are usually dominated by local wealthy elites and bureaucrats, who seek to maintain state patronage. Hirsch (1990:193) describes both Village Committees and Tambon Councils as 'more relevant as tools of state power at the village and subdistrict level than as vehicles for articulation of community interests in dealings with the state authorities'. Chaichana (1990) reaches similar conclusions, arguing that the Tambon Council has not been an effective instrument for developing local participation.

On the other hand, local bureaucrats have acquired considerable power and influence within village affairs, especially over the state resources allocated

for local development. An example is the operation of the Tambon Rural Development Committee, which was established by the government to advise and support the Tambon Council in planning and implementing local development. It is dominated by state bureaucrats appointed by the District Office: the Public Health, Development, and Agricultural Extension Officers, a local teacher, and a representative from the district administration. The Tambon head and three other villagers make up the local representatives.

Village schools, rural development and participation

For several decades the government has encouraged village teachers to become local agents of community development, but has given virtually no financial or material support (Gurevich 1975; Judd n.d.: 154). School-based rural development was given renewed emphasis in the 1977–81 Fourth National Plan (Watson 1980:211). The Plan introduced the School Lunch Programme to alleviate malnutrition, and called for more locally relevant subjects and the provision of non-formal education in schools. Since then, agricultural and vocational education have been incorporated into the timetable of most rural primary schools. Teachers have been encouraged to work closely with other local officials and to expand the role of the village school as a site for community activities and development resources. Under these policies many village schools have developed small-scale agricultural activities, both as teaching resources for agricultural education and to produce food for the School Lunch Programme.

Recently, school-based rural development has also been supported by internationally funded development projects targeting specific poverty-stricken areas. The Ubon Land Reform Area Development (ULRAD) project, funded by the Thai and Australian governments, is one example which has attracted attention within Thailand for its school-based component. The project, implemented from 1990 to 1995, aimed to 'improve the quality of life of the rural poor' by facilitating community participation in local organisations and development processes, and improve the government's 'ability to respond to community needs' (ULRAD 1991). Village schools were assigned an important role in the project strategies and significant project resources were provided for school-based development activities. Village schools came to be seen as 'local organisations', integrated into both the local community and the bureaucracy, through which state resources could be more effectively and appropriately accessed by the community.

During the period of project implementation, however, there emerged contradictions and tensions between the participatory rhetoric and the institutionalised practices and attitudes of the teachers in their running of the school and relationships with the village community. Three issues

emerged. First, the formal relations between the school and village exclude local community influence or participation in school affairs and teachers make little effort to change this. Second, the development discourses and attitudes expressed by teachers tend to devalue and marginalise local knowledge, priorities and initiative. Third, the authority of teachers in village affairs is sometimes resisted by other sections of the community and struggles emerge over control of local development.

Relations between the school and the village

Ban Na Haeng School began with one teacher in the village meeting hall in 1968. Four years later the first school building was constructed on public land on the village outskirts. Since then the school has continued to develop through investments from the provincial Department of Education and contributions from the village community. In the 1992–93 school year Ban Na Haeng School employed 12 teachers including the principal and had 283 students enrolled from pre-school through to grade 6. Ban Huay Lek School, on the other hand, has grown to serve a much larger village community. The school was established when the first building was constructed by villagers, under the insistence of district officials, in 1964. By the 1992–93 school year 615 students were enrolled from pre-school through to grade 6. The staff consisted of 30 teachers including the principal.

The great majority of village teachers in the two schools are Lao-Northeasterners who share a common language and cultural background with the village people. Although very few are born locally, most have lived and worked in the same village for many years and turnover rates are relatively low. In spite of this, their relationships with the village community are largely determined by their status as bureaucrats. Their training and work anchors them within a bureaucratic culture which demands the use of the Central Thai language and the social norms of the centre in their dealings with students and other officials.

Apart from their work teaching the village children, the teachers make little effort to participate in the life of the community. Their status and social distance from village people are emphasised in many ways. The principals of both schools live in their respective district towns and commute to and from school each day. Most of the teachers live in government accommodation within the school grounds, forming a bureaucratic enclave at the edge of the community. They tend to socialise together and with other bureaucrats. Only a small proportion establish permanent homes in the village.

Village people have ambivalent attitudes towards the school teachers. They are mostly satisfied with the teachers' professional performance, but are sceptical, and often cynical, about the teachers' involvement and interest in village affairs. The following quotes are typical of villagers' comments:

The only time we see them is when they ride their motorbikes through the village on their own business…. It would be better if they came and drank with us.

<div align="right">(Mr Yai, farmer/shopkeeper, Ban Huay Lek)</div>

They never come and sit with us to talk and eat together.

<div align="right">(Mrs Uan, Ban Huay Lek)</div>

Teachers don't enter the village! They stay in the school!

<div align="right">(Grandmother Suay, Ban Na Haeng)</div>

I've never seen them come, even once, to talk with us and ask us about our problems.

<div align="right">(Mrs Joon, Ban Na Haeng)</div>

Village people have very little influence over school affairs. The largely academic curriculum is determined by the Ministry of Education in Bangkok and teaching staff are appointed by the provincial office. While the government demands that each school organise an Education Committee *(kamakan su'ksa)* to facilitate co-operation and consultation between the school and the community, this is often no more than a bureaucratic device. The committee of seven villagers is selected by the principal and meetings are meant to be held twice a year. In practice, the principals in Ban Na Haeng and Ban Huay Lek have selected village representatives who they feel will co-operate and comply with their wishes. Meetings are held sporadically and do little more than confirm proposals and projects announced by the principal. The Education Committee is primarily used by the principals to mobilise volunteer labour and assistance for school projects instigated and controlled by the teachers, for example, small construction projects within the school.

Consultation between the principal and village head usually takes place when the principal wants to request resources and assistance from the community. Over the years villagers have been called upon to supplement the resources of the state. State programmes, such as the School Lunch Programme, and pressure on principals and teachers to 'develop' their schools (and so gain status and recognition in the education bureaucracy) have led to frequent requests for assistance from the villagers, most of whom are struggling with their own debt and poverty, but who have little choice but to co-operate with the decisions made by their village leaders under pressure from the principal. From the villagers' point of view the only thing that the school does to help them is teach their children, and while they value education for their children, the advantages that come from that education are often ambiguous. It is not surprising then that teachers and villagers respond differently to questions about the ways in which the school helps the village community:

We have a very good relationship between the school and the villagers. The school helps the villagers and the villagers help the school.

> (Principal Chomchai, Ban Huay Lek School)

They've never come and helped the villagers. It's always the villagers helping the school.

> (Mr Sai, farmer, Ban Huay Lek)

The principals and teachers have made little effort to change this one-way flow of assistance and resources or to break down social and status boundaries and involve members of the village communities. There has been a notable lack of consultation between the teachers and village representatives, or even between the teachers and the school students, with regard to community needs or priorities. Instead, they keep state-sponsored and ULRAD project-sponsored activities within the school domain where they have most control. This has allowed their schools to acquire valuable development resources and acquire recognition and status within the bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic discourses of development

Hobart (1993:14) argues that 'government officials representing the nationstate play a central role in attributing knowledge, ignorance and agency' in development. Official 'discourses of development' often dismiss local knowledge and cultural priorities and represent local populations as uneducated and ignorant. They disregard the agency of rural people and assign authority and knowledge to state representatives in development (Hobart 1993). As Chambers (1983:140) suggests, such attitudes legitimate the 'unavoidable paternalism' of development bureaucrats that prevails in many countries.

Paternalistic discourses are pervasive throughout the Thai bureaucracy and are often expressed in official documents on rural development (see Apornpun 1987). For example, the official *Manual for the Tambon Council Committee,* in use until the late 1980s, represented the problem of rural poverty in the following terms:

a) The economic problem in rural areas comes from the fact that the rural people do not know how to use their time efficiently and fruitfully. They use only 4–5 months in the whole year for their productive activities. More than that, they do not know how to improve the quality of their land. In general, these rural people lack modern technology and agricultural practices….

b) The social problem comes from the rural dwellers' lack of education and training. They lack motivation and knowledge to improve their production. They rarely seek knowledge; they are not interested in learning from the

mass media, from discussions with experts, or from a study by themselves. More than that, they do not realise the importance of health and sanitation…. They do not keep their village clean and tidy. They lack drinking water, drainage systems and toilets. Most of them are passive; they do not work hard enough…. They are individualistic and cannot work as a team because they are not used to the concept of group responsibility. Rural people respect those who have seniority, they let their elders make the decisions. They are fatalistic. They believe in supernatural powers and spirits. Moreover, some local customs, for example, merit making, marriage ceremonies and house warming ceremonies are detrimental to development because the rural people spend much money on them, often more than they earn, and also because these ceremonies take time away from work.

(Ministry of the Interior, quoted in Chayan 1984:307–9)

This official view conforms very closely with a popular Central Thai stereotype of Northeastern villagers that is still common in the media. It ignores any analysis of the economic, social and political structures that might contribute to poverty and represents village culture as an obstacle to development and as a central element of the 'problem' that must be overcome.

Similar attitudes were expressed by the teachers in the two Ubon villages and shape the way they see their role and that of villagers' in local development. During interviews about local development many teachers were concerned about relations with the village community and the extent of co-operation they receive for their development efforts. They see the main problem as the nature of the village community:

Mostly the relationship between the school and the villagers is not good yet. Because—it's not that there's animosity—it's like they're one type and we in the school are another type, different types of people…. An important problem is the community is not yet fully prepared. Previously this school was judged first in developing schools but the community is not developed yet. Therefore when there is a problem it brings out the differences. It makes for poor possibilities for organising work in the school. In the community there are old people with traditional thinking…. The school has better capabilities but the parents of the students are traditional people and think traditionally…. The students come and we pass on knowledge but their parents are traditional and so we have a problem….

There's another point: lack of industriousness in the community. Sometimes we ask them to come and help with work in the school but hardly any come…. If you have no knowledge you have no industriousness….

In the past the government just gave things away. They came and distributed things—clothes—gave them free. Therefore they did nothing for it, this village, they received that's all. If we give to the villagers, if the

school has rice to distribute the meeting hall is full. If we ask them to come for a meeting they don't come or only a few come. For them the principal doesn't have a use.

(Teacher Ngiap, Ban Na Haeng School)

Similar comments were also made by the deputy of Ban Na Haeng School:

I think poverty is the villagers' greatest problem, but really that's not quite right. If there was industriousness *[khwam khayan]* there would be no poverty. If there is development work most of the villagers show little interest. If there is an activity requiring co-operation the villagers are not really interested, only a few.

(Deputy Principal Sombun, Ban Na Haeng School)

This attitude obviously reflects the official rhetoric quoted above. Local culture is seen as a problem to be overcome, rather than a legitimate local resource and starting-point for understanding and articulating local needs and priorities.

Finally, the teachers tend to disregard local agricultural knowledge and ascribe legitimacy only to knowledge that comes through official channels, such as government extension officers and ULRAD project field workers. They start with the view that local farmers lack the knowledge they need to successfully improve their agricultural production.

Local resistance and political conflict

Local people resist such paternalistic discourses and the teachers' efforts to extend their influence in village affairs in various ways. They may choose to reject teachers' claims to expert knowledge, but also quietly judge their involvement and commitment to the village community. In Ban Huay Lek some questioned the success of the school's agricultural project and said that village people received little benefit. For example, Mr Sai, a young farmer with children at the school, gave his assessment:

The school fishery project has been going on for many years already, about three or four years, raising fish. But they haven't had any results yet…. They're still getting started…. No benefits [come to us]. I think, suppose they sell the products, the money will be used to buy things for the school. I don't know, to buy pencils, notebooks, food. I don't know. No part of it will come to the community. Any income goes to the school to buy this and that.

Villagers often said that although agricultural education is part of the curriculum, the teachers knew little about farming, some suggesting that 'the children know more about farming than the teachers'. Just as the teachers' discourses devalue local knowledge and culture, villager discourses, although

less likely to be heard by outsiders, attribute knowledge but also ignorance to the teachers and undermine some of their claims to authority in local development.

In a discussion of the role of Ban Huay Lek School in village development the Tambon head was cynical of the authority of teachers and described local bureaucrats as outsiders with only shallow roots in local soil. He also emphasised a common view of the school as a consumer of village resources:

> The villagers and the school: the villagers hold that the school belongs to the village, not to the teachers. I have said before, the teachers teach our children. Most of them come from elsewhere. They come and pass on knowledge. We should respect that and help when we can because it is our village's school…. In not a long time the teachers will move—civil servants move. Every year they request donations of rice from the villagers—about 2,000 kilogrammes to use for the School Lunch Programme. When the [school's] Buddha image was made they requested it from the villagers, please donate rice, money—10,000 baht. The villagers helped. Here, if the school needs help they come to the village. We help— sport, books, donations of money. The year before last a new school building was to be built. The principal therefore came to consult. They had no funds. How much wood could we send? We went and cut the wood.

In the case of Ban Na Haeng, struggles and conflicts over the local power and influence of the teachers emerged more openly. In previous years the school principal wanted to take the lead in development activities but encountered resistance from the village community and its leaders. As he narrated the story of a series of conflicts between the school and the community over development, he expressed particular dissatisfaction with the village head, but also began to doubt the effectiveness of the school in developing the village community:

> We hurry too much—we want to see our plans complete. Many things that we want to do we can't do. The villagers always wait for a meeting. One year we wanted to make a road around the village. The villagers agreed but the village head wouldn't do it. I had called the meeting. I told the village head he doesn't behave correctly. In preparations if we're not together it won't be successful…. We don't have the authority to organise work or improvements following our own methods. We are one portion of society, not the whole lot. Coming to another story, when we demolished the old school building [to build a new one]…. The villagers weren't satisfied. They said that they had not been informed when teachers took the galvanised iron to make a chicken pen…. We said that the building was demolished already. They didn't know what we'd used it for. We used it in the school for their children, not for our own personal purposes. They don't seem to want to live together in harmony. I wondered why these problems arose. I think it comes from

misunderstandings between us and them. Okay, I decided that we are one part of society. To better the whole of society is impossible, but we have to encourage people to be good. That is enough. So we began to think again about how to develop the children. Developing the villagers won't get results, and it is better to begin with the children; better to help them have a home and sustenance…. Now, if the villagers have a festival or project we will go and help but we won't take on the leadership as before. We won't go and try to introduce new projects to them. We will begin with the school children. In about ten years time it'll be different, our current students will be adults.

(Principal Sawat, Ban Na Haeng School)

Although Principal Sawat believes he has the interests of the community at heart, his expectation as school principal is that he should take a leading role and be given appropriate co-operation by village leaders and the villagers themselves. Hence he laments the lack of 'authority to organise work or improvements following our own methods'. He blames the villagers for their lack of co-operation and justifies his present stance towards local people on the argument that 'developing the villagers won't get results'.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between teachers and villagers models the relationships between the bureaucracy and rural people in general (Keyes 1991). Teachers are more a part of the educational bureaucracy and its demands and culture than they are a part of the local communities in which they teach. Their relationships with village communities and approach to community development are shaped by bureaucratic practices and discourses which assign status and power to officials and tend to devalue local culture and priorities. State policies calling for village schools to become local agencies of community development imply an orientation and responsiveness to the conditions and needs of the village community. But, in practice, schools remain oriented to the hierarchical authority and centralised control of the state education bureaucracy. The state retains strict control over school curricula, the examination system and the ideological and cultural practices of the school, which mirror those of the central state. Villagers are almost totally excluded from any authority or control over school affairs.

The case of village schools illustrates the tensions and contradictions between policies of local participation and pre-existing government and bureaucratic structures. In Ban Huay Lek and Ban Na Haeng local bureaucrats and officials derive much of their power from the control of local development processes. They have proved unwilling or unable to relinquish that power so as to promote more democratic local decision-making. The reasons for this extend beyond local power structures and

struggles. Village agencies of the state have been subject to contradictory policies and procedures from central government. In spite of policies of decentralisation and popular participation, political, administrative and economic power have remained highly centralised in Bangkok. Top-down developmentalism predominates, ensuring that local officials remain oriented to maintaining higher level patronage and local power and influence.

10 Locating working-class power

*Andrew Brown**

For many observers, the dramatic events of May 1992 symbolised the increased power of the middle class in Thailand's politics (see, for example, Anek n.d.). It seemed that a turning-point had been reached, with a civil society finally emerging (Girling 1988). Despite the death of many demonstrators, there was a sense of optimism regarding the potential for a more liberal politics.

Equally, for many of those who study labour politics, the 1992 events were further confirmation of the lack of political consciousness and strength of the working class. Despite having been legal for almost two decades, albeit with restricted rights, and despite the rapid growth in union numbers during the 1980s, it was observed that '[organised labour was significant by its absence' in the street demonstrations of May 1992 (Sungsidh and Pasuk 1993a:35). For many, the working class had once again demonstrated its inability to act as an autonomous class or movement and, more importantly, this assessment suggested that an understanding of workers and their activities was of limited significance for understanding contemporary politics.

This chapter will suggest that while this perspective on working-class politics has become the established position, it is based on an altogether too narrow view of the nature of the working class. Often it is assumed that this class must be cohesive, conscious of its strategic political location, and activist in its pursuit of its class interests. It will be argued that this theoretical position has coloured the analysis of working-class politics, producing an analysis which seeks ideal-typical forms of labour activism. With this model being used to compare with the real world, few analysts have been able to locate labour activism or fully appreciate the historical and contemporary significance of the working class in Thailand. In this chapter an alternative perspective on the politics of the working class will be outlined, based on a different theoretical appreciation. Following this, will be a discussion of the recent political history of Thailand's working class, and I will go on to indicate this class's position and role in the emerging civil society, reflecting on some of the general issues raised in this collection.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

Analyses of the history and politics of Thailand's working class have been informed by a range of approaches, assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Despite this diversity, scholars have tended to employ a similar mode of analysis in their studies. The historical significance of labour politics has been assessed in terms of models which take it for granted that there are inevitable forms of struggle for a 'true' working class—consciousness of an objective class position will lead to actions indicating class solidarity (see Samrej 1987:2). It has, of course, taken minimal research to establish that workers have neither achieved 'revolutionary consciousness' nor replicated the forms and trajectories of struggle already taken by their counterparts in the advanced capitalist democracies. While projections may differ, the adoption of this type of analysis has produced a remarkable convergence of views regarding the historical salience of working-class politics. Thai workers are not considered to have represented a significant force in processes of political change, and the academic literature is pervaded by a sense of disenchantment with workers, with considerable effort being given to explaining the apparent failure of labour to fulfil its assigned historical and political destiny (see Brown 1990:1–7). Attempts to assess the historical significance of class and class relations in terms of the existence or otherwise of certain theoretically privileged forms of struggle has not been confined to the field of Thai labour studies. Rather, as a specific mode of analysis, it has often been applied to studies of workers and their politics in both the developing and developed world.

Class structure and class formation

The overwhelming concern with the level of appearances in studies of labour in Thailand is revealing of underlying empiricist models of explanation. These models are associated with Weberian or crude sociological views in which classes are conceptualised as collectivities of individuals.[1] From this perspective, class politics is defined as the regular behaviours and observable interactions between these collectivities as they embrace, promote and defend explicit and unambiguous class interests and ideologies. In the case of Thailand, the apparent absence or weakly developed state of these class markers has been taken as proof of the insignificance of class and class politics and, in particular, of the working class.

   Such empiricist views can be contrasted with a realist position which holds that the proper objects of explanation and analysis are the real, albeit not empirical, underlying structures which generate the level of appearances (see Bhaskar 1978). The realist explanation provides the theoretical grounding for the characteristic distinction Marxists make between class structure (a real underlying social relationship of exploitation and struggle) and the ongoing and open-ended process of class formation through which this relationship is

formed, reformed and (possibly) transformed in and through the concrete practices of human agency.[2]

Several important methodological implications flow from this conceptualisation of class as 'structured process', two of which are noted here. First, a distinction needs to be made between a *theoretical* analysis of the structure and dynamics of class relationships and an *historical* analysis of the actual effects this dynamic produces in concrete circumstances. As Wood emphasises:

> while the basis of class formation is to be found in the antagonistic relations of production, the particular ways in which structural pressures exerted by these relations actually operate in the formation of classes remains an open question to be resolved by historical and sociological analysis.
>
> (Wood 1995:98)

In other words, while class relations may delimit realms of historical possibility and experience, the ways in which agents who are incorporated into these relations respond to the class experience, the forms of struggle, organisation and ideas which are developed as part of this response and, crucially, the success or otherwise of these responses in terms of producing, reproducing or transforming class relations cannot be simply 'read off' a knowledge of the class structure itself (see Metcalfe 1988:14). Second, the notion of class politics does not therefore refer to the observable activities of classes but rather denotes struggles *over* class relationships, their establishment, maintenance and possible transformation (Dow and Lafferty 1990:5).

These comments suggest that analysis which focuses solely on forms of appearance is inadequate. Unfortunately, most analysis of labour in Thailand is limited in this manner, with class-consciousness and action seen to be poorly developed. However, if class struggle is, as Metcalfe (1988:86) suggests, always a 'mixing of different responses to a shared structural situation', then there cannot be any single form of struggle which is theoretically superior to any other. What is required is to go beyond the models currently popular, and employ a range of theoretical concepts capable of analysing the *shifting* forms which class relations and struggle actually take in changing historical and social contexts. This is a task which can only be carried out on the basis of rigorous and extensive empirical research. In the following sections I will suggest some ways in which the adoption of this approach opens avenues of research into labour politics which have been closed to those wedded to empiricist epistemology and shallow views of class. It is to these issues that the discussion now turns, beginning with a brief outline of the moral and organised dimensions of class and class struggle.

The moral dimension of class struggle

In an important examination of 'war' as a dominant metaphor in the analysis of class struggle, Metcalfe (1991:89) argues that while this military metaphor has its uses, 'its uncritical use blinds people to the many ways it is an inappropriate or misleading metaphor'. He suggests that it conceals the way in which class relations and class struggle 'resembles a struggle between lovers, or more generally between those in intimate relations'. He continues, arguing that:

> Working class people are often mythologised as Prometheans, but Hamlet would equally serve as a model. People's intimate midnight ruminations about the daily humiliations they suffer, about the shame they feel, about the claims to honour they would like to make: these too are struggles about class. Whatever people's long term interests, however economically exploited they are, there are personal matters of dignity and identity that demand people's attention on a daily basis, and anyone who does not understand the character of these private class struggles will not be able to understand those carried out in public places'.
>
> (Metcalfe, 1991:90)

The nature of the wage-labouring experience and the private responses to this experience have not been considered a useful or important topic in the analysis of Thai labour politics. Yet, as Metcalfe suggests, such experiences are crucial in understanding the development of more organised public forms of opposition and struggle. These are the experiences typically associated with wage-labouring, the various humiliations workers suffer in the context of social relations which challenge their honour and dignity, and their private responses to them.

Although this chapter is primarily concerned with organised forms of opposition, attention should also be drawn to this moral dimension of class struggle, to suggest briefly why it must also figure in the analysis of working-class politics.

As part of a recent campaign which aimed to improve Thailand's labour laws, a poster displayed prominently in demonstrations declared that laws must be 'just' and boldly declared that 'workers are not slaves!' This poster may be seen as representative of a quest for justice. Interestingly, the statement that wage workers are not slaves has been a constant theme in working-class discourse and can be traced to the very beginning of the processes of working-class formation in Thailand.

In an early and one of the most militant and bitter labour actions during the period of the absolute monarchy, a group of 300 tramway workers employed by the Siam Electric Company struck in early 1923, presenting the company with a long list of grievances.[3] The sometimes violent strike dragged on for

several weeks and left an indelible mark on political thinking. Indeed, in the draft of his ill-fated 1932 Economic Plan, Pridi Phanomyong used the strike as an example of the type of industrial conflict and social discord which would be inevitable if the private ownership of manufacturing plants was allowed to continue (cited in Landon 1968:284).

While this event was about 'economic exploitation', with the men and their families seeking to have their wages increased, there was a great deal more at stake. During the course of their working day the men were governed by an ill-defined set of work rules under which they were in constant fear of being fined, arbitrarily dismissed and even physically assaulted. In a letter sent to the *Sayam ratsadon* newspaper (19 January 1923), the men described this work experience as 'unjust oppression', making them feel that they were 'having their blood sucked', and being 'disadvantaged', while the company was described as 'squeezing and exploitative', 'monstrous', and even as 'inhuman and vulgar'. The rules themselves were said to be 'beyond the ability of humans to follow'. For the tramway men the rules and regulations the company enforced, and the manner of their enforcement, were perceived as dehumanising; they were symbols through which their value as human beings was being denigrated. This challenge to their sense of dignity and self-worth demanded a response. Arguing that 'we had reached the end of our tether', they stopped work, took their struggle to the streets and approached both the Police Commissioner and the Minister of the Interior in the hope of receiving 'justice'.

By rupturing their routine subordination to capital, by risking fines and unemployment, and by forging new solidarities, the tramway men aimed not only to secure a higher wage, but were also engaging in a struggle for self-respect. This struggle was conducted within a network of social relationships in which they were being treated as mere units of labour-power to be bought, sold, traded and set to work.

It might be asked what this has to do with politics. If politics is concerned primarily with relations of power and struggles over these relations, private struggles over issues such as identity and justice are political for they penetrate to the heart of the wage-labour/capital relation and have been central features of the struggle over this relation. Although ignored by scholars, these private struggles over dignity and the search for justice have come to form the moral bedrock upon which attempts to develop more public forms of class struggle have been based. This distinctive moral dimension of struggle can be seen to have threaded its way through the history of labour activism.

Organised class struggles

Classes do not simply appear on the historical stage already fully formed. Rather, class struggle is, first and foremost, a struggle to organise a class before becoming a struggle between organised classes. Indeed, for Przeworski

(1977:372), the process of class formation is essentially one in which classes are continually being 'organized, disorganized, and reorganized'. Studies of class based on historical projections, including many on Thailand (e.g., Kanchada 1989; Sungsidh 1989), are unable to conceptualise this process. For writers employing such an approach, the appearance of organised forms of struggle into the public realm is assumed to be more or less inevitable. What is lost in this is an appreciation of what Dow and Lafferty (1990:10–11) refer to as a 'contested, uneven, contingent and political process' whereby the working class emerges as an organised social force, develops its political skills and abilities, and the capacity to challenge the rule and domination of capital.

The events of the 1923 tramways strike did not herald the beginning of working-class struggles in Thailand, but did mark an important moment in the process in which workers began to organise their struggles to contest capitalist prerogatives. As the tramway men's battle dragged into its third week a new newspaper emerged on the streets of Bangkok. Called *Kammakon* ('The Labourer'), the paper was the work of a group of journalists led by a monastic-educated, ex-civil servant named Thawat Rittidet (1894–1950). In what must figure as a key text of Thailand's working-class history, Thawat outlined the reasons for the establishment of the paper. He argued that a new form of slavery had emerged, 'concealed within the bodies of employees'. For Thawat these new 'slaves' lived a 'hand-to-mouth' existence, and it was the lack of any alternative which forced them to work for wages regardless of the many inequities they faced at the hands of their employer. Thawat asked whether it was 'just' or 'equitable' to be forced into a work contract in 'times of hardship'. He demanded:

> Who will lend a hand to these suffering workers?…[W]e must look to ourselves…we raise our voices, we speak up like workers from other countries but we are ridiculed with the reply you are only an employee, you don't need to have a voice.
>
> (*Kammakon* 27 January 1923)

It was to provide a voice for workers, and to destroy slavery and replace it with 'freedom', that Thawat and his fellow activists established *Kammakon*. For Thawat, Siam had entered a 'civilised era' and it was therefore appropriate that workers be given the right to organise and represent themselves.

More than seven decades have passed since Thawat made these appeals for workers to have the right to organise and have their voices heard, and still the struggle goes on. Recent studies have examined how the capacity to realise these objectives has been constrained by the nature of capitalist industrialisation, employer systems of control and the role played by the state (Hewison and Brown 1994; Brown and Hewison 1997). With regard to the latter, it is clear that the capacity of organised labour, and the forms which organisation has taken, is inseparable from the fluctuating fortunes of civil society.

Working-class politics and the expansion of political space

Hewison and Rodan (1994) have rejected evolutionary understandings of recent political developments in Southeast Asia in which economic change and emerging social pluralism is seen to be inevitably giving rise to civil society and the unravelling of authoritarian political structures, paving the way for the installation of democratic regimes. Drawing on the work of Bernhard, civil society is used to refer to 'an autonomous sphere from which political forces representing constellations of interests in society have contested state power' (cited in ibid.: 238). Notable in their analysis is the inclusion of a sense of agency in understanding how this sphere develops. They argue that it is:

> Through struggle…[that] the state will be compelled to recognise a political space where autonomous self-organisation can occur outside official politics. This autonomy is used to place civil society in a position to have an institutionalised influence over the official political sphere.
>
> (Hewison and Rodan 1994:239)

From this perspective they assert that the development of civil society is not an historical end-point, but a product of the ebb and flow of opposition. This focus on political space, activism and the discontinuous and open-ended nature of opposition is valuable in thinking about the salience of labours' contribution to political change.

Hence, while the search for labour as a revolutionary class-for-itself in Thailand may be in vain, this should not mask the fact that workers and their organisations have played an historically significant role in struggles to open and expand the non-state political space of civil society. Beginning with the efforts of Thawat and the tramway men, a history of these contributions to the expansion of political space would need to begin with an account of developments during the late 1920s and early 1930s. It would need to examine the closing of political space to workers from the mid-1930s, followed by the processes of reorganisation in the early 1940s and the following decade of relatively open working-class struggle from the late 1940s until 1958, when an authoritarian regime was established by the military, banning labour activism. The re-opening of political space to workers, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing through to the mid-1970s was something of a golden age for labour and unions operating on a wide political stage.

In each of these periods workers fought to secure a space within which they could build their organisations, and in which they could legitimately air their grievances and attempt to influence the policies of employers and the state. The following section discusses labour's recent pursuit of these objectives, noting how apparent concessions from state and capital have, paradoxically, resulted in a weakening of labour organisation.

