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United States Department of State

*Washington, D.C. 20520*

Case No.: 200701753

**MAR 25 2010**

I refer to your letter dated March 11, 2007 regarding the release of certain Department of State material under the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5 USC Section 552).

We searched for and reviewed the self study guides that you requested and have determined that all except one of them may be released. They are on the enclosed disc. One of the guides is being released with excisions.

An enclosure provides information on Freedom of Information Act exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made excisions, the applicable exemptions are marked on each document. With respect to material withheld by the Department of State, you have the right to appeal our determination within 60 days. A copy of the appeals procedures is enclosed.

We have now completed the processing of your case. If you have any questions, you may write to the Office of Information Programs and Services, SA-2, Department of State, Washington, DC 20522-8100, or telephone us at (202) 261-8484. Please be sure to refer to the case number shown above in all correspondence about this case.

We hope that the Department has been of service to you in this matter.

Sincerely,



*for* Margaret P. Grafeld, Director  
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures:  
As stated.

**63934 Federal Register/Vol. 69, No. 212**  
**Rules and Regulations**

Subpart F – Appeal Procedures

§171.52 Appeal of denial of access to, declassification of, amendment of, accounting of disclosures of, or challenge to classification of records.

- (a) *Right of administrative appeal.* Except for records that have been reviewed and withheld within the past two years or are the subject of litigation, any requester whose request for access to records, declassification of records, amendment of records, accounting of disclosure of records, or any authorized holder of classified information whose classification challenge has been denied, has a right to appeal the denial to the Department's Appeals Review Panel. This appeal right includes the right to appeal the determination by the Department that no records responsive to an access request exist in Department files. Privacy Act appeals may be made only by the individual to whom the records pertain.
- (b) *Form of appeal.* There is no required form for an appeal. However, it is essential that the appeal contain a clear statement of the decision or determination by the Department being appealed. When possible, the appeal should include argumentation and documentation to support the appeal and to contest the bases for denial cited by the Department. The appeal should be sent to: Chairman, Appeals Review Panel, c/o Appeals Officer, A/GIS/IPS/PP/LC, U.S. Department of State, SA-2, Room 8100, Washington, DC 20522-8100.
- (c) *Time limits.* The appeal should be received within 60 days of the date of receipt by the requester of the Department's denial. The time limit for response to an appeal begins to run on the day that the appeal is received. The time limit (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) for agency decision on an administrative appeal is 20 days under the FOIA (which may be extended for up to an additional 10 days in unusual circumstances) and 30 days under the Privacy Act (which the Panel may extend an additional 30 days for good cause shown). The Panel shall decide mandatory declassification review appeals as promptly as possible.
- (d) *Notification to appellant.* The Chairman of the Appeals Review Panel shall notify the appellant in writing of the Panel's decision on the appeal. When the decision is to uphold the denial, the Chairman shall include in his notification the reasons therefore. The appellant shall be advised that the decision of the Panel represents the final decision of the Department and of the right to seek judicial review of the Panel's decision, when applicable. In mandatory declassification review appeals, the Panel shall advise the requester of the right to appeal the decision to the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel under §3.5(d) of E.O. 12958.

## The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

### FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Withholding specifically authorized under an Executive Order in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, and properly classified. E.O. 12958, as amended, includes the following classification categories:
  - 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
  - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
  - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
  - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
  - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
  - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
  - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
  - 1.4(h) Information on weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
  - ARMEX Arms Export Control Act, 22 USC 2778(e)
  - CIA Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
  - EXPORT Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 App. USC 2411(c)(1)
  - FSA Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4003 & 4004
  - INA Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f)
  - IRAN Iran Claims Settlement Act, Sec 505, 50 USC 1701, note
- (b)(4) Privileged/confidential trade secrets, commercial or financial information from a person
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
- (b)(7) Information compiled for law enforcement purposes that would:
  - (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
  - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
  - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
  - (D) disclose confidential sources
  - (E) disclose investigation techniques
  - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

### Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request, excised with the agreement of the requester

# THAILAND

## SELF STUDY GUIDE



### **NATIONAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS TRAINING CENTER**

School of Professional and Area Studies  
Foreign Service Institute

The **Self-Study Guide: Thailand** provides U.S. government U.S. Department of State personnel in the foreign affairs community with an overview of important Thai issues related to geography, history, culture, social issues, economics, politics, and foreign affairs. The guide is introductory - a self-study resource. Thai affairs are complex, and the reader is encouraged to explore issues raised in the guide by referring to the books, articles, periodicals, and Internet sites listed in the appropriate sections.

The first edition of the **Self-Study Guide: Thailand** was prepared in June 2001 by Dr. Clark D. Neher, Professor of Political Science and Associate of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University. The second edition includes updated information provided by David E. Jensen, Coordinator for Southeast Asia Studies at the Foreign Service Institute of the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. The views expressed in this guide are those of the authors and attributable sources and do not necessarily reflect official policy of the U.S. Department of State or the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

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## *Geography and Population*

Thailand is situated in the center of mainland Southeast Asia, surrounded by the countries of Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. It is one of the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), including Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Brunei. Along with the people of the other mainland nations, the Thais are predominantly Buddhist.

### **Geographic Features**

A prominent geographic feature of Thailand is the rivers that flow north to south. Most emanate from China's mountains and empty into the Gulf of Siam. The largest of these is the *Mekong* River, which forms part of Thailand's border with Laos before cutting through Cambodia on its way to the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam. Another important river is the *Chao Phraya*, which served as the primary route of southern Chinese migration to Thailand.

Thailand's other major geographical feature is the northern mountain chain, home to many "hill tribe" groups. These people are isolated from the majority Thais and keep their own practices, rituals, and language. They engage in *swidden* agriculture, moving to new fields every few years while allowing the old fields to regenerate. As farmers move to new areas to plant crops, they burn the area to clear it. This method of agriculture is sometimes known as "slash-and-burn," and is viewed as a primary cause of deforestation.

### **Thai People**

The Thais who migrated down the rivers to settle on the plains practiced wet-rice agriculture. Canals were constructed along the banks for irrigation. Rice has remained the staple food of Thailand ever since. Indeed, the verb "to eat" in the Thai language is literally "to eat rice." Thailand's agricultural industry has diversified somewhat in recent decades, although rice remains its primary export.

Thailand has a relatively homogenous population – about 95 percent of the country's 65 million people are Buddhist and more than 85 percent speak a dialect of Thai and share a common culture. However, the population is ethnically diverse due to the arbitrary borders drawn by Western colonial powers. For example, many Shan and Karen people live in the mountainous areas of northern Thailand, though the bulk of these peoples are found in Burma. Similarly, Lao, Hmong, and other ethnic groups that originate in Laos also inhabit northeast Thailand, and some speak dialects that would not be understood in the rest of Thailand. Malay-speaking Muslims, most of whom reside in the southernmost provinces bordering Malaysia, comprise another significant minority group with about 2-3 percent of the total population.

