

# SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/>

**View the table of contents for this issue:**

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2023/12/vol-12-supplementary-issue-of-southeast-asian-studies/>

**Subscriptions:** <https://englishkyoto-seas.org/mailling-list/>

**For permissions, please send an e-mail to:** english-editorial[at]cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp

# SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

---

Vol. 12, Supplementary Issue

December 2023

---

## CONTENTS

### Thailand at a Global Turning Point

Guest Editor: Hayami Yoko

Hayami Yoko	Foreword .....	( 3 )
Nathan Badenoch		
Suehiro Akira	State Modernization vs. Social Development: Two Directions in Thailand's Development .....	( 5 )
Saichol Sattayanurak	The Thai Middle Class and the Dynamics and Power of Conservative Ideology in Thai Society and Politics .....	( 43 )
Kasian Tejapira	Disguised Republic and Virtual Absolutism: Two Inherent Conflicting Tendencies in the Thai Constitutional Monarchy .....	(105)



## FOREWORD

We are honored and grateful to present to you this special issue. The three papers were originally keynote speeches given at the 14th International Conference on Thai Studies (ICTS14), which was held online from Kyoto University on April 29–May 1, 2022. ICTS is held every three years, alternating between conferences in Thailand and in other countries. So far, the latter has been mainly in English speaking countries such as the US, England, and Australia. It was a great opportunity to hold it in Japan this time, and we were looking forward to meeting scholars coming from Thailand and from different parts of the world. Unfortunately, due to COVID19, we delayed the schedule once, and then finally had to hold it online. Even so, there were 381 participants from 20 countries who joined us in the three-day conference.

We would like to thank the Japanese Society for Thai Studies for co-sponsoring the conference, and also Kyoto University and the Kajima Foundation for generously supporting the conference and the post-conference editing process. The Conference theme was “Thailand at a Global Turning Point.” Indeed, globally shared issues such as global warming and environmental degradation, soaring prices and growing disparities, unstable or failing democracies, transnational migration, and plural coexistence, these were some of the topics discussed during the sessions as they are poignant in Thailand too. We are truly grateful to the three distinguished scholars, Professor Suehiro Akira, Professor Saichol Sattayanurak, and Professor Kasian Tejapira for inspiring us with their respective speeches at the conference. Each gave a concerned interpretation of the current economic and socio-political condition in Thailand, from the perspective of an economist, historian, and political philosopher, respectively. Furthermore, they provided us with the manuscripts to be printed in this special edition of the journal *Southeast Asian Studies*.

We apologize for the delay in making this publication available, and are glad to be able to present this just as Thailand is entering a new era in its political leadership. Finally, we are grateful to the editorial staff for pulling through with this extra work.

Hayami Yoko, ICTS14 Conference Secretariat  
Nathan Badenoch, *SEAS* Editor-in-chief



# State Modernization vs. Social Development: Two Directions in Thailand's Development

Suehiro Akira\*

Following the currency crisis in 1997, Thailand has employed two different approaches to respond to external shocks to its economy. The first approach aims to construct a strong state that can effectively manage crises and seeks to become a high-income country through industrial upgrading. This approach was manifested in the Kingdom of Thailand Modernization Framework (KTMF) initiated by the Thaksin government. The second approach relies on more flexible social networks, favoring resilience rather than economic growth to ensure social development. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy proposed by King Bhumibol was representative of this approach.

Tending to avoid extreme thought and actions, Thais have preferred a middle path when pursuing development policies. This is visible in the balancing act between the Eastern Seaboard Projects (typical of Newly Industrializing Countries) and Kosit's rural development project (typical of Newly Agro-Industrializing Countries) in the early 1980s, and then again between the state strategy of Thailand 4.0 (2017–36) on the one hand, and the World Bank joint proposal for inclusive growth (2016) and the BCG Economy Model (2019), on the other. However, such Thai-style balancing policies have revealed their limitations in the face of structural problems, such as labor shortages due to the aging society and the lack of human resource development in the realm of digital innovation.

**Keywords:** Thai economic policy, state modernization, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy เศรษฐกิจพอเพียง, middle-income trap, Thailand 4.0, BCG (Bio-Circular-Green) Economy Model, external shocks, high-income country

## I Introduction

### I-1 *From a Developing to a Middle-Income Country*

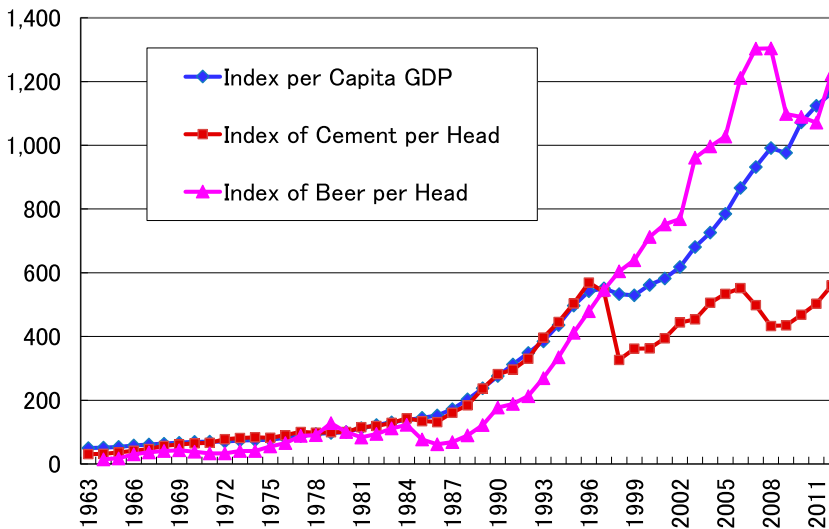
*“Thailand today is a very different country from Thailand a decade ago. The economic boom that began after 1985 has changed so much.”* (Pasuk and Baker 1996, 1)

---

\* 末廣 昭, Professor Emeritus, The University of Tokyo  
e-mail: asuehiro0830@gmail.com

In describing Thailand's unprecedented economic boom between 1987 and 1995, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker emphasize change. Indeed, as Fig. 1 clearly demonstrates, Thailand has undergone dramatic changes both during that period and since.<sup>1)</sup> It uses three indicators to demonstrate this: 1) per capita GDP as an indicator of economic growth in general, 2) cement production per head as an indicator of industrial infrastructure development, and 3) beer production ( $\approx$  consumption) per head as an indicator of improved living standards. It is interesting to note that beer production has consistently increased, even during the period of the Asian currency crisis (1997–2001). Apart from beer consumption for the sake of relief from stress, this suggests that the crisis did not disrupt people's lives as much as the dramatic decline of GDP growth rates would indicate (see also Fig. 3).