THE DISORGANISATION OF ORGANISED LABOUR

For a number of writers, the mid-1970s marks an important moment in the development of a 'true' labour movement (Mabry 1977; Vichote 1991). The economic growth of the 1960s had given rise not only to a significant number of wage earners but, in keeping with crude sociological and preclassificatory frameworks outlined above, also saw vigorous public forms of conflict as workers organised, struck and challenged employers over wages and conditions. At the same time, government was seen to be coming around to the idea that, rather than representing a threat to national security, allowing workers to organise might prove useful in promoting economic growth and prosperity. To these analysts it seemed that labour's place in civil society was assured, with Mabry (1979:81) declaring the continued existence of organised labour 'inevitable' and Wehmhorner (1983:494) arguing that it was highly 'unlikely that Thai governments would ever be able to push the country back to a state where there would be no trade unions'.

The working class had indeed emerged as a significant social power by the mid-1970s. Not only had wage-labour become increasingly vital to the development and structure of the economy, but, through struggle, workers demonstrated an intention to translate their social power to the political arena. Labour was reorganising and claiming a legitimate place for itself in both the industrial and wider political life of society. The crowning achievement in this process came with the promulgation of the 1975 Labour Relations Act which established a complex set of laws, structures and procedures which accorded workers basic rights and permitted them to have a legitimate voice in the formulation of labour policy. As Saowalak (1990) has shown, these developments reflected a general restructuring of state-labour-capital relations. The repressive controls imposed under the authoritarian, military-led regimes of the 1958–73 period gave way to the development of new modes of labour control which relied less on coercion and emphasised consultation and mediation within an institutionalised tripartite arrangement where workers, employers and government were to co-operate in solving industrial conflict and disputation. For both state and capital this regime of control has apparently proven successful as industrial militancy has declined and rates of economic growth have reached unprecedented levels (see Table 10.1). Likewise, taken at face value, the data indicate that the system has served working-class interests well as labour organisations have grown steadily (see Table 10.2).

However, a simple focus on institutions, observable behaviour and the changing forms of struggle can be misleading, for it hides a reality which is quite different from the initial impression. Rather than representing growing strength within a modernising industrial relations framework, the proliferation of unions may actually be interpreted as representing a

Table 10.1 Industrial disputes, strikes and lockouts (1975–90)

Year	Disputes	Workers involved	No. of strikes	Workers involved	Lockouts	Workers involved
1975	460	187107	241	9474	n/a	n/a
1976	340	194469	133	65342	n/a	n/a
1977	61	49673	7	4868	n/a	n/a
1978	156	98247	21	6842	n/a	n/a
1979	214	93466	62	15638	n/a	n/a
1980	174	58461	18	3230	n/a	n/a
1981	206	115774	54	22008	n/a	n/a
1982	376	100959	22	7061	n/a	n/a
1983	229	100729	28	10532	n/a	n/a
1984	86	32752	17	6742	n/a	n/a
1985	220	49073	4	648	2	370
1986	168	27982	6	5191	4	544
1987	145	29006	4	1092	6	1835
1988	120	29178	5	1444	2	640
1989	85	27854	6	2678	5	2850
1990	118	35792	7	2799	2	1499
1991	n/a	5316	7	n/a	n/a	n/a
1992	n/a	6614	20	n/a	n/a	n/a
1993	n/a	4817	14	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Department of Labour *Yearbook of Labour Statistics,* Ministry of the Interior, Bangkok, various issues

disorganisation of organised labour and a consequent undercutting of the capacity of unions to represent the interests of workers. In part, this situation is explained by the demobilising effects of rapid industrialisation. That is, as rural communities are uprooted and people seek waged work across a range of industries, often employed in small enterprises, the task of establishing and maintaining existing organisations has proven difficult (see Brown and Hewison 1997:14–15). However, the disorganisation of organised labour is also an outcome of continuing struggles over political space as workers have endeavoured to exercise their legal rights in the face of continuing opposition from powerful elements of capital and state.

Thus, although some sections of capital have been prepared to accept organised labour, even to the extent of seeing unions as conducive to increased productivity and higher profits, they remain a minority. The anti-union resolve of the majority remains strong (Brown and Frenkel 1993:86). From the late 1970s private sector employers have systematically sought to inhibit labour organisation, their task made easier by a ready supply of labour power. The strategies included: widespread use of short-term contracts; closing militant sections of factories; sacking the promoters

Table 10.2 Numbers of labour unions, federations and councils (1972–95)

Year	Private sector	State enterprises	Total	No. of members	Federations	Councils
1972	7	2	9	n/a	n/a	n/a
1973	18	4	22	n/a	n/a	n/a
1974	34	11	45	n/a	n/a	n/a
1975	83	28	111	50000	1	n/a
1976	135	49	184	70483	1	n/a
1977	117	47	164	n/a	1	n/a
1978	120	54	174	95951	1	2
1979	144	62	206	114249	2	3
1980	185	70	255	150193	6	3
1981	255	79	334	153960	8	3
1982	292	84	376	214636	10	3
1983	323	91	414	221739	14	4
1984	337	93	430	212343	16	4
1985	339	97	436	234359	16	4
1986	362	107	469	241709	15	4
1987	398	116	514	272608	15	4
1988	444	118	562	295901	15	4
1989	470	123	593	309041	15	5
1990	583	130	713	336061	17	5
1991	645	36*	645	162424	19	7
1992	749	37	749	190142	19	7
1993	839	37	839	231480	19	8
1994	888	43	888	242730	18	8
1995	968	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8

Note: *Following the February 1991 *coup* state enterprise workers were removed from coverage of 1975 Labour Relations Act. New legislation was introduced which allowed state enterprise workers to form 'associations'.

Source: Raengnan porithat, 19, 6, 1995:23; *Nation* 28 January 1996

of unions by exploiting legal loopholes; drawing out bargaining negotiations; encouraging splits within union leadership; and closing factories to re-open them with newly recruited work-forces. These and other measures have been reinforced with threats, beatings and the murder of a few union officials and activists to intimidate the majority (Arom 1993:22).

For its part, the state has also made a significant contribution to restricting the space available to organised labour. In this it is important to appreciate the continuing significance of state repression within contemporary systems of labour control. For while workers have been granted space to contest employer and state policies, this is still a limited, narrow space, and those who have attempted to operate outside it have been subject to state coercion (Somsak 1991:122–3). Although the scale of repression has eased over the last two decades, the continuing importance of the phenomenon in understanding

contemporary labour relations should not be underestimated. For, as discussed below, even those who have been prepared to stay within the rules of the game must continually struggle to exercise their rights.

Apart from its coercive activities, the state has also effectively placed restrictions on the exercise of rights by failing to close the many loopholes in the labour law, not enforcing employer compliance and refusing to ratify those International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions which cover the right to organise.[4] In addition, specific elements within the state have restricted worker autonomy. In the late 1970s the military established its own labour organisation, the National Free Labour Congress, to compete with and promote divisions within organised labour at the peak council level. The military has also fostered competition within labour councils. A good example of this is the Internal Security Operation Command's sponsorship of its own faction within the Labour Congress of Thailand which fomented the break-up of the then strongest and most progressive body of organised labour (Brown and Frenkel 1993:92–4). Such interventions reflected the military's wider mission of managing conflict through political means. Their aim was to co-opt and shape labour organisations and ensure that they could not become part of an opposition movement which could threaten the military's conception of legitimate political activity (see Samrej 1987:158).

Other elements of the state have played a significant part in limiting the basic right to organise. As indicated above, the number of unions, federations and councils grew rapidly during the 1980s and early 1990s. These developments were directly related to competition among some union leaders to establish their congresses and compete for prestigious seats on various tripartite bodies such as the National Advisory Council for Labour Development and the Labour Court. This competition has been facilitated both by the law itself, which grants each union one vote regardless of the size of its membership, and by elements within the Department of Labour (since 1993, a part of the newly formed Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare). A review of Department of Labour records conducted in May 1993 showed that officials had been in breach of the law by granting registration to unions without first receiving detailed information concerning the names of union officials, not including details of annual general meetings and generally failing to ensure that registration cards were completed appropriately. Preferred unions and their candidates have thus been able to monopolise positions on tripartite bodies, contributing further to labour disunity and a general weakening of organised labour.[5] This strategy of fostering competition between unions and their leaders has been the subject of a great deal of debate within labour ranks and is widely seen to have been a major factor in constraining the development of effective unions.

These ongoing efforts to inhibit the development of organised labour occurred during the late 1970s and throughout the period of

'semidemocracy' presided over by Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda from 1980 to 1988. However, the election of Chatichai Choonhavan as prime minister in August 1988 promised a better deal for labour. He recognised the importance of cultivating the support of industrial workers in electoral politics and this was reflected in his attendance at May Day celebrations in 1989 and 1990, the former being the first time a serving prime minister had attended in almost a decade, and in the appointment of his son Kraisak, who had long-standing links with labour, to the position of labour adviser. Importantly, Chatichai demonstrated an intention to accord greater priority to engaging workers in a dialogue, allowing them to express concerns on wages and conditions, social security, privatisation, temporary work contracts and child labour (US Department of Labor 1990:2).

However, after an initial period of enthusiasm, organised labour's attitude to and relationship with the Chatichai government began to sour. This was particularly true for powerful and well-organised state enterprise unions which had hoped for a reversal of long-standing plans to privatise state enterprises. This did not happen, and privatisation continued. Workers were unable to force the government to take account of their views and concerns (US Department of Labor 1990–91:13), and a number of strikes ensued. Even so, the Chatichai period did see some significant developments in labour relations, including: the enactment of the first social security law; increases in the state-set minimum wage; improvements in workers' rights (for example, raising the minimum working age from 12 to 13); and increasing the number of inspectors employed by the Department of Labour (ibid.: 9–13).

At about the same time, some employer representatives were beginning to take a more conciliatory attitude towards labour, especially as profitability came to demand a more effective use of human resources in some industries (see *BP* 30 March 1987). Strategically important urban industrial workers were increasingly cast in the role of partners with state and capital. As Sopon Wichirakorn from the influential Employers Confederation of Thailand (ECOT), argued:

> The employers' associations…should…make their members aware that resistance to organized labour is a futile effort. Employers must recognize that the right to organize is a universal right of the workers which is guaranteed by law. Rather than fighting against it, employers should take a more positive, enlightened approach to turn the adversaries into advocates, transforming negative energy into constructive one *[sic]*. The…[ECOT] has contributed its part to the process of educating its members in the proper concept of labour relations. Employers have been constantly persuaded that good labour relations are conducive to better productivity and higher profit.
>
> (Sopon Wichirakorn 1991: n.p.)

Together with developments noted above, this idea that labour organisation could be a productive force suggests that, during the Chatichai period, there were at least the signs of a greater commitment to respecting labour rights and according greater legitimacy to a space in which workers could effectively develop their organisations, air their grievances, and have a voice in policy processes.

In February 1991, however, Chatichai's term as prime minister was cut short by a military *coup*. The coming to power of conservative forces, led by the military, immediately saw workers placed under considerable pressure as the National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) launched an offensive against unions and the political space in which they were operating. The attack on organised labour was embodied in three pieces of legislation enacted shortly after the *coup*: (i) the 1991 Amendment of the 1975 Labour Relations Act, which removed state enterprise workers from coverage by the 1975 law; (ii) the State Enterprise Employees Relations Act 1991, which was to govern labour relations within state enterprises; and (iii) the NPKC's Announcement 54, which amended sections of the 1975 Labour Relations Act applied to private sector workers.

The combined effect of this legislation was to change industrial relations regulations in ways detrimental to labour but favourable to capital and the state. The military justified these changes in terms of economic imperatives, including the need for increased international competitiveness, as well as the maintenance of internal security (*Khao phiset* 25–31 March 1991; Sungsidh 1991:2).

Perhaps of greatest significance in this attack on labour was the State Enterprise Employees Relations Act, which banned unions and strikes in state enterprises. Workers were, however, allowed to form 'associations', with the objectives of these limited, especially as all final decisions were to be made by committees dominated by either management or government representatives. The withdrawal of state enterprise employees from coverage by the 1975 Act had a devastating impact on the structure of organised labour. Apart from depriving the union movement of some of its most experienced and knowledgeable leaders, a number of unions, federations and councils had to either be dissolved or reformed. The loss of 186,000 state enterprise workers in one legislative *coup* meant that the trade union movement was left with just 152,000 private sector members. Labour councils were also considerably weakened, with the Thai Trade Union Congress losing 18 members from its governing committee of 39, including its president, four vice-presidents, and 23 affiliated unions. Meanwhile, the second largest council, the Labour Congress of Thailand, lost 30 affiliated state enterprise unions and a number of its committee members including its president and secretary (Banthit 1991:266–7). Apparently, up to 70 per cent of the affiliated membership of labour councils was lost.

As if this forced restructuring of organised labour was not enough, unions in the private sector also came under attack. The NPKC's

Announcement 54 was issued because the junta considered the 1975 Act 'carried provisions…inappropriate for current economic and social conditions' (cited in ibid.: 243). In 'updating' the Act, the Announcement reduced the support unions could call on during disputation by placing restrictions on union advisers. It also introduced secret ballots which meant that no strike action could be taken until at least 50 per cent of total union membership had agreed to the action. Moreover, the role of the Department of Labour (subsequently renamed the Department of Labour Welfare and Protection) was strengthened (ibid.: 255–7). These changes placed extra and formidable obstacles in the path of the union movement in the private sector, and it is clear that, following the *coup,* the capacity of unions adequately to represent the interests of their members was greatly reduced. Thus, through legislative procedures which forced the restructuring of unions, federations and councils, and by altering the rules of the game in which these organisations operated, the NPKC effectively narrowed the space available to organised labour, further undercutting its capacity to represent worker interests.

If this background of efforts by the state and capital to disorganise, split and fragment organised labour is considered, it should be no surprise that, despite the existence of hundreds of unions, it was extremely difficult for workers to provide a united, public and well-organised opposition to the NPKC.[6] Rather than suggesting the insignificance of labour politics in the manner identified earlier in this chapter, the process of disorganising labour and undermining its autonomy actually attests to the increasing centrality of class relations and class politics. This is especially evident in the need of the state and capital to circumscribe the development of organised labour and the political space within which it operates, ensuring that labour remained subordinated to the changing demands of capital accumulation. If this perspective is adopted, then it may be seen that working-class opposition in the 1980s and early 1990s did not take the form of a struggle between two well-organised classes of labour and capital. Rather, labour was essentially concerned with creating and maintaining a degree of autonomy, independence and space within which it could develop its organisations and legitimately contest the dictates of capital and the state over issues such as wages and conditions, occupational health and safety, short-term employment contracts, social welfare and the introduction of new technology (see Somsak 1995, where an extended list of issues is discussed).

In essence, organised labour was continually on the back foot, challenged by often successful attempts to limit and disorganise it. However, far from being absent from the political struggles of the 1980s and 1990s, organised labour was operating at another level, and remained a significant element in the struggles for expanded political participation.

WORKING-CLASS POLITICS AND DEMOCRATISATION

In a recent study, Vichote (1991) has addressed the question of the role which organised labour has played in the development of Thailand's democracy. Although conceding that labour has emerged as an extrabureaucratic force capable of defining its own goals and interests, he none the less argues that, unlike workers in Latin American countries, Spain, Korea and the Philippines, workers and unions in Thailand have *not* played a 'significant role in the process of democratisation…[but have rather been] more dependent on the process of democratisation than… an independent *force* that caused democratisation (ibid.: 2–4, emphasis added). Again, workers have not lived up to academic expectations regarding their historical role.

Although he does not elaborate, it is clear that Vichote equates democracy with the presence of certain institutional forms such as elections, parliaments, political parties and the like. However, as Hewison, Rodan and Robison (1993:4) stress, the mere existence of the formal institutions of democracy 'guarantee nothing'. Rather, they argue that democracy is more profitably thought of in terms of certain 'objectives and guarantees':

> First, legal guarantees of 'citizens' to participate in the formulation of policies. Second, the institutionalisation of specific political freedoms including freedom of speech, association and judicial rights, as well as representative control over the executive and the bureaucracy. Third, political contestation is considered legitimate and is legally supported. Finally, political democracy is also seen to encompass popular accountability.
>
> (Hewison, Rodan and Robison 1993:6)

Understood in these terms the contributions of workers and their organisations to the development of democracy can be appreciated. Since at least the early 1920s, workers and their representatives have consistently struggled not only for political rights, including freedoms of speech and association, but also for the extension of social rights to economic and social welfare and education (see Arom 1990). The failure to recognise this is not only to misunderstand significant aspects of modern Thai politics, but to privilege a certain form of political activism to the exclusion of important elements of worker struggles to change the industrial, social and political conditions under which their labour is exercised.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the significance of class and class struggle is not to be found in the appearance or non-appearance of certain theoretically privileged forms of activism but rather needs to be located in terms of

'relationships*—the relationships of exploitation, conflict and struggle which provide the impulses to processes of class formation' (Wood 1985:93). Adopting this position opens some perspectives which have been closed to those analyses based on pre-classificatory models and crude sociological views of class.

Although largely ignored by political scientists, it has been suggested that the moral dimensions of class struggle require investigation. Although our knowledge of the history of this aspect of working-class struggle is limited, it is clear that the vast majority of workers who have been incorporated into the capitalist system have not sought the revolutionary overthrow of the system or even a radical response to their relationship with employers. Rather, they have argued for a more equitable, just and dignified treatment *within* this relation. Without an appreciation of this daily, often private, search for justice and dignity it is difficult to understand the impulses which have driven workers to publicly organise their struggles.

The forms of organisation and the range of issues on which workers have been deemed competent to speak has, however, been the subject of long and continuous contestation and conflict which have conditioned and been conditioned by the ebb and flow of political space. Since the mid-1970s the state has been granted workers basic rights within a structured space in which they have been permitted to develop their organisational capacities and have an institutionalised voice in policy development. However, as indicated above, although the formal industrial and wider political structures are in place, the exercise of industrial and political rights, and thus the degree of space available to labour, has been the subject of ongoing struggle and negotiation. This is not just a contest between labour and the state and capital, but also within the state, within the capitalist class and between capital and the state. In a number of important respects, the arena of labour relations has thus formed a microcosm of wider struggles concerned with participation, opposition to authoritarian rule and the development of more representative forms of politics.

The continued development of capitalism will mean that the labour-capital relation will assume even greater significance in the lives of increasing numbers of Thais and this, in turn, will ensure that it forms a central focus for their political activity and struggle. However, understanding the moral imperatives which lie behind these struggles, explaining the forms they assume and appreciating the contributions they make to expanding civil society and the strengthening of democratic politics will not be achieved through an analysis focused on institutions and observable behaviours. What is required is an examination of the reality which lies behind the appearances, a reality of contradictory and inherently conflictual social relationships which will continue to shape Thailand's economic, political and social development.

11 The politics of environment
Opposition and legitimacy

Philip Hirsch

The environmental movement in Thailand has become a significant force in recent years, notably since the successful campaign to prevent construction of the Nam Choan Dam in 1988. The movement has drawn in a wide range of social, economic and political actors in Thai society, yet it has also maintained its role as a significant challenge to dominant patterns of development and vested interests embodied in the *status quo*. In this respect, environmentalism represents an oppositional force, but one that has, ironically, been *increasingly inclusive*. Environmentalism thus signifies a change in the way in which politics is carried out in Thailand, whereby coalitions of interests are assembled to challenge the centralised decision-making of the political elite. This aspect presents certain contradictions within the environmental movement itself, whereby strategic dilemmas arise in relation to concerns over co-optation as the reverse side of enhanced legitimacy of opposition.

This chapter addresses two facets of change in the nature of oppositional politics. The first is the growing role of the middle class as a political force and the second is the increasing participation of peripheral interests, albeit on highly unequal terms. My main assertion is that interpretations which see environmentalism mainly as a logical or inevitable outcome of middle-class growth overlook the complexity and significance of environmentalism as a political force.[1]

There is little doubt that Thailand's middle class, however defined, is growing. There has been considerable discussion of what and who constitutes the middle class (see Hewison 1996; Robison and Goodman 1996). For present purposes, the growing numbers of professionals and individuals involved in business is sufficient evidence of a numerical growth, while their political growth is characterised both in events (notably the May 1992 uprising against the military-dominated government) and institutional channels, whether through business associations (see Anek 1992) or media representation.

Similarly, the increasing participation of peripheral interests and voices in mainstream issues is attested to daily in the national media. Such participation can be explained in two complementary ways. First, new

political spaces have been created for articulation of claims over resources and voicing of grievance over various abuses of power. Second, the incorporative nature of Thailand's development path means that peripheral areas and their inhabitants have been drawn into mainstream political and economic currents. Peripherality has both spatial and social manifestations, since many of the poorest and politically weakest people live on marginal lands, often in recently cleared forest areas, that are remote from urban centres of relative affluence and political power. Recent encroachment on the resource base of such groups has intensified their marginalisation. Not surprisingly, therefore, environmental issues loom large in conflict between marginalised and dominant social and political actors. On the one hand, environmentalism serves as a legitimising discourse for claims over resources, while on the other the material changes that have prompted protest are environmental in their essence.

Where, then, are the main challenges represented by environmentalism coming from? Should we be looking primarily to the middle class, primarily to marginalised social groups, or to other social and political dynamics produced by recent patterns of economic and political development?

THE ENVIRONMENT AS AN ISSUE

Damage to Thailand's environment has been widely reported (Hirsch 1993; Rigg 1995). More than half the country's forests have disappeared in a generation, leading to loss of biodiversity and to widespread soil erosion. Industrial and domestic pollution of waterways and of Bangkok's air has reached crisis proportions. Misapplication of pesticides and chemical fertilisers has contributed to the loss of biotic resources and serious soil degradation. New lifestyles have led to environmental conflicts over recreational land uses such as golf courses and resorts that encroach on forest and agricultural land and waterways. Coastal pollution due to tourism threatens the very industry that has helped create the problem.

The response to environmental degradation has also been significant and sustained, suggesting that environmentalism is more than an epiphenomenon in Thailand's political development. The 1989 ban on logging, the cancellation of the Nam Choan and other dams, anti-eucalyptus and anti-golf activism, protests over the destruction of urban communities to make way for expressways, and the legislative change enshrined in the 1992 National Environmental Quality Protection and Enhancement Act all attest to the place environmental issues have earned on the national agenda. However, environmentalism is not an automatic or consensual response to ecological destruction. Rather, it is a complex political phenomenon that needs to be understood with reference to the rapidly changing polity of which it is a part.

Politics, the environment and environmentalism

A basic premise of this chapter is that the environment is itself an inherently political issue. This is reflected in a number of ways. Conceptually, the politics of environment are represented in the political ecology approach (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987:17–19; Bryant 1992). Political ecology addresses environmental questions through an analysis of the role of the state and control over environmental resources by capital and different social groups, in particular political-economic circumstances. More generally, the environment is political as it concerns the allocation of resources in society, especially in the unequal distribution of costs and benefits associated with development. While benefits may readily be measured financially, many of the costs are unequivocally environmental in nature, or are at least expressed politically as environmental. Environmentalism is political, not only in its most obvious sense as represented in politicised disputes with environment at the centre (for example Nam Choan Dam; the 1989 logging ban—see Hirsch 1993: Chapter 1), but also as different manifestations of environmentalism represent, and reflect on, particular ideologies of development. In this respect, environmentalism as a social movement has attracted increasing interest (Ghai and Vivian 1992; Papadakis 1993; Peet and Watts 1993).

The environment has been used politically in a number of ways. One of the most significant is as a legitimate means for marginalised social actors to lay claim to resources. In the past, many such claims were seen as subversive, and threats of violence sanctioned by local powers served as effective deterrent against overt social protest (Turton 1984). Within a now more open and liberalised rural polity, the encompassing nature of environment makes it a useful shorthand for more fundamental claims and expressions of grievance.

Political use of the environment as a legitimising discourse is not of course limited to disempowered groups. On the contrary, claims to resources have been legitimised in the name of ecology by dominant groups in numerous ways. In the broadest sense, the claim by the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) over nearly half the national territory in the name of forest reserves, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries is a case in point. More specific is the justification of 'reforestation' programs that establish corporate claims to land for production of raw material for the pulp and paper industry (Lohmann 1990; Apichai, Samboon and Chaiyuth 1992). The main pretext for moving villagers out of forest reserves to make way for such productive schemes is the environmental problems allegedly caused by their occupation of these areas. Likewise, the sedentarisation of upland ethnic minorities is often a control measure carried out in the name of the environment. While it is important to be cognisant of these elite and sometimes repressive aspects of environmentalism, for current purposes the focus is on environmental

challenges, that is, the oppositional use of environmental discourses to question dominant interests and paths of development.

THE SOCIAL BASIS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

A wide range of environmental initiatives is evident in Thailand, and each has a particular socio-political location associated with it. A simple breakdown may run as follows:

- *Urban activist/student/NGO:* an overtly political, activist-based approach characterises groups such as the Project for Ecological Recovery or the grouping of student environmental clubs from 16 tertiary institutions. Several prominent academics have lent support to this approach. The perspective of such groups is evident in some of their publications (e.g., Project for Ecological Recovery [PER] 1992; *Thai Development Newsletter; Watershed).*
- *Local livelihood-based NGO:* this involves community initiatives in live-lihood-based environmental management that receive outside material and other forms of assistance. A case in point is the Yadfon organisation in southern Thailand (see Phisit 1994; Prudhisan and Maneerat's Chapter 12 in this volume).
- *Local spontaneous initiatives based on traditional systems:* commonly seen as grassroots initiatives, isolated, local attempts to assert management rights over environmental resources are widespread. Community forests and *mu'ang fai* (traditional weir and irrigation systems) fall within this category. Thung Yao community forest is a well-known case in point. It may also cover resistance to encroachment on the local resource base, for example local action to uproot eucalyptus seedlings as seen periodically in the Northeast. The case of Dong Yai in Buriram has been one of the best known of these such local movements, in this case under the leadership of the monk *Phra* Prajak (Saneh and Yos 1993; Taylor 1993b).
- *Nature protection (middle class):* NGO initiatives are not necessarily grassroots-based. Several NGOs are concerned primarily with nature conservation in a pure sense, with little direct involvement in local livelihood issues; indeed, such an approach can, on occasion, find itself in conflict with livelihood concerns. Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT) and the Wildlife Rescue Foundation are examples of such groups, and although they maintain close links to foreign groups and Bangkok-based expatriates, they are staffed and supported largely by middle-class urban dwellers and maintain a bi-monthly bilingual journal *(WFT Bulletin* and *Warasan pheua kan-anurak).*
- *Local issue-based:* increasingly, local interests are being articulated by the growing educated, professional presence outside Bangkok. Environmental issues are an important focus for organisational expression of such

interests. Among the more prominent of these is the Club for Chiangmai, a group of academics, architects and other professionals concerned with the threats to the city's cultural heritage from developments such as condominiums and the proposed cable car up Doi Suthep mountain. Elsewhere, many provincial environmental groups have sprung up, often following the initiatives of teachers, pharmacists, doctors and others.

- *Business-based:* a range of business groups is involved in environmental initiatives (discussed on p. 185). The interests involved in initiatives ranging from Magic Eyes to Think Earth are multifarious and not easily categorised except by their identification with big business. While there is little sense in which such initiatives are grassroots, they are nevertheless a manifestation of the growing role of civil society.
- *Think-tank or consultancy:* environmentally concerned think-tanks such as the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI) and Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) also represent a non-grassroots approach to environmental management. This approach is one that in principle takes on board social interests through a neo-liberal ideology of market-based measures to overcoming the grosser transgressions that have been integral to Thailand's development experience to date (TDRI 1988; 1995; TEI 1995).
- *Royal:* royal projects have had an environmental profile for some time, particularly the King's highland development projects among ethnic minorities. Recently, others have been established, notably, by the Chulabhorn Research Institute, which has a number of technically-focused environmental research projects. Environmental education is a major focus of *Lok si khiaw* (Green Earth), a foundation established by *Momratchwong* Narissara Chakrapong, scion of a princely family.
- *Bureaucracy:* the heightened profile of environment has led to the establishment of the new Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, and other ministries also give increased attention to environmental issues (Rigg 1995). Nevertheless, bureaucratic organisation lags behind even the government's own legislation. For example the provision in the 1992 Act for a 'polluter-pays' principle has no adequate monitoring and enforcement mechanism. While bureaucratic initiatives may seem inimical to the concept of challenge to dominant interests, they do legitimise certain types of action and provide a *de jure*—not always *de facto*—forum for greater popular participation in areas such as environmental impact assessment.

The first three of these groups are unequivocally oppositional in nature, although the nature of their confrontational stance tends to vary from one group of actors to another, depending on political vulnerability, breadth of perspective, geographical and social location. The next two—nature protection and local issue-based groups—are more ambiguous as oppositional forces, often engaging in non-adversarial and elite-focused campaigns

although sometimes aligning themselves with more radical groups on specific issues. The final four are unequivocally elite-focused and non-oppositional in orientation, representing mainstreaming, co-opting or opportunistic deploying of environmentalism, depending on perspective.

Although there is an increasing acceptance and understanding of the socio-political nature of environmental questions, and despite the clearly differentiated nature of the environmental movement, an ambivalence is implicit in the way in which environmentalism is represented and popularly understood. On the one hand, environmentalism is often interpreted simplistically as the product of the country's rapidly growing middle class. It is commonly assumed that a combination of education, increased concern over quality of life issues and the leisure to reflect beyond immediate survival questions all give the middle class a key role in environmentalism. The implication is that environmental concern is a luxury, vested mainly in the middle class, that comes at a particular level of development (see Dhira and Olsen 1994:7). This is an approach that often seems compelling in the Thai case, given the rapid and coincident emergence of environmentalism as a socio-political force and the numerical and political growth of the middle class within a rapidly growing economy.

On the other hand, many of the very problems that environmentalism has set out to address arise directly or indirectly from the patterns of growth that have helped to create this middle class (Rigg 1995). Moreover, basic livelihood issues affecting the country's still mainly rural population lie behind the more politicised environmental campaigns of recent years. Increasingly, rural, peripheral and marginalised groups have been drawn into the environmental arena through livelihood-based struggles over dams and other direct encroachments on their resource base or even over developments with less direct impact. They are thereby actively participating in—and sometimes providing the driving force behind—environmental politics. In such instances, issues that are played out as environmental politics often reveal a more fundamental social basis, with control over resources situated at the heart of many disputes.