The ethnic Chinese are also an important minority group in Thailand. Although they are now mostly wealthy urbanites, the first Chinese immigrants in Thailand were brought by Western

powers to provide labor in the tin mines and rubber estates. Today the Chinese own large corporations, banks, and lending agencies. Although they only constitute about 10-12 percent of Thailand's total population, they enjoy disproportionate economic influence. Unlike in many other Southeast Asian nations, however, the ethnic Chinese minority has experienced relatively little difficulty assimilating into mainstream society in Thailand.

Notwithstanding increasing urbanization, Thailand remains a predominantly rural society. Almost 70 percent of the population still lives outside of urban areas. Bangkok, with over 10 million people or about one-sixth of the total population, is Thailand's only metropolitan area. It is the country's political, cultural, and economic capital. The city suffers from crowded slums, environmental pollution, and an inadequate infrastructure. In the past several years, new expressways, a "sky train", and a subway have been built to help reduce traffic.

Thailand is divided into four major zones: North, Northeast, Central, and South. The Central region consists of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority. The city remains the focus of urban migration, as per capita income there is about three and seven times greater than the Central (outside Bangkok) and Northeast regions, respectively. The Central region contains the most productive farms and abundant land. A massive, semi-arid plateau can be found in the Northeast, home to about 20 million Thais. The North, with a population of about 12 million, is the most mountainous region and is where numerous hill tribe people reside. Finally, the South includes about nine million persons and has rubber plantations, tin mines, and rice fields.

Thailand's agriculture had made large strides over the last three decades. Green revolution technology has been adopted, and multiple cropping has become the norm. Most farmers now use machinery instead of water buffalo. Sophisticated canal systems provide irrigation and miracle rice is standard. Much of the land is now planted with alternative crops. Nevertheless, poverty is still prevalent among the rural peoples, and the gap between the rural poor and the urban wealthy has grown over the last thirty years.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What are the principal geographic elements in Thailand that have affected its history and culture?
2. Is Thailand essentially homogeneous or heterogeneous? How so?
3. Has ethnic diversity in Thailand had a positive or negative impact on the stability of the nation?

### *Suggested Readings*

1. Robbins Burling, *Hill Tribes and Padi Fields: Life in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965; reprinted in 1992 by the Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona).

2. Thomas R. Leinback and Richard Ulack, eds., *Southeast Asia: Diversity and Development* (Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2000). (See Thailand chapter).
3. Robert L. Pendleton, *Thailand: Aspects of Landscape and Life* (New York, 1962).
4. Frank J. Moore, *Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, revised edition (New Haven, 1974).
5. Charles Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Duang Kamol, Bangkok, 1989).
6. Michael Moerman, *Agricultural Change and Peasant Choice in a Thai Village* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968).

## *History*

### **The Original Thai People**

The Thai people are a synthesis of a wide array of cultures from within Southeast Asia and from areas outside the region, China and India in particular. The traditional belief has been that the Thais were pushed from the Nanchao kingdom in southern China's Yunnan Province southward into the river valleys of mainland Southeast Asia around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is now thought that a large group of Thais lived in the valleys for many centuries prior to the southward migrations. The weakening of the neighboring Burmese and Khmer (ancient Cambodian) civilizations allowed Thai ancestors to expand and consolidate their holdings. By 1300, branches of the Thai racial group, which included the Shans, Laotians, and Siamese, controlled the major valleys of a large portion of the Southeast Asian mainland.

### **The Sukhothai Kingdom**

The Thais rose in the wake of the collapsing Khmer Empire, which for four centuries had been a civilization of great splendor and brilliance based at Angkor. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Thais built the capital of Sukhothai in an outlying province of the Khmer. There, they established a monarchy headed by paternalistic kings. The Kingdom was ethnically diverse and less unified than subsequent ones. The Sukhothai era lasted from about 1238 to 1350.

### **The Ayuthaya Kingdom**

The paternalistic character of the Sukhothai kings contrasts with the more absolutist rule of the monarchy that developed in Ayuthaya. Located several hundred miles south of Sukhothai, Ayuthaya was the area to which the Thais fled when the Burmese and Khmer overwhelmed their capital. In 1350 a new king, Rama Thibodi I, established a capital at Ayuthaya that continued for the next 400 years. The autocratic Ayuthayan monarchs, similar to the Khmer kings, were less accessible to their subjects, and considered "lords of the universe."

In Ayuthaya, every Thai person was organized hierarchically by means of *sakdi na*, a system which ranked individuals based on the size of their land holdings. All interactions were determined by status differentiation.

### **Bangkok and the Rise of the Chakri Dynasty**

In April 1767, Ayuthaya fell to the Burmese. Thousands of Thais were slain or captured and the royal family and nobility were disbanded. A new ruler, King Taksin, the first king not an heir to the royal family, was crowned. The capital was first established at Thonburi and then moved in 1782 to Bangkok, a small fishing village on the Chao Phraya River fifty miles south of Ayuthaya. Taksin was succeeded by Rama I, the first of the Chakri kings, from whom the

present monarch descends. The kingdom rebuilt its devastated society and a long line of kings emerged under whose reign the modernization of Thailand occurred.

By means of judicious diplomatic skills and the adaptation of selected Western practices, the Kings coped with the demands of Western nations seeking commercial and imperial power. The most famous of these kings were Rama IV (Mongkut), and his son, Rama V (Chulalongkorn). Mongkut established a government outside the royal palace. Under his and his son's rule, Thailand underwent major political and societal transformations. Slavery and corvee labor were abolished, the principle of universal military conscription was established, and secular educational opportunities were expanded for persons of all classes. The kings' power was enhanced by these changes.

During the 1880s and 1890s, the entire bureaucracy was reformed to better meet the needs of the people. The society remained centralized, however, with most power emanating from the capital city. Following King Chulalongkorn's death, two weaker kings, Rama VI, or King Vachiravudh, and Rama VII, King Prachatiok, ascended to the throne. The latter was the reigning sovereign when the absolute monarchy was overthrown.

### **The 1932 Revolt**

The coup of 1932 occurred in response to the king's aggrandizement of power and his reluctance for further reform. The republican elite, angered at the King's royalist retrenchment that often blocked the promotions of the noble class, led the revolt under the leadership of Pridi Phanomyong, a civilian law professor, and Phibun Songkram, an army colonel. This group of some fifty persons formed the "People's Party," a loosely knit, poorly organized structure based more on personal relationships than on formal rules, party discipline, or common ideology.

King Prachatiok acquiesced to the demands of the coup leaders to save the monarchy. In March 1935, Prachatiok abdicated the throne in favor of his nephew and closest heir, Prince Ananda Mahidon, who was studying in Switzerland. A new elite class from the bureaucracy and the military now held power, headed initially by a retired jurist, Phraya Manopakorn. This was the first of many power successions engineered through coups rather than through heredity. However, the 1932 coup did not produce a social revolution; the masses remained deferential toward the government, and were little affected by the change in leadership.