In tracing the trajectory of Thailand's socio-economic development for four decades (1958 to 1997), we may divide it into two major stages. The first stage is the era of a



**Fig. 1** Changes in per Capita GDP, Cement Production per Head, and Beer Production per Head, 1963–2012 (1980 = 100)

Sources: Arranged by Suehiro, based on Bank of Thailand, *Monthly Bulletin, Raingan setthakit raiduean*, and *Sathiti setthakit lae kanngoen* respectively for the years 1963–2012.

1) For more on the economic boom of the mid-1980s, see Pasuk and Baker (1996) and Suehiro (2009). In 1996, Thailand's Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) summed up the state of the economy this way:

“Thailand has achieved an exceptional record of economic development over the last 30 years, as witnessed by the rapid expansion of the national economy at an average rate of 7.8 percent per annum. The Kingdom's average per capita income reached 68,000 Baht in 1995, compared with only 2,100 Baht in 1961.” (Thailand, NESDB 1996, 1)

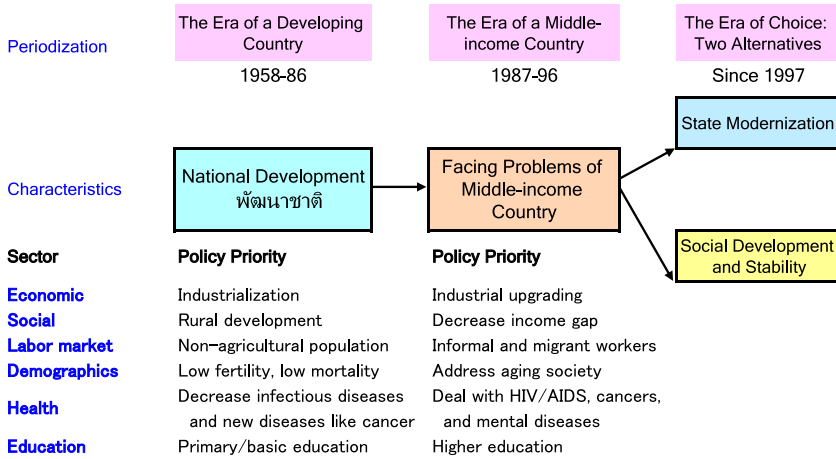


Fig. 2 Thailand’s Economy and Policy Priorities 1958–96

Source: Suehiro (2009, 26).

developing country with a set of national development (*phatthana chat*) policies that the Sarit government first put into motion in 1958 (Suehiro 1993, Chapter 1). With the start of economic boom in 1987, Thailand began to move into the next stage, the era of a middle-income country, and faced a variety of new problems. Fig. 2 compares the targets and the tasks for the Thai government in various sectors during these two different eras (Suehiro 2009; 2020).

During the National Development Era, the government set policy priorities in each sector as follows: import-substitution industrialization in the economic sector; rural development in the social sector; promotion of the non-agricultural labor force in the labor market; control of the population growth rate through family planning in the demographics “sector”; eradication of infectious diseases in the public health sector; and the extension of elementary and secondary education in the education sector. With these priorities, the government aimed to upgrade the economic status of Thailand from a lower-income country to a middle-income one.<sup>2)</sup>

By contrast, during the Middle-income Era, the government shifted policy targets to correspond to the progress of the developmental stage, thus prioritizing industrial upgrading in the economic sector; decreasing the income gap in the social sector;

2) According to calculations by Felipe *et al.* based on the purchasing power parity (PPP) in 1990, Thailand became a lower middle-income country in 1976, and further shifted to the status of an upper middle-income country in 2004 in accordance with the World Bank’s definition (Felipe *et al.* 2012, 51–53). According to the authors’ calculations based on the market price of per capita income, Thailand became an upper-middle income country in 1996 (Suehiro 2018, 72).



control of the informal labor force (*raeng-ngan nokrabop* แรงงานนอกระบบ) in the labor market; addressing the aging society in the demographics “sector”; responding to new diseases, such as cancers, diabetes, mental illnesses, and HIV-AIDS (Suehiro 2009, 123; 2014a, 200),<sup>3)</sup> in the health sector; and promoting and extending higher education to the masses.

### I-2 *Two Approaches to External Shocks*

However, Thailand reached a turning point in the aftermath of the Asian currency crisis of 1997, which revealed vulnerabilities in the country’s economy as well as society (Natenapha 2006; Suehiro 2008a). The question of how Thailand should respond to such external shocks has continued to attract practical concern ever since. Following the currency crisis, two general approaches have emerged. The first approach aims to 1) construct a strong state that can effectively manage crises and 2) enhance the competitiveness of the country within the global capitalist system. A representative person who employed this approach is the former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. He proposed the idea of a strong state under the Kingdom of Thailand Modernization Framework (or KTMF), in which the government aimed to achieve high-income country status through reforms in the political system and economic activity. The second approach responds to external shocks with more flexible social networks based on traditional values originating in Buddhism. Representative of this approach is the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (*pratyā setthakit phophiang* ปรัชญาเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง), proposed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and the idea of resilient society (*sangkhom khemkheng* สังคมเข้มแข็ง), proposed by Mo Prawase Wasi immediately after the currency crisis.<sup>4)</sup>

In brief, Thaksin’s approach promotes a modernization of the state and is characterized by the keywords of competitiveness and efficiency in both the private and public sectors. Thaksin’s approach also prioritizes development in the business sector over social sectors. By contrast, King Bhumibol’s approach promotes the development of society and is characterized by the keywords of harmony and security in both society and individual lives (see Fig. 5 in Section II-3). The King’s approach prioritizes social stability rather than economic growth.