Environmental challenges and the middle class

On the surface, there is much to support the notion that environmentalism is a middle class phenomenon. Many of the more strident campaigns are articulated through the Bangkok-based media, which identify closely with the loosely defined middle class as a progressive, democratising force in society (notably the *Nation* and *Krungthep thurakit*), with the editorial influence of key figures such as Suthichai Yoon. Indeed, the media has itself been a significant influence and facilitator in key environmental disputes and in promoting wider awareness of environmental issues. Middle-class interests in environmentalism are evident in a number of business-based environmental

initiatives in recent years (see TEI: 1994). Within the bureaucracy, and in policy-oriented think-tanks, environmental initiatives are associated with technocratically inspired moves toward a more ecologically informed approach to development. Even NGOs are staffed mainly by educated, middle-class personnel. Each of these is considered in turn below.

Business and environmentalism

Until the 1980s, business and environmentalists were often assumed, structurally and strategically, to be on opposite sides of the major environmental debates. This was true globally, and reflected in Thailand in some of the early environmental struggles such as the TEMCO issue in the 1970s (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989). More recently, business has been keen to be seen as concerned about the environment. There are both contrived and genuine elements to such concerns at a subjective level. Materially, there are more contradictions than complementarities between business environmental concerns and short-term profit objectives, but in certain areas such as energy saving and environmental technology there are commercial incentives for a greener approach. Global initiatives such as the Business Council on Sustainable Development, which played an important role at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, have been mirrored in Thailand (see *TEI Quarterly Environmental Journal* 2, 1994).

A number of prominent business groups and individuals have taken up environmentalist stands of one sort or another in recent years. Among the best-known as committed to making industrial practice compatible with Sustainable environmental initiatives is Sophon Suphaphong, President of Bangchak Petroleum and an important sponsor of the Thailand Environment Institute. Another prominent business figure who has taken on a role as environmental warden is Chodchoy Sophonpanich, daughter of Bangkok Bank founder, the late Chin Sophonpanich, whose family interest in Southeast Asia's largest private bank is still considerable. Chodchoy has become known, first and foremost, for her 'Magic Eyes' *(ta wiset)* antilitter campaign and associated cosmetic initiatives. She has also become embroiled in the Skytrain controversy, even venturing into an unlikely alliance with Kraisak Choonhavan, a radical former academic and adviser (also son) to former Prime Minister Chatichai, in opposition to overhead routes (*Manager* March 1994:26–9).[2] Pornthep Pornprapha, founder of the environmental organisation Think Earth, is another prominent business personality associated with environmental initiatives; as President of Siam Motors, Pornthep is prominent in an industry that is itself heavily implicated in the country's pollution problems. Other business initiatives are more directly related to the business activity itself. The Regent Hotel, for example, has sought the assistance of the Faculty of Environmental and Resource Studies at Mahidol University, together with the Local Development Institute, to develop an environmentally

sound 'master-plan' for its beachside Cha-am site. Hotels and the tourist industry more generally epitomise some of the contradictions in business-based environmentalism, since the environment becomes the commodity which the industry relies upon yet degrades.

How is business-based environmentalism to be interpreted? The public (media, NGO, popular opinion) response reveals a range of assumed motivations. Speculation ranges from ingenuous assumptions of altruism on the part of business, to conspiracy-inspired assumptions of cynical concern for image alone. Doubtless there is a spectrum of underlying reasons for individual business involvement in environmental initiatives, which vary from one individual, one business and one initiative to another. It is also likely that there are multiple motivations behind each. A simplistic spectrum of motivations, ranging from altruism at the top of the spectrum to self-interest at the bottom, might run as follows:

- *idealism* based on genuine concern for the environment, either in general terms or directly related to the impact of the activities of the business concerned;
- *'feel good' activity* for those with time and money to spare from business activities who would like to do something positive for society at large;
- *fashion,* or the band-wagon inducement to be part of current trends;
- *image,* where environmental concern is seen to improve the selling power of business to the public or consumers concerned;
- *business interest* in environmentally sound practice, either through resource and energy savings or through the business of environmental technology;
- *vested interest* where, for example, superficial environmental arguments may be used to oppose a development that threatens business interest.

Given the likely overlapping sets of reasons from within this spectrum for any one business group becoming involved with environmentalism, it is difficult to factor out primary motivations. Perhaps just as significant, from the perspective of environmental politics, is the assumed rather than 'real' motivation. Thus, for example, Chodchoy's stand against overhead rail is immediately assumed in the media and among sceptics to be related to her family's business interests (e.g., real estate to be devalued by overhead rail; releasing the bank from commitments to finance the system—*Manager* March 1994:29). Chodchoy, meanwhile, claims aesthetics of Bangkok streetscapes to lie at the centre of her concern. The relevant point is that, from a political point of view, interest-centred concerns do matter.

The complexity of issues raised by business-based environmentalism illustrates a wider difficulty, that of sorting out ideological and material interest in the environment. Social class, questions of access to resources and pecuniary benefits may shape particular environmental stands, but these should not be seen entirely in isolation from the influence of environmental concern that is, to some degree, independent of narrow self-interest.

Whatever the role and motivation of business in environmentalism, it represents an elite-based approach. The individual business personalities concerned tend to see themselves—and business in its role of representing the new middle-class alternative to bureaucratic influence within Thailand's polity—as the vanguard of environmentally sound approaches to development, particularly approaches that do not threaten the basis of the country's economic growth. In this sense, business-based environmentalism is at least a challenge to particular practices, but not to the political-economic mainstream. On the other hand, the kudos derived by business from association with environmental protection does represent a departure from bureaucratic monopoly on such initiatives.

Bureaucracy, technocracy and environmentalism

Bureaucratic power is often seen as antithetical to the emergence of civil society, and as such runs against the grain of growth in the role of middle-class influence. Nevertheless, within the bureaucracy, it is useful to distinguish between old-style, entrenched modes associated with patronage and those informed by technocratic concerns. Recent legislation in key areas has been informed by more or less genuine attempts to respond to some of the concerns raised by critics of Thailand's rapid—and sometimes rapacious—development path (Mingsarn 1993). The role of independent think-tanks is of some significance in the latter case, particularly in the area of environmental policy and legislation.

An important bureaucratic reform has been the changed role of the National Environment Board (NEB). The NEB was established in 1975 under the first National Environmental Quality Act. As a separate body reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office, the NEB had little enforcement power and a limited bureaucratic role. In 1992, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) was created, with three new departments specifically concerned with environment added to the old Ministry of Science and Technology. These new departments took on many of the functions of the old NEB, and the NEB was reconstituted as a prime-ministerial advisory board. The powers of the new MOSTE were enhanced by the potentially far-reaching National Environmental Quality Protection and Enhancement Act of 1992. It has been suggested that an entire ministry be devoted to environment, and that this ministry take on functions, such as flora and fauna protection, that sit uncomfortably with the primary function of other ministries in which they are currently based (Kasem 1994). In this case, environmentalism has served to foster intrabureaucratic challenges.

This is not the place to detail new bureaucratic approaches to the environment, except in so far as they reflect on the potential of environmentalism to challenge existing structures. Potentially, one of the most important provisions under the new Act is access to information. In practice,

however, there are still multiple obstacles to citizens who require data relevant to the environmental impact of particular projects. While this can be put down in part to the persistence of bureaucratic modes that reject true participation, it is simplistic to establish a dichotomy to separate bureaucratic and private sector middle-class influence, at a time when many in the bureaucracy are influenced by similar concerns.

One of the more significant institutional interfaces between public and private middle-class influence is to be found in policy-oriented think-tanks. Two of the most significant of these, TDRI and TEI, have environment high or at the centre of their policy and research agendas (TDRI 1995; TEI 1995). The professional orientation of these institutes can be characterised as technocratic-rationalist. In the environmental arena, this means exploration and development of centrally located information systems and policy instruments that make for more sound environmental management. A recent trend has been to push for a move away from the old 'command and control' approach to environmental legislation and standards, which has been ineffectively applied and subject to abuse, towards more market-oriented principles such as 'polluter-pays' approaches that rely on business self-interest (Dhira and Olsen 1994). Of course, for such approaches to work, an effective monitoring system is still necessary, and to date little has been achieved in this area.

While think-tank approaches place emphasis on non-bureaucratic, rational environmental management, they still do not represent a major challenge to established interests. Their challenge is to establish substantive over instrumental rationality as the basis for decision-making. Essentially, the task of environmental management is seen as getting the market signals right, internalising externalities and finding the right level of compromise where there are unavoidable conflicts of interest between environmental and developmental objectives (Qwanrudee 1994).

NGOs and environmentalism

In an organisational sense, environmentalism in Thailand is associated, first and foremost, with NGOs. Non-profit think-tanks such as those referred to in the previous section are sometimes characterised as NGOs but, for the purposes of this chapter, NGOs are limited to organisations whose main functions and *modus operandi* are further removed from government, and which are often established to provide alternatives to mainstream development initiatives. Within this grouping there are many types of organisation and environmental ideology and activity. NGOs sit somewhere on the divide between elitist, middle-class action and grassroots, rural-based social and political action, reflecting the problematic aspect of their simplistic representation as oppositionist. On

the one hand, most NGO workers are from educated, middle-class backgrounds. Many prominent NGO activists have academic or other professional credentials and ideals that place them firmly within the set of democratic forces that lay behind the May 1992 opposition to authoritarian rule. This illustrates the fact that NGOs commonly work to an anti-bureaucratic, often egalitarian ideology born of opposition to the mainstream development path that has marginalised less privileged sections of society and done so much to damage the country's natural environment (Seri 1986; Gohlert 1991).

There is an increasing number of NGOs specifically concerned with environmental issues in Thailand. Others have become involved in environmentalism either incidentally or through a reorientation of activities, ideologies and practical concerns as resource and environmental issues have become part of the development agenda. The study by Pfirrmann and Kron (1992) provides an excellent reference for the range of NGOs involved in environmental issues.

The extent to which NGOs represent, or should be represented, as *the* principal challenge of Thai environmentalism to established interests is open to question and depends also on which NGOs are under discussion. NGOs vary by ideology, with some firmly committed to advocacy and thus political action while others have a more project-based alternative development agenda. Among the former, organisations range from those that work closely with government agencies (for example, Wildlife Fund Thailand) to those that tend to confront government policy, programmes and projects (for example, Project for Ecological Recovery). Personnel also vary between those based in Bangkok and staffed mainly by university graduates, and more locally-based NGOs run by monks, school teachers or other prominent local figures. NGOs also vary according to the issues they deal with, the level at which they operate, their interaction with other NGOs, and so on.

Of late, a key issue that has drawn NGOs into the environmental arena is the close association of livelihood issues with environmental degradation. Because most NGOs working in rural development express a concern for people's welfare and with approaches to development that depend on low-technology, high-natural-resource content production alternatives, together with issues of resource management and land tenure, environmental degradation has found its way onto the NGO agenda as a logical outcome of Thailand's declining environmental fortunes and increasing conflict over natural resources. In this sense NGOs, despite their middle-class staff profile, have found themselves close to the livelihood issues that are the primary basis for grassroots environmentalism.

Environmental challenges and peripheral interests

While many of the principal actors in environmental policy and politics are indeed middle class, defined in the broadest sense, a study of the key environmental issues suggests a more complex picture. Grassroots environmentalism has emerged as a combination of two related trends. The first is the impact of Thailand's development path on rural livelihoods, in particular as it has affected peripheral and marginalised people and areas. This has been most apparent in forest reserve areas, where resource competition between state, capital and local people's interests has intensified greatly (Hirsch 1993). The second trend is the incorporation of people living in more marginal areas into mainstream political and economic arenas, and the role of environment as a legitimising discourse for their claims over resources.

The past three decades of economic growth have affected rural and urban livelihoods in multifarious ways. Elsewhere, I have characterised the overall thrust of Thailand's development path as incorporative, as peripheral people and resources have been drawn into the mainstream polity and economy (Hirsch 1990). A consequence has been encroachment on the country's land, forest and water resources. In a country where, despite rapid industrial growth and urbanisation, a majority of the population is still rural and depends at least in part on local environmental resources for day-to-day livelihood needs, it is thus difficult to separate the issues of development, environmental degradation and impacts on welfare.

Between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) insurgency placed constraints on these processes. CPT activity had two main effects. First, there were areas of the country that were essentially off-limits to state personnel and business activity, and which remained inaccessible due to poor roads. More generalised was the reluctance of state authorities to alienate people living in forest reserves and other rural areas, for fear that they would turn to the CPT. In some cases, the military actively promoted settlement of some frontier areas and promised security of land tenure in order to create a buffer against insurgents on the forest fringe. From the early 1980s, the CPT went into rapid decline as a viable challenge to state authority, in part due to internal problems and in part due to success of the government's two-pronged political-military approach to rural insurgency (Pasuk and Baker 1995). The decline allowed for rapid strategic road construction into peripheral areas, which in turn facilitated resource extraction opportunities in newly accessible areas. With removal of concerns about alienating villagers in forest reserve areas, resource exploitation has served as the backdrop to intensified competition for resources between local people and external claimants (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989). This has been exacerbated in areas

where the earlier promises of land have proven to be empty as RFD asserts its authority in areas no longer of military interest. Meanwhile, the redundancy of the 'communist' label pinned on those challenging abuses of power has facilitated new forms of protest, including environmental action by villagers whose livelihoods are under threat. There are thus direct links between the demise of the CPT oppositional force and the rise of peripheral environmentalism.

Examples of resource encroachment, degradation and competition that have led to environmental disputes include large dams, logging, eucalyptus planting, mining, industrial and tourist developments and a host of other resource exploitation activities. The grassroots responses to these have been exercised at a number of levels. It is important to bear in mind that those that find their way into the national press, frequently as they do, are still only the tip of the iceberg. More typically, resource disputes remain local and are resolved or left to fester at the local level. It is usually when related disputes involve wider environmental politics that they become publicised, sometimes as *causes célèbres*. This is an important point in interpreting the nature of environmental politics as perceived through the Bangkok media, for it tends to imply that there are non-local (or non-grassroots) players acting as catalysts, coordinators, instigators, or even *agents provocateurs*—depending on point of view—in most disputes. The politics of alliance are considered further in the concluding section below.

Grassroots environmental initiatives need to be seen in a wider historical and cultural context. Much more long-term and generalised than the direct challenges alluded to above, but receiving much less written attention outside specialised academic circles, is the wide range of traditional resource management practices that are the historical basis for environmental stewardship. Local irrigation systems in the North *(mu'ang fai)* and sacred forests in the Northeast *(pa pu to)* are among the various means by which local people have managed resources and environment over a long period of time (Siam Society 1989). On the other hand, there are also many examples of unsustainable use and management of environment by local people, exacerbated greatly with the commodification of the resource base and promotion of commercial cropping in the absence of secure resource tenure regimes.

In recent years, local resource management has been politicised as contradictions have emerged between local interests, on the one hand, and centralised state management and control over resources, on the other. Decentralisation is an issue that has recently taken on wider political significance, and there are important implications for local environmental action and resource management (Apichai 1994; Hirsch 1994b). Community resource management has become an important focus for development work of NGOs, and some promising moves in a similar direction are also the subject of new government initiatives. A notable

example is the Sam Mun Highland Development Project, a watershed management scheme that emphasises participatory approaches to conflict-resolution among the communities involved. Elsewhere, support for community forests makes use of traditional and innovative approaches that often involve aspects of empowerment; the question of community control over forest resources is as much socio-political as organisational. Networks ('horizontal' linkages) are an important aspect of recent grassroots approaches in such areas, and NGOs have had an important facilitating role. The issue of community versus state management of forest and other resources was the subject of a symposium held at the parliament building in February 1993 (Wiwat 1993).

While much of the grassroots activism in the environmental arena has been in peripheral rural areas and has arisen as people and resources have been affected by resource competition arising from mainstream development trends, marginalised groups in urban areas have also been drawn onto the stage of environmental politics. A recent example is the community of Ban Krua, a longstanding Muslim settlement in the heart of Bangkok that would be dislocated by the construction of an expressway extension. Opposition by those to be affected led to the setting up of an inquiry, which found the expressway to be unwarranted on a number of grounds. An important claim of opponents is that the expressway would be built to serve private rather than public interest, as it would link the main expressway network with the new World Trade Centre. Here, too, an environmental dispute turns out to be based on livelihood concerns and questions of economic interest of poorer and wealthier sections of society.

Environmentalism and the contingent politics of alliance

What is new about the style of environmentally based oppositional politics *vis-à-vis* old political forces? At one level, new groups—notably the middle class and 'hitherto excluded' (Turton *et al.* 1987) peripheral voices are participating in new arenas or those previously the preserve of a narrower range of socio-political actors. Thus, environmental challenges represent the expanding participation that has characterised a gradual democratisation of society. However, perhaps more significant than the growing participation of one or another set of social actors is the formation of new strategic groupings that have emerged with environmental politics. A pigeon-hole approach to identifying individual initiatives would miss an important aspect of environmentalism, which may be termed the contingent politics of alliance.

In many respects, environmentalism readily lends itself to alliance among diverse social actors. It is an inclusive, encompassing discourse that crosses social boundaries. Moreover, environmentalism has a range of material and ideological bases, some of which sit in apparent contradiction

to one another—hence some of the ironies of business-based environmentalism alluded to above. This helps explain, for example, how provincial business groups, the RFD and radical environmentalists could unite on the Nam Choan issue. However, the uncomfortable juxtaposition of contradictory structural and superstructural interests also serves to make environmental coalitions unstable and fissiparous.

Some of the most important environmental controversies have involved a range of actors at various levels, whose interests coincide in a temporary, issue-specific manner rather than in a long-term, structural sense (Gagnon, Hirsch and Howitt 1993). Campaigns have sometimes brought together oppositional and non-oppositional actors in tenuous yet effective alliances. In addition to the seminal Nam Choan issue, the logging ban, the response to the suicide of Seub Nakhasathien and the Pak Mun Dam controversy have each involved a coalescence of diverse social actors that has ultimately proven short-lived. Those whose interests or ideologies converge on one issue may find themselves structurally opposed on the next—witness the disagreements between RFD and NGOs on eucalyptus plantations. Nevertheless, there are some more permanent multi-level and diverse coalitions, notably the annual year-end environmental forum that has been held over the past several years (TEI 1993).

The contingent politics of alliance represented in environmentalism are essentially an expression of strategic pragmatism. They are, however, also a reflection of rapid socio-economic change and the emergence of new material and ideological interests—and opportunities for representing them—among diverse societal groups. Similarly, the rapid emergence of environmentalism as part of the Thai political scene is coincident with a breakdown of old axes of antagonism—left versus right, urban versus rural, and even bureaucratic versus civilian. Nevertheless, it would be false to jump to the conclusion that a unified and entrenched environmental movement, *per se,* has emerged.

CONCLUSION

In summary, environmentalism in Thailand reflects on a rapidly changing polity as it connects with broader social and economic issues. Questions of control over resources, centralised versus decentralised power, bureaucratic power versus participation, and ultimately of state versus civil society are raised by recent environmental initiatives. It is often missing the point to ask whether environmentalism is effective in a narrow sense, for environmental initiatives have a more fundamental socio-political basis than that of maintaining environmental quality in an objectively measurable sense.

Environmentalism is closely tied to Thailand's fluid class structure, as represented by the contingent alliances associated with particular issues.

These alliances are not only within the more obvious elite cohorts but, more importantly, involve multi-layered coalitions. There are, therefore, limitations to an overly simple structural analysis. Furthermore, it is necessary to disentangle material and ideological bases of environmentalism. Perhaps most important is to recognise the role of environment as a legitimising discourse for social protest, for protection of vested interest and for staking of claims over resources, by grassroots and elite forces alike.

12 Non-governmental development organisations
Empowerment and environment

Prudhisan Jumbala and Maneerat Mitprasat

'In the water there are fish, in the fields there is rice'. So the Thai saying goes, or went. Rapid industrialisation, a policy of successive governments, has taken its toll on the natural environment and the livelihood of rural people. Today, Thailand is known for enviable economic growth rates and Bangkok's smog-filled streets, literally in the same breath, which is suggestive of the causal connection between the two. For example, few would know that golf courses for the urban rich devour farmland, compete with paddy fields for water and pollute rivers, resulting in the denial of livelihoods to many rural people. Family and community life are disrupted as villagers migrate in search of non-agricultural work.

Working to promote better outcomes and an understanding of such issues is the environmental movement, comprising people of many social strata (see Hirsch's Chapter 11 in this volume). For the poor, environmentalism is not a fashion or a form of idealism, but is a defence of their livelihoods. Together with non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs), they work to protect and rebuild their local environment, exert pressure on government to assist, refrain from environmentally damaging projects such as dams, and attempt to have government reorient its development strategy.

This social and political activism contrasts with the usual political studies depiction of the masses as politically passive (see Wilson 1962; Morell and Chai-Anan 1981). Political attitudes and behaviour have changed, but its dynamics remain little understood.[1] An understanding of the processes of political mobilisation is important as Thais, motivated by the May 1992 uprising, have launched another round of democratisation.

The dynamics of provincial political mobilisation testify to the fact that the development of civil society is not confined to the business and middle classes, often identified as the harbingers of democracy. Indeed, the dynamics of mobilisation give cause for reflection on the nature and sustainability of the democratic system. Will the emphasis on parliament and political parties be enough, or will attention need to be given to structures and processes of policy-making which allow real participation?

In reflecting on such issues, this chapter analyses the role NGDOs play in empowering disadvantaged groups through development work. It begins by examining the developments of the NGDO sector, and the way in which environmental concerns have become central to their work. Two cases from the South will illustrate how NGDOs have assisted rural people to mobilise in protests against government policy and in community efforts to protect their local environmental resources and their livelihoods from the negative impacts of industrialisation and market forces.[2] The chapter concludes with observations regarding the challenges NGDOs and people's organisations (POs) pose for representative democracy and the challenges faced.

THE NGO SECTOR

The term 'non-governmental organisation' (NGO) is not always easy to define. Here, rather than a definition, four observations are offered towards a delineation of NGOs.

First, to qualify as an NGO an organisation must not be part of government. This is not a facile distinction, since the state has established organisations similar to NGOs. For instance, the absolute monarchy set up the Thai Red Cross outside government, while ensuring that it also received state funding. More recently, in line with the policy of using political rather than military means to defeat the communist insurgency, government agencies have created village organisations for state-directed 'community development' (Kovit 1984). Regardless of the benefits to villagers, these are not NGOs.

Second, the organisation must be non-profitmaking. This excludes businesses. There is a tendency for businesses to establish NGO-like groups which provide benefits, including image-building, to businesses. Examples of this trend include the Think Earth project of the Siam Motors Group and the Creative Media Foundation attached to the Bang Chak Petroleum Company (see Suchit and Prudhisan 1993:18–24).

Third, these organisations must have altruistic objectives. This distinguishes NGOs from interest groups such as employer associations and labour unions. It also allows a distinction to be drawn between NGOs and POs. By and large, NGOs are set up and run by middle-class activists to assist the disadvantaged, while POs are formed for self-help purposes.

A further distinction, important for this chapter, can be drawn between non-governmental organisations and non-governmental *development* organisations. In Thai, the acronym *'or por or' (o'ngkan phathana ekachon)* is used for all NGOs, but NGDO workers prefer to distinguish their organisations from the general NGO. The distinction is significant, for while NGOs may include charities, social welfare agencies and even professional associations, NGDOs are a special category distinguished by their: (i) search for development alternatives to benefit the disadvantaged and the powerless;

(ii) attempts to assist the needy to form self-reliant groups for solving their problems in their own ways and in their own interests; and (iii) ultimate objective of developing a more equitable society. NGOs may also have the needy as target groups for assistance, but concentrate on charitable activities, often delivered in a top-down fashion. In contrast, NGDOs encourage these groups to conceive and handle development projects themselves and to become as self-reliant as possible (Ungphakorn 1986:14).

NGDOs are concerned to act as catalysts or facilitators in development, in contrast to government officers, who tend to think of themselves as agents of development. NGDOs also emphasise their independence and their lack of the hierarchical structures typical of government. NGDOs are bound together by the concern they share in 'developing people' and in 'social development' (Amporn 1992:12–13), suggesting to some that they have many of the characteristics of social movements (Phumthum 1986:25; Bantorn 1993:307).

While such distinctions are not always easily seen, they allow this chapter to concentrate on NGDOs, and particularly those in rural development, leaving aside NGOs of the social welfare variety and those dealing directly with human rights and the promotion of democracy.

NGDO GROWTH AND EXPANSION

It is useful to begin by placing the expansion of the NGDO sector into a broader political and economic context so that opportunities and constraints on their activities may be appreciated.

The 1960s: beginnings

NGDOs first emerged in the late 1960s, at a time of growing disillusionment with government economic growth policy involving the provision of infrastructure, promotion of private investment and the authoritarian military regime. While economic growth had boomed, inequalities were perceived to have increased and rural people experienced increasing dis-location as differences between urban and rural life increased. In 1967, Dr Puey Ungphakorn, a respected economic adviser, disillusioned that development was not having the expected trickle-down effect, became a prime mover in setting up two rural development organisations. The Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement worked in Chainat Province, on integrated rural development and the Maeklong Rural Development Project, involving three universities. Later, Puey established the Graduate Volunteer Project at Thammasat University, providing graduates with the opportunity to train for rural development work. Many of today's NGDO leaders gained experience and developed their ideas in these organisations (Prayong 1994:69–70; Dej 1994:76).

This period was one of political activism and student foment. Student activists were involved in a range of pursuits, from Peace Corps-style rural development camps and educative and social development tasks to involvement in critical intellectual pursuits, notably those associated with outspoken social critic Sulak Sivaraksa and the *Social Science Review,* and more overtly political agitation. These activities converged in the student movement that emerged to demand constitutional rule and which took the leading role in the October 1973 uprising against the military regime (Prudhisan 1987:136–40).

The 1973–76 democratic period: the dangers of confrontational politics

During the 1973–76 democratic period, a range of rural NGDOs emerged. There were those inspired by religious values, with one Buddhist-oriented group developing around Sulak and the Komol Keemthong Foundation, and another centred on the Catholic Council of Thailand and a range of Protestant organisations (Vitoon 1986:31). At the same time, human rights groups such as the Union of Civil Liberties sprang up as a watchdog group, but operating at the national rather than local level.

A major influence on development work was the democracy dissemination campaign launched by student activists. Large numbers of participating students were shocked by what they saw in rural areas: poverty, economic exploitation and the repression of villagers by the military and local authorities. These experiences led to Maoist ideas becoming attractive, with some activists moving to the left. In their impatience to hasten change, these students pursued a confrontational strategy (Prudhisan 1987:144–53).

Increasingly, these activists viewed development camps and NGDO work as reformist. This criticism had some effect on NGDOs in that consciousness-raising work was introduced to build villager confidence in dealing with exploitation. Some student activists spent long periods in villages engaged in political agitation, being accused of playing into the hands of the communists and creating disunity (Phumthum 1986:23–5). In the face of rightist attacks, many students were even more radicalised. They launched campaigns to mobilise villagers, especially in the North, where the Peasant Federation of Thailand was formed to link with workers and students in attacking the fledgling parliamentary system as a sham (Prudhisan 1987:155–9).

While such experiences eventually brought some students to NGDO development work, the immediate impact was that local elites, officials and hired thugs harassed NGDO workers, driving them out of villages, along with student activists. In this dangerous environment, many NGDO projects closed, with political polarisation and violence ruling out moderate options in rural development (Phumthum 1986:24; Vitoon

1986:31). In this highly charged atmosphere conflict was unavoidable, and by October 1976, the military had succeeded in orchestrating a violent *coup* (Prudhisan 1987:161–2). The *coup* group installed an authoritarian civilian government, with many activists imprisoned. Others fled to the jungle to join the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) armed struggle or took refuge abroad. There was a lull in NGDO activities, as these were identified by security agencies as suspect. This repression lasted about a year, when another *coup* brought a strategy of national reconciliation.

1980–85: proliferation, reorientation, networking

It was only after 1980 that the NGDO sector was able to again expand. There were a number of reasons for this. First, the relaxation of political controls opened space for activities that had been seen as subversive. An amnesty was offered to those who had fled the *coup,* detainees were released and an olive branch extended to those who had joined the CPT, calling on them to participate in national development. The new policy focused on social, political and economic development, where participation became something which the military-bureaucratic and business elites felt had to be permitted in order to avoid the violence of the previous decade (Prudhisan 1992a:89–94). These policies allowed NGDOs the political space they needed to operate in rural areas and to participate in the development debate (Anake 1990:6).

Second, ideological splits developed between the new communist regimes in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, resulting in a split within the CPT and a consequent loss of bases and support. This undercut the CPT and led to disenchantment among those who had joined the party after 1976, and many left. A number of these returnees retained their commitment to social change and pursued this through peaceful means, working in NGDOs and in rural development (Anake 1986:57; Phumthum 1986:24–5).

Third, the Second Oil Crisis brought three devaluations of the baht between 1981 and 1985, and saw an economic downturn (Hewison 1989: Chapter 5). Agricultural commodity prices had also dropped, and farmer's debt burdens increased, prompting the government to initiate a poverty reduction plan in rural areas. This saw a co-ordinating body for rural development established and special development budgets allocated (Anake 1990:6–7). The government also recognised that NGDOs had a role to play in rural development (Phumthum 1986:24).

Fourth, with the economy still undergoing adjustment, business was not yet an appealing source of employment for university graduates, and memories of social and political activism remained fresh in the minds of recent graduates. Thus there were still many willing to support the expansion of NGDOs.

Finally, the availability of funds and ideas from NGOs and foreign agencies stimulated the expansion of NGDOs. Interest in Thai NGDOs

developed as a product of activities by foreign agencies with Indochinese refugees on Thailand's eastern border (Anake 1986:56; 1990:50), and they became increasingly interested in rural development in Thailand.

This growth period for NGDOs was marked by a proliferation of small, localised NGDOs, often established by development workers who had resigned from larger NGDOs due to differences over ideology or methodologies. This sometimes saw experienced field workers opposed to NGDO managers or executives, who were academics or members of urban elites, and without long-term or field experience in development (Anake 1990:52; Bantorn 1993:308–9).

Initially, many of these locally based NGDOs operated as welfare providers and concentrated on economic benefits, in much the same way as government agencies, although they paid more attention to villager-identified needs and to the social and cultural dimensions of development. Over time, however, they realised that welfare improved livelihoods in the short term, but ignored the development of the community's capacity for self-reliance.

A change in approach began in the mid-1980s. While continuing to promote projects aimed at the alleviation of poverty, NGDOs engaged in more participatory activities which often included the analysis of a community's history and present situation, developing the capacity to analyse and solve problems, and engendering a sense of community. In contrast, government agencies emphasised material well-being while NGDOs were more interested in human development and the villagers themselves. This stance made NDGO workers realise that village communities had their own histories, institutions, cultures and processes for self-reliant development (Kanchana n.d.: 120–2). This renewed respect for villagers and their ways, placing them at the centre of development activities; this was not the case in mainstream approaches.