### **The Rise of the Military**

By 1938 the military faction, led by Phibun, gained dominance. Phibun assumed the Prime Ministership. He was a partisan of Japanese fascism and his government collaborated with the Japanese during World War II. Because of Phibun's acquiescence during the Japanese occupation and his decision to join the Axis powers, Phibun was forced to resign at the war's conclusion. Pridi emerged as the next Prime Minister, though his rule suffered a grievous blow with the death of young King Ananda, in June, 1946 (His younger brother, Bhumipol Adunyadej became Rama IX). Although debate remains as to the cause of King Ananda's death, Pridi was

alleged to have played a role. A group of army officers then seized control, and Phibun resumed as Prime Minister. The “fascist dictator” of the 1940s had become the “leader of the bastion of democratic forces” in the 1950s. He was eventually overthrown by an army general, Sarit Thanarat, who led the country until his death in 1963. Sarit abolished the constitution, dissolved the Assembly, banned all political parties, jailed suspected leftists, and declared martial law. He became famous as an economic developer, focusing on the Northeast, his home base. Through ruthless governance, he cut through bureaucratic incompetence and pushed through favored development policies. After his death it was revealed that Sarit had amassed a huge personal fortune. Thus acclaim for Sarit’s accomplishments was modified by the revelation of his personal corruption.

General Thonon Kittikachorn, Sarit’s deputy, became his successor 1963. Kittikachorn was Thailand’s eleventh Prime Minister since the 1932 coup. He clung to power until 1973 when the student revolt occurred against military rule. Under his leadership, Thailand became a leader in Southeast Asian international affairs. Political parties were reintroduced, and Thailand’s economic development underwent high rates of growth. However, Kittikachorn’s rule did not alter the bureaucratic-elitist system of government.

### **The Democratic Interregnum**

On October 14, 1973, Thais overthrew the top leadership. King Bhumipol Adunyadej appointed a civilian government. The major underlying causes of discontent included the political and economic mismanagement by the military, factionalism within the ruling administration, and the rise of an organized and aroused student population, supported by the citizenry and the King. The Thanom government was unable to cope with natural disasters including drought, unbalanced trade agreements (particularly with Japan), and unruliness of students. A violent crackdown by the military exacerbated the situation. In an unprecedented move, King Bhumipol intervened. He exiled the military rulers, appointed a civilian Prime Minister, and established a National Convention to write a new constitution.

The democratic period lasted only three years. During this period, the Thai economy slumped, American influence declined as American military bases in Thailand were closed, oil prices rose, high inflation weakened consumer demand, and labor strikes paralyzed industries. Students were the primary forces behind daily massive demonstrations. New civilian Prime Ministers, brothers Seni and Kukrit Pramoj, could not counter the opposition. Of further concern were the 1975 Communist takeovers of neighboring Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The citizenry applauded the student-led revolt for bringing civilian-led government to power. Many Thais believed that democracy and progress would replace dictatorship and stagnation. However, the euphoria was short-lived. Their movement fragmented as leaders clashed over tactics, strategy, and ideology. A major rift developed between university and vocational students, with the latter becoming active in ultra right-wing organizations.

## **The Return of the Military**

At the same time, the military was reconsolidating to prepare for a return to power. The general population grew restive at the civilian government's inability to meet the new expectations of the citizenry. In October 1976, the military overthrew the democratic government again. It proclaimed martial law and abrogated the constitution. Thais were relieved that the era of "chaos" had drawn to an end, and that the administration would once again provide structure and discipline. Admiral Sangad Chalayu led the new military government, and established an Administrative Reform Council that included the leading military leaders. He appointed a civilian, Thanin Kraivichien, as Prime Minister. Thanin was a Supreme Court justice and close confidant of the King. The military chose Thanin because he lacked a political base and was perceived as being easily manipulated. Thanin proved to be less pliable than the military had expected. He moved forcefully in his suppression of suspected dissidents. His foreign policy was based on an anti-communist ideology that precluded improved relations with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Thanin's policies proved too rigid for the military. After months of unsuccessful attempts to moderate his views, military leaders in October 1977 executed another coup. General Kriangsak Chamanond became the new Prime Minister, and led the country until 1980 when General Prem Tinsulanond succeeded him.

The 1976 coup actually strengthened Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) fortunes, despite the doctrinaire anti-Communist policies of the Thanin administration. This crackdown sent the Communists into the jungles and mountains to join the insurgents. An estimated 4,000 students, intellectuals, politicians, labor leaders, and political activists joined this insurgency, swelling its ranks to around 12,000.

## **The Transition to Civilian Democracy**

Under General Prem's leadership, the military remained an important government institution. During this period, however, the country was transformed into a more democratic society. Prem appointed several civilian technocrats to his cabinet and relied on the freely elected legislature for support of his programs. Despite two coup attempts, Prem remained in power from 1980 until his voluntary resignation in 1988. His long tenure was a transitional period from military to civilian rule.

The clearest sign of democratization was Chatichai Choonhavan's rise to power in 1988. Chatichai became the first elected Member of Parliament to become Prime Minister since 1976. The smooth transition from Prem to Chatichai reflected the new optimism about Thailand's evolution toward democracy.

The military coup in February 1991 was a shocking assault on this notion. In retrospect, it is clear that democratization had not ended the factionalism that has long been a part of Thai politics. A source of discontent among coalition parties was that most of the popularity of the administration had been focused solely on Chatichai. Furthermore, corruption remained an

important part of the political process. The phenomenal economic growth rates of the 1980s brought large capital inflows, which became the targets of corrupt public officials. The military's stated motivation for the coup was the pervasive corruption of the kingdom's politicians.

On February 23, 1991, Supreme Commander Sundhara Kongsompong and Army Commander in Chief Suchinda Kraprayoon abrogated the constitution, dismissed the elected government, and set up the temporary National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) with powers of martial law. The coup was met with initial acquiescence. The NPKC established an interim constitution and named Anand Panyarachun, a distinguished civilian, as Prime Minister. Anand's appointment was universally praised, reflecting his impeccable reputation as a diplomat, administrator, and businessman. Anand ruled independently of the military and blocked its requests for more arms. He passed an election law and organized elections, which were held in March 1992.

Vote buying plagued the 1992 elections. To ensure that the military maintained its dominance, military-backed parties formed a joint campaign scheme to win a plurality of votes. The pro-military coalition nominated Narong Wongwan as the next Prime Minister. His credentials as a civilian, four-term elected Member of Parliament and former cabinet minister made him an attractive choice. However, the U.S. State Department confirmed that Narong had been denied a visa to the United States because of alleged involvement in drug trafficking. Following that realization, the military distanced itself from Narong, and supported General Suchinda as the new Prime Minister, despite his initial refusal to accept the position. When he was named, thousands of protesters demonstrated against Suchinda.