The two different approaches are not unique to the period of the Thaksin government (2001–06). Both can be traced back to the first half of the 1980s, when Thailand was recovering from a long-term economic recession due to two oil crises (in 1973 and 1979). The Prem Tinsulanond government (1980–88) introduced industrial policies to

3) Cancers, diabetes, heart diseases, and high blood pressure are categorized as “lifestyle diseases” common in advanced countries.

4) For more on these ideas, see UNDP (2007), Prawase (1998; 1999), and Paiboon (2010).

promote heavy industries based on natural gas, which had been discovered in the Gulf of Thailand in 1973. The promotion of such heavy industries, in addition to export-oriented industries such as garments, was considered the most suitable policy for Thailand to overcome the long-term recession. This policy agenda was supported by the industrial promotion group within the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) as well as by neo-classical economists, led by Dr. Narongchai Akarasenee.<sup>5)</sup>

On the other hand, the economic recession in the early 1980s had seriously damaged the rural economy. Moreover, the promotion of heavy industries required a huge amount of foreign investment. To address these concerns, a group led by Kosit Panpiemras in the NESDB proposed a counter-balancing approach of rural development (*kan phatthana chonnabot* การพัฒนาชนบท), in which the government would strategically allocate budget to reduce rural poverty and to promote agro-industries that depended on domestic resources.<sup>6)</sup> By the mid-1980s, the former group had joined the Committee to Promote the Eastern Seaboard Projects set up in December 1980, while the latter participated in the National Committee for Rural Development (Ko.Cho.Cho. ก.ช.ช.) in 1981.

Looking at these two groups, it is possible to say that the former group promotes an industrialization typical of Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) and the latter group promotes a development typical of a Newly Agro-Industrializing Country, or NAIC (Suehiro and Yasuda 1987). The two approaches—of NIC- and NAIC-style development—overlapped during the 1980s (during the Prem government). From the author's observation, these two approaches seem to have been employed in a mutually complementary manner rather than a mutually exclusive one in the process of overcoming the long-term economic recession.

Table 1 compares the various iterations of the two approaches—of state modernization and social development—in responding to external shocks during each critical period since 1980. These include industrial upgrading (via the Eastern Seaboard Projects) vs. rural development (*a la* NAIC) in the 1980s; Thaksin's modernization vs. King Bhumibol's self-sufficiency in the first half of the 2000s; Thailand 4.0 proposed by Somkid's economic technocrat team vs. the inclusive growth approach proposed by the World Bank Group in 2016; and Thailand 4.0 vs. the BCG (Bio-Circular-Green) Economy Model under the Prayut Chan-o-cha government.

5) At the time, Dr. Narongchai (the former dean of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University) was a project advisor to the Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand (IFCT). He was also appointed Minister of Commerce for the Chavalit government (November 1996 to October 1997) and Minister of Energy for the first Prayut government (October 2014 to August 2015), and later served as a Senator.

6) For the rural development initiative in detail, see Shigetomi (2000). Kosit's ideas about national development are compiled in Kosit (1993).

Table 1 Two Approaches (1980 to today)

Chief Promoter	State Modernization in Pursuit of High-income Country Status	Chief Promoter	Social Development in Pursuit of Stability and Well-being
NESDB + IFCT Narongchai	Eastern Seaboard Projects (1980-) Promotion of heavy industries การยกกระดับอุตสาหกรรม	NESDB + Ko.Cho.Cho. Kosit	Alleviating rural poverty Rural development (1980-) การพัฒนาชนบท
Thaksin + Somkid, Savit	KTMF: Kingdom of Thailand Modernization Framework (2005) ระบบทุนนิยมทันสมัย Thailand Corporation (2001)	The King + NESDB Mo. Prawase, Paiboon	Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (1997) ปรัชญาเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง Resilient society (1998) สังคมเข้มแข็ง
Yingluck	Mega Projects of 2,000 Billion Baht (2012) 2 ล้านล้านบาทไปรวดเร็ว	NESDB	Creative Economy (2013) เศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์
Prayut + Somkid, Savit, Uttama, Sontirat, Kanit	Thailand 4.0 (2016) State Strategy, 2017-36 กรอบยุทธศาสตร์ชาติ ระยะ 20 ปี	World Bank + Thailand team	Inclusive Growth (2016) ลดความเหลื่อมล้ำทางสังคม Support for the poorest 40% of the population
Prayut + MOI, NESDB	Continuation of Thailand 4.0 New Mega Projects of 2,000 Billion Baht 2 ล้านล้านบาทไปรวดเร็ว	Savit + MHESI, NSTDA	BCG Economy Model (2019) Bio-Circular-Green เศรษฐกิจชีวภาพ-หมุนเวียน-สีเขียว

Source: Made by Suehiro on the basis of his field research conducted from 1979-2019.

It should be noted here that the governments of both Yingluck Shinawatra (Thaksin's youngest sister) and Prayut (who is principally anti-Thaksin in political stance) have followed Thaksin's approach of promoting state-sponsored mega projects in pursuit of high-income country status.<sup>7)</sup>

### I-3 *Structure of the Paper*

This paper presents three comparisons to illuminate the two different approaches during each critical period. Section II compares Thaksin's framework for modernization (the KTMF) with King Bhumibol's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy following the 1997 currency crisis. Section III compares two strategies to escaping the middle-income trap: 1) the productive, or innovation-driven, growth engine strategy of the Thailand 4.0 plan, and 2) the inclusive growth engine strategy submitted by the World Bank Group in 2016. Section IV compares Thailand 4.0 with the BCG Economy Model in the wake of the international pressures of COP 26 and the SDGs. Finally, Section V examines the limitations of the two different approaches given the changing circumstances and suggests the need to introduce a new agenda for the survival of Thailand in the future.