Veteran NDGO worker Anake Nakabutr, explains that, in the Northeast, there were six elements in the new approach to development: first, the study of community history and culture to engender self-confidence and draw villagers into the process; second, Buddhist practice, reducing materialistic behaviour; third, mixed farming rather than mono-cropping, emphasising self-sufficiency over market production; fourth, the development of revolving funds to sustain productive activities; fifth, the promotion of traditional medicine to supplement modern health care; and sixth, a dynamic learning situation involving discussion and the sharing of knowledge and experience between networked communities (Anake 1990:22–7).

In fact, there was no single approach, but a set of overlapping approaches, variously named community culture, religious, alternative agriculture, self-reliance, and grassroots wisdom. Each NGDO and locality chose its emphasis according to their circumstances, but there was

agreement that the nurturing of grassroots organisations, to eventually be run by the villagers themselves, was most important in the pursuit of participatory development (Anake 1986:68). To avoid imposing outside organisational forms, community analysis was meant to discover how villagers organised themselves so that new methods could be grafted to such organisation to meet new challenges (Seri 1991:35; Bantorn 1990:42, 1993:315–6). In essence, these processes are political, and are seen to represent the practice of democracy at the grassroots (Bantorn 1993:315–6).

During this period NGDOs were also networking among themselves. From 1978 there had been consultative meetings, and networks emerged, focused on development issues, localities and regions. In 1981, the government's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), concerned to push its rural development strategy, had called for consultations with NGOs and coordination between government organisations (GOs) and NGOs. In 1984 a joint GO-NGO Task Force on Rural Development was formed and, on the NGDO side, the NGO-Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD) was established in 1985, composed of elected representatives from each of the five regions (Amara and Nitaya 1994:56–8).

The delay in establishing NGO-CORD and GO-NGO co-ordination was due to the fact that NGDOs were still establishing their own networks and were uncertain of the NESDB's intentions. They feared that the government might co-opt them into a corporatist framework, similar to what had happened to business (see Anek 1992), and that they would have limited bargaining power (Anake 1986:66–8). However, by 1985 NGDOs had established a number of networks. These included the Thai Development Support Committee (to co-ordinate small NGOs, act as an information clearing house and to publicise their activities), the NGO Coordinating Committee on Primary Health Care, the Coordinating Committee of Human Rights Organisations. The need for a national peak organisation to give access to government planning and decision-making was accepted by NGOs. Though the name suggests a focus on rural development, NGO-CORD came to represent other types of NGOs dealing with the disadvantaged and human rights.[3]

1986–96: policy advocacy and environmentalism

As the economy boomed after 1985, export-orientation increased, accompanied by greater resource extraction, tourism and agro-industry, affecting rural areas in unprecedented ways. Such development took a heavy toll on the environment and saw conflict emerge between rural groups and between rural people and outsiders. Examples included rock salt mining in the Northeast, export-oriented prawn farming in the South, and land speculation associated with tourism and industrial development. The latter, when

combined with the end of the communist insurgency, meant that forests became accessible and logging expanded. Many who had lost or sold their land established new settlements in forests and contributed, in part, to extensive deforestation. Forests were also granted to commercial interests for eucalyptus plantations. People living in or near forests and depending on them for housing materials, firewood, food and traditional medicines fought their eviction. Another threat to rural dwellers came from dams, built mainly for electricity supply to industry and urban interests. Dam construction uprooted villagers who were resettled, often in less fertile areas, and without adequate compensation. Farmers who depended on dams for irrigation, found water supply erratic as electricity production took precedence (Surichai *et al.* 1992).

Environmental issues caught public attention as a series of disasters and struggles put environmental concerns on the national political agenda (Hirsch 1993:17–23, 133–48). In March 1986, the government revived a project to build the Nam Choan Dam in the Thung Yai Naresuan wildlife sanctuary in Kanchanaburi Province. A diverse coalition of interests opposed the project in what became a long campaign. Playing a crucial role in co-ordinating the action was the newly-formed Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), an environmental NGO combining technical expertise with an activist approach, and with experience of rural, community-based, environmental development projects, and links with other NGDOs and students (Suchit and Prudhisan 1993:12–13). Such attributes positioned PER to draw the more conservative environmental NGOs, academics and Forestry Department scientists into a temporary, but effective, coalition against the dam (Hirsch 1993:138–40).

Though the alliance was Bangkok-based, local people, whose livelihood was threatened by the dam, were an important element of the opposition. But the campaign owed its success less to this mobilisation than to its ability to link with technical experts who could mount convincing counter-arguments to those put forward by the dam's proponents. The ability to capture media attention was also crucial. The dam's opponents used the instability of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda's government to their advantage. In March 1988, the government shelved the project indefinitely, and elections a few months later saw Prem replaced as prime minister by Chatichai Choonhavan (Suchit and Prudhisan 1993:25–6).

A second environmental issue which emerged in the 1986–88 period was the Forestry Department's scheme to reforest with eucalypts. There was widespread opposition, for the scheme involved the eviction of villagers from land that some had cultivated for years. In addition, small-scale farmers felt that the eucalypt had adverse effects on nearby crops. In two cases, Non Lan in Sisaket Province and Pa-Kam in Buriram, villagers destroyed eucalyptus seedlings after negotiations with the concessionaires and local government failed to achieve results for villagers (Hirsch 1993:19–20). Such cases indicated that local conflict-resolution was difficult as local officials had little autonomy when policy was involved. The eucalyptus issue also opened

debates regarding community rights over forests versus the view that forests were vested in the state, giving the state the right to allocate concessions to private business.

These issues gained immediacy when the Chatichai coalition government was faced with an environmental catastrophe just weeks after its election. In November 1988, torrential rains brought floods, mudslides and a 'sea of logs' down the mountain slopes, devastating a vast area of Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province. This disaster heightened fears regarding environmental degradation. Illegal logging, with official connivance, was exposed and official suggestions that villagers were the culprits in deforestation were weakened (Binkaew 1989:74–6). Politically, the new government could no longer afford to heed the powerful timber lobby, and a nationwide logging ban was imposed in January 1989.

Despite this strong beginning, the Chatichai government was unable to maintain its environmental push. One reason for this was that the government's free-wheeling economic policies unleashed a war on natural resources. Double-digit growth expanded demands on the resource base, to fuel ever more rapid industrialisation. The result was that villagers were drawn into a complex web of conflicts with the wealthy and well-connected.

In response, NGDOs decided that they could not limit their activities to small-scale development as villagers had to be aided in dealing with the onslaught from the outside. By 1988, NGDOs had adopted a three-tiered strategy. The first tier involved grassroots work that linked community culture with peaceful conflict-resolution. An example of this was the so-called 'ordination of trees' by Buddhist monks, allowing villagers to stake a religion-based claim on forest areas and institute community rules against tree-cutting. NGDOs also expanded villager networking, linking those with related problems in areas such as forest policy. In the Northeast this resulted in a forest conservation network covering eight provinces and advocacy for a community forest bill which was to provide state recognition of community rights in forest management, rather than ownership.

The second tier involved alliances with academics to gain access to information and knowledge to serve villagers and to disseminate information to the mass media to promote a better understanding of village-level issues. In addition, the Nam Choan campaign had demonstrated the importance of drawing provincial middle classes into networks to counter-balance the influence of local notables. Having prepared for a favourable policy environment, the third tier of the strategy, policy advocacy, could be enhanced (Anake 1990:55–6, 68–9).

There has been a trend for NGDOs to adopt environmentalism as a theme in their work. A number of reasons explain this. First, many of the livelihood problems faced by villagers could be linked to environmental degradation. Second, environmentalism had become prominent globally and foreign funding was available for NGOs. And third, environmentalism was seen to cut

across class lines and was crucial in making important alliances with the middle classes.

During the Chatichai administration, though NGDOs opposed the government's free-wheeling economic policy, they found increased access (ibid.: 58). Personal relationships aided this. Chatichai's son, Kraisak, and some of the prime minister's policy advisers had relationships with NGDO (Gawin 1991:9; Kraisak 1996:21). During cabinet meetings, held in regional centres for the first time, NGO-CORD provided opportunities for village representatives to present grievances to Prime Minister Chatichai. This resulted in the formation of a committee of officials, PO and NGO representatives, to solve the problems of villagers in forest reserves. Here, again, a community forest law was suggested. This proposal passed through several governments, finally being enacted in mid-1996, albeit in a form NGDOs considered imperfect for the concessions it granted business (*BP* 8 May 1996; Sayamol 1996:42–3).

For the first time NGO-CORD gained representation in drafting the Seventh National Plan, proposing that development redress rural problems and economic disparities and balance the industrial and the agricultural sectors. However, their efforts did not result in any major shifts in the plan (Anake 1990:58). Even so, facing mounting criticism of corruption, Chatichai continued to make overtures to NGOs. NGOs responded by asking the government to establish support funds.

While Bangkok policy-makers were according NGOs greater recognition, relationships with provincial bureaucrats remained problematic. NGOs resolved to organise for policy advocacy and called for a coordinating body to promote NGO interests in rural development. Their argument was that co-operation between government and NGOs would enhance the operations of both by combining the organisational flexibility of NGOs and village links with the financial and technical resources of government. Little progress had been made by February 1991 when Chatichai was toppled by a *coup* (Gawin 1991:10).

The *coup* had an impact on NGO activities. Initially, the *coup* was not unpopular among the urban middle classes, who saw the Chatichai government as corrupt. Though opposed to long-term military rule, the NPKC's announcement that it would establish a government of technocrats under Anand Panyarachun was appealing, as was the promise of a new constitution and a return to electoral politics. The middle class saw the *coup* as taking one step back in order to go forward (Prudhisan 1992a:120–1).

However, within NGOs there was almost no support for this view. Human rights NGOs and students combined in the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), headed by Gothom Arya, to scrutinise the constitution-drafting process. Though NGO-CORD was not officially involved, personalities overlapped. While the CPD involved itself with the political, institutional and legal aspects of democratisation, NGO-CORD concentrated on the nurturing of POs and influencing policy.

NGO-CORD was assisted by the fact that two appointed ministers were sympathetic to NGOs. NGOs advocated that capacity-building and improving the quality of rural life take precedence over economic growth in development policy. They also argued for the decentralisation of power. NGOs proposed that legal restrictions on NGOs be relaxed, particularly the prohibition on political activity, including state recognition of the autonomy of NGOs. They also proposed that government provide seed money for a social development fund, give tax incentives for donors to the fund and revamp GO-NGO coordination. Prime Minister Anand responded by praising NGOs as communicators of social grievances, facilitators of community self-help, and for their involvement in development and scrutiny of the government's work. He chided bureaucrats for viewing NGOs as trouble-makers and advised NGOs to maintain their principles (Gawin 1991:14).

These were unprecedented statements by a Thai prime minister. However, one NGDO activist sounded a warning:

> This speech is worthy of serious consideration as government-NGO cooperation is a novel idea but it is also political, having to do with power. To change the attitudes of bureaucrats who would rather monopolise…decision-making powers is not easy. Furthermore, policy itself may change at any time since politicians…come and go. There is no… guarantee that the next government would be so open-minded on cooperation.
>
> (Gawin 1991:14)

It was not just that governments came and went, but also that words and actions often diverged. As Anand was courting NGOs, trouble brewed in the countryside. A huge government scheme, known by its acronym, *khor jor kor,* to resettle hundreds of thousands of villagers from forest reserves which had been initiated by the army under Chatichai, was implemented under Anand. Aimed at increasing the country's forested area, it identified villagers as the prime culprits in forest destruction. The army felt that eliminating the illegal status of poor farmers as forest encroachers while planting trees would be seen as socially and environmentally appropriate (Hirsch 1993:21).

Villagers vigorously resisted eviction and began planting rubber and native trees to demonstrate an alternative approach to forestation (ibid.: 21–2). A range of NGOs established a network of the scattered local protests and mounted a national campaign. Their analysis was that areas cleared of villagers would become commercial tree plantations, benefiting business. Facing a military-backed government, the campaign achieved little. While admitting some flaws in the scheme, in late 1991, Minister of the Interior General Issarapong Noonpakdi convinced cabinet to extend the scheme. On this matter the military called the tune, and Anand capitulated, despite pledges of cooperation with NGOs. However, soon after the May 1992 uprising, the

reappointed Anand, faced with a massive farmer rally threatening to descend on Bangkok from the Northeast, scrapped the project (Sanitsuda 1993:39).

At the time that the military was proposing resettlement, they were also manipulating the constitution-drafting process in a way that would allow the NPKC to control parliament and government after the 1992 elections. The CPD was at the forefront of opposition, with NGDOs providing information to rural people regarding the negative aspects of the proposed constitution (Callahan 1993:103). Thus, the democratic struggle was linked at the institutional and grassroots levels. Even so, the draft constitution was passed.

Unperturbed, the CPD initiated an independent election monitoring body to ensure that the 22 March 1992 election was fair. Since this was untried in Thailand, they accepted a government-appointed body, PollWatch, in which leaders of the CPD, other NGOs, professional associations and academics were represented. Its task was to report on election irregularities and encourage increased democratic awareness. Provincial NGDOs were reluctant to become involved as it drew them away from their development work. However, as PollWatch needed 20,000 volunteers, and as NGDOs had established networks, their involvement was necessary. In the end, participation in PollWatch enabled NGDOs to make alliances with the provincial middle classes.

During the May 1992 crisis, when human rights and democracy NGOs were at the core of opposition to army chief Suchinda Kraprayoon becoming unelected prime minister, NGO and PollWatch networks were activated. It was these groups, rather than political parties, which organised opposition in the provinces (Callahan 1993:109). Indeed, except for Chamlong Srimuang, the Palang Dharma Party leader, political parties were feeble in their response to the May events and parliament was ineffectual.

During the second Anand government (May-September 1992) the CPD and other NGOs were moderately successful in pushing constitutional amendments. PollWatch was also reactivated during the September 1992 elections. When the Democrats' Chuan Leekpai became prime minister after the election, the heightened interest in democratisation on the part of the urban middle classes waned. NGOs, however, continued to push for transparency in government, the public's right to information, policies more responsive to the disadvantaged, and decentralisation. While initially supportive of the Chuan government, the relationship soon soured following a series of broken promises on crop prices, compensation for people displaced by dam projects, land rights in forests and the like (see Thai Development Support Network 1996:42–54).

A network of POs, the Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast (ASFN), aided by NGDOs, sent 100 representatives to Bangkok to demand that the government honour its promises. While the government delayed, the police detained students supporting the rally without charges, bringing

protests over the right of assembly. Eventually, ASFN leader Bamrung Kayotha negotiated an agreement with the Minister of Agriculture, who undertook to solve the problems. However, the arrest of leaders, accusations that they and students were acting as outside agitators, and the unwillingness to negotiate set a pattern (*CPD Newsletter* 2, 9, 1994:28–30). But the pattern of mass rallies designed to gain government attention was also set. During the first year of the coalition government headed by Banharn Silpa-archa such rallies were common.

In April 1996, a 10,000-strong rally supported by NGDOs, and calling itself the Assembly of the Poor, pitched tents in front of Government House. They demanded that the prime minister negotiate over some 100 cases of unmet promises by a range of governments. They pressed for the speedy passage of a number of bills seen to have the potential to strengthen people's rights (*Sayam pot* 1 April 1996:2).

Banharn also refused to meet the protesters, sending ministers to negotiate. The government suspected that the rally was timed to coincide with a no-confidence debate in parliament. With villagers and NDGO leaders steadfast, the rally continued until the government agreed to mechanisms and a timetable to settle villager grievances. The rally, lasting four weeks, was the longest for many years, and as it ended, Khuenpetch Ponerum, an NGDO adviser to the Assembly, warned that the promises should be honoured: 'We are not threatening the government, but…[it must be realised] that a rally is the ultimate weapon of the poor seeking justice' (*Sayam pot* 23 April 1996:16).

This background to the development of NGDOs indicates how environmental concerns, always crucial to villagers and their livelihoods, have become significant on the national political stage. It is now appropriate to examine two case studies of local-level work from the South. These cases cover the period from the mid-1980s to 1996, straddling the networking, policy advocacy and environmental phases discussed above.

CASE STUDIES

The first case involves the Yadfon (or Raindrops) Association, an NGDO operating in Trang Province. It has environmentalism at the centre of its development projects and nurtures village organisations by encouraging them to defend and resuscitate their natural environment. It also politicises villagers by assisting them in articulating their interest and negotiating with government. The second case discusses opposition to the planned construction of the Kaeng Krung Dam in the forested valleys of Surat Thani. It shows how local people were politicised, becoming central to the network that opposed the dam, and developing into an environmental group that is now normalising its work, supporting environmentally appropriate activities among villagers.

Steady mobilisation: the Yadfon Association

The Yadfon Association is of particular interest for its ability to assist villagers in establishing environmental protection and rejuvenation, built on their experience in resisting those damaging the environment. It has established people's and community organisations, and has had success in gaining co-operation of government. Its methods are being emulated in Songkhla and Surat Thani Provinces.

Yadfon was founded in 1985, with the aim of promoting the quality of life and sustainable development in rural areas. The association's work has mainly been among fisherfolk in coastal villages, only recently launching projects to revive traditional methods of rice growing in Trang, alternative agriculture in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, and sugar palm in Songkhla (Phisit 1992: n.p.).

Yadfon focused on fishing because of its importance for coastal villagers and was under pressure from a range of competing interests. First, mangroves, essential for fish breeding, have been depleted through charcoal-making. Initially, this was an important source of extra income for villagers, but has been reduced as the mangroves have been depleted. Second, since the late 1960s, fisherfolk have been increasingly drawn into an industry network which buys fish and grants credit to villagers for the purchase of larger boats and sophisticated fishing equipment. Third, agribusiness and government have promoted the rapid expansion of prawn farming on the coast, further denuding mangroves and polluting water, upsetting the ecological balance. The destruction of mangroves meant a reduction in marine life habitat and the depletion of near-shore sea grass. The encroachment of large boats close to shore, using nets on the sea bed, also destroyed the sea grass, so important to marine life (Yadfon Association 1993). These activities, combined with the establishment of a debt cycle, meant that fisherfolk faced an increasingly precarious life.

With small boats, fisherfolk could only fish in coastal waters, and with increased competition for fewer resources, conflict developed between the small-scale fisheries and the owners of larger boats and fishing companies. Thus, environmental degradation and economic survival were linked in the lives of coastal villagers. Such conflicts were at their height a few years prior to the establishment of Yadfon. At the same time, villagers, who had been permitted by local authorities to use non-concessioned mangroves, had already taken initiatives to protect their areas from encroachment by charcoal concessionaires, but with little success. The result was often violent conflict. There had also been failed negotiations to reduce the destructive impact of company-owned trawlers. Attempts by the villagers to place obstacles around areas of sea grass led to further violence. In this situation, poor government policies and a lack of enforcement worked against villagers, making it difficult for them to organise. Lacking outside support, villagers had little bargaining power.

It was at this low point that Yadfon's involvement began. At first, following NGDO style, it encouraged villagers to form groups to develop income supplementation activities. A highlight was the opening of a gasoline station for refuelling fishing boats, and competing with fishing industry outlets. It was successful in reducing prices, and encouraged villagers to again turn to environmental protection. Yadfon brought in expert technical advice and sought the co-operation of the local forestry office and provincial administration in designating an area of 'community mangroves'. The villagers then sought to prove that they could manage the mangrove, preventing encroachment by charcoal concessionaires, while planting seedlings.

The next target was sea grass. The villagers refrained from the use of destructive fishing equipment and urged others to do the same. An action and publicity campaign was launched to protect sea grass, involving fisheries, forestry and provincial officials, academics, and the media. Yadfon had convinced high-ranking officials of the project's worth, and their support and publicity resulted in reduced damage to sea grass. This was despite the fact that the villagers' actions had no legal basis.

Though Yadfon and the villagers have been able to gain support from provincial authorities for their mangrove management projects, these have yet to receive the approval of the National Forestry Department. It maintains that mangroves are state property and does not consider that local communities have legal rights over them. Such projects are thus operated as government projects which recognise villager participation. In the case of sea grass conservation, provincial support was gained through the influence of outside technical expertise. The Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), a specialist and prestigious NGO, conducted background research, the results of which were used to mount a campaign which led to a provincial-level project financed by the Ministry of the Interior and Yadfon. The project involved villagers, government agencies and NGOs, and convinced the authorities to ban various fishing techniques and more strictly to enforce the existing 3,000-metre coastal limitation on trawlers.

These efforts point to problems officials have in enforcing the law, but also to the community's readiness to aid them. Yet without legal recognition of the community's rights and powers to manage coastal resources in their localities, such efforts remain high-risk and ineffective. In this context, Yadfon and the villagers are joining with the national NGDO network to promote the legal recognition of community organisations and their rights to use and manage local resources.

The efforts of villagers and Yadfon have led to ecological improvements, including increases in marine life, have prompted further efforts to preserve rare species, and villagers have agreed to refrain from collecting turtle eggs, from using damaging fishing equipment and, together with the WFT, have taken their campaign to the media. Yet they still face challenges from the

trawler operators, meaning further lobbying of government officials for support. Improvements to the environment have had a favourable impact on village livelihoods, with increases in income and a more even distribution of income (Yadfon Association 1994). Another product of conservation has been village group organisation and the emergence of 'natural' leaders, nurtured by Yadfon's process of learning and conscientisation. The villagers have learned to identify and analyse problems concerning their livelihood and environment and to determine solutions. They have also seen that cooperation can create community power that can be used to negotiate with others, be they villagers, commercial interests or government. And, they have learned how to borrow the influence and prestige of the media and academics for their advocacy campaigns. These processes represent the emergence of a form of grassroots or community democracy where reasoned discussion within the group leads to community action and pressure politics, seeking to influence policy-making and implementation.

Despite Yadfon's success, victory cannot be claimed, but nor can the NGDO withdraw. It continues to assist villagers, particularly in negotiations with government and in bringing technical experts and other influential persons to support villagers. The achievements in Trang remain unusual, being the result of a combination of astute lobbying by the NGDO and an uncommon level of support from officials. The same level of success cannot be expected in every case, however, as much depends on provincial officials being persuaded or cajoled into supporting the activities of NGDOs and villagers. And, if decentralisation remains limited, provincial officials still have little autonomy, meaning that local NGOs need to link with the national NGO network for advocacy work.

Yadfon has also become more politically active in recent times, gathering around it a sympathetic group of school teachers, academics and other members of the middle class in the South. Some of these are of the 1973–76 generation of political activists, and are now conducting educational projects involving students in co-operative efforts with villagers in environmental protection. Members of Yadfon and its related NGDOs have also been involved in the PollWatch organisation, monitoring the conduct of general elections. In addition, the Trang Environmental Protection Group has been formed to work in inland areas, again aimed at identifying community leaders, building their organisations, and nurturing grassroots democracy.

Mobilisation to meet a crisis: the Kaeng Krung Dam

The proposal to construct the Kaeng Krung hydropower and irrigation dam in Surat Thani dates from a feasibility study in the early 1980s. In 1984, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) proposed the project to cabinet, which recommended an environmental impact assessment (EIA). Five years later, the proposal was returned to cabinet without National

Environment Board (NEB) approval, but was approved in principle. At this point the project caught public attention. In July 1989, Vinai Kaewampai, a provincial councillor who was also personal secretary to Pinya Chuayplod, Deputy Minister of Commerce from the Social Action Party (SAP), together with a group of local people, raised objections to the dam. Opposition grew, and in mid-August cabinet asked Pinya and EGAT to address the discontent. However, villagers in areas to be affected by the dam continued to oppose it, and began campaigning in villages. By September, the local opposition had the support of a group of Ramkhamhaeng University students from Surat Thani, and a two-day protest was staged in the town centre. Following this cabinet decided to defer the project (*Matichon* 1 October 1989).

The opposition to government policy was initially led by local people who believed they would be adversely affected by the dam. This was different from the Nam Choan case, where Bangkok-based NGOs and environmental and student groups initiated and were at the core of the opposition (Panu 1988). One reason for this difference was that the Kaeng Krung area is heavily populated compared to the area of the Nam Choan. In addition, the SAP's network was instrumental in informing locals of government plans, particularly as there was political capital to be gained in its competition with other parties. However, that government agencies avoided public scrutiny was similar to the Nam Choan case, and seems the normal practice.

Interviews revealed that local opposition had three elements: teachers and bureaucrats in their thirties; lower-middle-class townspeople with rural connections; and local village heads and villagers in the areas to be affected. Teachers and bureaucrats contributed to technical knowledge, gathering information and conducting analysis. They were also the most cautious element in the protests. Together with students, they brought expert opinion from Bangkok-based environmental groups. This was especially important when the Minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office, Anuwat Watanapongsiri (Chart Thai Party, overseeing EGAT) successfully proposed the project to cabinet a second time on 27 March 1990. The townspeople were instrumental in alerting villagers and in organising and enlivening the rallies. They established and maintained the network of contacts in the areas to be affected.

Protests became increasingly heated as opposition mounted and supporters of the dam in government circles established local support groups. While Minister Pinya voiced his opposition to the dam, Democrat MPs Banyat Bantadthan and Suthep Tuaksuban, then in government, voiced their support. When the matter returned to cabinet in May 1990, they brought villagers to Bangkok to show support for the government. Still undecided, cabinet sent Chart Thai Party Minister Anuwat and Minister of the Interior Banharn to the area. Supporting the dam's opponents was the local Palang Dharma Party MP, then in opposition. Later, Kraisak Choonhavan, Prime Minister Chatichai's son and adviser, also visited the area and joined academics who opposed the

project and petitioned the prime minister. However, the Chart Thai Party remained divided on factional lines. By the end of July 1990, racked by differences among ministers, cabinet again deferred its decision and ordered further studies to examine the irrigation potential and impact on the environment. However, since the 1991 *coup,* the dam proposal has remained dormant.

This case is significant in a number of areas. First, had there been no popular opposition, the decision-making process on the dam would not have included public scrutiny. Information was kept within government circles, and it was only the actions of local people which opened the process. This was only possible in a period when parliament had become central to the political system, and politicians had to heed popular voices for fear of losing votes in this highly politicised province.

Second, the project's supporters were mobilised only at a late stage in the conflict, reacting to the strong opposition, thus suggesting manipulation. While some of these villagers might have come from areas which stood to benefit from the dam, their stated reasons for support of the dam were remarkably similar to those publicised by EGAT, making it appear that EGAT had a role. It was joined by Democrat Party politicians, who made use of their electioneering network among subdistrict chiefs and village heads to mobilise support. Clearly, even when parliament and prime minister were elected, the bureaucracy, in this case EGAT, aided by some elected ministers, were able to use old-style bureaucratic methods, and it was left to local people to demand accountability.

Those who opposed the dam were living downstream of the proposed site. They feared that electricity generation would mean water shortages and pollution from submerged tree stumps. They had heard that this occurred at the Chiew Larn (now Rachaprapa) Dam, not far from the proposed site. They believed that the impact on agriculture there had been adverse, so that farming no longer supported the villagers who increasingly sought work in industry. In other words, the Kaeng Krung opponents were mobilised by a concern for their livelihood, which was tied to the land, the fish in the rivers, and the forests in which they foraged for food and medicinal herbs. Their livelihood was seen to be inseparable from the environment. However, it was unlikely that they would have protested had there not been leadership and organisation from townspeople.

The townspeople involved were local entrepreneurs straddling urban and rural occupations, owning market stalls and small rubber plantations. For many years they had had important commercial dealings with rural people in the forest areas. These merchants saw that it was in the townspeople's interest to oppose the dam because if farmers could not grow crops, merchants and urban consumers would be affected.

Support also came from teachers and agriculture and forestry officials who had engaged in socially- and politically-oriented activities as students

in the early 1970s. When authoritarianism was relaxed, they formed networks to assist each other in rural development and, as NGDO activity gained currency, they formed an environmental group in 1986. The Kaeng Krung Dam spurred them to action. Their organisation, the Natural Resources and Environment Conservation Club of Surat Thani (NRECS), is a loose group, bound by common 'understandings' rather than rules and clear membership. In the anti-dam protests, NRECS played a crucial role in networking with outside NGOs and in bringing in expert opinion to counteract EGAT claims, but seldom took a leading role in the mass protests.

The townspeople and educated members of NRECS constituted an interesting group of activists, with complimentary yet potentially problematic roles. The townspeople had long-standing village contacts and did much to mobilise them, while the educated played their part in supporting villager opinions with those of outside experts, thereby building confidence. They were also instrumental in drafting petitions to officials and in writing press articles to gain public support. They were cautious, appealed to reason, and advocated peaceful protest, being concerned to establish democratic conflict-resolution. The townspeople were more direct. They kept protest rallies alive and advocated somewhat violent methods to establish their position. This included detaining a notable dam supporter and storming a government radio station. One leader said, 'You mustn't fear the state machine. You have to be bold, otherwise the villagers will not rise up' (interview, January 1993). They were also skilled political operators who were able to turn party political rivalries to their benefit. They were unabashed about admitting to receiving financial backing from politicians, but were adamant that it was used only for the cause. In other words, they combined democratic-institutional procedures of grievance redress with threats of using non-institutional protest tactics, as the occasion demanded. The educated were uneasy about the links with politicians, lest they appeared partisan. They were also worried about political volatility. While these differences were swept aside in the heat of the anti-dam campaign, they remain problematic and are a recurring issue for NGDOs.

This discussion shows that the dam opponents were not politically passive, the common characterisation of non-elite politics in Thailand (see Morell and Chai-Anan 1981: Chapter 1). They were able to articulate grievances and locate channels to decision-makers from local bureaucratic agencies to the prime minister and cabinet. This was achieved by 'borrowing' the power of experts, capturing press attention and holding attentiongrabbing rallies. These actions saw the power of the protesters grow. Such methods of self-empowerment were possible because the movement established a network of people from many strata and adopted a range of strategies. Diversity was their strength, so long as internal tensions were contained.

With the project dormant, the opposition it produced has been able to develop its potential for wider social change and politicisation. NRECS continues its activities, somewhat surprisingly being run by local officials and school teachers. While they carry out this NGDO work in their spare time, it is conducted in conjunction with their government work. They establish networks with young officials to initiate and implement development projects emphasising environmental sustainability and participation. Such officials are in the minority, but innovative projects which have them in contact with villagers mark them out as remarkable in the bureaucracy.