The conflict between Thailand's reverence for tradition and its plunge into modernity was the key factor in the events that drove Suchinda from office after only a forty-eight day reign. He bet that the military would prevail, and he underestimated the power of the ideal of democracy among the country's increasingly educated and sophisticated citizens. Suchinda did not understand that the days were long gone when the military could dominate every aspect of Thai politics. Thais were embarrassed that their country had suffered another coup just as much of the rest of the world was moving toward more open regimes. He misunderstood the reaction he would generate by approving a violent response to the anti-Suchinda demonstrations. When the crisis of May 1992 reached a stage of potential civil war, King Bhumiphol stepped in, and his extraordinary intervention forced the resignation of Suchinda and placed the immense prestige of the monarch on the side of democratic rule.

The establishment of a civilian administration was more difficult than the removal of Suchinda. In a second intervention, the King approved the return of Anand Panyarachun as Prime Minister. Most Thais greeted this appointment with enthusiasm. Once again, he made courageous and effective decisions that moved the kingdom closer to full democracy. In September 1992, another election was held and this time the civilian parties won a plurality under the leadership of Chuan Leekpai, the soft-spoken, moderate leader of the Democrat Party. He struck a balance between democratic rule and sensitivity to the traditional prerogatives of the military during his rule from September 1992 to May 1995. Chuan became at that time the



longest-serving elected civilian Prime Minister in Thai history, although this record has since been surpassed. His coalition fell apart as a result of differences among the ruling parties.

In the July 1995 election, the leader of the Chat Thai Party, Banharn Silapa-Archa, a billionaire businessman, emerged as the nation's new Prime Minister. Banharn's administration turned out to be ineffective, characterized by corruption, a lack of direction, personal dishonesty, and economic malaise. He was forced to call new elections in November 1996, which led to the emergence of a new ruling coalition with New Aspiration Party leader, Chavalit Yongchaiyut, as the next Prime Minister. Like Banharn, Chavalit was unpopular among Bangkok's elites and the leading newspapers. He was faced with two challenges – solving an economic crisis and drafting a new constitution.

In 1997, a currency crisis hit Thailand, and Chavalit was unable to resolve it. Chavalit resigned in November after holding office just 11 months. The country continued its economic turndown. The Thai baht lost half its value against the dollar, the stock market fell precipitously, and the International Monetary Fund was asked to help bail out the country with a loan of some \$17 billion. All these travails led to the reinstatement of Chuan as Prime Minister after he forged a new coalition of parties in the parliament.

The shock of the financial crisis created a widespread demand for change, especially in the political system which was perceived to have led to this disaster. A new constitution was approved in September 1997. Its principal aims were to restrict government corruption and to ensure a more transparent electoral process. Under the new constitution, Members of Parliament (MPs) must resign their parliamentary seats to take up cabinet posts, ministers are required to declare their financial assets before and after taking office, and the prime minister must be an elected MP. Candidates for the 200-member Senate (the upper house) must now be elected rather than appointed.

The new constitution calls for 500 members of the lower house, of whom 400 are to be directly elected in single-seat constituencies nationwide and the remaining 100 (called party-list MPs) are appointed to each political party in direct relationship to the proportion of votes they receive. Any party receiving less than 5 percent of the popular vote loses its right to any party-list MPs. Only MPs on the party list may be selected to join the cabinet.

Chuan led the country until 2001 when new elections led to an overwhelming victory for Thaksin Shinawatt, a billionaire telecommunications mogul and leader of the Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai) party, who campaigned on a populist platform of economic growth and development. Thai Rak Thai won two seats short of an absolute majority in the lower house, and subsequently converted that into a majority of almost 300 out of the 500 seats by absorbing two other parties. Thaksin's Prime Ministership was in immediate jeopardy because of alleged corruption that threatened to force him from politics for a period of five years. However, the Constitutional Court, in an eight to seven vote, ruled that Thaksin could remain as Prime Minister. A majority of Thai citizens supported the decision.

Despite this shaky beginning, Thaksin progressively consolidated his hold on power and was able to complete a full four-year term as an elected Prime Minister for the first time in Thai history. His first term in office was not without controversy, however. Many criticized his Administration for using its powers to squelch dissent and weaken the institutions established in the 1997 Constitution to provide checks-and-balances on government authority. Others questioned some of the practices used in Thaksin's aggressive "war on drugs" in 2003, which resulted in the deaths of more than 2,000 people.

One of the most serious problems that emerged during Thaksin's first term was the resurgence of violence in the Muslim-dominated southernmost provinces, which had experienced sporadic, but relatively low-scale unrest for decades. More than 800 people were killed between January 2004 and mid-2005. The population in the affected region is largely of Malay origin and speaks a Malay-based dialect. It is still unclear who is causing the violence, but the Thai government blames Muslim separatists. The region is poor, unemployment is high, and there is a deep resentment of centralized rule from Buddhist-dominated Bangkok. The Thaksin government tried a variety of approaches, varying from more force to more negotiation to deal with the situation, but the violence has continued well into 2005.

Despite these problems, Thaksin's domestic popularity continued to grow through the end of 2004, aided by a growing economic recovery and strong support for his populist economic policies, the crackdown on drug dealers, and his quick response to a tragic tsunami storm in southern Thailand in December 2004. Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai party were re-elected in February 2005 with an even greater majority than in 2001, winning 377 out of the 500 lower house seats. His second administration took office in March 2005.

Military coups have served as the major means of succession in modern Thai political history. Despite managerial changes at the top levels, policy continuity has been a feature of this process. New leadership has been generally met with acceptance by the politically aware, as coups have rarely obstructed government processes or undermined nation, king, and religion – the principal underpinnings of the state. The May 1992 incident was a violent affair, perpetrated by a military bent on power. That violence changed the Thai citizenry's views on the acceptability of military rule and undermined Suchinda's legitimacy. The King's interventions were indicative of a system that had not yet established succession processes independent of the ceremonial head of government. The struggles between state officials and the military, and politicians and business elites, remain a centerpiece of Thai political activity. The battles for political will persist between this new Bangkok-centered middle class and the entrenched military. The Thais' capacity to cope with change by balancing tradition and modernity suggests that democratization will likely continue to establish deeper roots in the future.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What are the main external forces that have influenced Thai history? Are their effects more or less significant on Thailand's history than have been those of indigenous leaders and events?
2. How do Sukhothai and Ayuthaya differ in their impact on modern Thailand?
3. How did Thailand escape Western colonialism?
4. What are the prospects for Thailand continuing its progress toward civilian democratic governments?

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## *Culture*

### **Hierarchy**

Over the centuries, the Thais have developed particular patterns of interaction and a composite set of attitudes, beliefs, and values. These interactions and value patterns constitute the culture of Thai society. For example, scholars of Thai politics have long noted the importance of status and hierarchy in Thai relationships. When two persons interact, they automatically assess each other's status. Physical stance, language, and the gestures of a "status inferior" show deference, whereas those of the "status superior" show dominance and authority. This show of status has been socialized into the behavior of Thais since childhood, when they are taught to treat certain persons as superiors. Persons deemed of higher status have some combination of the following characteristics: greater age, wealth, education, prominent family background, professional occupation, and affiliation with the Buddhist priesthood.