## II Thaksin's Modernization Framework (KTMF) vs. King Bhumibol's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

### II-1 *Thaksin's Economic Reforms and Thaksinomics*

Thaksin Shinawatra came to power in 2001 and was exiled from Thailand after the military coup d'état in September 2006. He has been attacked by mass media and anti-Thaksin groups for extreme power concentration, political nepotism, and corruption. However, very few scholars have focused on his ambitious reforms, which aimed to transform the Kingdom of Thailand from a traditional bureaucratic polity into a modern, strong state on a par with an emerging middle-income country within global capitalism (Suehiro 2014b, 299).<sup>8)</sup>

By the time Thaksin won the general election in January 2001, Thailand's economy had begun to show signs of restoration from the economic recession caused by the currency crisis. As Fig. 3 indicates, the annual growth rate, which dropped from 5.8% in 1996 to -10.5% in 1998, had recovered to the level of 4.4% in 1999. Nevertheless,

7) In 2012, the Yingluck government announced mega projects with a total investment value of 2,000 billion Baht. In 2018, the Prayut government introduced similar types of mega projects for the period of 2019–25 with an investment value of the same amount.

8) Thaksin's idea of state reform came from his business experience in information and communication technology industries. For more on Thaksin's background as a business tycoon, see Sorakon (1993), Suehiro (1995), and Pasuk and Baker (2004, Chapter 2).

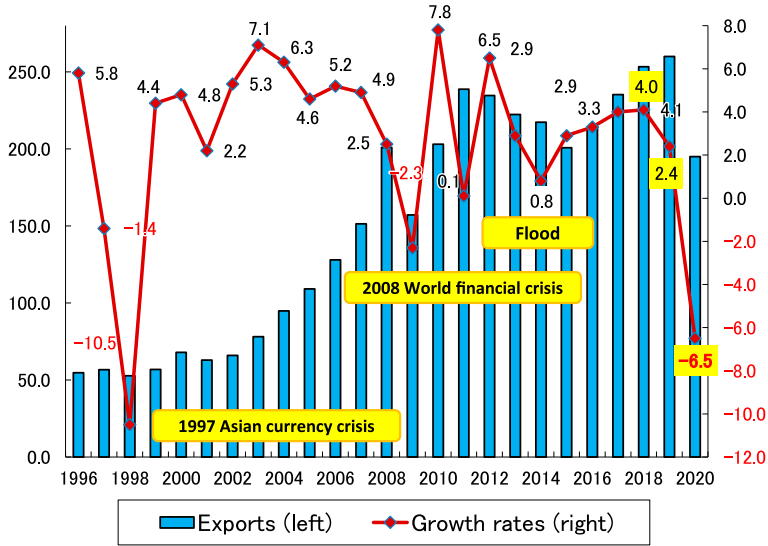


Fig. 3 Overview of Thailand Economy, 1996–2020 (USD Billion, %)

Sources: Compiled by Suehiro based on economic data compiled by the Bank of Thailand and the Asian Development Bank.

Note: The scale of exports is shown on the left-hand side (in Billion USD) and growth rates on the right-hand side (%).

under the strict control of the IMF and the World Bank on fiscal expenditures, there were still no signs of strong recovery. The NESDB therefore decided to set target growth rates at 4.0% to 5.0% during the period of the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002–06).<sup>9)</sup> However, growth rates under the Thaksin government exceeded the NESDB targets, reaching 5.3% in 2002, 7.1% in 2003, and 6.3% in 2004 respectively (Suehiro 2009, 160; 2014b, 306).

What were the major elements contributing to such economic performance under Thaksin’s premiership? One possible answer to this question is his unique combination of promoting a grassroots economy in rural areas with favorable treatment of investments by big firms in urban areas, or the so-called dual-track policy (*nayobai khwaḗpkhu* นโยบายนโยบายคู่). The promotion of a grassroots economy included provision of village funds, credit supply through people’s banks, a debt moratorium for rural people, the one *tambon* one product, or OTOP, scheme, and 30-Baht universal medical services (Thailand, NESDB 2005; Suehiro 2009, 159–167). On the other hand, favorable treatment of big firms included mobilization of foreign capital through reform of the stock market, invest-

9) Compared to the relatively low-level targets in the Ninth Plan, the NESDB had set an average annual growth rate target of 8.2% in the Seventh Plan (1992–96).

ment promotion through the National Competitiveness Plan, and securitization of state-owned-assets. Together, all these policies and reforms were called Thaksinomics.<sup>10</sup>

Several scholars have noted that Thaksin's political style adheres to the concept of a future Thai leadership (*khvam pen phunam* ความเป็นผู้หน้า) proposed by Somkid Jatusripitak, who headed the economic policy team of Thaksin's political party Thai Rak Thai.<sup>11</sup> Somkid was appointed Deputy Prime Minister fully responsible for economic matters when Thaksin organized his Cabinet.

Thaksin also frequently and publicly expressed his idea that "a state is a company, and a prime minister is the CEO of the country" (Pran 2004, 223–233; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 101). This implies that the prime minister, like a CEO, is fully responsible for both the ultimate decisions in implementing company (or in this case, country) strategy and high-level personnel management. Furthermore, Thaksin ordered all government agencies and officers to report their missions, goals, and performance every three months (under the "principle of three months") in the same way that board members of a private company must submit a quarterly financial report on their performance to all the shareholders (Suehiro 2008b, 241).

Thaksin's principal concern was to ensure Thailand's competitiveness within the new wave of globalization. With this aim, he asked Michael Porter, a renowned professor of the Harvard Business School, to advise (in the capacity of special advisor to the prime minister) on a National Competitiveness Plan that would refer to the concepts of the American business school.<sup>12</sup> Thaksin's priority to enhance Thailand's competitiveness in the world market came, however, at the expense of national defense budget allocations.

From Thaksin's point of view, arms competition seemed to be an old-fashioned product of the Cold War and he therefore had little interest in adding to the national defense coffers.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as the Fig. 4 demonstrates, total budget allocations for national defense hardly increased during Thaksin's tenure in spite of the fact that the total government budget increased from 860 billion Baht in 2000 to 1,250 billion Baht in 2005.