Members of the group are conscious of the political context of their actions. Some see their task as building democracy from below, encouraging villagers to exchange information and experience. The aim is to develop a sense of community and an awareness of community rights and the right of participation in decision-making, and to instil an understanding of the relationship between livelihood and local ecology. The strategy is to focus on livelihood problems and to educate villagers without dominating—a difficult proposition. By emphasising community decisions and responsibility, they hope villagers will become politically aware, participate in political activity and scrutinise government proposals.

That there are officials who can free themselves from bureaucratic culture and structure to create projects for the benefit of villagers and who are aware of the political nature of this is noteworthy. It is a sign of the development of civil society, and has an important impact on democratisation.

Implications of the cases

In both cases it can be seen that villagers facing problems of livelihoods and attacks on their way of life have been prepared to engage in defensive actions, with NGDO assistance. The need to defend livelihoods has been a key factor in mobilisation, but the means to help themselves and seek redress have been limited. It was NGDOs that gave technical support, created learning situations and provided knowledge of the political system. This has allowed villagers to become confident and assertive, able to pursue collective ends and seek redress from government. These villagers have begun to understand how government works, its institutional procedures, and its shortcomings. Throughout the process NGDOs have steered villagers to institutional procedures—to negotiate rather than demand, and to seek their own solutions to problems rather than waiting for solutions from the outside. This suggests that NGDOs are integrating villagers into the political system, albeit wanting a system which is more open to people's participation.

The cases show how large-scale government projects, pursued without public scrutiny, brought the mobilisation of villager opposition, in coalition

with urban dwellers. That there was an immediate crisis accounts for much of the mobilisation, but it is also clear that villager behaviour did not suddenly change from political passivity to action. Rather, in the Kaeng Krung Dam case, the villagers had been politicised by years of experience in the middle ground in the conflict between the state and the CPT, learning the art of political manoeuvre. The new quality in their struggles is the link with townspeople and the educated, building an organisational network that can deal more effectively with complex political situations. Likewise, the ability of this coalition to generate support from officials has been a breakthrough.

The development of people's organisations has also been an important outcome, suggestive of the development of a civil society in provincial areas. It can be argued that such organisations are better-equipped to represent local interests than parliament and political parties, especially as the relationship between these latter institutions and civil society remains problematic.

CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS

While NGDO actions appear to demonstrate unity and strength, there are concerns regarding strategy. For example, there is disagreement over the repeated use of direct action, as in the Assembly of the Poor case, to pressure government. Some NGDO leaders prefer to concentrate on strengthening grassroots organisations and adopt a flexible position in negotiations. This dilemma has been challenging NGDOs for a number of years, causing splits in the Northeastern organisations, and is a challenge which is unlikely to be easily resolved. Despite a commitment to peaceful methods, rallies have sometimes been violent. When this occurs, the resulting adverse publicity can alienate middle-class supporters and damage alliances and networks. Yet it must be admitted that lobbying and negotiation have often proven slow or unable to produce satisfactory results, making more direct action necessary, despite its pitfalls.

While NGDOs continue to promote a strategy which has them operating at three levels—nurturing POs, building networks and alliances, and pursuing policy advocacy—in practice, they have found it increasingly difficult to work at all levels. There are a number of reasons for this. First, economic growth has seen opportunities for well-paid employment expand, reducing the flow of talented graduate recruits to NGOs. Second, Thailand's economic success has seen overseas funding agencies reduce their support for Thai NGOs, without a commensurate increase in domestic funding (*Thai Development Newsletter* 29, 1995:42–43, 52–53). Third, the problems facing villagers mount, placing increased demands on NGDOs. This places enormous demands on often young and inexperienced NGDO workers who complain that the 'experience of our veteran workers is wasted on coordinating activities. Worse…, our limited resources are spent…chasing…the political issues of the moment'

(cited in Sanitsuda 1995:48). More experienced workers acknowledge this, but recognise that village work is not enough in the 1990s. They understand that much must be done at the policy level if long-term solutions to village problems are to be found. The challenge is to balance these competing demands.

13 Thailand's media

Whose watchdog?

*Thitinan Pongsudhirak**

The forces impinging on Thailand's modern politics have changed dramatically in recent years. A cursory glance at the political landscape reveals new centres of influence vying for increased access to power. While the military and civilian bureaucracies, and increasingly, political parties and parliament are powerful, these institutions have had to yield to new forces in the developing civil society. Foremost among them are the mass media. Indeed, it is probably true to suggest that never before have the media been so powerful. They may not have the wherewithal 'to make or break governments' as some have suggested (*The Economist* 24 February 1996), but media attention is increasingly important in determining things of significance in Thai politics.

Thailand's media has a long history, and while politically and socially important in the past, have shot to prominence only recently. While the print media has had a significant political role throughout this century, their current power and influence are attributable to the heady days of the May 1992 uprising. Until then, the press was not able fully to assert itself as an independent political force, while the electronic media were mostly tools of the state. In contrast, today's media are multi-layered and differentiated, increasingly independent, organisationally astute, technologically sophisticated and capable of reaching the remotest area. Some of them operate in comprehensive forms, through radio and television, apart from the media. And, increasingly, more of them get their funds from the stock market. Arguably freer than ever, today's media have trespassed into other business domains such as real estate and property development. Accordingly, a truly national media can be said to have been spawned only during the last several years, somewhat in parallel with Thailand's ongoing economic boom, democratising society and advancing information technology.

Since May 1992, the media's role has been dynamic and increasingly significant, making it worthy of investigation for a more complete understanding of Thailand's politics. This chapter attempts to foster such an understanding. Beginning with a chronological sketch, it will be indicated how the media have vaulted to their present prominence in a relatively short

time, tracing the transformation of their role from servants of the state to political watchdogs, and the implications of this for the broader society. Concentrating more on the print than the electronic media, and focusing on the period between the February 1991 *coup* and the May 1992 uprising, it is argued that the press has become an important oppositional force, due to the parliamentary opposition's inability to carry out its role effectively. The more inept an opposition, the more powerful the press is likely be. At the same time, when the opposition is robust, the press has the potential to play a potent role in checking governmental performance. The state-owned electronic media, meanwhile, lag behind their press colleagues. I also draw on personal experience to suggest some inherent problems of the print media, based on the rapidity of their success and the continuing revolution in information technology, as well as to illuminate areas where future research is needed.

CATEGORISING THE THAI MEDIA

Pharr (1996:34) has devised a useful typology for examining the media's role in Japan and in advanced industrial societies generally. Of her four interpretations, the first sees the media as *spectators,* simply a neutral conduit for transmitting information among all 'real' domestic political actors and thus serving no particular interests. In advanced industrial democracies, the media from the 1940s to the early 1960s were seen mainly as observers which had minimal effects on the state and society. The second approach holds that the media is a major and independent force in politics, working as *watchdogs* for the public interest. The third category sees the media as *servants* of the state who forge a consensus on social and political values and provide regime support, with the media being subservient to the state. Until recent years, when the press broke free of state control, this view appears most applicable to the Thai case. Finally, the media can be seen as something Pharr has chosen to call *trickster.* The trickster, as she views it,

> moves about in places where others, bound to the established order, are not allowed to go…. As a cultural broker between the outside world and the community, the trickster in its multiple roles from tension releaser to scapegoat, makes it possible for the structures and institutions of society to be maintained.
>
> (Pharr 1996:25)

While Pharr argues that the role of Japan's media best fits the trickster category, in Thailand, the role of its media can best be seen to have vacillated between servant and watchdog.

The Thai press as servants

The first newspaper was established in Thailand in 1844 by an American missionary named Dr Dan Bradley. Called the *Bangkok Recorder,* it simply printed Siam's domestic and international happenings (Seri 1984:1–7) and was essentially a Western transplant (Saitip 1991). The *Bangkok Recorder* folded within a year due to lack of interest, but it was revived with limited success on a monthly basis in 1864. It was transformed into the *Royal Gazette* under the patronage of King Mongkut, set up chiefly to publicise royal decrees and related affairs. King Chulalongkorn converted the paper into the *Government Gazette,* with a weekly edition starting in 1874. Meanwhile, the first daily newspaper came out in 1868, known as the *Siam Daily Advertiser,* while several other weekly newspapers were short-lived. Ownership of newspapers in this period was confined to the foreign missionaries or to the monarch and his immediate family members.

In the following years, newspapers grew significantly in number, and for the first time they belonged to commoners. In 1904, for instance, the first Chinese newspaper was created, targeting the new waves of Chinese immigrants. Apart from the Chinese influx, King Chulalongkorn's interest in Western culture allowed additional newspapers to take root. At one point during his reign, some 52 newspapers and magazines existed (Sukanya 1977:27). For the first time, there was a crusade for a free press. The American missionary Samuel John Smith wrote a column which called for freedom for Protestant churches, schools and papers, as well as for women (ibid.: 29). Similarly, a Thai journalist named Tianwan wrote provocative articles demanding freedom for slaves and women. He was eventually jailed for 17 years, partly for his radical views.

When King Vajiravudh ascended the throne in 1910, an unprecedented number of newspapers flourished, with the King producing three himself. The King may well have been tolerant towards the press, but he was also limited in the actions he could take against them. The seepage of Western ideas and practices previously introduced by King Chulalongkorn may well have precluded restrictions on the press. The fact that many editors could claim rights under extraterritoriality treaties also protected the press. This reign was a watershed for the development of the print media. According to Sukanya (1977), King Vajiravudh presided over a populace more conscious of democratic principles and events abroad. Newspapers during this period became more commercial, and competed more fiercely for readership. Concurrently, technological improvements were making an impact as photographs were widely used to accompany news content. Some 22 dailies and 127 magazines circulated, and according to Copeland (1993), some seriously questioned absolutism through the clever use of satirical cartoons. The last reign of the absolute monarchy saw 60 daily newspapers and 160 magazines, although King Prajadhipok placed controls on them, especially

when stories critical of the absolute regime appeared. While the press grew substantially during the last years of absolute monarchy, its freedom to take critical editorial positions remained severely limited.

After the 1932 *coup* that replaced the absolute monarchy with constitutional rule, newspapers took qualitatively different positions, becoming pro- or anti-monarchy, pro- or anti-government, neutral, and so on. But even then, the press was not entirely free. The new regime, led by the People's Party, was unstable, and to entrench its new-found power, found it expedient to close several newspapers and to limit the freedom of others (Sukanya 1977:127). This was to be the norm for several decades thereafter, when press freedom was often curbed following significant political change. The press continued to be servants of the state in the factional struggles that ensued between the People's Party and the old regime and among the party's members themselves. By the late 1930s, Phibun Songkram, an army member of the 1932 *coup* group, emerged triumphant. His position as prime minister from 1938 to 1944, and again from 1947 to 1957, ushered in a period of nation-building during which the mass media were extensively employed. Phibun's programmes to 'civilise' Thais while simultaneously promoting their Thai-ness were often carried out through the media. As Kobkua (1995:120) notes, The main instrument employed by the government in spreading and propagating the new set of social and moral values was the mass media which included radio, stage plays, printed literature, newspapers, and socio-political slogans'.

Indisputably, Phibun's deft use of the mass media provided popular support for his regime and policies. The assistance of key propaganda architects, notably *Luang* Wichitwathakan, enabled Phibun to mould the nation as he saw fit (Barmé 1993; Kobkua 1995:102–151). The radio, for example, was used to disseminate state information to the public. Radio talk shows like 'Nai Man and Nai Kong' dominated the airwaves, conveying political ideas which reflected Phibun's vision of society (see Thak 1978:260–316). Among the media that carried Phibun's state ideology, the radio was perhaps the most influential as it transmitted his government's policies to the largely illiterate masses. During the Second World War, Radio Thailand issued official propaganda in favour of Japan against the Allies. Japan's defeat allowed the press to regain their freedom as Phibun and his cohorts were temporarily replaced (Kobkua 1995). Phibun's return to power in 1947 saw another decade marked by nationbuilding, propagandist policies.

During the tenure of Phibun's successor, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the print media were also employed to advertise Sarit's political ideas and provide regime support. As early as 1957, when Sarit broke from Phibun in a *coup,* the press supported him (Thak 1979:118). Thak has documented Sarit's shrewd use of press interviews to gain legitimacy following the 1957 *coup* by publicising his royal appointment as 'Defender of the Capital'.

While he operationalised censorship by issuing Revolutionary Announcement No. 17, Sarit cited his own lack of knowledge about legal matters and asked for advice from the press, crediting its positive role as having educated him on national affairs. This did not last long, however, as he turned against his educators after the 1958 *coup,* imposing heavy censorship and repression. As Thak (ibid.: 126) notes, 'After 1959 Sarit had a vision of the future course of his regime and "education" by the press was no longer needed'.

During 1963–73, Sarit's heir, General Thanom Kittikachorn used some of the print media for legitimacy and consensus-building, while repressing others. Still, a number of liberal newspapers and magazines were able to develop and proved instrumental in the 14 October 1973 popular revolt against the military. In that episode, segments of the print media playing the role of information facilitator or spectator in Pharr's categories, between the people and the students much more than between the people and the Thanom government. The press helped to disseminate news from the protesting students to the public at large, thereby effecting an understanding between the two groups. As a consequence, the public came to regard the Thanom government in a negative light and sympathised with the students (Rawewan 1985:142–7). Thanom's downfall paved the way for the 1974 constitution, which unambiguously ensured freedom of information and prohibited censorship. The 1973–76 democratic period also provided the press with a fresh, vibrant environment. In July 1974, for example, 400 new publishing licences were registered, including those of leftist publications (Knight 1994). During this democratic period, a 'proper' role of the press as the people's political representative became more acute. As Knight observes,

> This is not to say, however, that the older style of reportage disappeared; but there was increased competition between those publications espousing investigative journalism and political reviews, and those which preferred to maintain stories of scandal and social gossip.
>
> (Knight 1994:17)

Equally, as conflict grew, the press polarised along political lines. While the electronic media were used as tools by the government, the print media were divided along ideological lines. *Dao sayam* and *Khao raiwan* were considered to be on the right end of the spectrum, and the *Nation, Sayam rat,* and *Prachachat* were associated with the left, whereas *Thai rat, Daeli thaim* ('Daily Times'), *Bangkok Post,* and *Bangkok World* were viewed as neutral, and *Daeli niew* ('Daily News'), *Ban mu'ang, Sayammit, Prachatippatai,* and *Khao thai* as center-right (Rawewan 1985:225–31). When the military regained power through the 1976 *coup,* the press saw their freedom end as the newly appointed government shut down all newspapers for two days—this was the first time a press ban had occurred. The National Administrative

Reform Council then issued Decree No. 42 which authorised the Press Officer (an *ex-officio* post held by the police chief) to arbitrarily shut any newspaper without legal recourse. Branded 'draconian' by reporters, this decree would not be lifted for 15 years.

As a result of the rampant repression and heavy-handed tactics imposed on the media and other social forces following the macabre confrontation on 6 October 1976, press freedom was curtailed. Newspapers operated, but they were not free to check governmental performance or to pursue important issues. The threat of censorship and outright closure were always clear under Decree No. 42. This period also coincided with the campaign of the CPT and its insurgency. Anti-communism allowed the government to keep the press in line with the view that the maintenance of internal order and national security demanded limits on press freedom. While reporters were allowed to function, they had to work carefully and hard to expand their freedom to write, and were still unable to assume a watchdog role.

From servants to watchdogs

Throughout the 1980s, and especially during the 1988–90 economic boom, when the economy achieved three consecutive years of double-digit growth, the print media had an opportunity to bolster their independence and grow into their role as the public's watchdog. Not only did the communist threat disintegrate, but the newspaper business grew enormously, evidenced by huge advertising revenues, which rose from 4.2 billion baht in 1987 to 8.7 billion in 1989, with corresponding rises in the share prices of media stocks, including Matichon, Post Publishing, Nation Publishing, and Manager (*BP* 28 March 1990). Alongside their growing coffers, the press also benefited from a democratising political arena when the 1988 election catapulted Chatichai Choonhavan to power as the first elected premier since 1975. Emboldened by its more robust financial base and a more liberal publishing ambience, the press began to flex its muscles.

In February 1990, following its controversial reports on the mysterious death of three Saudi diplomats, the *Naew na* newspaper was closed down for one week through the invocation of Decree No. 42. That incident prompted the editors of leading newspapers to call on the Chatichai government to abolish the decree (*Nation,* 28 February 1990). After a prolonged and acrimonious debate, reinforced by constant press pressure, the government finally axed Decree No. 42 (*BP* and *Nation* 11–12 January 1991). The new press law which replaced Decree No. 42 was still deemed stringent, but it was devoid of arbitrary powers to close newspapers without due legal process. It should be noted that the press bore the brunt of legal restrictions because the government had a much tighter grip on the state-owned electronic media.

The test of the press's new-found strength came with the military's resurgence through the February 1991 *coup*. When they took over power, the

National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) members had almost complete control of the state apparatus. The generals were in charge of key ministries, and particularly the powerful Ministry of the Interior. The military establishment, including the top posts of the army, navy and air force as well as strategic command units, also came under the domination of the NPKC. This firm military lock on the state machinery was a litmus test for Thailand's print media at the time. On balance, the press fared remarkably well, and in the absence of a democratic government and opposition to check military power, except the limited authority of the appointed technocratic ministers of the Anand cabinet, the press became a counter-vailing force against the NPKC. At this time, the burden of countering military dominance was shouldered by the press.

When it came to power, one of the first things the military junta did was to impose censorship on newspapers. Known as NPKC Announcement No. 14, it meant 'Newspapers which published uncensored items will be closed down for three days, seven days or permanently depending on the degree of seriousness of their violations' (*BP* 24 February 1991). A day later, however, the edict was toned down, and newspapers were asked to exercise prudent self-censorship. The military junta cited 'co-operation' from the press in its decision to lift the censorship order. The NPKC eased its grip on the press partly because Thai-language newspapers were strongly in favour of the *coup* (*Nation* 25 February 1991). The foreign press was critical of the *coup* plotters. This led the *International Herald Tribune,* which carried reports from both *The New York Times* and *Washington Post,* to suspend a day of distribution for fear of closure (*BP* 2 March 1991). But the local press's initial consent soon evaporated when it appeared that the allegedly genuine intentions of the generals were suspect.

When the NPKC tried to transfer the police force from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Defence, print reporters quickly made their role felt. *Naew na* and *Sayam rat* published leaks suggesting that the military had intended to take over the police force (*Nation* 18 April 1991). Similarly, the press got hold of classified military information which outlined how the Police Academy would fall under the domain of the military's Chulachomklao Academy. These two proposals were reported to have shaken police morale (*BP* 20 April 1991), but the publicity succeeded in deterring the two schemes.

With their independent stance, it was not long before journalists faced terror tactics from the military. Two editors of *Manager* magazine received death threats (*BP* 30 April 1991). Such intimidation became more blatant when two sports reporters from *Khao sot* were attacked by two army colonels for their biting stories about conditions at Lumpini boxing stadium, which was under the management of army officers (*BP* 7 July 1991). One of the colonels was subsequently fired from the management board of the stadium, following protests by the Reporters' Association of Thailand. In another well-known case of harassment, the home of the publisher of the

Nation, Suthichai Yoon, was attacked, and two cars inside the compound vandalised (*Nation* 24 April 1992).

When it appeared that the NPKC might renege on its promise to hold elections, the press publicised leaks suggesting that General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth had called for an early election. This brought the warnings from the Police Special Branch not to create 'rifts between groups' (*Nation* 11 July 1991). But the overall effect was that print journalists kept the issue of a general election on the public agenda. And when the air force was accused of corruption at the Airports Authority of Thailand, the print media's exposure infuriated top air force officers so much that they decided to ban *Naew na* reporters from air force premises as well as to end the subscription to the newspaper by the air force-controlled Thai International (*Nation* 22 August 1991).

Thai press as opposition

The earliest opposition to the NPKC's General Suchinda assuming the premiership following the 22 March 1992 election also came from the press. Although they were not uniformly against Suchinda, the largest Thai- and English-language dailies launched both overt and veiled critiques of how the unelected Suchinda took the prime ministership after his dramatic, tearful statement of personal sacrifice on state-run television: 'Behind those tears there is a big smile', proclaimed *Thai rat.* Other critical papers included *Daeli niew, Matichon, Naew na,* and *Phuchatkan,* although *Ban mu'ang* and *Dao say am* were favourable to the new prime minister (*Nation* 12 April 1992). As political temperatures rose during the prelude to the May violence, the Reporter's Association kept up its pressure for freedom of information (*BP* 18 and 25 April 1992).

The press became a staunch ally of the parliamentary opposition, consisting of the so-called 'angelic' parties as opposed to the government's 'demonic' factions. The opposition acted in parliament on behalf of press freedom, with the Palang Dharma Party voicing the most vociferous support for the press (*BP* 29 April and 1 May 1992). The alliance between the press and the opposition strengthened as political tensions increased. Each needed the other. The opposition parties benefited from the print media's sustained undermining of the Suchinda regime's legitimacy and credibility. The press also needed the opposition as a parliamentary backer lest the Suchinda government became openly repressive against it. The Suchinda regime was at a loss as to how to handle the media's onslaught. When the press became more vitriolic, the regime again requested that print journalists exercise self-censorship. Part of the reason more drastic actions were not taken was the slowdown of the country's economy as a result of the worsening political crisis. Perceptions abroad of what was taking place in Bangkok had adversely affected foreign investment, which was vital to economic growth. Hence, Suchinda called for

the press to moderate its reporting 'to ensure law and order and help the country's economy' (*BP* 3 May 1992).

While the protests against Suchinda multiplied in early May, the contrast between the print media and the state-operated electronic media was stark. The press was fighting tenaciously on behalf of the people to oust military dictatorship and restore civilian democracy, clearly taking on the role of watchdog. Moreover, the press became more vehement about its watchdog role as the Suchinda coalition tried to stifle its freedom. All this time the efforts to control what flowed out of the electronic media produced the opposite effect. News blackouts on state radio and television ended up sending more people onto the streets to get first-hand information. As Ubonrat (1994:103) notes, 'Radio and television are seen as state ideological apparatuses that provide dis-information'.

During the violent street confrontations between soldiers and prodemocracy demonstrators during the events of 17–20 May, the press continued to defy the Suchinda government's control. At the climax of the confrontation, *Nation, Phuchatkan* and *Naew na* provided scathing coverage of the events, earning a government-imposed three-day closure (*BP* 21 May 1992), although the order was rescinded just hours later. A total of 31 journalists were injured in the coverage of the anti-Suchinda rallies.

After the May events, the press cooperated with pro-democracy groups like the Confederation for Democracy and PollWatch to maintain a watchful eye on the politicians. When prominent MP Banharn Silapa-archa brought his provincial supporters to Bangkok for a good time during the build-up to the 12 September 1992 election, for example, *Siam rat* exposed how the MP had treated his cohorts to a lavish dinner and a visit to a local massage parlour (*Nation* 17 September 1992).

And when Chuan Leekpai's Democrat Party-led government later came into office, the press, which had earlier enjoyed cosy ties with the 'angelic' parties constituting Chuan's administration, continued to act as an opposition. The customary honeymoon between the press and Chuan ended virtually before it had begun, as the premier-elect soon found himself grappling with press scrutiny. Despite the new leader's politeness and soft-spoken manners, the press still pulled no punches (*Nation* 29 September and 30 November 1992). Shortly after taking office, Chuan was called upon to institute an information act to make the government more accountable to the press (*BP* 11 October 1992). Although this demand went unheeded, it none the less reflected the print media's momentum following its role in the May events.

Throughout the Chuan administration, the press remained a force against the military. When there appeared to be irregularities in the purchase of army helicopters, for instance, the print media were the first to expose it (*Nation* 29 June 1993). Likewise, the press kept a close eye on the generals who participated in the May massacre. When one of them came up for promotion, the press successfully campaigned against it (*Nation* 9 August

1994). The print media also maintained their vigilance against opposition politicians. For example, the press divulged details regarding US government allegations of narcotics connections by two MPs, Mongkol Chongsuttamanee and Thanong Siripreechapong. The latter was forced to quit parliament, and was eventually extradited to the US to stand trial. Soon after, newspapers hinted that powerful MP Vatana Asavahame had been involved in the drugs trade, enraging the opposition politician (*Nation* 11 August 1994). This revelation dealt a severe blow to the Chat Thai Party and significantly weakened the opposition's attempt to censure the government. With a wounded opposition, the press also put the Chuan coalition under pressure. Indeed, it was not the opposition's efforts but unrelenting press inquisitions on the Phuket land reform scandal that eventually led to the resignation of the Chuan government in May 1995.

After the July elections, the press allowed the Banharn administration a short honeymoon, with a *Nation* editorial lamenting that the press was a victim of its own success:

> Ironically, the success of [reports on the Phuket land reform] by the media has contributed to the current political situation. Before the July 2 general election, the Democrats were strongly attacked by the media following the land reform debacle. The media attacks on the Democrats continued during the run-up to the July 2 poll. The attacks were credited with helping the Chat Thai party to emerge as the single-largest group, winning 92 House seats, six more than Democrat MPs.
>
> (*Nation* 2 January 1996)

However, the press did not abandon its scrutiny of government, and the Banharn coalition was dogged by press attacks. At first, journalists attacked Banharn's integrity and that of his cabinet colleagues. Then, in November 1995, when the government staged a major press conference to shore up its image, ministers were met with rigorous and sometimes belligerent questions. As an American journalist observed, 'Government officials were taken aback by the withering assault, but they had better get used to it. The media and their middle-class audience are holding politicians to a higher standard of behavior, and scrutinizing them as never before' (Fairclough 1995b). The exposure of illegal land-grabs and money-laundering scams by ministers, alongside a strong parliamentary performance by the Democrat Party-led opposition, compelled the premier to undertake a major cabinet reshuffle in May 1996. This followed a disastrous no-confidence debate which the government ended prematurely to prevent further revelations of corruption. Not surprisingly, the Banharn government promptly rebuked the press by issuing warnings to a number of dailies and weeklies (*BP* 23 May 1996). The reshuffle did not patch up the Banharn government's image, and columnists and newspaper editorials continued their attacks (*Matichon*

sutsapda 4 June 1996). The Banharn coalition collapsed and new elections were held in November 1996.

Whose watchdog?

Clearly, the press has emerged as a pivotal force in Thailand's politics. When the opposition is competent, the press enhance their role in monitoring government performance. Where oppositional toughness has been lacking, the press has stepped in. Further, all political groups—with the significant exception of the monarchy—and even the monastic order, are now subject to press scrutiny. Newspapers have become an 'educator' to the public, and the Thai case appears to extend Pharr's typology. Readers of daily newspapers now read debates about society and democratisation by prominent intellectuals like Chai-Anan Samudavanija and Nidhi Aeusrivongse who, among other 'public intellectuals', have posed competing analyses of the causes and effects of the country's rapid industrialisation (Kasian 1996).

In general, the press appears freer and more confident of its role than ever before, more comfortable in setting the agenda and in highlighting the leading issues of the day. In a democratising society, having a watchdog press to represent and safeguard the 'public interest' would seem to offer considerable support to civil society. But, a watchdog press can be a double-edged sword, depending on whose behalf the press operates. In other words, like the political groups it probes, the press also deserves scrutiny.

While it has been regarded as one of the freest in Asia, Thailand's press works within certain boundaries. Even the most critical of print journalists exercise self-censorship by tacitly acknowledging certain subjects to be 'untouchable'. During the NPKC era, when the public interest was abused, the press came to the rescue, but it is doubtful that the press can always be counted on to protect and promote the people's interests.

Part of the doubt lies with the press's changing business interests. The core business of segments of the press is no longer exclusively media-related. Some newspapers have taken up interests in real estate and property development. One major media group has initiated a business forum to promote regionalism in the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation organisation (*BP* 10 May 1996). Other groups have organised seminars, sometimes bringing in world-renowned speakers. Such ventures in non-media areas raise questions about business and the public interest in news reporting.

Correspondingly, media companies have become conglomerates over a remarkably short period. Not many years ago, few newspapers had a nationwide readership. Today, the major publications are largely financed from the local capital market. As a result, within the last decade, media conglomerates like the Manager Group, the Nation Publishing Group and Wattachak have come to prominence, with large financial bases allowing

them to own and operate all media forms—radio, television and Thai-and English-language newspapers. Media firms that do not perform well in this highly competitive environment become susceptible to takeover and manipulation. *Siam rat* is a good example; once a proud and successful newspaper owned by the learned Kukrit Pramoj and his family, it is now a target for takeover by dubious interests (*Matichon sutsapda* 23 April 1996). The media business has changed qualitatively, becoming more competitive, multi-layered, widespread and better financed. The competitive dimension of the business, moreover, has split the media into distinct camps, each with its own identity and political prejudices. In May 1992, they stood largely side by side in opposing Suchinda and the NPKC. In the next crisis, it is not yet clear that these media companies will define the 'public interest' in the way it did in 1991 and 1992.

Apart from the non-media growth and conglomeration, the press suffers from a host of inherent problems. Chief among them is corruption. Boonlert (1996), an experienced journalist from *Matichon* traces a trail of corruption in the press since the 1940s. Bribery *(sin bon),* according to Nation publisher Suthichai Yoon, 'lowers the capacity of a newsman to perform his duty. Whatever makes a newsman perform with special consideration or concern towards a news source or individual, rather than a consideration for the public, his readers' (quoted in *BP* 15 June 1996). But as the economy continues to expand, reporters will find it difficult to resist the bribery and manipulation of politicians, business people, bureaucrats, and even entertainers, all of whom want to pass off their public relations and private interests as news.

In addition, publishers increasingly have their own agendas and support particular individuals, politicians and parties. On the other hand, in their zeal, reporters can also be used by politicians. Once they can establish the prejudices, sympathies and vulnerabilities of certain reporters, politicians have been known to use them for their own purposes. To remedy these ills, reporters must be well trained and well informed, with a certain degree of education or research skills, to do their job properly. Herein lies another fundamental problem of the press.

Because of very rapid growth, the print media have been overwhelmed by their success. Legions of new reporters have been employed in the last several years, sometimes right out of university, without adequate preparation for their work. Consequently, reporters are often poorly trained, rarely doing the necessary research before going out to pursue stories. Not surprisingly, many reporters do not have the ability to raise the right questions. The pressure to get the gist of a story is so intense that good reporting skills and methods are sometimes compromised. With poor training, reporters are sent out to do all kinds of stories—some sophisticated and technical, others mundane and straightforward—without proper guidance from editors. This stems partly from the lack of

experience and educational background of the editors themselves. The upshot is that reporters have to learn on the job. Learning by doing has advantages, but proper preparation goes a long way in improving the skills of novice reporters.