Such emphasis on status has resulted in a vertically organized and integrated society. Relationships among equals occur, for example, in schools where classmates interact with their peers. However, relationships that are fostered for self-interested purposes, such as protection or services, take place between persons of different status.

### **Patron-Client Relationships**

Patron-client relationships, which are one type of hierarchical tie, integrate the entire society. Patron-client relationships are informal, two-person ties in which a person of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his or her resources and influence to provide benefits for a person of lower socio-economic status (client). Clients reciprocate by offering their patron deference, labor, or other services. Reciprocity assures that the relationship is not exploitative. If patrons make unreasonable demands upon or do not meet the needs of their clients, the latter may terminate the relationship. The flexibility of patron-client relationships keeps society from deteriorating into feudalistic practices.

Thailand's relatively few interest groups, weak political-party structure, and ineffective legislative bodies make it an ideal society for pervasive patron-client ties that substitute for more formal social institutions found in the West. These informal ties communicate information from the kingdom's leadership to the masses and, less effectively, from the masses to the leadership.

Groups of patron-client relationships also form among the political elite. He who rules in Thailand is dependent on the capacity of these groups to control the key positions of government. In recent Thai history, the configuration of groups within the military determines who rules. There is constant jockeying for position, and continual shifting of clients from one military patron to another. Once a particular faction prevails, there is a period of stability and consolidation as subordinates attempt to join the rulers. Patron-client ties act as an integrating mechanism by cutting across class and ethnic divides. Chinese businessmen, for example, are

integrated through their patron-client relationships with high-level bureaucratic and military leaders. Low-level civil servants have a stake in their ministry through patrons at higher levels.

Thailand is undergoing rapid changes in its political culture. As the society shifts from traditionalism to modernity, new values often conflict with those held by the older generation. The Thais' sense of identity and legitimacy toward the kingdom relates to the monarchy, the symbol of the Thai people. The traditional patron-client ties no longer can meet modern expectations and demands for a greater role in political processes. The democratic interregnum, from 1973 to 1976 is an example of the conflict.

## **Buddhism**

Buddhism is adhered to by about 95 percent of all Thais. Theravada Buddhism penetrated Thailand from India by way of Sri Lanka. Buddhism created a more egalitarian religious community and the religion was more easily assimilated to local cultures than was the previous hierarchical Hindu religion of the area.

Buddhism is not a God-oriented system of faith and worship. Beliefs such as the notion of a Supreme Being must not be taken on faith. Rather, all teachings must be evaluated in light of one's experience and reason. The Buddha points out the path on which to proceed, but all persons must tread the path themselves. The religion's most distinctive doctrine is karma, the notion of cause and effect. Good deeds will eventually benefit the doer of the deed, either in this life or in the next. Giving food to monks, refurbishing temples, leading the life of the middle path (moderation in thought and action), becoming a monk, and following the Buddhist precepts all are deeds that can make merit. The accumulated merit can help lead to a better existence, but the ultimate goal is nirvana, the complete cessation of suffering. To achieve nirvana, one must free himself from the cycle of karmic rebirth and live by the Four Noble Truths. The first Noble Truth holds that all existence involves suffering; the second teaches that suffering results from desire; the third teaches that suffering will cease when desire and greed cease; and the fourth indicates the Noble Eightfold Path that one should follow to bring suffering to an end. Buddhism emphasizes the need to withdraw from society to meditate and to protect the discipline that is necessary for achieving nirvana.

Some analysts explain the behavior of Thais in terms of their religious beliefs. For example, the Thai emphasis on superior-subordinate relationships is based on the Buddhist concepts of merit and karma. Deference to authority is explained by the Buddhist teaching that a person's lot in life is primarily a result of the virtue or immorality of his or her deeds in previous existences. People of high status are treated with respect because they are assumed to be good people who have accumulated great merit in past lives. These notions help explain the political passivity of Buddhists in Thailand and elsewhere. The Buddhist countries' low level of economic development is said to be rooted in a lack of greed and materialism, a belief fostered by the Buddhist idea that desire and greed cause suffering.

These explanations must be viewed cautiously. Buddhism is an important aspect of Thai culture, but Buddhists have different interpretations of their religion and display a wide range of motivations. Furthermore, deferential behavior was an operative force in Thailand before Buddhism was firmly established, though Buddhism may have strengthened it. Similarly, the Buddhists who build a temple may appear to be spiritually ascetic. However, Buddhist donors may view this as a way to guarantee a more comfortable life in their next existence instead of striving for self-perfection or the quenching of desire.

Buddhism contributes to the social fabric in a variety of ways. Buddhism provides a sense of national unity and identification that helps foster social stability and unity. Buddhism's inherent tolerance, flexibility, and lack of rigid dogma may have encouraged the spirit of compromise that is a hallmark of the politics of Buddhist nations, and the Buddhist emphasis on serenity and virtue mitigated the violence of rulers toward the ruled.

Modernization in Thailand has strained these traditional patterns. Urbanization and industrialization have upset the Buddhist ritual rhythms. Buddhism is becoming more worldly and practical. Traditionally, in Thailand the temples were the educational centers and the monks served as teachers. But in contemporary times, secular schools have been constructed and the monks seldom perform as teachers except in the most rural areas. Consumer capitalism has also made inroads, and the people are increasingly attracted to a variety of spirit cults.

### **The Family System**

Despite the patriarchal character of Thai families, women are not considered the "weaker sex." They are perceived as having high status in comparison to the women of China and India. Thai women have responsibilities for managing family budgets and influence on household decision-making. They are also becoming more active participants in the labor force. Although a woman is expected to be dutiful and obedient to her husband and his parents, this duty is not as important in Thailand as it is in China or India. Women cultivate the fields, interact with townspeople, own factories, maintain family stability, and discipline the younger generation. As the primary agents of family socialization, women are responsible for the education of the youth.

Thai families are becoming smaller. For centuries, Thai women averaged six births each. In the past two decades, however, family planning programs in Thailand have brought down the rate of population increase to about half what it was just two decades ago. Discussions about "the condom" have become acceptable in a society known for decorum regarding sexual matters.

### **Sex**

There is a sexual double standard in Thailand. Premarital sex is generally deplored, but this rule is applied more strictly to girls than to boys. Among higher-status and upwardly mobile families, girls who are thought to have had sexual relations before marriage are often ostracized.

A major blot on the reputation of Thailand is the easy availability of prostitutes. Thailand has developed a negative reputation for “commercial sex services” and “sex tourism.” It is difficult to explain this paradox of a large prostitution industry in the midst of a sexually conservative society that values female virginity. However, it must be remembered that only a small percentage of women engage in prostitution. Also, there is a double standard that promotes women’s virginity and faithfulness while condoning extramarital sex by men. The income from prostitution can be greater than that from other occupations, and many prostitutes send money to their families in the villages.