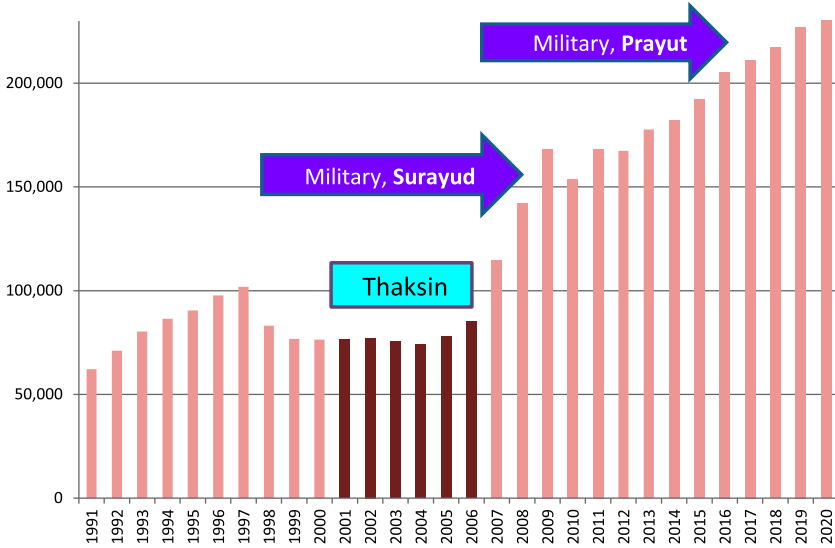
---

10) For the background and outcomes of Thaksin's reforms and Thaksinomics, see Pasuk and Baker (2004), Thailand, NESDB (2005), Rangsana (2005), Oizumi (2008), and Suehiro (2008b; 2009; 2014b).

11) Somkid's idea of "Thailand Inc." and his image of Thai leadership (as a global player) are compiled in Somkid (2001, 71–97). Thaksin's political style is described well in Pasuk and Baker (2004, Chapter 4), McCargo and Ukrist (2005), and Rangsana (2005).

12) Porter's ideas on Thailand's competitiveness are compiled in his proposal for the Thai government. See Porter (2003).

13) However, Thaksin did directly intervene in the personnel management of top-ranking persons in the military circle. For instance, under his special consideration, Thaksin's nephew Uthai Shinawatra was promoted to the Deputy Permanent Secretary of Defense in October 2002, and Chaiyasit, Uthai's younger brother, was promoted to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in October 2003; these promotions neglected the normal order of promotion in the Army (Suehiro 2009, 157–158).



**Fig. 4** The National Defense Budget and the Thaksin Government, 1991–2020 (Million Baht)  
 Sources: Made by Suehiro based on Thailand, Bureau of the Budget, *Thailand’s Budget in Brief*, various issues.

As a result, the percentage of national defense allocations against total budgets significantly declined from 16.0% in 1991 to 8.9% in 2000 and 6.2% in 2005 (Suehiro 2008b, 262–263). Naturally, such a policy caused strong dissatisfaction among the military group.

*II-2 Thaksin’s Political Reforms and Modernization Framework*

As mentioned earlier, Thaksin employed a dual-track economic policy. While his promotion of a grassroots economy contributed to his rising popularity, populist-oriented policies and projects were only one aspect of his overall approach. Moreover, especially following February 2005, when his Thai Rak Thai Party won 377 out of a total of 500 seats in the House of Representatives in the general election, Thaksin prioritized the second track of his approach: the promotion of big business groups in urban areas.

Thus began the second stage of Thaksin’s state reforms (in 2005). First, he launched an ambitious plan to reorganize Thailand as a modernized state suited to the economic status of a middle-income country. In his eyes, Thailand’s political regime, bureaucracy, and public services were outdated (*lasamai* ส้าสมัย) and such old-fashioned ways and institutions would isolate Thailand from global capitalism. According to his thinking, an economically advanced country must reform its institutions, practices, and social values in line with the new circumstances, just as a modern corporation needs to reform its management to keep up with the times (Suehiro 2014b, 301–302).

Thaksin's Kingdom of Thailand Modernization Framework (KTMF) was precisely a product of his strategy to ensure Thailand's survival within global capitalism and he often employed key words such as Knowledge, Technology, Management, and Finance when explaining the essence of the KTMF. Thaksin presented the KTMF to over 1,000 foreign and domestic investors at the prime minister's residence in December 2005,<sup>14</sup> where he provided an outline of mega projects amounting to 1,800 billion Baht (45 billion US dollars).

The KTMF planned to allocate investments for the following sectors: energy projects (23.6% of the total), transportation (18.4%), mass transport, including a subway and the BTS Skytrain in Bangkok (16.9%), housing (13.8%), water resources (11.7%), education (5.7%), and public health (5.6%). So far as investment funds were concerned, the government estimated that it could source 628 billion Baht (or 36.9%) from borrowings, 247 billion Baht (14.5%) from state enterprise revenues, 172 billion Baht (10.1%) from securitization of state-owned assets, and the remainder (38.5%) from private firms investments (Suehiro 2008b, 258–259).

Thaksin recognized two major obstacles in promoting the KTMF: (i) the ineffective services of the public sector due to the rigidity of the traditional bureaucracy, and (ii) the existing budget system, which was under the strict control of line ministries. For these reasons, Thaksin accelerated reform of the public sector under the auspices of the Public Sector Development Commission (PSDC), which had been established in October 2002. At the same time, he launched a radical reform of the budget system based on the concept of Strategic Performance Based Budget System (SPBBS), replacing the former Planning Programming Budget System (PPBS), which was based on line minister requests (Suehiro 2008b, 255–273; 2014b, 324–334).

The naming of the KTMF (which used the *Kingdom* of Thailand rather than simply Thailand) seemed to imply that the final target of the reform process would be the political regime, although Thaksin had no intention of eventually changing the existing regime of democracy with the King as the head of the state (*kan pokkhrong rabop prachathipatai an-mi phramahakasat songpen pramuk* การปกครองระบอบประชาธิปไตย อันมีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุข). Aside from his cautious political stance, Thaksin did frequently demonstrate behavior that mirrored King Bhumibol, such as giving his mercy to common people. Such activity inevitably made it seem that Thaksin would challenge the King as another father of the country, which in turn resulted in the movement to kick him out of the political arena (McCargo 2009; Puangchon 2020). In the long run, Thaksin's activity, including power concentration, state reforms, and challenging traditional values, resulted in a

14) The original draft of the KTMF was formulated by the Ministry of Finance, and it was approved at the mobile Cabinet meeting in Phayao Prefecture (northern Thailand) on June 14, 2005 (Suehiro 2008b, 259).



military coup d'état led by Army Commander-in-Chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin in September 2006. However, the political leaders that followed Thaksin did not abandon his ideas. Indeed, his plan to invite foreign capital to invest in mega projects was reproduced by the Yingluck, Abhisith Vejajiva, and Prayut governments.