In addition, there is a culture of benign plagiarism in the press. To the beat reporters, the sharing of news is consistent with camaraderie and a sense of solidarity. But this practice could produce inaccurate news: 'It's common for reporters to copy notes from one another, but sometimes one...will get it wrong and the others will copy it', said Akapol Sorasuchart (interview, 31 May 1996) based on his dealings with reporters as government spokesman. Given these shortcomings, it is understandable that many have lost patience with reporters. Prime Minister Anand was critical of the press; and Prime Minister Chuan sometimes lost his temper when bombarded with seemingly irrelevant questions from reporters (*Nation* 9 August 1993).

For all its problems, however, the press is also trying to improve its performance. The Manager Group, for instance, has been running a school devoted to journalism training, as has Post Publishing. Similarly, the Nation Group has begun a research and development scheme using a fixed percentage of the company's income. It can be expected that this research and development dimension of the industry will continue to expand, and will hopefully produce better-quality reporting and a better media.

THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA: TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

In this final section, some of the broad issues related to the electronic media will be discussed. Since 1930, when broadcast media entered Thailand through the radio (television was introduced in 1955), they have, until recently, been under tight governmental control. Before 1949, the Public Relations Department and the Post and Telegraph Department controlled radio operations. After 1949, other government agencies began to take control of various frequencies, based on the premise that national security required state ownership of this important medium. The populace of the 1940s to 1960s was not widely literate, and hence radio was a most effective tool for promoting state policies. As mentioned above, Phibun astutely used the radio to spread his nationalist political ideas to the masses. Sarit also used the radio to support his regime and its legitimacy. The two major crises of 1973 and 1976 saw the electronic media used as tools of the state.

The electronic media's subservience to the state was most evident during the May 1992 crisis: state-controlled television failed to report the street protests, prompting curious viewers to go onto the streets for first-hand information. Likewise, radio did not report the protests; indeed it was prevented from reporting them. For example, the Nation Group's private radio

talk show decided to shut down rather than toe the government line (*Nation* 31 March 1992), while the popular and critical talk show, *Mong tang moom* ('Different Viewpoints'), also came under the threat of censorship (*BP* 19 April 1992). When there was some reporting from the electronic media, namely Radio *Jor sor* 100, the reportage became disinformation and lies (*BP* 12 May 1992). Somkiat Onwimon, the programme's chief, lost considerable credibility after the May 1992 crisis as a result of his support for the Suchinda regime. None of this means that electronic media reporters were in favour of the Suchinda government, but the broadcast media is structured in a way that requires reporters to regurgitate government views or lose their jobs, an unrealistic prospect for most (*BP* 16 May 1992).

After the Suchinda regime collapsed, there were widespread calls by the press, academics and NGO activists to reform the broadcast media (*BP* 29 May 1992). The National Broadcasting Executive Board, the electronic media's controlling body, became the National Broadcasting Commission. The second Anand government placated the demands for liberalisation by allowing private operators to acquire radio and television licences for designated time slots (*BP* 29 July 1992; *Nation* 31 August 1992). The Anand government also authorised the establishment of UHF (ultra-high frequency) channels to compete with the existing VHF (very-high frequency) stations. The first UHF channel came into being in 1995, known as Independent Television (ITV), a 24-hour news and entertainment operation. It has a deal with CNN International of the Turner Broadcasting Corporation to air daily international news (*BP* 22 May 1996).

Coupled with state-of-the-art information technology, this increasing internationalisation is loosening the state's long monopoly of television. Apart from ITV, there is now a range of cable and satellite channels. IBC, for example, cables eight news and entertainment channels, while Thai Sky puts out six by satellite. Subscriptions for these outlets are affordable to a large number of the Bangkok population and to a sizable provincial customer base. Within a short period, these channels have managed to offer popular alternatives to the five state-owned channels. What they have also done, with the aid of advanced technology, is to bypass the state (see Chai-anan's Chapter 3 in this volume). Television will never be the same again. No longer can the state control information as it did in May 1992; people now have other outlets to turn to. By being forced to liberalise and grant concessions to cable and satellite operators, the state has yielded much of its power to control information in this key medium.

The five state-owned channels, meanwhile, remain under the control of government, and they are still subject to censorship. For example, the 'Mong tang moom' programme on state Channel 11 was discontinued by the Banharn government in February 1996 for alleged bias against the prime minister and government. This was widely perceived as Banharn's revenge for the programme's scrutiny of his candidacy on the eve of the 1995 election

(Fairclough 1996a). Other state-owned channels have seen vested interests jockeying for influence, and the assassination of Sangchai Sunthornwat, the director of Channel 9 under the Mass Communications Organisation of Thailand, was seen by some to be related to disputes over money-making activities (*Matichon sutsapda* 23 April 1996). Overall, while the five domestic state-operated TV channels have become more diverse and assertive in their programming, the government and individual ministers can still exert considerable influence over programme content.

Radio, perhaps still the most powerful in reaching the masses in the countryside, has also gone through a process of liberalisation. It differs from TV in its much higher number of frequencies which have bred intense competition. Competing for popularity, radio current affairs programmes are favourites amongst Bangkok motorists stuck in the city's notorious traffic. In fact, the radio has profoundly changed the way information is conveyed. A growing number of drivers, equipped with mobile phones, have participated in the radio's political interview programmes. This interactive mode is a new phenomenon, developing political consciousness and bringing more people into the democratic process, as well as inducing greater accountability from public officials. Given the heightened role of Bangkok's middle class, who make up the majority of the capital's drivers and passengers, the radio is likely to become more important as a medium for political discourse and information dissemination. Similarly, rural people are likely to benefit from this development as radio stations continue to set up provincial bureaus (*Sayam pot* 21 August 1994).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has tried to show the reality and potential of media power as an oppositional force. For most of their 150 years of existence, until the 1990s, the print media were servants of the state in one form or another. In the last few years, under the influence of the continuing economic boom, a more open polity and cutting-edge information technology, the media's independence and assertiveness in checking governmental performance have been boosted. The print media's oppositional role was particularly significant during the NPKC's short-lived seizure of the political process from February 1991 to May 1992. That the press can act as an opposition when needed augurs well for the greater participation in democratisation. However, this is not to say that press power and influence will always contribute positively to democratic development. The press also needs to be monitored lest it abuses its growing power. Because of shifting business interests, large media companies may act in their corporate interests rather than continue their oppositional role. The case of Thaksin Shinnawatra's ownership of IBC at the time of his leadership of the Palang Dharma Party

raised questions about the independence of the cable company. Equally, the conglomeration of a number of media entities has enabled them to own electronic as well as print media. At a different level, the print media suffer from rampant if subtle corruption. The political alliances and prejudices of owners and editors have figured in many a press report. Reporters, on the other hand, do not have adequate training, though this condition should improve as media firms invest more in research and development.

This chapter has paid insufficient attention to the electronic media. More research is required into questions of ownership and control. Questions of how media conglomerates are financed and what motivates their domestic and cross-border investment decisions is necessary. In addition, the formation of alliances between media owners and managers with political groups needs closer study. The impact of new technologies will also be important; for example, the use of the Internet and anonymous facsimiles may well prove significant. In addition, while it is known that the foreign press and media played a significant role in the May 1992 events, their position has not been examined. Clearly, more work is required as the media has great political significance.

14 The Thai medical profession and political activism

*Scott Bamber**

Since the early 1970s doctors and other health professionals have played an important public role in political activities in Thailand. The medical profession was involved in the political protest movement associated with the events of 1973 and 1976, the community development and primary health care (PHC) movements of the 1970s and 1980s, the events of 'Black May' 1992, when the army and police opened fire on demonstrators in Bangkok, and the electoral watchdog group PollWatch and the Confederation for Democracy (CFD), both major organisations working for democratic reform. Doctors associated with the activist movement have attained prominent positions in public life. Among the better-known of these are Dr Prawet Wasi, a Magsaysay Award winner, and editor of the popular *Folk Doctor* magazine, and Dr Krasae Chanawongse, also a Magsaysay Award winner, an MP for the socialist-oriented Palang Mai (New Force) Party and formerly head of the ASEAN Training Centre for Primary Health Care Development (now the ASEAN Institute for Health Development).

On the face of it, this involvement with political activities appears to run contrary to the role which the medical profession would be predicted to take on the basis of status and class interests. In Thailand, perhaps more than in developed countries, the medical profession constitutes a privileged elite, with admission skewed very much in favour of the affluent (see Maxwell 1975; Silcock 1977; Smith 1982). Yet, in taking stances opposed to the government, the doctors involved were apparently acting in ways detrimental to their supposed objective interests, risking their professional positions and, in some instances, their lives. Unlike other groups, however, they appear to have emerged largely unscathed from this involvement; indeed, in certain cases, the affiliation with the political reform movement seems to have enhanced their public standing.

This topic is clearly one of importance both for politics and for the field of health and community development. In the light of the current movement towards democratisation, these issues are significant in regard to understanding the development of political opposition, its nature and sources of legitimacy. Of particular interest are, first, the factors which led the medical

profession to take a stance opposing certain governments, one which was almost sure to be harmful to their interests and, second, the links between these actions and the NGO movement and the more generalised middle-class activism of the 1990s. Despite the relevance of these issues, however, little has been written on the subject.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate three main questions: (i) What are the forces which brought the medical profession into the area of political activism in the 1970s? (ii) What are the factors which enabled the medical profession to avoid severe repercussions resulting from their political involvement during that time and to go on and play an active role in community development in the 1980s? (iii) How is this activism linked to the political activism of the early 1990s?[1]

THE NATURE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

This chapter employs a broad definition of political activism as participation in any of a range of activities, including public affairs and involvement with societies or organisations. However, many of the health professionals whose opinions are discussed here would define their involvement as being in 'reform' rather than 'politics'. There are probably good reasons for this: amongst some sections of society the word *kan mu'ang* (politics) is identified with party politics and carries negative connotations. Nevertheless, within the definition used here, it is clear that many of the actions of such people constitute political activity; even what seem to be the most benign of reforms in the area of health can have important implications. It is also important to understand that the concept of PHC itself is inherently political, with its focus on bottom-up processes maximising community participation, equality of access to services, and addressing the social and economic factors related to health (see World Health Organisation [WHO] 1978).

This chapter focuses on the period from the early 1970s to the present time. It should be pointed out, however, that this does not mean members of the medical profession eschewed political activity prior to this period, but rather that such activity was largely confined to achieving reforms within the health system (see Donaldson 1981; Ampha 1995).

The 1970s to the early 1980s

This period was a time of major political activity, marked by two major crises, the events of 14 October 1973 and of 6 October 1976. Members of the medical profession were involved in both, as well as the activities which preceded and followed them.

In the early 1970s medical students participated in student organisations, became involved with print media, such as newspapers, and engaged in debates embracing political themes. At this time there were three centres for medical education in Bangkok, consisting of the Faculty of Medicine at Chulalongkorn University, and the two campuses of Mahidol University's Faculty of Medicine, at Sirirat and Ramathibodi Hospitals. Participation in political activity was, however, largely focused on Mahidol University, and in particular at Ramathibodi, the most recently established of the three, which had gained a reputation for excellence and which had a liberal-minded Dean. Even there, the number of medical students actually involved appears to have been small, although they were sometimes able to gain support from a wider body of students and staff members. Importantly, Mahidol University also had a Faculty of Public Health, located close to the Ramathibodi campus, which brought medical students together with others from a wider range of social backgrounds and with different perspectives on health issues.

At the time medical students were active as members of the Mahidol Medical Students' Union (MMSU), the Mahidol Students' Union, and the Students' Federation of Thailand (SFT). Other student organisations were also important, such as the Buddhist Student League (BSL). There was some overlap in the membership of these organisations; for example Dr Weng Tochirakan, a core member of the CFD, was leader of both the MMSU and the BSL during his time at Ramathibodi in the early 1970s. This radical group was also involved with the publication of the Mahidol student newspaper *Mahidolsan,* which they took over and made ῾very political, very left'. Some five issues were produced in the 1972–73 period before being closed by police.

Links were also established with students at other universities. This was achieved not only through student organisations such as the SFT, but also through events such as inter-university debates. For example, Mahidol students were involved in a series of debates with students from Thammasat University, a hotbed of activism, on political issues. Such collaboration was probably aided by the close geographical proximity of Thammasat, which is situated opposite Sirirat Hospital.

As well as a concern for outside political issues, the Mahidol medical students also focused on a number of in-house reforms at this time. One of these was the introduction of elective subjects into the medical curriculum. Another was an attempt to change the system of initiation to which first-year students were subjected on entry to the university. This practice, which in its extreme forms amounted to little more than a gross humiliation of the new students, was seen as perpetuating the same social inequities to which the students were opposed in society at large. An attempt was made to replace it with involvement of new students in the discussions and other activities.

Such concerns also led to the first strike ever held by medical students. This was in 1972, when Thailand was under a military government, and concerned the regulation in force at that time which prevented women medical students from becoming civil servants and working in rural areas. In addition, women had to pay a 10,000 baht tuition fee. As a result of the strike action, which included a visit by women students to the prime minister's house, the regulation was changed.

At this time, the actions of the government, led by military leaders Thanom and Prapass, with their attempts to control universities and prohibit political discussion by students, were an important factor in mobilising additional student support. However, according to some of those involved, in the case of medical students, this support was not necessarily directed towards expressly political activities, but to the social programs which the radical students had helped establish. These included projects such as the provision of health and sanitation services to the inhabitants of the Khlong Toey slum.

The establishment of a democratic government in 1973 provided an opportunity for this involvement with social welfare projects to be translated into more broad-ranging development projects at the national level. The 'Return to the Countryside' programme, initiated in 1974, saw student volunteers, among them medical students from Mahidol, spend a month in rural villages investigating local problems. This project was followed soon after by a 'Public Health for the Masses' campaign, involving doctors, health workers and students (Cohen 1989:167). On graduation, a number of doctors who had been involved in student politics turned their attention to the welfare of rural villagers, especially in the Northeast. Their interests coincided with those of the nascent NGO movement, with its emphasis on the health and well-being of the rural poor. This was a forerunner to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) concept of PHC expounded at Alma Ata in 1978 (see ibid.: 167–71; Gohlert 1991:101–2).

The interest of the medical profession in the plight of the rural poor is of particular note. Historically there has been strong resistance from the medical profession to community development strategies; the profession was, until relatively recently, reluctant to allow the training of village health workers (see Donaldson 1981), and doctors have generally held the use of traditional medicines in low regard (Smith 1982; Le Grand, Luechai and Streefland 1993). Yet, in supporting PHC programmes, or their predecessors, members of the profession involved broke ranks and actively encouraged both village health workers and traditional medicine. This brought them into contact with a range of NGOs working for rural development, as well as people involved in political activities.

A number of respected members of the medical profession were associated with NGOs which came into being at this time. For example, Dr Prawet founded the Folk Doctor Association, which commenced activities such as the

training of monks in basic medicine from around 1976 (Gosling 1985:761). The Drug Study Group, an organisation which aimed to address the widespread problem of the incorrect use of pharmaceuticals, came into being in 1975 (Jiraporn 1986:164). One of the first NGOs to become involved with community development, family planning and PHC was the Population and Community Development Association, led by Meechai Viravaidya, established in 1974, which began in 1973 as Community-based Family Planning Services (Anon n.d.: 10). As Jon Ungphakorn (1994:19) has pointed out, while these organisations had specific objectives and concerns, such as PHC and safe drug use, they also had more general aims which were related to the promotion of social development alongside material development.

It appears that, in many cases, some of the ideals which had characterised their activities as medical students were carried into the work of doctors after graduation, when they commenced work as interns. For example, around 1974 one group of Ramathibodi graduates at a hospital in Korat, where conditions were poor and staff morale low, embarked on a reform programme which resulted in considerable improvements. Among their actions was support for a strike of low-paid non-professional hospital labour, in pursuit of increased wages.

By the time of the violent military backlash against parliamentary government in October 1976, a number of the medical student radicals had graduated and were working as doctors. Following the *coup,* a repressive atmosphere developed, not unlike that of the McCarthy era in the US. The activities of doctors were closely watched including those of some of the older and widely respected generation such as Dr Prawet.[2]

The situation became increasingly difficult with the assassination of some of the leading figures in the radical movement. Health professionals were also targeted: in rural Nakhon Ratchasima a sanitation student was reportedly killed by right-wing elements, an event which caused a number of doctors to give serious consideration to following other radicals into the jungle. One Bangkok-based doctor reportedly fled with the assistance of hospital staff after a gunman was sent to the front of the operating theatre to kill him. In another case, a Northeast-based doctor was helped to escape by clinical staff and subsequently went into hiding.

The move into the jungle brought doctors into contact with the CPT and the Khmer Rouge, the latter of which at that time (1976–77) was operating in Buriram. In fact, most politically involved doctors (80–90 per cent according to one source) had been previously contacted by the CPT, although the number who actually endorsed communist ideology appears to have been small. Doctors defended contact with the CPT, saying that, given the political circumstances of the time, in which all activists were branded as communists, they were forced into a situation where there was no middle ground.

Doctors and other medical professionals proved to be of considerable value to the CPT in the jungle. Apart from battle casualties, there were other

major illnesses such as malaria and diarrhoeal diseases which required expert medical care. The conditions under which they worked were extremely difficult, usually in makeshift surgeries with few trained assistants. Generally doctors had to undertake the training of other non-medical personnel, including villagers, in order to ensure an adequate supply of staff. Some of these trainees acquired sufficient skills to undertake basic surgical procedures. The doctors themselves were relatively inexperienced in the type of medicine they were required to practise. The work often required learning direct from textbooks and was extremely stressful. On top of this they lived on a very simple, plain diet, much of it obtained from the jungle, and their health was often not much better than that of those they were treating.

Although there were hospital facilities at CPT bases in Laos, such as those opposite Nan and Ubon Provinces (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987; Gawin 1990), Thai medical personnel had little contact with these. Despite the links between the CPT and the Chinese Communist Party and the regimes in Laos and Vietnam, there appears to have been little opportunity for Thai doctors with the CPT to travel to those countries for training or work. This was in spite of the fact that, in some cases, Thai doctors entered the jungle via China or Vietnam and then on to Laos. Nevertheless, at least one Thai couple is said to have undergone training in China, and there were reports of the use of Chinese medicine, in particular acupuncture, by Chinese practitioners from Kunming. Some Thai herbal medicine was also tried on an experimental basis. However, modern medicine and Chinese medicine were the main types of medicine practised.

The 1980s to the early 1990s

Towards the end of 1980 those who had fled to the jungle, including doctors, began to return to their urban homes under the amnesty offered by Prime Ministerial Order 66/2523. This period was one of considerable uncertainty and confusion, with many returnees unsure of what might happen. In general, the initial action chosen by those leaving the jungle seems to have been to 'lie low and wait'. One option was to work in private hospitals or clinics, another was to undertake postgraduate study overseas. With time, most of those who returned were able to resume careers in the health area. As one doctor put it: Thai culture is very forgetful, and as long as you don't attack your friends and neighbours they will protect you.'

Even so, doctors wishing to re-enter the civil service faced special problems as they had been dismissed from their posts on entering the jungle. A first step was to obtain clearance from the *santiban* (security police). Respected figures such as Dr Sem Phringphuangkaew (a former provincial doctor who, before retirement, held high positions in the civil service, including Minister of Public Health) and Dr Prawet played an

important role in this process by acting as advisers and working behind the scenes to ensure no problems occurred.[3] However, even following security clearance doctors were not accepted as full civil servants, but rather as hired employees *(luk chang)* of the institutions concerned, usually at greatly reduced wages. Despite satisfying these requirements some doctors, in particular those who were viewed as having been particularly supportive of the CPT, were unable to gain acceptance into the institution of their choice and consequently entered private practice.

One area in which doctors were able to play an important role was in collaboration with the NGOs which had re-emerged after some curtailment of their activities following the events of 1976 (Gohlert 1991:102). PHC, which had been incorporated into the Fourth National Economic Development Plan in 1977, provided a legitimate means for members of the medical profession to re-engage themselves in some of the reform activities which had previously led to accusations of being 'communist'. PHC provided an important bridge between NGOs and Government agencies, with doctors playing an intermediary role. This was clearly seen in the cooperation between the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), the Rural Doctors' Society, and NGOs in a number of Northeastern PHC and community development projects, for example at Rasi Salai, Srisaket, and Bua Yai in Korat. A key figure in both these projects was Dr Sanguan Nitayaramphong, a chairman of the Rural Doctors' Society and a Ramathibodi graduate who had been active in student politics (Khana phaetsat siriratphayaban 1985:12).

By 1984 as many as 17 NGOs were involved in PHC (Cohen 1989:168). They included the Folk Doctors' Association, the Drug Study Group, the Traditional Medicine in Self-Curing Project, the Community Health Group, and the Foundation for Children, of which the chairman was Dr Sem. Other members included the Rural Doctors' Society and the Sungnoern Primary Health Group, the founder of which, Dr Samroeng Yaengkratoke, was a Ramathibodi graduate (Khana phaetsat siriratphayaban 1984:50). These NGOs were linked through membership of the umbrella organisation, the Co-ordinating Committee for PHC of NGOs (CCPN) which was established in 1983, with Dr Prawet as chairman (*Thai Development Newsletter* 2, 2, 1984:17–18).

Given the political climate of the late 1970s, it is not surprising that these NGOs were often at pains to emphasise their lack of affiliation with political parties or movements (Gohlert 1991:115). The Rural Doctors' Society, for example, states in its information pamphlets that it is 'apolitical' (Chomrom phaet chonabot 1994). Nevertheless, it remains that many of the NGOs' activities were political, and that they were viewed by many, including those who were disenchanted with socialism, as an alternative means by which change could be achieved (Wasant 1993). This is reflected, as Cohen (1989:168–72) has described, in the statements by some of the leading

figures in the PHC movement which address the importance of an equitable distribution of power in the achievement of PHC.

During this time a new generation of students was coming through the medical education system. While they had little, if any, connection with the radicals of the 1970s they were involved with various causes. One of these was the plight of those living in Bangkok's slum communities, with which they had contact through the university society system (for example the *Chomrom salam* or 'Slum Society'). Slums had become an important social issue by the mid-1980s, with a number of communities faced with displacement because of proposed development projects. Medical students had worked closely with the slum communities, with activities including education and the provision of basic medical examinations. When the communities were threatened with eviction, many of the students identified with their position and supported the slum dwellers. Their actions included protests outside UN offices in Bangkok, food preparation and helping them find new accommodation. This experience was important in politicising young doctors, and showing them that the poor still had little opportunity to share in the country's growing wealth.

At this time, in the absence of the major domestic political issues which had motivated the students of the 1970s, the attention of student activists was focused on international issues. The People Power movement in the Philippines, which resulted in the election of the Aquino government in 1986, was reported to be a major source of inspiration for Thai medical students, especially in the context of their involvement with slum communities. Medical students were also involved in protests over Japanese trade and the US Farm Act.

The involvement of medical students in these issues was mainly through national student organisations such as the Students' Federation of Thailand (SFT). In 1986, the secretary of the SFT was a Mahidol (Sirirat) medical student, Poosit Prakongsai (later chairman of the Rural Doctors' Society 1993–94) and another Mahidol medical student, Wilasanee Mokecharoenphong, who studied at Ramathibodi, was secretary of the SFT in 1989.

After the 1991 military *coup*

The military *coup* in February 1991, which deposed the elected government of Chatichai Choonhavan, had an important effect in moving doctors and other health professionals to resume an important public role in politics. Alarmed at what they saw as an attempt by the military, in the form of the National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC), to maintain its domination of politics, health professionals joined the protest campaign (Dr Surapong Suepwonglee quoted in Mukdawan 1992; Dr Weng Tochirakan, personal communication). According to Dr Wichai Chokwiwat, Secretary General of the Medical Council of Thailand, 'they [medical professionals] and the general public had wanted to take politics

into their own hands ever since the 1991 *coup'* (cited in Mukdawan 1992:A8).

Medical personnel were also closely involved, both as participants in the protests and in a professional capacity, with the violent events of 18–21 May 1992, the Black May incident, and the demonstrations which preceded it (see Kiatchai 1994). A number of doctors, including Dr Weng, who had been active in the student movement in the 1970s and had entered the jungle after October 1976, were drawn back into the political arena and joined the CFD which was formed on 11 May. Other doctors, who had not previously assumed public roles, also became involved at this time. For example, Dr Sant Hatirat, who was active in the Folk Doctor Association in the early 1980s, was chairman of the CFD at the time of the antiSuchinda protests on 14 May.

Doctors and nurses are reported to have defied the military when refused access to the wounded on Ratchadamnern Avenue (Mukdawan 1992). There were also reports of medical personnel being hindered in their duty, assaulted, shot at or wounded (Kiatchai 1994:64).[4] These reports served to greatly increase the involvement of the health profession throughout the country (Kiatchai 1994). Doctors in Ubon, for example, reportedly took an ambulance to Bangkok in order to look after their friends among the protesters injured on Ratchadamnern.[5]

In addition to the provision of immediate medical aid, the health profession responded to the events in other ways. Senior members of the profession attempted to exert high-level influence on the NPKC. Dr Sem went to the Palace to obtain an audience with the King. While he was unsuccessful in this, he did eventually manage to speak by telephone with Privy Councillor and former prime minister Prem Tinsulanonda, and urged him to exert influence in bringing the two sides (General Suchinda of the NPKC and Major-General Chamlong, leader of the protesters) together for talks (Anuraj 1992:32).

Medical professionals in provincial centres who were unable to travel to Bangkok concentrated on local activities in the provincial and district centres where they worked. Such activities included demonstrations, the dissemination of information by means of fax and billboards set up outside hospitals, as well as the monitoring and taping of international satellite or television broadcasts (Kiatchai 1994).

It is also worth noting, in connection with the role of universities after the Ratchadamnern massacre, that Mahidol University's Salaya campus was the centre for the telephone hotline which was set up to enable relatives and friends to trace those who had disappeared. This involved a different group of health professionals—those working in the social sciences.

Following the fall of the NPKC, medical professionals continued their participation during the period leading up to the September 1992 elections.[6] A major force behind these activities was the Health Assembly for

Democracy *(Samacha satharanasuk phu'a prachathipatai)* which was formed after a meeting at the Monks' Hospital, in Bangkok on 7 August 1992. Members included Dr Sem, Dr Prawet, Dr Surapong Suepwonglee and Dr Hattai Chitanond, as well as a number of other doctors, such as Dr Wichai Chokwiwat and Dr Sanguan Nitayarampong, who had been prominent in the area of social reform and NGO movements during the previous decade. The Assembly was founded in order to ensure the continuity of the pro-democracy movement, to help spread the message to urban and rural areas, and to give the lead to other professions (Mukdawan 1992). Among other things the Assembly's campaign included the distribution of 'Lover of Democracy' cards and certificates and a television advertising campaign. Interestingly, organisers stated that they hoped to 'repeat the success' of an anti-smoking campaign organised earlier in the year (Mukdawan 1992).

Apart from promoting the election in September 1992, doctors were also prominent in PollWatch, the organisation set up to act as a watchdog during voting. Participation seems to have varied from region to region: more doctors became PollWatch representatives in the Northeast than in the South, where it was teachers who played a prominent role.

After the September elections health professionals continued their involvement in political activities. For example, along with Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and Minister of the Interior Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, health professionals including Dr Sant Hatirat and Dr Samlee Jaidee (a pharmacist from Chulalongkorn University with a long involvement in the Drug Study Group) attended the ceremony held at the Democracy Monument on 15 May 1994 to commemorate the second anniversary of the Black May massacre. The CFD, in particular members Dr Prawet, Dr Sant and Dr Weng, has also been prominent in attempts at constitutional amendment (*BP* 14 April 1994), especially in relation to the hunger strike by pro-democracy campaigner Chalard Worachat (*Thai rat* 4, 7 June 1994).

FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION

From this description it is possible to isolate a number of factors which affected the participation of health professionals in political activities since the 1970s.

The health profession

At some stage in life everyone gets sick, and for this reason the health professions differ from other occupations in that they involve direct contact with people from all levels of society. The medical ethic also stipulates that it is the duty of every medical practitioner to provide treatment to those who

request it, regardless of their background. Thus doctors have close contact with both those from the privileged levels of society as well as those who are marginalised; they also have a responsibility towards the well-being of those who request their services.

As has been shown, a number of doctors had links with the poor, such as rural villagers and urban slum dwellers, both through their ordinary work in hospitals and clinics, as well as through specific activities, for example research and student projects and camps. In some cases, contact with marginalised groups alone seems to have been sufficient to politicise, or at least foster a social conscience, in some members of the profession. The various violent political episodes which occurred over this period also had a powerful effect on their participation; someone had to provide for the care and treatment of those hurt at the hands of the military in 1976 and 1992, and this responsibility fell largely on the staff of the major public hospitals, Sirirat and Ramathibodi. Health professionals were thus able to get a first-hand picture of what happened and were in a position to judge the accuracy of the official accounts of events. This was very important in the context of manipulation and censorship of news which took place in May 1992 (*BP* 15 May 1994). What is more, their sociopolitical awareness was further heightened when medical workers were shot at in the course of doing their duty on Bangkok's streets.

In addition to contact with the marginalised and those who suffered injury as a result of the actions of the military, members of the profession also had contact with those at the other end of the social spectrum. In Thailand, as in most societies, doctors usually come from well-to-do backgrounds (see Maxwell 1975); further, through their work, they have contact with the powerful and the affluent. These factors meant that senior members of the profession had access, albeit indirect, to people at the highest levels, including within the Palace.

Contact with influential groups is backed up by the considerable prestige which is attached to the medical profession. In part this may be seen to have a basis in the high position which doctors held in the past at the Court (Bamber 1989). In addition, from its introduction in the mid-nineteenth century, Western medicine was regarded by the Siamese as having special prestige, possibly due to its acceptance by King Mongkut (Terwiel 1988:186). This association with royalty was maintained into the twentieth century when the father of the present King, Prince Mahidol, studied public health and medicine at the Harvard Medical School (Silcock 1977:59). His contribution to medicine is remembered in the name of Mahidol University.[7] Another important association between royalty and medicine was in the person of the mother of the present King, a qualified nurse and the initiator of the Princess Mother's Flying Doctor scheme, providing health care for remote communities, mainly in the North. This association has also continued in the activities of one of the King's daughters, Princess Chulabhorn, who is patron

of a medical research institute, and whose public speeches often address medical issues.