One result of prostitution has been a significant rise in HIV/AIDS infections in Thailand since the 1980s. The annual number of new HIV infections in Thailand reached a peak of about 143,000 in 1991. Alarmed Thai officials instituted an active campaign to increase public awareness of the disease and encourage the use of condoms as a preventive measure. As a result of these efforts, new HIV infections per year fell dramatically to about 16,000 in 2003. Nevertheless, the United Nations estimates that more than 50,000 Thais died of AIDS in 2003 and over 600,000 Thais (about 1.5 percent of the adult population) are currently living with HIV/AIDS. AIDS remains the leading cause of death among young adults in Thailand.

Many Thai men continued to patronize prostitutes even after the AIDS crisis began. However, in the past ten years a major behavior change has taken place. Thai men are no longer visiting prostitutes in such large numbers, because they fear catching AIDS and because their wives have made it clear that they will not sleep with husbands who continue going out. This change has helped bring the AIDS epidemic under greater control.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How will modernization affect traditional patron-client relations in Thailand?
2. How has Buddhism affected the cultural values of Thais?
3. How does Thai family planning affect the country’s future?
4. Thailand is viewed as patriarchal, meaning that men dominate most sectors of society. How does that affect progress and change in the kingdom?

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## *Economics*

### **Agriculture and Village Life**

The majority of Thais live in rural villages made up of some one to four hundred households. The family is the basic unit of social organization. Agriculture is the center of life and rice farming the main means of livelihood. Many farmers are poor while a minority of landowners are disproportionately well off. Droughts and floods can bring disaster to subsistence-level peasants and their small farms. Villagers are also vulnerable to powerful people such as urban and rural landlords, urban business people, moneylenders, and public officials.

Until recently, many Southeast Asian villagers were caught up in a vicious cycle of poverty. Machinery, pesticides, and fertilizer were not yet widespread. Debilitating diseases sapped the farmers' energy, labor-intensive farming methods resulted in low levels of productivity, and harsh weather conditions threatened the harvests. The lack of surplus crops kept farmers from earning capital, and the lack of capital precluded savings and investment. Birth control was not yet practiced. Arable land became less available as the population expanded, and family farms shrank as they were divided among the children.

Poverty also caused many villagers to be committed to the status quo and to traditional methods of farming. This conservative trait stemmed from a "safety first" principle. Subsistence farmers avoided economic disaster instead of taking risks to maximize their average yearly income. Instead of thinking like adventurous entrepreneurs, they typically preferred arrangements with social superiors that would enable them to survive times of bad harvests.

In the past several decades, the conservative and withdrawn nature of Thai peasants has changed. Since the 1960s, the "Green Revolution" has swept over much of the region as many farmers have adopted and adapted new technologies such as pesticides, fertilizer, and machines. The once traditional and subsistence-oriented farms have become part of a cash economy that has replaced the traditional barter economy. As a result, the richest farmers have increased their wealth while the poorest continue to struggle. The gap between the rural rich and poor has increased.

Thailand contains about 50,000 villages organized into some 5,000 "clusters" known as communes. Thai villages are led by headmen who are usually elected to the position by the villagers. They are "middlemen" between villagers and government officials. Village group activity is based on a web of loose, reciprocal relationships. Farmers who receive assistance are expected to help others in turn, though no formal record is kept of who worked for whom or for how long.

## **Economic Development**

During the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, Thailand sustained a seven percent rate of real annual economic growth (measured in gross domestic product or GDP), a pace equaled by only a few other developing nations. In the late 1980s, the growth rate averaged over 10 percent, higher than in any other country. Coincident with these high growth rates was an increase in the export sector, which in the late 1980s grew by about 24 percent each year. Foreign investment also grew at a rapid rate, with Japan, Taiwan, the United States, Hong Kong, and South Korea the leading investors. Manufacturing replaced agriculture as the largest share of total Thai GDP.

Although the majority of the Thai people are involved in the agricultural sphere of the economy, the number of those in rice farming is decreasing. Thai farmers have diversified into crops such as vegetables, fruits, maize, tapioca, coffee, flowers, sugar, rubber, and livestock. Although rural areas have not developed as rapidly as urban environments, the standard of living in the countryside has improved since the 1970s. Nevertheless, the urban bias of Thai economic development is clear from both the emphasis on manufacturing and the higher percentage of budget allocations centered on Bangkok.

The kingdom's economic successes have been based on its commitment to free-market, export-driven policies, and political stability. While *coups* have commonly occurred throughout contemporary Thai political history, these have not undermined the continuity of the policy process. Furthermore, Thailand's ethnic Chinese minority has been a vital component of the country's economic engine. This group has provided leadership in banking, export-import manufacturing, industrialization, monetary policy, foreign investment, and diversification.

Liberal regulations governing foreign direct investment resulted in large capital inflows from industrial nations. This has improved Thailand's access to foreign credit, technical assistance, and international trade relations. Thailand has become a favorite site for production plants owned by Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese firms. The government's decision to move toward an export-oriented industrialization strategy has been central to the kingdom's economic growth.

## **The Asian Economic Crisis**

Nearly three decades of sustained economic development came to an abrupt halt in mid-1997 after the Chavalit administration, faced with depleted foreign reserves, floated the baht on the international exchange market. Within weeks, the currency and stock market plunged, losing about 40 and 70 percent of their values respectively. The International Monetary Fund, along with the help of other Southeast Asian nations, provided a \$17 billion bailout package for the Thai economy.

The Southeast Asian financial crisis occurred for several reasons. These include: weak political leadership, lack of fiscal discipline, corruption, the influx of short-term capital, and

growing offshore debt. Borrowed funds were spent on risky ventures – such as real estate and other investments that offered meager returns. As the Japanese yen depreciated throughout the late 1990s, the baht, which was pegged to the U.S. dollar, became overvalued. As a result, Thai labor and exports became more expensive and therefore less competitive on the world market. Speculators then bet on the devaluation of the baht, borrowing baht at one price and selling the currency back at a devalued rate, thereby making tremendous profits.

One obstacle to solving the crisis fully is the poor state of Thailand's infrastructure. Bangkok's gridlock traffic, despite recent improvements, continues to hinder economic development. Electricity and telecommunications are also unreliable. A second problem is the depletion of Thailand's natural resources. The government lacks the ability to enforce recent legislation aimed at curbing illegal logging. Flooding and landslides, exacerbated by deforestation, have killed hundreds of people and devastated human habitats.

Third, the AIDS crisis also has undermined economic growth. Billions of dollars will need to be spent on care for these victims. Fourth, the number of college graduates in the "hard" sciences and technology is not sufficient to meet developmental needs. Thai universities graduate only one-third of those needed in engineering. Public sector salaries cannot compete with those paid by the private sector.

Positive economic growth resumed in 1999 after two years of decline. Prime Minister Chuan's government claimed the country's economic recovery was a result of its strict adherence to IMF guidelines. Critics argued, however, that the economy was still in jeopardy due to a weak baht, deflation, and non-performing loans. Foreign direct investment had slowed, family businesses disintegrated, and ordinary Thais bore the greatest burden of the crisis.