### II-3 *King Bhumibol's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP)*

Thaksin's modernization reforms and dual-track economic policy were a response to the external shock of the economic recession caused by the Asian currency crisis of 1997. Another response to the same external shock emerged in the immediate aftermath of the currency crisis. This was King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, or *setthakit phophiang* (เศรษฐกิจพอเพียง), which he introduced in the annual address given on the day before his birthday that was given at Dusit Palace December 4, 1997 and broadcast to a nationwide television audience. In his speech, the King proposes new priorities:

Recently, so many projects have been implemented, so many factories have been built, that it was thought Thailand would become a little tiger, and then a big tiger. People were crazy about becoming a tiger. . . . Being a tiger is not important. The important thing for us is to have a sufficient economy. A sufficient economy means to have enough to support ourselves. . . . It doesn't have to be complete, not even half, perhaps just a quarter, then we can survive. . . . Those who like modern economics may not appreciate this. But we have to take a careful step backwards. (UNDP 2007, 20)<sup>15)</sup>

The "tiger" that the King mentions is a reference to hopes that Thailand would become the fifth Asian tiger following the four Asian NIES tigers of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In its famous 1993 report *The East Asian Miracle*, the World Bank identified Thailand as a new tiger, designating it a High-Performance Asian Economy, or HPAE (World Bank 1993). One year later, R. Muscat, an American development economist with many years of experience in Thailand, also christened the country the "Fifth Tiger" (Muscat 1994). However, as we see by the above quote, the King seemed to dismiss these ambitions as hubris, and explicitly told Thailand that it needed to rethink the direction of the national economy and people's lives.

Originally, the Sufficiency Economy was not an economic policy compiled in the National Economic Development Plan, but rather a kind of philosophy (*pratyā* ปรัชญา) to guide the direction of economic life. The word *phophiang* itself comes from the Buddhist teachings that attribute wanting little with contentment (少欲知足論) (Nonaka 2009, 139). The main concepts of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) are depicted in

---

15) The original transcript of the King's speech in Thai is compiled in Thailand, SCSEP, NESDB (2007).

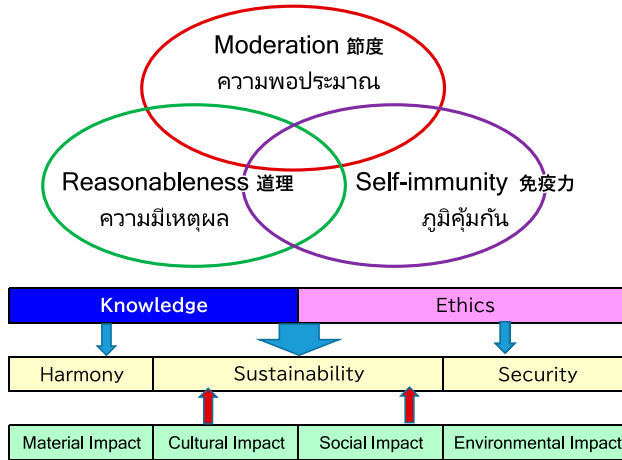


Fig. 5 The Concept of King Bhumibol's Sufficiency Economy

Source: Made by Suehiro on the basis of UNDP (2007, 30).

Fig. 5. In SEP, three major tools of moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity help to achieve three goals of harmony, sustainability, and security. Self-immunity refers to the social capability to respond to external shocks. The SEP does not propose a return to the self-sufficiency economy of ancient times, but rather attempts to create a social reliance, or ability to deal with various external shocks that confront society and the people. In other words, the SEP suggests ways for people to effectively manage the serious impacts of globalization on their lives, society, and environment, while also providing a roadmap to achieve a harmonious, secure, and sustainable society.

Before the crisis, King Bhumibol began an experimental farming project in Saraburi Prefecture to demonstrate his idea of integrated agriculture (*kankaset phasom phasan* การเกษตรผสมผสาน). A 2.4-hectare farm was divided into four zones: (i) 30% for rice cultivation; (ii) 30% for fruits and other crops; (iii) 30% for a pond to supply water in the dry season and to cultivate fish; and (iv) 10% for housing and animal husbandry (UNDP 2007, 28). This idea of integrated agriculture was further developed as a royal theory of agriculture and was introduced to rural people after the crisis.<sup>16)</sup>

In 1998, the Ministry of Interior began an SEP campaign via local governments, while the Ministry of Education ordered primary schools to introduce integrated agriculture according to the SEP.<sup>17)</sup> In the 14 months from December 1999 to January 2001, the

16) For more on the royal theory of agriculture, see Thailand, SCSEP, NESDB (2015). For a critical review of the SEP campaign in rural areas, see Walker (2010).

17) According to the author's observation, most elementary schools in Northeastern Thailand introduced the cultivation of organic vegetables together with poultry and fish farming within their campuses.

Ministry of Education disseminated 25,000 pamphlets introducing the King's new theory of agriculture. The pamphlets were reprinted six times, a record in Thailand's publishing world (Thailand, Ministry of Education and Ruam Duai Chuaikan Printing House 2001).

By the beginning of the year 2000, the NESDB had designated the SEP as the core concept to promote in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002–06). Incidentally, the commencement of this Five-Year Plan overlapped with the second year of the Thaksin government. As mentioned above, Thaksin was adopting a new state strategy that was diametrically opposed to the SEP. For example, Thaksin promoted profit-making agriculture rather than organic integrated agriculture. He also ordered the development of fossil fuels using latest technology rather than clean energy based on natural resources.