Such relationships are particularly important in conferring prestige and a degree of protection on the health professions, as well as opening channels of communication with influential segments of society. At the same time, they also create the possibility of a conflict of interest, especially when health professionals advocate PHC, with its implicit challenge to the *status quo*. One reason why medical and public health personnel have been prepared to engage in political activity without apparent risk to this relationship with the upper levels of society is that the same contradiction also applies to royalty. The professed concern for the health of the population is an important legitimising factor for the monarchy and regime, and the medical and public health professions are necessary in any public health efforts. However, any real attempt to address the basic social and economic factors related to ill-health and equality in access to services, such as in the PHC approach, would threaten the power of those in positions of influence. This might explain why the involvement of the monarch or regime in the area of health is often more a matter of form than actual concrete deeds, or else implemented through special projects or schemes which do not involve a loss of control over the population.

Another attribute of the medical profession which deserves mention is the perception of its members that they should take a leadership role in society. Most of the doctors interviewed in this study acknowledged that, because of the rigorous criteria for admission to the medical degree, they are among the most academically gifted. Consequently, members of the medical profession felt that they had a responsibility to take on a leadership role. Indeed, according to those interviewed, society expected them to assume such a role.

Taken together, the above-mentioned attributes of prestige, influence, leadership and a social conscience, have contributed to making the medical profession a powerful voice in society.

Experience as students

It is clear that their experience as students was also an important factor in encouraging the interest of health professionals in political activities. There are a number of dimensions to this: the international political climate of the day, the national political situation and the educational process itself.

The first major period of student political activity considered here was in the 1970s. In the context of the Vietnam War, American involvement in Indochina and the presence of foreign soldiers in Thailand, it might be expected that Thai students would respond in a similar way to students in the US and other Western countries in taking an anti-war stance. Certainly the rise in student activism in Thailand coincided with that in the West but, for medical students at least, the American presence does not seem to have been a

major motivation for their involvement in politics. Rather, at this time students seem to have been more preoccupied with domestic political issues, in particular the establishment of a democratic system of government and the plight of the poor. In the 1980s, however, when there were less pressing domestic concerns, international issues such as those involving trade, or political movements in other developing countries like the Philippines, seem to become more important foci for Thai students.

The educational process itself was an important factor in encouraging medical students to become involved in political issues. One aspect was the relationship with older generations of students, academic staff and civil servants. Respected academics such as Dr Prawet and civil servants such as Dr Sem served as models for medical students. Older generations of students also encouraged incoming students to engage in such activities as joining organisations, participation in camps, debates and the publication of newspapers. Of these activities, one of the most important seems to have been the participation in societies and camps, which gave students an opportunity to gain knowledge and experience among the disadvantaged groups in society.

In addition to these factors, it should be borne in mind that medicine is one of the longest university courses of study, and is also irregular in terms of the teaching time. Thus, medical students are at university for a longer period than other students, and are also there at times when other students are on holiday. In this respect they are well-suited to ensuring the continuity of activities and are in a position to respond to events when other students are not on campus.

Participation in political activities can also be a significant part of university education, and the experiences of those medical professionals who were students at the time of the events of 1973–76 were also important in determining their response to the events of May 1992. They had an awareness of what could happen, as well as skills in organising and responding to the situation.

There are, of course, aspects of medical education which make it difficult for medical students to participate in student activities and these are discussed on pp. 248–49.

The role of doctors in the civil service

There are two related issues of note here: first, the demand for qualified personnel; and second, the nature of professionalism within the MOPH. The former situation is important because it concerns not so much why doctors became interested in political activity as why they decided to engage in it. The difficulty of getting doctors to work in rural areas has long been a problem (Donaldson 1981:113; Silcock 1977:63), Recently, with the rapid expansion of private hospitals in urban centres (*BP* 17 February 1994) there has come a new problem: a 'brain drain' from the civil service to private practice. This was a major concern for the Rural

Doctors' Society just before the events of May 1992, and has again been taken up as an issue in recent times (Dr Poosit Prakongsai, personal communication, July 1994). Because of these factors, the MOPH and the government are constantly faced with a problem of staff shortages in rural hospitals. While this has been addressed to some extent through the policy of having new graduates work in rural areas, there remains a chronic shortage of experienced doctors.

Because of this situation, experienced doctors working in rural areas are in a strong position to make demands of the MOPH, and conversely there is pressure on the MOPH to make concessions in order to encourage doctors to stay. For these reasons, rural doctors, and to a lesser extent those in urban civil service, are likely to be able to speak out publicly on political issues without fear of repercussions. In the event of problems arising, there is always the option of private practice or work in private hospitals, although few of the doctors interviewed considered this desirable.

The MOPH differs from other ministries in that many of its officers are also members of the medical profession; they are at one and the same time bureaucrats and members of the medical elite. Thus, unlike the situation in most ministries, doctors working at the district level have the ability to communicate with those in the MOPH as colleagues. Further, a tradition of reform has developed in the MOPH with a number of doctors formerly associated with NGO movement now in senior positions. This has been reflected since the present government of Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa came to power in a series of protests from within the MOPH over politically motivated staff changes and threats to cut funding for NGOs supported by the ministry, including some of those under the CCPN mentioned earlier (*BP* 19 October 1995; 2 November 1995).

Ethnicity

Another important issue is that of the ethnic background of the medical profession. Most doctors who play important roles in the political activities described here are of Chinese ancestry, which is not surprising considering that most were from Bangkok or other large urban centres, of relatively affluent backgrounds and had access to superior education (see Maxwell 1975). This raises a number of points in regard to participation. The first of these is that there are strong reasons why being of Chinese ethnic background should be more closely associated with a conservative attitude towards politics rather than a radical stance. Family investment in putting a child through medical school and pressure to repay the debt on graduation would dampen any interest in political activities. This was certainly the case for the majority of students. Why, then, did some Sino-Thai medical students choose to engage in politics?

A possible explanation is that living between two cultures, Sino-Thai students were more sensitive to, and could be more critical of, the dominant 'Thai' culture. This may have been the case for students at Mahidol University, which was viewed as less prestigious than the older and more conservative Chulalongkorn. Further, through an awareness of reform movements in mainland China, Chinese students may have been more familiar with notions of social reform and thus more inclined towards political activism.

Religion

Buddhism has also clearly been important in the political activism of doctors. Some of the more general features of Buddhist culture which directed doctors' actions were the notion of self-sacrifice, 'humaneness' *(manutsaya-tham),* non-violence (as one doctor put it 'democracy achieved by violent means will be destroyed by violent means'), a lack of concern for personal wealth, and 'forgiveness'. This latter feature was said to be very important in understanding how doctors (and others) were able to re-enter society after leaving the CPT.

A number of doctors had been monks or novices, or members of the BSL while at university. As mentioned above, for a number of doctors, Buddhism was important in the development of the philosophical bases for their interest in social reform. The teachings of the monk Buddhadasa were extremely influential in this regard, being paraphrased by one doctor as 'simplicity, plain living and high thinking'. These ideals had much in common with those of socialism which, during the 1970s, may have served to bring some medical students closer to the members of the CPT who were attempting to 'contact' student activists.[8] By the same token, a major cause of the disillusionment felt by some doctors with the CPT was its condoning of the use of violence, which is at direct odds with the medical and Buddhist ethics.

Buddhism also figured importantly in a number of other ways. These include the involvement of monks in the provision of PHC within the NGO movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s under the 'bare-headed doctor' scheme initiated by Dr Prawet, the use of contacts with the Supreme Patriarch in an attempt to get him to intercede with the military in the violent events of May 1992 and the performance of Buddhist ceremonies as part of the process of reconciliation and healing after those events, for example, the commemorative ceremony held at Ratchadamnern in May 1994.

Communications

Much has been said of the role of communications technology, in particular mobile telephones, in the events of 1992. Doctors had access to these devices

and made extensive use of them in the protests on Ratchadamnern and during the violence. Doctors were also involved in gaining access to satellite television coverage and its distribution.

One of the reasons why the effects of these activities were so widespread was the health network which had been established throughout the country from the 1970s. In part, this network has resulted from the government's efforts to promote PHC, including the establishment of the system of district hospitals and village-level health workers, as well as the links between this system and the NGO network. In May 1992 this network provided, by fax and telephone, an effective means of communication between most areas of the country, and served to the advantage of health professionals in dissemination of information on events in Bangkok as well as between health professionals in different parts of the country. This network was also important to the activities of PollWatch.

Another aspect of the PHC network which has facilitated political activism is the experience it has provided in mass communication. This is exemplified in the campaign-style approach adopted in promoting messages designed to address various health problems such as smoking, the eating of raw fish and, since 1989, HIV/AIDS. It has not been difficult for health professionals to adapt this approach for the communication of messages regarding democracy and participation.

BARRIERS TO POLITICAL ACTIVISM

This discussion has focused on health professionals who were politically active. It should be noted, however, that they represented only a fraction of the membership of the professions. There were many who did not participate. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to examine these non-participators, some information on the reasons why they did not become involved with political activism can be gained by examining the barriers faced by those who did. Some of these should already be apparent from the description of events. However, others only emerge from discussion with individual doctors.

The medical school which doctors attended seems to have been a basic factor in determining their political activism. Of the several schools, the two campuses of Mahidol University, and in particular Ramathibodi Hospital, have produced many more politically active doctors than other schools. Graduates of the conservative Faculty of Medicine at Chulalongkorn University have not been prominent in political activities, while graduates from provincial universities at Chiangmai, Khon Kaen and Hadyai have not been prominent either, probably because these institutions were established relatively recently. In regard to Ramathibodi, graduates cited the young and enthusiastic staff and the progressive and tolerant attitude of the Dean as the reason why they were able to participate in political activities. The close contact between Mahidol's

medical and public health students also exposed them to different perspectives on the links between health and social issues.

One problem faced by all doctors is the time factor. In the normal course of their duties they are faced with heavy workloads, and political activity is a further burden. This problem exists from the time they are students; it is only in the first few years of the course that they have time to devote to outside activities. Even then they are placed under considerable pressure from teachers and family to concentrate on their studies.[9] Also some teachers were worried that, if students became distracted by outside interests, then they would become incompetent doctors.

After graduation, similar pressures were sometimes exerted by superiors in the civil service who expected that doctors devote themselves wholly to medicine. On graduation the doctors themselves felt that they should refrain from speaking out on various issues outside their speciality. The exceptions to this were doctors whose superiors were sympathetic, and in specific situations where they felt that they had to make a stand, as was the case after May 1992.

A further pressure exerted on the medical profession may come from the general public's expectation of what is appropriate behaviour for doctors. This is an issue which is difficult to discuss on the basis of existing information. One reason for this is that it is very much in the interests of the rightwing elements to silence activists; putting pressure on doctors to confine their activities to the practice of medicine is one way of achieving this.[10]

The extent to which these views are shared by the general population would need a more detailed investigation. However, in the light of recent events, it is not difficult to see how such views serve the interests of various right-wing elements. Further weight is added to this by the treatment to which some of the doctors involved in political activities have been subjected since May 1992. These include threats of violence to themselves and their families, abusive telephone calls and attacks on their property. Doctor members of the CFD stated that it was largely due to the presence of then Prime Minister Chuan and General Chavalit that violence was avoided at the commemorative service held on Ratchadamnern in May 1994. Despite the dangers, such opposition has so far not silenced these health professionals.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to investigate three main questions: the forces which brought the medical profession into the area of political activism in the 1970s, the factors which enabled the medical profession to avoid severe repercussions resulting from their political involvement during that time, and the link between this involvement and the political activism of the early 1990s. The picture which emerges is complex.

It is evident that there is no single factor which motivated health professionals to engage in political activities. Rather, it has been the combination of several major factors, including the nature of the professions themselves, the system of education, the social background of health professionals, and historical events, which have been responsible. Similarly, the barriers which have served to hamper participation in political activities are varied. The most important of these are the demands of study and work, the conservatism of some medical educational institutions and the opposition of certain vested interests within Thai society.

15 The changing role of provincial business in the Thai political economy

*Parichart Chotiya**

Since the late 1980s, Thailand has moved increasingly rapidly into the ranks of the newly industrialising countries (NICs). The success of the transformation of an agricultural economy to one dominated by industry is usually attributed to two factors: first, prudent fiscal and financial policies pursued by officials at the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Thailand who managed to remain relatively independent of political interference; and second, the entrepreneurialism of local business people (see Christensen *et al.* 1993).

Government intervention in the promotion of industry is considered by some observers to have been, at best, 'ineffectual', with government development area-targeting not being particularly forceful (see ibid.: 7–18). This has been particularly evident in the indeterminate fate of the Eastern Seaboard Zone, a large regional industrial development project which has been plagued by frequent changes and chronic delays. Some have even suggested that Thailand has been fortunate in this as the government has been unable to damage the economy and private sector (Christensen 1992).

Another line of argument is to suggest that the business community has become so strong that it can now dictate its own terms with government. This concept has been advanced in the bureaucratic-authoritarian model proposed by Patcharee (1985). Related, Anek (1992) has proposed that interest representation and negotiation between the state and business has become entrenched, particularly through the operation of business associations and chambers of commerce.

The tragic events of May 1992 seemed to confirm the thesis that the middle class, dominated by business owners, managers and professionals, had gained the upper hand over the security-oriented state. The role of business people in the bloody uprising against the government, led by former Army General Suchinda Kraprayoon, was not just a Bangkok event, for it extended to all major provincial cities and towns, and involved thousands of people. In this protest against the military regime, provincial business people joined hands with activists from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although most of these alliances withered after the 1992 events, a few business people

continued to involve themselves in pro-democracy activities and pushed for increased decentralisation. With the military in retreat, there were hopes that the middle class would play a leading role in bringing about more liberal and democratic changes which would lead to a more benign state (Sungsidh and Pasuk 1993b).

This optimism was challenged by Chai-Anan Samudavanija (1993b), who warned that the state, and especially the bureaucracy, was not as weak as perceived at the time, and would not simply wither away or give up its power to the business community. The state would, he argued, accommodate some changes in an attempt to retain its role, status and power in the changing socio-economic environment (Chai-Anan 1988). He suggested that the much-touted Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee (JPPCC) was the National Economic and Social Development Board's (NESDB) attempt to incorporate business elites into the state's structures (Chai-Anan 1993), and not the reverse, as some have suggested.

While it is uncertain who incorporates whom in the interplay between the bureaucrats and the business community, at least in Bangkok, the fact remains that both parties have been closely associated in politics, economics and society for quite some time (see Hewison 1989). However, this process has not gone so far in the provinces. Because of the frequent rotation of high-level officials from one province to another, bureaucrats and provincial business communities have not been able to develop strong networks and connections (Anderson 1990). In addition, because of the centralised system of administration, provincial officials do not have much real policy- or decision-making authority, having to follow policy lines set by the ministries in Bangkok. As a result, it has not been particularly effective to lobby for policy change at the provincial level. Thus, provincial business people have not been able to do much more than curry favours and seek special treatment at the local level. For most provincial business people the power to make and change policy seemed beyond their reach, while the centralised state seemed forever strong.

Provincial business has not often warranted serious consideration by scholars, politicians or policy-makers (exceptions are noted below). Nevertheless, they have played an important, if unassuming, role in propelling Thailand's economy forward. Their investment and consumption spur growth in several sectors and in all parts of the country. For example, while not an entirely accurate reflection of their importance, business registrations showed that in 1995, of 328,498 active businesses, 111,588 (34 per cent) were registered in the provinces, with the rest being in Bangkok (*Phuchatkan* 22 November 1995).

Business, wealth and social status have a close association, and provincial business people certainly belong to the upper- and middle-income groups. As shown in Table 15.1, between 1987 and 1995, the 'upper-class' in the urban area of the provinces increased from 18 to 22 per cent while the 'middle-class' increased from 19 to 29 per cent (the classification by household income is set out in Table 15.2). During the same period, there

Table 15.1 Economic status by household income (%)

Income bracket	Bangkok		Urban provincial		Rural provincial	
	1987	*1995*	*1987*	*1995*	*1987*	*1995*
Upper	16	18	18	22	12	20
Middle	31	29	19	29	13	12
Lower	53	53	63	48	75	68

Source: Deemar Media Index (1995).

were few changes in Bangkok. Thus, it is clear that provincial business has been an engine of growth in this period.

As noted above, provincial business people have not played an important role in interest representation or policy-making at the national or provincial levels. They have not been able to press their demands in any sustained, collective manner, and have, by and large, accepted and learned to live with the powers-that-be. The relationship between the state and provincial business in the 1980s has been dominated by alliances between political candidates and powerful local 'godfathers' *(chao pho')*. Political candidates had to look for (at least) the tacit support from these local godfathers in their constituencies. In recent times, local godfathers also provide financial support for politicians, and in some cases, have run their own political candidates (Sondhi 1991; Chaowana 1993). Successful candidates who attained significant positions of power return the favours by ensuring that these influential individuals get government construction contracts, logging concessions and the like. In some cases, politicians protect the gambling dens, illegal smuggling operations and other shady business activities run by the godfathers. In the 1990s, the relationship between

Table 15.2 Classifications of household incomes

Location	Income bracket (in baht)	Estimated number of people
Bangkok	Upper (>35,000)	1,246,000
	Middle (17,500–34,999)	2,013,000
	Lower (<17,499)	3,635,000
Urban provincial	Upper (>20,000)	748,000
	Middle (10,000–19,999)	1,055,000
	Lower (<9,999)	1,739,000
Rural provincial	Upper (>8,000)	7,681,000
	Middle (6,000–7,999)	4,525,000
	Lower (<5,999)	26,201,000

Source: Deemar Media Index (1995).

appointed state officials in the provinces and the local business community is changing. The new corps of provincial business people are well-educated and socially sophisticated, with many of them having benefited from the booming consumer economy and not having been involved in traditional resource-extraction businesses based on state concessions (see Hewison and Maniemai 1993). In addition, some have established export-oriented industries closely linked to the world political economy, extending their political, economic and social horizons.

Globalisation has had an impact on even the most remote areas of the country, one result being that the state and local business people have been forced to turn to one another. On the one hand, for some kinds of investment, Bangkok and its nearby provinces have reached their economic limits with exorbitant land prices, overburdened infrastructure and heavily congested traffic. On the other hand, new and attractive opportunities for trade, investment and tourism have opened the countries along Thailand's borders, and to capture these opportunities the state has had to support the development of long-neglected basic and social infrastructure in the provinces. Increasingly, the state is recognising that in order to sustain economic growth, it must strengthen the provinces (see, for example, *Board of Investment Review* 1 February 1993).

For provincial business people, trade liberalisation has pushed them to compete with Bangkok-based firms and, increasingly, transnational production and trading firms. This has made them aware of opportunities in the global market. To compete and capture these opportunities, they often encounter institutional obstacles, finding that they are at a disadvantage compared with their Bangkok-based counterparts. To overcome these, provincial business people have realised the need to assert themselves at both the provincial and national levels.

STRENGTHENING PROVINCIAL BUSINESS AS THE NATIONAL POLICY

Although almost all governments have had policies to promote investment in the provinces, there had not been any substantive efforts to implement these until the Chuan Leekpai government came to power in late 1992. One of the major policies of the Chuan government was decentralisation. When Chuan unveiled this policy, it was assumed that it would concentrate on reducing the extraordinary power of the Ministry of the Interior and the centralised administrative system. However, contrary to such expectations, the administration put most effort into economic decentralisation by increasing and relocating investment to the provinces. For the Chuan government, this policy was considered an important strategy to alleviate rural poverty and to slow or reduce soaring urban migration. It was felt that more provincial jobs would be available if there was increased investment in rural areas (Prime Minister's Secretariat 1994).

To underscore this policy, the name of the national committee established during the Prem Tinsulanonda administration in the early 1980s was changed from the 'Committee on Rural Development' to the 'Committee on Rural Development, Prosperity and Decentralisation'. The Ministries of Commerce, Industry and Science, Technology and Environment were brought in to join the established committee members from the Ministries of the Interior, Education, Public Health, and Agriculture and Co-operatives. This committee was no ordinary bureaucratic body. Besides the fact that the prime minister chaired the committee, some 10 per cent of the national budget was earmarked to the programmes and projects under its direction.

The promotion of provincial business was spearheaded by the 'Sub-Committee on Prosperity and Decentralisation', chaired by Dr Sawit Bhotivihok, Minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office. The NESDB served as the secretariat to both the committee and the sub-committee. Sawit was no stranger in this work, having previously been a high-level NESDB official, taking the leading role in the Eastern Seaboard Development Plan. Hence, he was able to serve as an important link between the elected government and the NESDB, the state's central policy agency.

The sub-committee decided that investment in the provinces had encountered four disadvantages: first, there were inadequate incentives to invest in the provinces *vis-à-vis* Bangkok and its immediate environs; second, infrastructure was insufficient; third, there was a lack of management expertise and skilled labour; and fourth, there was a lack of clear development policy and strategy at the provincial level (Sub-Committee on Rural Development, Prosperity and Decentralisation 1993:9–10).

Until this time, provincial business had received little attention, and no government agency was directly responsible for promoting and strengthening these businesses. The Department of Industrial Promotion in the Ministry of Industry offered training courses, but these were mainly suitable to small handicrafts and were geared to occupational training and job-creation in rural areas. The Bank of Thailand imposed certain percentage targets for commercial bank lending to the agricultural sector or to the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC), but only agricultural businesses could take advantage of this facility. The Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand (IFCT) was meant to provide industrial credit in the provinces, but its requirements and procedures were seen to be so slow that few provincial business people sought its services. While the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Industry had branch offices in all provinces, these focused their efforts on regulation and the compilation and reporting of data to Bangkok (Khosit 1993:37).

During the Chuan administration all of these instrumentalities began to reorient their operations to provincial business. In April 1993, the Board of Investment (BoI) added 12 businesses to the list of 148 they promoted, and announced special investment privileges for investments in Zone 3 (the 60

outlying provinces). More state funds were channelled to the provinces, with the Ministry of Finance encouraging commercial banks to provide more loans and at lower rates. The amount set for private commercial banks was 400 billion baht in 1993. Meanwhile, the amount earmarked for state-owned financial institutions was 44.4 billion baht in 1993 and 86 billion in 1994. The state-owned Krung Thai Bank was to spearhead this task with a 1994 target of 20 billion baht. To facilitate its activities, the charter of the BAAC was amended to allow for non-agricultural credits in the provinces while the IFCT and the Government Savings Bank were asked to promote the movement of capital outside the greater Bangkok region. In addition, the Bank of Thailand was obliged to provide 42 billion baht in low-interest credit for industrial investment in Zone 3, through commercial banks. The government allocated a further 700 million baht in 1993 and 800 million baht in 1994 to support related measures. Further, the sub-committee assisted provincial companies in applying for special listing on the Securities Exchange of Thailand (Sub-Committee on Rural Development, Prosperity and Decentralisation 1993; Prime Minister's Secretariat 1994; *Phuchatkan* 3 January 1995).

As part of this policy, the NESDB launched a Provincial Investment Plan project to compile information and analyse investment opportunities in each province, aimed at facilitating the investment decisions of both local and foreign investors. The provincial investment plan was significant in three respects. First, and for the first time, the government abandoned the strategy of using infrastructure as the lead sector in economic development. Instead of relying on infrastructure to induce business investment, the government decided to assess investment potential and to supplement these with public infrastructure. Second, the plan was based on the idea that private investors should play the leading role in bringing about investment projects. Public sector activities would be limited to facilitating the role of the private sector whenever and wherever necessary. Third, in the process of drafting the plan, the government required that both the public and private sectors in each of the provinces be directly involved.

Despite these positive changes for business, an examination of the policy to promote decentralisation shows that it was meant to encourage the establishment and/or relocation of business from Bangkok and its nearby provinces. The emphasis remained on providing 'capital' and other factors of production rather than on promoting the people who hold the key to the success of this policy—the provincial business people. In sum, the policy promoted provincial business, not provincial business people.

Promotion of provincial business

By and large, small- and medium-scale provincial entrepreneurs have had to be self-reliant, having been relatively neglected by state authorities. However,

as they have done reasonably well for themselves, especially when compared with farmers and workers, this neglect by the state has been, if not acceptable to both parties, at least not a major cause of conflict. Certainly, provincial businesses have not always desired state involvement in their activities.

It is interesting to note that the most systematic and substantial programme to promote provincial business came from foreign assistance, especially that from the US, which established a programme to strengthen the role of the private sector, including provincial businesses. While this project was established during the Reagan administration, it built on a long US involvement with provincial business, going back to the 1960s (see Muscat 1990). From 1987, the United States Agency for International Development provided funds to improve the performance of provincial chambers of commerce and business associations. The Bureau for Private Enterprise provided a grant to establish the Institute for Management Education for Thailand (IMET), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), an organisation supported by the United States Chamber of Commerce, assisted Thailand's National Institute for Development Administration and IMET with provincial networking (Anek 1992:82–3).

IMET developed during the currency of the Fifth National Plan and the height of the JPPCC system, and received the high-profile co-operation of successful businessmen such as Amnuay Viravan, then of the Bangkok Bank, and academics from various universities. The programme was successful in strengthening entrepreneurship and management skills among provincial business men and women. It also stimulated a sense of leadership and awareness of possible collective action among provincial entrepreneurs (ibid.: 80–5).

IMET offered nation-wide business training courses that supported provincial business people in several areas. First, the short training course taught basic and standard business practices. Second, it brought provincial business people together to form long-lasting informal social networks and business alliances, with the IMET alumni becoming a most active social organisation. Third, provincial business people had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of the instructors and speakers, many of whom were prominent players in national political and economic policy-making circles. This training succeeded in making provincial business people more confident and aware of their potential collective power. After several years, IMET had succeeded in creating a corps of confident and active provincial business people all over the country.

Despite these developments, provincial business people were still not recognised. A major reason for this was that there was a lack of information regarding the pattern of provincial business development and the attitudes and characteristics of provincial business people themselves. It was not until business newspapers began to develop in the mid-1980s that information about this group became more readily available.

Similarly, there was little substantive academic research on provincial business people. While there were notable exceptions (see Saeng *et al.* 1978), it has only been in recent times that academics have seriously addressed the issue of provincial business development. For example, the Social Science Association of Thailand has completed a project on the middle class which included research papers featuring socio-economic profiles of business leaders in the provinces (Social Science Association of Thailand 1991). In addition, the profiles of 200 key provincial business people have recently appeared (Niran 1992), and studies of provincial business people in the Northeast have been published (Hewison and Maniemai 1993; Ueda 1995). The publication of a survey and analysis of the role of provincial business people in industrial development was on government contribution to this research (Khosit 1993).

Provincial business and national policy-making

With a centralised state, provincial business is naturally heavily influenced by policy-making at the national level. Policies regarding finance, tax, industry, wages and labour, environment, and trade are all made at the national level. As a result, rules, regulations and operating procedures tend to be standardised and uniformly applied throughout the country. While national policy-making has an overwhelming impact on their businesses, provincial business people have had few opportunities to make their voices heard at this level.

Big business in Bangkok has not faced such obstacles, especially since the establishment of the JPPCC in 1981, recognised as marking a new chapter in the relationship between the state and the business community (Anusorn 1991; Anek 1992). It also serves as an indicator of the changing role of the state, from regulator to facilitator, from instructor to dialogue partner. The JPPCC is now a permanent element in the national policy-making system, even if it has had periods where its influence has been reduced. Thus, in the 1990s, Bangkok business people have direct and formal access to high-level state policy-makers. Informally, they also have great influence. For example, interviews and criticism by leading business figures or powerful business organisations are published in leading business newspapers and receive the attention of officials as well as the public. In addition, the social links between powerful business people and high-level bureaucratic families are well established (see Hewison 1989:206–14).

The case of provincial business people is very different. They still lack the necessary conduit through which a meaningful policy discourse can occur. There are essentially two channels by which local initiatives can be transmitted to the national level. These are the Thai Chamber of Commerce, through the respective provincial chambers of commerce, and

the Provincial JPPCC (PJPPCC) which began in 1985, four years after the national organisation. The Fifth National Plan prescribed the establishment of chambers of commerce in every province and, as a result, these organisations proliferated, increasing from 15 in 1983 to 72 in 1986 (Anek 1992:71).

Despite this, provincial business groups often find these channels ineffective or inadequate. The most common complaint by provincial chambers against the national body is that the organisation tends to serve the interests of large Bangkok-based business groups while neglecting those of provincial business (*Phuchatkan* 14–15 November 1992). This was confirmed in the national conference of chambers of commerce in 1995, when the national chamber was criticised for its weakness, ineffectiveness and un-responsiveness (*Phuchatkan* 24 November 1995).

The PJPPCC is subject to at least six constraints. First, it was designed as a consultative forum at the provincial level, meaning that it is most effective at addressing issues at this level. However, many of the problems faced by provincial business are at the national level, especially as policy-making remains highly centralised. Second, each PJPPCC is dependent on the goodwill of its chair, the governor of the province, appointed by the Ministry of the Interior in Bangkok. In 1993, the Governor of Chiangmai did not call a PJPPCC meeting for over ten months, but neither the NESDB, then the JPPCC coordinating body, nor the Ministry of the Interior was aware of this.[1] This indicates that there is no monitoring and enforcement mechanism between the national and provincial levels. The overwhelming power of the governor and other public sector representatives also prevented PJPPCC from developing as a real problem-solving forum for the private sector.[2] Third, there is no institutional linkage between the PJPPCC and the national JPPCC. Complaints and initiatives raised at the various PJPPCCs have no channel to move forward to become a part of the agenda of the national JPPCC. Fourth, the effectiveness of the JPPCC system depends, in some measure, on the political support it receives from each national government. The JPPCC enjoyed a high profile during the Prem administration but it was moved to the back burner during Chatichai Choonhavan's premiership (Anek 1992:74–6). Fifth, the supervision and monitoring of the PJPPCC has been moved from the NESDB to the Ministry of the Interior. This ministry does not perceive the PJPPCC as one of its priority tasks.[3] Finally, operating between the PJPPCC and the national JPPCC, there are four regional JPPCCs, with representatives from the government attending their meetings. However, each regional JPPCC is more like a forum than an institution. There are no guidelines regarding the scheduling of meetings, meaning that this depends on decisions made by government officials. In addition, regional JPPCC meetings are too large for meaningful policy discussion.