The Thaksin government took office in February 2001 with the intention of stimulating domestic demand and reducing Thailand's reliance on foreign trade and investment. Since then, the Thaksin administration has refined its economic message, embracing a "dual track" approach that combines domestic stimulus with Thailand's traditional promotion of open markets and foreign investment. Weak export demand held 2001 economic growth to about two percent. Beginning in 2002, domestic stimulus and export revival fueled a stronger performance, with real growth at over six percent in 2003 and 2004.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. Why have Thailand's economic growth rates surpassed those of most other developing nations?
2. How will Thailand change as the economy shifts from agriculture to manufacturing?
3. What were the principal reasons for the 1997 Asian economic crisis?

4. How optimistic or pessimistic are you about Thailand's capacity to overcome the Asian economic crisis and to reassert itself globally and economically?

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## *Politics*

### **Constitutions**

The Thai propensity for changing constitutions has been referred to as *faction constitutionalism* – meaning, each successive draft reflects, legitimates, and strengthens major shifts in factional dominance. Thai constitutions have not been considered the fundamental laws of the land, but rather, have functioned to facilitate the power of the ruling regime.

Since 1932, Thailand has had sixteen constitutions. Six of these were democratic, holding the executive accountable to the parliament. The remaining constitutions either balanced the near-complete power of the Prime Minister against the military's control over the upper house, or provided for neither an elected parliament nor multi-party participation.

Thailand's most democratic constitution was drafted in 1997. It was designed to combat corruption, improve human rights, decentralize governance, increase the accountability of the Senate or upper house through direct elections, separate the executive from the legislative branch (by requiring ministers to resign from the parliament), enhance the authority of the judiciary, and strengthen political parties. The new constitution also called for a neutral and autonomous National Electoral Commission.

In 2001, the Constitutional Court opened a corruption case against Prime Minister Thaksin. The National Counter Corruption Commission charged that Thaksin had concealed assets as a cabinet member in 1997 by transferring shares worth billions of baht to his family, servants and close friends. The Constitutional Court found him innocent, and Thaksin remained as Prime Minister.

### **Military**

Since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the Thai military has played the dominant role in Thai political history. It is the most organized institution in the kingdom, and its hierarchical structure is congruent with the nation's centralized political culture. Because Bangkok dominates every aspect of the country's political and economic life, the military has had only to control this one city in order to maintain its grasp over the entire kingdom. Army divisions that have jurisdiction over Bangkok can control those functions that are necessary for dominating society – defense, interior, and communications.

With Thailand no longer under threat from outside aggression, the military has moved more forcefully into the development arena. Communist insurgency, which had threatened Thailand in the 1960s and 1970s, had been quelled. This undermined the major rationale for military intervention in governmental affairs. Most scholars therefore suggest that the era of military coups has ended. The strengthened role of political parties and the parliament, plus a warming toward democratic civilian rule, also reduces the military's influence.

## **Bureaucracy**

For most of the contemporary era, Thailand has pursued a bureaucratic polity within the bureaucracy itself. The bureaucracy has been the bedrock of stability in a political system in which top leadership positions change unpredictably. Although coups may bring new factions into power, the bureaucracy maintains its conservative policy role. The formerly exclusive role of the bureaucracy has been widened in recent years by the new role of technocrats, who have attained important positions and brought a more rational mode to policymaking. The bureaucracy is no longer the only arena of politics, however. Extra-bureaucratic groups, including the parliament, political parties, and pressure groups, and the military, now play significant roles in determining public policy.

## **Parliament**

At one time, elections in Thailand were held only when the ruling group became convinced that it could reclaim victory. Today, elections provide more meaningful choices among candidates who represent alternative ideas. The bicameral Parliament, no longer the Prime Minister's rubber-stamp, engages in public debate over important issues. Today, both houses of the parliament are elected. In the past, the upper house or Senate was appointed and was comprised of military generals and protégés of the Prime Minister. The parliament includes a large number of Sino-Thai business executives, an indication that Thailand's ethnic Chinese minority is moving from the economic sector to involvement in politics as well.

## **Political Parties**

Thai political parties often center on individual personalities. The ruling Thai Rak Thai party is focused on the personality of Thaksin Shinawat. Without his leadership and money there would be no Thai Rak Thai. Nevertheless, there has been some institutionalizing of parties. The Democrats have been a party for over 50 years and have organizational structure down to the village level.

Most parties in Thailand are not truly ideological although they can be classified as liberal or conservative. Ideological positions are not paramount in campaigns because only a minority of voters makes choices based on issues. Parties continue to "buy votes" as well as "buy candidates" whom they believe can win elections. The Thai Rak Thai party bought dozens of candidates using funds from the vast fortune of the party's leader.

## **Monarchy**

Legally above politics, the Thai monarch is the nation's symbol. The monarch is the supreme patron who reigns over all, and is the leader and protector of the Buddhist religion. The prestige and veneration of the monarchy has grown since the coronation of King Bhumipol Adunyadej, who is the kingdom's longest reigning monarch, serving since 1946. In the 1980s the King became more involved in Thai politics, intervening against military *coup* attempts. The

King's most important intervention occurred during the 1992 crisis when he supported Anand Panyarachun to be interim Prime Minister.

The Thais' universal veneration for their monarch has raised concerns about a potential succession crisis. The King promoted his daughter Princess Sirindhorn to the rank of Maha Chakri (crown princess), thereby placing her in the line of succession along with her older brother, Crown Prince Vachiralongkorn. The crown prince has often been criticized for his lack of commitment and discipline, whereas the princess is admired for her dedication. Because the King is the symbol of all that is great in Thailand, a contentious succession could undo the present stability.

### **Democratization**

The history of politics in Thailand is largely a history of authoritarian rule. The strength of Thailand's semi-democracy is a function of the economic boom and the government's capacity to meet the needs of the citizenry. When basic needs are met, other non-democratic values become secondary. However, when a government is perceived as unable to meet citizens' needs, the values of security and stability take precedence. Hence, a severe downturn in the economy or an unexpected external threat to Thai sovereignty could undermine the evolution toward democracy.

Another threat to Thai democratization relates to monarchical succession. The Thais' veneration for their king is also directed more to his daughter than to the crown prince. Most observers expect that the Thais will likely acquiesce to the prince's ascension and simply ignore the monarchy, or tone down their attitude of veneration. In either case, the Thai monarchy will less likely be the kingdom's bedrock of stability and legitimacy.

Democracy thrives in a political culture supportive of its values. Modernization has brought high levels of education, literacy, free media, and travel – all of which have heightened Thais' awareness of democratic values. Traditionally, other values, such as security, development, deference, and economic stability, have taken precedence over citizen participation in governmental affairs. The status of democratization in Thailand is therefore tenuous.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What are the primary institutions that affect Thai politics?
2. Why has the military dominated Thai politics?
3. What are the prospects for democracy in Thailand?
4. Who are some of Thailand's most effective leaders since the 1932 revolt?