Under the Thaksin administration, the NESDB was asked to simultaneously carry out two different types of national development, namely, Thaksinomics and the SEP under royal patronage.<sup>18)</sup> Following the military coup d'état in September 2006, the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007–11) put more emphasis on the SEP, and a specific sub-committee to promote the SEP inside the NESDB was formed (see Photo 1). In 2007, the SEP was officially authorized through its inclusion in Section 83 of Chapter V (Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies) of the 2007 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand under the auspices of the military junta (Suehiro 2009, 135).<sup>19)</sup>

In economic terms, the SEP has hardly contributed to Thailand's GDP. However, the SEP seems to have functioned as a barometer to check the fairness of the country's economic direction in reference to the context of its social development. Indeed, the idea of the SEP has been endorsed by the Social Investment Fund (SIF) program, which was introduced immediately after the Asian currency crisis in collaboration with NGO groups, as well as by the social policy group of the World Bank.<sup>20)</sup> Likewise, under the Prayut government, the idea of the SEP has been partially reproduced in the approach of the inclusive growth engine (see Section III) and the BCG Economy Model (see Section IV).

18) Interview by the author with Arkhom Termpittayapaisith at the NESDB office in January 2004.

19) Section 83 stipulates that "The State shall promote and support the implementation of the philosophy of sufficiency economy" (constituteproject.org 2022).

20) The SIF was initiated by two key persons: Paiboon Wattanasiritham, who had served as Director of the Foundation of Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement by royal patronage from 1988–97 (*munlanithi burana chonnabot haeng pratheththai* มูลนิธิบูรณะชนบทแห่งประเทศไทย) and later was appointed Minister of Social Development and Human Security in the Surayud government (October 2006 to February 2008), and Mo Prawase Wasi, who was a distinguished leader of an NGO promoting the theory of resilient society. The background, process, and outcomes of the SIF are studied in detail in Shigetomi (2010). See also Suehiro (2022, 133–135, 138).



**Photo 1** Two different approaches: (A) King Bhumibol’s philosophy of Sufficiency Economy in the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007–11). (B) In 2013, Yingluck proposed a “Thai Silk Road” from Mae Sot through Myanmar to Europe. (C) Prayut’s 2019–25 plan includes highways, railways, and airport projects.

Sources: (A) Thailand, NESDB (2007); (B) Photo by the author in Tak Prefecture; (C) Prachachat Thurakit (2018).

### III Thailand 4.0 vs. the Inclusive Growth Approach

#### III-1 Economic Stagnation and Expanding Income Inequality

Since the 2006 military coup d’état, Thailand has suffered long-term economic stagnation, except in the years of 2010 and 2012 (see Fig. 3). Table 2 provides us with economic data to see this point more clearly. As we see in Fig. 1, Thailand enjoyed an unprecedented economic growth until 1996. However, entering the 2010s, Thailand began to show the lowest economic performance not only among ASEAN countries, but also among other emerging Asian economies, such as China and India. Thus, by the mid-2010s, economists have insisted that Thailand has been caught in the middle-income trap.<sup>21)</sup>

Causes of the middle-income trap for any given country cannot be attributed to a single factor. However, it is safe to say that a common phenomenon shared among countries experiencing the middle-income trap is a development pattern of dependence on low-cost advantage. In other words, these countries continue to follow a develop-

21) For discussion of the middle-income trap in Thailand, see Suehiro (2014a, Chapter 6), Veerayooth (2015), Suehiro and Natenapha (2022), and Natenapha (2023).

**Table 2** Annual Economic Growth Rates of Major Asian Countries, 2013–19 (%)

Country	On Average	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
India	7.23	6.4	7.4	8.2	7.1	6.6	7.3	7.6
Myanmar	7.16	8.4	8.0	7.0	5.9	6.8	6.8	7.2
China	6.94	7.8	7.3	6.9	6.7	6.9	6.6	6.4
Philippines	6.66	7.1	6.1	6.1	6.9	6.7	6.8	6.9
Developing Asia	6.61	7.0	6.8	6.6	6.4	6.6	6.5	6.4
Vietnam	6.43	5.4	6.0	6.7	6.2	6.8	7.1	6.8
Indonesia	5.17	5.6	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.1	5.3	5.3
Malaysia	5.16	4.7	6.0	5.0	4.2	5.9	5.3	5.0
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>

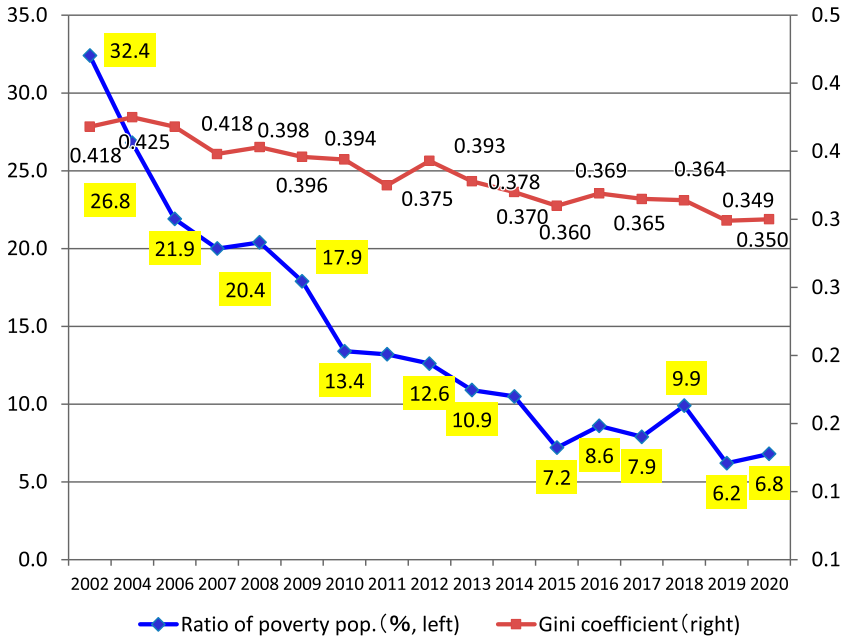
Source: Made by Suehiro based on ADB (April 2018, 310).

Notes: 1) Actual figures for 2013 to 2016, temporary figure for 2017, and projected figures for 2018 and 2019; 2) Asian NIES, including Singapore, are omitted from this table; 3) “Developing Asia” refers to countries (economies) in Asia excluding advanced countries (economies) in terms of per capita GDP.

ment pattern that depends on continuous input of cheap labor and low-cost capital funds without increasing productivity or improving investment efficiency (Gill and Kharas 2007; ADB 2017). Under these conditions, once wages begin to rise, growth rates inevitably slow down. Thailand is exactly such a case.