PROVINCIAL BUSINESS PEOPLE AND THEIR CONCERNS[4]

One of the characteristics of business people in the provinces is that they have several lines of business. Provincial business people tend to be mobile, both in terms of business activities and the geographical area of their operations, in their home and nearby provinces (see Hewison and Maniemai 1993). They like to venture into other lines of business and play on their base province's advantages rather than seek out-of-province markets for the expansion of their businesses.

Most leading provincial business people have been, at one time or another, on the board of the executive committee of their respective provincial chambers of commerce. At the same time, they are active in the Rotary Club, the Lion's Club or in business associations, including the Federation of Thai Industries. Many have held elected office in their province, at the municipal or provincial level (see ibid.).

It is interesting to note that when the Chuan administration's decentralisation policy was launched, one of the concerns of provincial business people was the government's business policy. They pointed out that the policy favoured provincial investments, not provincial investors. Investment incentives were offered to businesses that started or relocated to Zone 3, but not to existing businesses in Zone 3, meaning that provincial businesses were effectively discriminated against. For many business people, and especially in the Northern and Northeastern regions this meant that they not only had to compete with relocating Bangkok businesses, with better technology and larger capital bases, but also with businesses in the rapidly opening neighbouring countries, where labour is cheaper than Thailand's provinces. To meet this concern, national policy-makers urged provincial business to upgrade by switching to modern accounting systems in order to prepare to enter partnerships with Bangkok-based business groups or to register and list their companies on the stock market.

Toward this end, the IFCT introduced a programme in which it would match provincial businesses with Bangkok-based companies. The IFCT also established a fund to allow it to hold equity in a tripartite partnership where it would act as the balance or stabilising investor in the partnership. Such measures were designed to assist provincial business groups working with Bangkok-based business groups.

However, the idea of the partnership remains alien to many provincial business people who lack experience in such arrangements. They prefer to borrow to expand their business rather than to raise funds from prospective partners.[5] The idea of listing on the stock exchange was inconceivable to many as it required all companies to 'clean up' their accounting, financial and tax records and to maintain more rigid management discipline. However, most provincial businesses still maintain two account books, one for government officials and a second set for the internal use of the business. To list on the

exchange, such practices would have to cease, and the advice and services of investment banking experts, usually highly paid, would be required.

All incentives aside, provincial businesses do not have the middle-level management staff to permit a rapid conversion to the modern business system. This shortage of qualified people is one of the most frequent complaints heard from provincial business leaders. One business woman in Chiangmai, a major exporter of household decorative items, confessed that she even felt the need to dictate when and which one of her female staff could fall pregnant in order to avoid a shortage of qualified workers.[6]

A related problem is labour. Provincial business people claim to face three principal labour problems. First, as noted above, there are severe shortages of qualified personnel in all fields in the provinces. Second, the national wage system fails to account for the diversity in different localities. For example, although the minimum wage in Bangkok is slightly higher than that in Chiangmai, business people argue that the productivity of workers in Bangkok far surpasses that in Chiangmai, where local people are said to have yet to fully adapt to the work disciplines of an industrial society. Some have argued for the decentralisation of the wage system, to allow each province to establish its own wage negotiation system. Interestingly, this proposal has had limited support from the Ministries of the Interior or Labour and Social Welfare. Third, business people along the borders have proposed the establishment of special economic zones where foreign workers could be legally employed at wages lower than the national standard. These zones, they argue, would shore up the competitiveness of some Thai products *vis-à-vis* goods from neighbouring, low-wage, countries. In addition, they suggest that this would also help alleviate security problems related to the large number of illegal migrants (on these issues see *Bangkok Post* 12 May 1996; Chalongphob 1995). These latter two issues were addressed by the administration led by Banharn Silpa-archa, which began the registration of illegal migrant labour.

Decentralisation in both the public and private sectors is among the major concerns of provincial business people who perceive that a lack of autonomy on the part of provincial officials, and even of the managers of local commercial bank branches, is a major handicap for their businesses. From the banks' perspective, the limit on branch autonomy, especially in terms of loan authorisation, is necessary as banks also face a shortage of qualified personnel in their provincial operations; competent credit and loan analysis is a skill in short supply.

A further concern for provincial business is a lack of information in a number of areas. For example, national newspapers arrive in the provinces often a half a day after their publication in Bangkok. Only recently have some national newspapers had a regional printing capacity, although this is a costly operation. Provincial business leaders see an urgent need for the establishment of information centres in the provinces.

Mismanagement of policy and regulations is another concern. Some business people have reported gruelling experiences with provincial tax authorities who provided poor advice on the introduction of the value-added tax in 1992. Some were fined even though they had followed the official's advice. The accountability of public officials was a question raised on many occasions, with many arguing that efforts to rigorously enforce regulations in a system that still lacks qualified officials can seriously jeopardise business activity.

The state of the environment is another frequently raised issue, with several business people questioning the wisdom of business decentralisation when there is no adequate environmental enforcement in the provinces. This issue also raises the problem of co-ordination. When national policies which impact on investment in the provinces are handled by various national organisations at the national level co-ordination is essential, but seldom takes place. The situation gets worse when these policies are poorly implemented at the provincial level. When interviewed, officials from the Board of Investment admitted that while they promoted the decentralisation of industry, this could lead to negative environmental impacts, even though the environment has become a national priority. They argued that this was particularly acute in provinces where enforcement lagged behind policy. However, the Board's investment incentive certificates are issued without environmental considerations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In an exchange programme in which provincial business people visited various national agencies, and conversed freely with high-ranking officials, it is interesting to note that they appeared to be most impressed by those in uniforms. The National Defence College and the Police Education Bureau were the most popular organisations with provincial business people, due, in part, to their impressive reception there. Although the receptions were not as lavish as those put on by the big commercial banks, the provincial business people were more impressed by the fact that high-ranking officers were well-prepared for their briefings and were cordial in entertaining straightforward and even aggressive questions, especially remarks regarding the military's role in the May 1992 incident. So impressed were they that some even subscribed to the Strategic Club of the National Defence College and joined later seminars organised by the College. Provincial business people did not seem to relate to officials at other organisations in the same manner that they did with military and police officers. The officers seemed genuinely eager to get to know each of the business people as individuals, while other bureaucrats were more interested in discussing problems and issues.

This may be attributed to the fact that the officials were more directly responsible for the problems of provincial business people. Hence, they were

interested in the problems rather than the individuals. Furthermore, following the events of May 1992, military officers made increased efforts to regain public acceptance, and their meetings with provincial business leaders were part of this. It is also likely that the style and manner of the officers more closely resembled those of the provincial officials the business people were most familiar with. In other words, there was a certain degree of 'provincialism' among the officers which was not found among other bureaucrats. This is related to the fact that most military and police officers are transferred from one post to another around the country throughout their careers, whereas other officials can rise in the bureaucracy without leaving Bangkok. No matter what their social background, these officials tend to shed their provincial character after a few years in the capital.

These issues aside, there were other factors that determined the success or failure of the dialogues between provincial business and public officials. Often questions of tact and manners were involved, with the degree of aggressiveness, the confrontational or amicable style of exchange, and the realisation of the limits and utility of each exchange being considerations. People from different regions also display distinctive styles and manners which allow them to relate to different groups of policy-makers with different degrees of success. Business people from the North, who tend to have a polite, even muted, style of interaction, seem to relate better to bureaucrats, but do not appear to maintain close contacts with their MPs.

Southerners, who are typically more aggressive, found it easier to press their demands through their MPs, with whom they tend to maintain close relationships. Because of their strong localism and regionalism, Southerners tend to vote together for a party they perceive to be the party of the South— the Democrat Party—and it is in the South that vote-buying is believed to be the least rampant. To a degree, Southerners are loyal to their MPs, but they also keep their MPs on a tight leash.

Those from the Northeast tend to adopt a manner between that of those from the North and South; they are both demanding and playful. Northeastern business people, no matter how wealthy they are, invariably turn their region's disadvantages to their advantage; always referring to their region as the most backward and remote, they demand special treatment.

The discussions among provincial business people during the course of the development of the provincial investment plans was also illuminating. Although there were numerous resourceful business leaders in each province, only a limited few led the debates and discussions. The absence of a particular leading figure could totally change outcomes. In each province, it seemed that personality could still overwhelm structures and systems.

This puts provincial-level decision-making at risk, especially when there is no continuous forum or institutionalised process through which ideas and initiatives can be considered, debated and tested. Without such regular channels, the opportunities for participation that are occasionally offered to

provincial business people cannot always produce appropriate, well-balanced policy. The establishment of a regular and effective forum would encourage more provincial business people to take part in dialogue with public officials and would foster the public-private partnership in development.

The last year of Chuan administration, 1995, saw provincial chambers of commerce attempting to organise regional councils of the provincial chambers. Business leaders from the Eastern region led the way in the hope that their eight chambers could come together in support of the Eastern Seaboard Development Plan and accelerate its realisation. This was followed by the formation of the Council for Southern Provincial Chambers, with the Northerners following suite by announcing a similar structure. For the South and the North, the move was in response to the government's growth triangle and quadrangle policies. None the less, these initiatives have yet to record much success.

In the age of globalisation, provincial business people are being exposed to unprecedented opportunities and challenges. There is much to gain, but also much to lose, as the market increasingly ignores borders. Paradoxically, this means that it is more crucial than ever for government to recognise the growing significance of provincial business in the new political and economic context.

Notes

1 INTRODUCTION: POWER, OPPOSITIONS AND DEMOCRATISATION

1 Tradition is accorded considerable explanatory power. For example, Somsakdi (1987:xi) states: 'Even in the 1980s Thailand remains an essentially traditional society. The tensions and challenges of the modern world still are assimilated… through traditional values and norms, in traditional institutions and processes.'

2 In the 'radical' approaches discussed here, it is important to note that there are Marxist and non-Marxist theories involved. Here the emphasis is on the former.

3 This section draws on Hewison and Rodan (1994).

4 This section draws on Hewison (1996) and the references cited there.

2 POWER IN TRANSITION: THAILAND IN THE 1990s

* The authors wish to thank Kevin Hewison and Craig Reynolds for comments; Narong Petchprasert and Sungsidh Piriyarangsan for primary data on labour; and Thongchai Winichakul and Preecha Piempongsarn for critical needle.

1 This analysis calls into question the current enthusiasm for 'institutional' approaches to political economy. The evolution of institutions is a result of political conflict, not the structure in which the conflict is framed.

2 There were, of course, many civilian and military bureaucrats who dissented and distanced themselves from the old ruling culture. The point here is only that the bureaucracy continued to nurture a strong element of the political culture of the old regime.

3 Only around 10 per cent of MPs are elected from Bangkok. Chatichai himself, and several of his party members and ministers, were prominent in Bangkok business, and while provincial interests did not totally dominate during the Chatichai period, the logic of the electoral system became obvious.

4 At the same time, they supported constitutional reforms which would improve the efficiency and independence of parliament.

5 At the same time, some small attempts were made to undermine the military and government grip over the electronic media. A handful of programmes which appeared on the new Channel 11 were able to relay dissident views. In the big expansion of FM radio, private companies working on subcontract from the official station owners were able to gain considerable independence over programme content.

6   Estimates of the number of illegal workers vary. The official figure in mid-1996 is 600,000, while a spokesman of the National Security Council claimed two million (*Nation* 22 March 1996).

3   OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE, THEY ARE JUST BYPASSED: THE MILITARY, BUREAUCRACY AND GLOBALISATION

1   This is not the place to examine this system of social and political organisation—for details see Akin (1969).
2   *Chaophraya* is the highest title of the conferred nobility, usually reserved for ministers of the pre-1932 regime.
3   *Chao pho'* are powerful provincial business people who control many local businesses, some legal and others illegal (e.g., prostitution, gambling)—see Pasuk and Sungsidh (1992).

4   THE MONARCHY AND DEMOCRATISATION

1   *Momratchawong* is the lowest of royal titles under the monarchy's descending rank system.
2   It was only in 1995 that one of Thailand's leading social commentators was, in a landmark case, acquitted of *lèse majesté* charges. Ironically, his acquittal left the way open for the publication of a book about the charges laid against Sulak Sivaraksa and his trial, which includes material critical of the monarchy and the present King (see Anon 1993; Streckfuss 1996).
3   The Longman company faced a threat to its sales in Thailand (especially in English teaching texts) when it published a comment critical of Bangkok, while the *Asian Wall Street Journal* was banned in 1988 for publishing an article questioning the future of the monarchy (see *Sydney Morning Herald,* 15 February 1992).
4   By 'total standard view', Vickery (1984:28–63), writing of a quite different political situation, means a perspective which is based on incomplete and selective information, often selected for particular ideological reasons, and yet totalising and accepted as correct, especially by outsiders.
5   The father figure image of the present king, and the royal family as the image of a modern Thai family has been promoted. For example, Father's and Mother's Day are designated as the King's and Queen's birthdays (Tongnoi 1990:156).
6   *Phraya* is the second-highest rank of the conferred nobility under the pre-1932 regime.
7   Interestingly, the king's daughter, Princess Sirindhorn, completed her 1982 Masters thesis on this topic (see Keyes 1993).
8   The publication cited here as Grey (1988) refers to an extensive collection of non-Thai language press reports on the current monarch, from the 1940s to 1988. Rather than cite each article, the collection has been used.
9   The official history ignores the facts of the period and interprets 1932 in the following way: 'There is no telling what chaos leaders of the…[1932] *coup* might have wrought had they followed their initial plan and abolished the monarchy. Fortunately,… King Prajadhipok, was himself democratically inclined. He, too,…was…planning to introduce constitutional monarchy when the time seemed right. Consequently, he courteously accepted the young officers' demands and won

them to his side. It is largely due to King Prajadhipok that Thailand remains a constitutional monarchy in which the king is more than a figurehead, the nation remaining one through allegiance to him' (OPM 1979:140–1).

10 The work by 'Concensus' is referred to as Tongnoi (1983) because many parts of it are identical with Tongnoi (1990). If he is not the author, then it suggests remarkable links between those who write about the monarchy, or plagiarism.

11 The work and travel of the royal family has been a common theme since the first trip to the countryside in 1955. Superhuman efforts are sometimes suggested. According to United Press International reporter Sylvana Foa, the King was 'on the stump seven days a week, 52 weeks a year' (in Grey 1988:114). The King's Principal Private Secretary is quoted as stating that this king is loved and admired by the people because he has 'sacrificed so much for them' (cited in BP ed. n.d.: 7).

12 It is not possible to examine this transformation here and, indeed, much of it remains to be researched and written. See Thompson (1967:66–100), Ray (1972) and Brailey (1986) for some of the details on royalist reaction to the 1932 events and Thak (1977, 1978, 1979) on the relationship between General Sarit and the monarchy. The 'construction' of this monarchy is also deserving of attention, including the role of the US. For example, it is stated in Grey's collection (1988:47) that the oft-stated fact that 'Nearly every Thai household boasts a picture of the King' may have something to do with US policy, as 'American information officials in Bangkok long ago concluded that USIS funds could not be better employed than in spreading the likeness of His Majesty'.

13 For other descriptions of the monarchy as a conservative institution, see Wilson (1962:81), Wit (1968:108) and Morell and Chai-Anan (1981:68).

14 *Phra* is the third-highest rank of the conferred nobility under the pre-1932 regime.

15 The King's comments on this are odd, arguing that the US President and Vice-President were, on one occasion, unelected, following 'a kind of *"coup d'état" [patiwat]'*. He says that this was 'a change that was not done according to the traditionally accepted procedures for electing a president'. Given his fondness for Richard Nixon (see Grey 1988:136), the King may be alluding to the period when both Agnew and Nixon were forced out of office. If this is his reference, then his view of a *coup* is iconoclastic. In addition, the replacement of Nixon and Agnew followed constitutional procedures. The King's point seems to have been to support the idea of an unelected prime minister in the 1991–92 period of the military-dominated National Peace-keeping Committee.

16 Tongnoi (1983:19) is strong in his support of Thanin's highly authoritarian regime of 1976–77, and the narrow 20-article constitution he promoted.

5   WITHERING CENTRE, FLOURISHING MARGINS: BUDDHISM'S CHANGING POLITICAL ROLES

1 A range of honorific titles are used before the names of monks. Clerical honori-fics used in this chapter include: *Luang pho'*—'Reverend Father', a title used for old, revered abbots; *Phra*—'Reverend', a title used before the name of any ordained Buddhist monk; *Acharn*—Teacher', a title for a learned monk; *Than acharn*—'Respected teacher', a more respectful version of the previous title; and *Khru-ba*—'Respected teacher', a title used locally to indicate that a monk is of the Northern Thai or Lanna tradition rather than Central Thai or Siamese.

2 *Phra* Phayom Kallayano, abbot of Wat Suan Kaew in Nonthaburi immediately north of Bangkok, is widely known from his appearances on TV and radio. He is a

popular public speaker, with his cassette tapes and books sold nationwide. Pitch (1993) believes that *Phra* Phayom's main audiences are amongst marginalised urban dwellers adversely affected by rapid social change and industrialisation.

3   *Khru-ba* Bunchum Yansangwaro was born in Chiang Saen district of Chiang Rai Province and became a novice at the age of 10. He is the abbot of Wat Phra That Dorn-ru'ang, located in Chiangtung province of Burma. *Khru-ba* Bunchum has followers in Burma, Laos and Thailand, whom the Burmese authorities appear to permit to visit the monk without hindrance. In the early 1980s, *Khru-ba* Bunchum is reported to have had a vision in which he saw an abandoned Burmese reliquary of the Lord Buddha's remains that was in need of restoration. After the vision he became a wandering forest monk *(Phra thudong)* through northern Thailand and Burma until he found an abandoned pagoda. He and other monks have established Wat Phra That Dorn-ru'ang at the site.

4   On the point of unaccounted disappearances, it is noteworthy that the where-abouts of the bodies of several tens of people who disappeared during the May 1992 demonstrations are still to be established. In April 1994 Adul Khiew-bariboon, chairman of the May Heroes' Relatives Committee, reported that hundreds of people were still missing, while the Ministry of the Interior put the number of people who went missing during the military crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators between 17–20 May 1992 at 47 (*BPWR* 15 April 1994:2).

6   MORE OF THE SAME? POLITICS AND BUSINESS, 1987–96

*   The author was Thailand correspondent for *FEER* from 1987 to 1994. Since then he has reported for the *Institutional Investor*. This chapter is a summary and expansion of things learned, but frequently unreported, over this period, involving a large number of interviews and discussions, many of them confidential. This makes it difficult to produce documentary evidence for all assertions. Where possible, references have been provided.

1   This interpretation was given, for instance, in interviews with members of the 'Ban Phitsanuloke' advisory team of Prime Minister Chatichai.

2   Based on interviews by the author with various individuals in the banking, stockbroking and political sectors. Pairoj has been an adviser or business partner with senior politicians including Chatichai Choonhavan, Amnuay Viravan and Banharn Silpa-archa. Thaksin's stock market-built fortune permitted his cash injection to the Palang Dharma Party which gained him the Party leadership in 1995. He was also known to have supported many individual party members, as well as members of other parties, including the Group of 16.

3   The term *Sia* is generally reserved for wealthy business people, usually of Chinese origin. It combines notions of both wealth and power and is often associated with 'dark influences', or people who have gained wealth through an interest in semi-legal or illegal activities.

4   The author attended a number of these speeches and interviewed Song—see *FEER* 21 January 1993.

5   According to an ETA source, ETA was disappointed by this because it left the road in private, albeit allied, hands.

7 THAILAND'S POLITICAL PARTIES: REAL, AUTHENTIC AND ACTUAL

* The author wishes to thank John Schwarzmantel and William Callahan for their invaluable comments and suggestions.

1 This paper is concerned only with legal parliamentary parties, and so does not discuss the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The CPT was founded in 1942, and waged a 'peoples' war' against the state from 1965 to the early 1980s.

2 *Luang* is the fourth-highest rank of the conferred nobility under the pre-1932 regime.

3 Recent examples of academic involvement with political parties include Kramol Tongdhamchart with the New Aspiration Party and Sukhumbhand Paribatra with the Nam Thai and Democrat Parties.

4 Girling's negative view of Democrat Party history is contested; see Democrat Party (1995:1) for a more favourable account, portraying the party as struggling against dictatorial forces.

5 Santi Asoke is a small Buddhist movement which broke away from the orthodox *sangha* in the 1970s. Its followers adhere to a strict code of morality and asceticism. For a full account, see Sombat (1988).

6 This is an extremely crude characterisation of the position; for details, see McCargo (1993: Chapter 5).

7 This was, for example, the implication of Kukrit Pramoj's *'Suan phlu'* column in *Sayam rat* (10 July 1992), where he accused Chavalit of wanting a presidential system of government. Kukrit asked, where 'the King would be placed'. In response, Chavalit sued Kukrit for libel (see *BPWR* 24 July 1992).

8 ELECTORAL POLITICS: COMMERCIALISATION AND EXCLUSION

1 In 1995, the percentage of MPs stating a business background was reduced to 29 per cent. The reduction is perhaps explained by the fact that more than half declared themselves 'politicians', representing the emergence of a group of 'professional politicians' (see Matichon 1995:56).

2 Business can be roughly divided into three groups: provincial business tycoons. Bangkok-based metropolitan business and a small group of 'globalist' international business people (on the distinction between provincial, metropolitan, and international business, see Pasuk and Baker 1995, and their Chapter 2 in this volume).

3 The 'angel' parties were those which had opposed the unelected premiership of General Suchinda in April and May 1992 (primarily Palang Dharma, New Aspiration and the Democrats), while the 'devil' parties were those which had joined the Suchinda government, including Samakkhi Tham, Chart Thai and Social Action.

10 LOCATING WORKING-CLASS POWER

* Thanks to Kevin Hewison for his comments on earlier drafts.

1   Such views of class are most clearly evident in the modernisation literature on labour in Thailand (see Mabry 1979). Empirical understandings of class are also at work in the more radical studies. Although radical writers often begin with a structural understanding of class, when it comes to concrete analysis these structural views give way to essentially Weberian conceptions (see Narong 1982).
2   On the relationship between realist theories of science and Marxist political theory see Isaac (1987).
3   Detailed accounts of the strike are in Brown (1990:30–73), Sungsidh (1986:58–87) and Kanchada (1988).
4   Although a founding member of the ILO, Thailand has only ratified 11 conventions, none of which are concerned with the protection of basic labour rights (see Nikhom 1988).
5   Somsak (1991:147) estimates that in the early 1990s only a few hundred unions were actually functioning and that the vast majority were 'paper unions', existing in name only.
6   See, however, the analyses by Nophaphon (1993) and Somsak (1993), where it is shown that *sections* of organised labour played a rather more significant role in opposing the NPKC than has been generally recognised.

11 THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENT: OPPOSITION AND LEGITIMACY

1   The chapter builds on Hirsch (1994a).
2   There was considerable debate over the environmental impact of an overhead mass transit system (often termed Skytrain). Chodchoy opposed the plan, promoting an underground train system.

12 NON-GOVERNMENTAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS: EMPOWERMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

1   For critical reflections, see Prudhisan (1994), where it is argued that the political culture of the rural masses is changing from that of a deferential 'subject' to one which values participation, as a result of changes detrimental to their livelihood.
2   In addition to published sources, the cases draw on field work by the authors, much of it completed by early 1993, as part of the research project, 'Environmental pressure groups and their impacts on the Thai public policy process', conducted by Suchit Bunbongkarn and the authors. The support of the Ford Foundation is gratefully acknowledged. This section is adapted from the authors' earlier paper, Prudhisan and Maneerat (1994).
3   In 1994 the 'rural' in the name was dropped and the acronym changed to NGO-COD.

13 THAILAND'S MEDIA: WHOSE WATCHDOG?

*   The author would like to thank Kevin Hewison for suggestions, Duangkamol Chotana and Chaiwat Kamchoo for their in-depth discussions on this topic, and Akapol Sorasuchart for comments on an earlier draft.

14 THE THAI MEDICAL PROFESSION AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

* My thanks to Cholthira Satyawadhna, Naruemon Thabchumphon, Bill Callaghan, Peter Cox, Terry Commins and Kevin Hewison, as well as all the medical and health professionals who were generous in giving me their time and assistance.

1 Much of the information in this chapter is based on extensive interviews with participants. For reasons of confidentiality, and in some cases at the express request of those interviewed, the sources for some of the anecdotal information included are not attributed.

2 One doctor working in a district health centre in rural Korat described how a spy, disguised as a coffee-seller, was sent to keep watch on him outside the hospital. Dr Prawet, a teacher in Mahidol's Faculty of Medicine at Sirirat Hospital and respected by the student activists, described how he was accused of being the 'chief communist' because of his close links with the students. He was later given an official clearance to the effect that he was a 'reformer for humanity' (Prawet Wasi, personal communication, May 1994).

3 This assistance was not limited to those who had entered the jungle: previously, senior members of the profession had worked through the Human Rights Association in order to get the release of students arrested in 1976 (Dr Sant Hatirat, personal communication).

4 Dr Sant Hatirat claims that there was a story circulating at the time that he was shot and wounded, but this actually referred to the wounding of another doctor, a surgeon; there was confusion over his name, as *'Mor* (Dr) *Sant'* is a homo-phone for *mor san* or 'surgeon'.

5 One response, the subject of some controversy within the medical profession, is the threat made by some doctors to withhold treatment from members of the military. This is an issue of importance from the point of view of medical ethics, which insist that doctors must treat everyone, regardless of caste or creed. To deny treatment to the military would thus constitute a serious ethical breach. While most informants acknowledged that such a threat was made by doctors in some provincial hospitals, there is some disagreement as to whether this was actually carried out. One report suggests that treatment was actually withheld from military personnel at Saraburi, however this was unable to be confirmed. Dr Prawet insists that the issue of withholding services was confined to debate only, and never implemented (Dr Prawet, personal communication).

6 This included activities ranging from the distribution of 'how-to-vote' pamphlets from hospital out-patient departments, the display of posters urging people to exercise their right to vote, screening of videos explaining the voting system, and public speaking. One poster featured Dr Hattai Chitanond, a member of the Health Assembly for Democracy, in company with the film star Chintara Sukkhapat and famous boxer Khaosai Galaxy (Mukdawan 1992).

7 Ironically, at the time of the protests leading up to the massacre in May 1992 the portrait of Prince Mahidol hung over Ratchadamnern Avenue.

8 Buddhadasa's intellectual legacy has been described as a 'method of radical reform'—see Jackson (1994).

9 As one doctor interviewed in this study said: 'my mother is Chinese and didn't approve of my involvement with political activities. She said, "medicine is highly competitive and I should concentrate on my studies"'.

10 For example a recent letter, ostensibly from a villager, to the 'Green Gecko' column in the popular and generally right-wing newspaper *Thai rat* suggested that, rather than engage in politics, doctors could do more for the country by addressing the problem of the shortage of doctors and the predatory behaviour of private clinics and hospitals in southern provinces. In his reply, the author of the column confesses that he is also unable to understand why some of these senior doctors are more interested in politics than the ill-health of the population. He concludes by saying that 'we don't have a right to be disrespectful on this, it is for their own satisfaction; in the case of ordinary villagers, for us to think like that is a different matter' (*Thai rat* 4 June 1994).

15 THE CHANGING ROLE OF PROVINCIAL BUSINESS IN THE THAI POLITICAL ECONOMY

*   Much of the factual information produced in this chapter was collected by the author through interviews with provincial business people involved in the activities of the Institute of Public Policy Studies (IPPS), including the drafting of provincial investment plans in ten provinces.

1   This lack of information was confirmed in the meetings between a group of business people from the North and the director of the Government and Private Co-ordination Division of the NESDB and high-level officials at the Ministry of the Interior. The meetings were part of the project 'Enhancing access to national policy-making: a project for small and medium provincial business' organised by the IPPS in 1993–94.

2   In January 1996, the Ministry of the Interior ordered a streamlining and restructuring of the PJPPCC, reducing the number of members from the public sector while increasing those from the private sector. Representatives from academia and NGOs were also included. In the case of Chiangmai, this resulted in a change from the 36:10:0 public: private: NGO combination to one of 7:9:3 respectively.

3   A survey in 1993 showed that most provinces averaged only one PJPPCC meeting a year (Khosit 1993:39). In 1995, the Ministry of the Interior publicly admitted to various problems in the operations of this body and announced a policy to set up a division within the Permanent Secretary's Office to handle the affairs of the PJPPCC. Prior to this the work of the PJPPCC was overseen by the Office of Policy and Planning. Overwhelmed by other matters, officials had simply acted as couriers, forwarding PJPPCC reports and complaints to the ministries and departments concerned (*Phuchatkan* 24 November 1995).

4   This section and the next are based on the author's observations of the exchanges between provincial business people and Bangkok-based policy-makers during the course of a one-year project, 'Enhancing access to national policy-making: a project for small and medium provincial business groups'. The project, launched in 1993, involved four groups of provincial business people from the Upper North, Lower North, Upper East and Lower East together with high-level bureaucrats from Bangkok. There were a total of 73 participants from 19 provinces, with approximately three-quarters of the individuals involved in the 30–45 age group. Over half of the participants held a bachelor's degree or higher, and about half were members of their respective chambers of commerce. Ten held an elected office.

   Each group spent a week in Bangkok meeting high-level bureaucrats and policy-makers at the Secretariat of the cabinet, the Prime Minister's Office, the NESDB, the Environment Policy and Planning Office, the IFCT, the Bank of Thailand, the Department of Export Promotion, the Department of Industrial Promotion, the Department of Revenue, the Ministry of the Interior, the Police Education Bureau, the Police Development Institute, the National Defence College, the National Defence Institute and the House of Representatives. Each group also attended a dinner meeting with approximately 10 permanent secretaries or director-generals or deputy director-generals of relevant ministries and departments. The groups also exchanged views with high-level executives from the private sector including those from the Siam Commercial Bank, the Thai Military Bank, the Union Bangkok and the First City Metropolitan Bank.

5   An exception was the establishment of co-operation between 15 provincial department stores and the two giant, Bangkok-based department stores in 1995. This partnership was virtually unavoidable on the part of the provincial groups as the retail business was becoming increasingly competitive; either they joined the two large department chains or risked being driven out of the market.

6   This information came to light while participating in the project, 'Enhancing access to national policy-making: a project for small and medium provincial business groups'.

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