5. What problems must Thailand overcome to become a functioning democracy?

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## *Foreign Affairs*

Thailand's foreign relations underwent significant change following the end of the Cold War. Externally, Thailand no longer faced the communist threat of its neighbors. Internal considerations have also brought changes in Thai foreign policy-making. Thailand's economic development and the rise of business and other non-bureaucratic issues have had a particular influence. New advisors viewed international and domestic changes as an opportunity for Thailand to reassess its foreign policy. New foreign policy options included normalization of relations with China and Vietnam.

Thailand's foreign policy today includes strong support for ASEAN in the interest of regional stability. In recent years, Thailand has also taken an increasingly active role on the international stage. When East Timor gained independence from Indonesia, Thailand, for the first time in its history, contributed troops to the international peacekeeping effort. Thailand has recently contributed troops to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since World War II, Thailand and the United States have developed close relations, as reflected in several bilateral treaties, economic and security assistance programs, and joint involvement in United Nations multilateral activities and agreements. The principal bilateral arrangement is the 1966 Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations, which facilitates U.S. and Thai companies' economic cooperation. Thailand and the United States are also among the signatories of the 1954 Manila Pact of the former Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which stipulates that, in the event of armed attack in the treaty area (which includes Thailand), each member would "act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes". Although SEATO was dissolved in 1977, the Manila Pact remains in force and, together with the Thanat-Rusk communiqué of 1962, constitutes the basis of U.S. security commitments to Thailand. Thailand continues to be one of five U.S. security allies in Asia, along with Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea. In December 2003, Thailand was designated a Major Non-NATO Ally.

### Discussion Questions

1. Is Thailand relatively safe from external aggression?
2. In the long run, did the United States prevail in its war in Vietnam?

### *Suggested Readings*

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## Time Line for Thailand

1238	Sukhothai Kingdom.
1350	Ayuthayan Kingdom.
1764	Burmese invade and destroy Ayuthaya but are expelled.
1767-1782	Thai recover under military leader Taksin; the Thai kingdom is united first in Thonburi and later in Bangkok.
1782	Chakri dynasty begins.
1851	Coronation of modernizer King Mongkut (Rama IV).
1893	Fighting between French and Siamese forces; Bangkok blockaded. Laos becomes French protectorate.
1909	Siam relinquishes northern Malay states to Britain in exchange for an end to extraterritoriality and a loan for railroad construction.
1932	Bloodless coup by army officers; monarch henceforth largely a figurehead.
1939	Name of country changed from Siam to Thailand.
1941	Thailand sides with Japan in World War II.
1946	Thailand forced to return ill-gotten territory to neighbors.
1947 - 1973	Series of military coups d'etat; abrogations of constitutions; periodic elections; dominance of government by military.
1973	Popular revolt against military. King Bhumipol Adunyadej (Rama IX) sides with student rebels. Three years of civilian democracy.
1976	Military seizes power following violent demonstrations. 1975 Constitution annulled.
1979	Legislative elections; followed by thirteen years' transition to civilian democratic rule, mostly under General Prem Tinsulanond.

- 1991 Bloodless military coup temporarily ends transition to democracy; provisional civilian Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun appointed.
- 1992 Elections lead to Prime Ministership of General Suchinda. After 48 days he is ousted following large public demonstrations against him. Anand Panyarachun reassumes leadership. New elections lead to civilian democrat, Chuan Leekpai, as Prime Minister.
- 1995 New election leads to fall of Chuan and rise of Banharn Silapa-Archa and Chavalit as Prime Ministers. However, their rule is short because they could not manage the economy successfully.
- 1997 “Asian economic crisis” begins in Thailand with devaluation of the baht, the fall of the stock market, widespread unemployment, and an end to remarkably high economic growth rates. New Constitution adopted. Chuan Leekpai returns to the position of Prime Minister.
- 2001 Election provides Thai Rak Thai Party with absolute majority in parliament. Thaksin Shinawatt becomes Prime Minister. Constitutional Court meets to determine if Thaksin had engaged in corrupt activities while serving in a previous cabinet. He is acquitted of all charges and allowed to continue as Prime Minister.
- 2003 Thaksin launches controversial anti-drug campaign in which over 2,000 people are killed within three months.
- 2004 Long-simmering unrest in the Muslim-dominated provinces of southernmost Thailand erupts into violence. Several hundreds are killed in violence involving bombings and clashes between Thai security forces and armed militants.
- 2005 Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party are re-elected with an even larger majority in the Thai parliament.

# MAP



## READING RESOURCES

### 1. Periodicals

- A. Bangkok Post
- B. Bangkok Nation
- C. Asia Week
- D. Far Eastern Economic Review
- E. Internet Sites
  - 1. Thailand culture and information: [www.asean-coci.iit.net](http://www.asean-coci.iit.net)
  - 2. Thailand: The big picture: [www.nectec.or.th](http://www.nectec.or.th)
  - 3. Thaifind: [www.Thaifind.com](http://www.Thaifind.com)
  - 4. Asia Society: [www.asiasociety.com](http://www.asiasociety.com) (occasional in-depth articles on Thailand)
  - 5. Bank of Thailand: [www.bot.or.th](http://www.bot.or.th) (economic data)
  - 6. Thailand's Board of Investment: [www.boi.go.th](http://www.boi.go.th) (current economic data)
  - 7. Business Day: [www.bday.net](http://www.bday.net) (Thailand's daily news on business)
  - 8. Parliament of Thailand: [www.parliament.go.th](http://www.parliament.go.th) (current politics)
  - 9. Thai Government Organization: [www.au.ac.th/sunsite/thai\\_gov](http://www.au.ac.th/sunsite/thai_gov) (guide to independent public agencies and ministries)
  - 10. Thai Culture: [www.thaicultureinfo.iirt.net/culture\\_field](http://www.thaicultureinfo.iirt.net/culture_field) (Thai music, film, and literature)
  - 11. Thai History: [www.geocities.com/Heartland/5226/brfhis.html](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/5226/brfhis.html) (Brief history of Thailand)
  - 12. Thai History: [www.asia-discovery.com/thai\\_history.html](http://www.asia-discovery.com/thai_history.html) (General overview of Thailand's history and country facts)
  - 13. CIA Factbook: [www.usa.or.th/embassy/embindex.html](http://www.usa.or.th/embassy/embindex.html) (CIA facts about Thailand)
  - 14. Thai Embassy: [www.thaiembdc.org](http://www.thaiembdc.org)
  - 15. Thailand: The Big Picture: [www.nectec.or.th/](http://www.nectec.or.th/) (Everything about Thailand)
  - 16. Center for Southeast Asian Studies:  
<http://www.corn.cso.niu.edu/acad/cseas/index.html> (Many links to Thailand sites. Learn the Thai language at the SEASITE site. A wealth of information on Thailand)