In addition to long-term economic stagnation, Thailand has experienced another serious problem, that is, increasing economic inequality. Fig. 6 depicts changes in both the proportion of the population living in poverty and the Gini coefficient during the period from 2002 to 2020. For decades, poverty reduction has been one of the most important national targets for successive governments in Thailand to achieve. However, Prime Minister Thaksin declared an end to the war against poverty and shifted policy priority to extending welfare services to the lower income classes (Suehiro 2008b, 253–255; Oizumi 2008). The percentage of the population living in poverty subsequently—and impressively—decreased from 32.4% in 2002 to 6.8% in 2020. However, the Gini coefficient experienced no significant changes during the same period (although the figure slightly declined from 0.418 in 2002 to 0.350 in 2020). Usually, if the Gini coefficient in a certain country exceeds 0.350, the country concerned is defined as less equal in terms of income distribution. Thailand doubtlessly belongs to a category of countries with unequal income distribution.<sup>22)</sup>

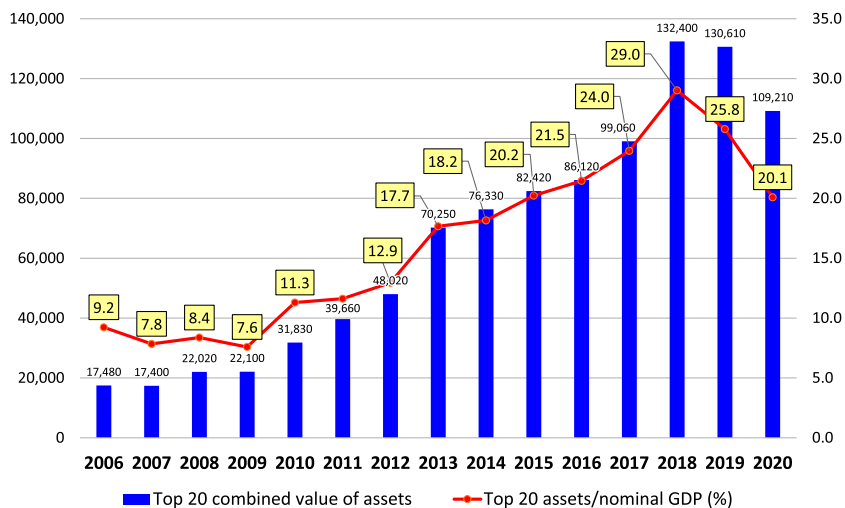
22) The ADB’s pioneering report (2012) analyzed rising economic inequality in Asian countries and included, for the first time, the current situation of each country, the major causes, and policy recommendations.



**Fig. 6** Percent of Population Living in Poverty and the Gini Coefficient in Thailand, 2002–20  
Sources: Made by Suehiro based on the World Bank online data for the Gini coefficient and the 2002–20 issues of the Thailand, NESDB (NESDC)'s *Phawa Sangkhom Traimat* for poverty data.

Fig. 7 clearly demonstrates the state of economic inequality in contemporary Thailand. To grasp the degree of economic concentration, the combined market value of the assets of the 20 richest families (based on data from *Forbes*) was computed as a percentage of Thailand's nominal GDP. It is striking that the assets have rapidly increased from 7.6% of GDP in 2009 to 18.2% in 2014 and 29.0% in 2018. Hewison (2019) has also studied the progression of economic concentration by using income data from the Gini Index (1981–2017) and surveys by *Forbes* (2006–20) on the wealth growth of Thailand's 50 richest families. Moreover, according to the *Global Wealth Databook 2018*, the wealthiest 1 percent of Thailand's population accounted for 66.9% of the total assets in Thailand, which was ranked the worst among 40 surveyed countries (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2018, 156, Table 6-5) for wealth distribution equality.<sup>23)</sup>

23) Other top countries in terms of unequal wealth distribution include Russia (where the wealthiest 1 percent of the population owns 57.1% of assets), Turkey (54.4%), India (51.5%), and Indonesia (46.6%).



**Fig. 7** Thailand's Richest 20 Families and Economic Concentration, 2006–20 (Million USD, %) Sources: 1) Suehiro database based on *Forbes'* “Thailand's 50 Richest List” (2006–20); 2) Hewison (2019, 262–277); 3) World Bank Indicators online data, accessed on July 18, 2020.

### III-2 *The State Strategy of Thailand 4.0*

In a lecture at the Asian Institute of Technology in 2016, Suvit Maesincee pointed to two major reasons to formulate a new national strategy for Thailand. The first was the need to follow advanced countries in formulating national strategies, such as the “A Nation of Makers” strategy in the United States, “Design Innovation” in the United Kingdom, “Smart Nation” in Singapore, and “Creative Economy” in South Korea. Key words commonly shared among these strategies are innovation and information technology (Suvit 2016, slides 2 to 7).<sup>24)</sup> The second reason for a new strategy was the need to overcome the middle-income trap explained above.

In this context, the Prayut government announced the new state strategy of “Thailand 4.0” in mid-2016, two years after the military coup d'état. Interestingly, several members of the economic team that introduced the idea of Thailand 4.0 were members of the economic team in the Thaksin government. Leading figures are: (i) Somkid Jatusripitak, who served as Deputy Prime Minister responsible for economic matters in both the Thaksin and Prayut governments; (ii) Suvit Maesincee, who served

24) The “Smart Nation” strategy in Singapore aims to create a new economy based on a tech innovation hub and IT ecosystem, while the “Creative Economy” strategy in South Korea seeks a new dynamic economy through innovation. China's “Made in China 2025: A New Era of Chinese Manufacturing” strategically promotes 10 target industries such as new IT, robotics, aerospace equipment, and new materials.

as Vice Minister of Commerce in the Thaksin government and was appointed Minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office in December 2016;<sup>25</sup> (iii) Uttama Savanayana, who served as Minister of Information and Communications between August 2015 and September 2016 (and later, Minister of Industry from December 2016 to January 2019 and Finance Minister from July 2019 to July 2020); and (iv) Sontirat Sontijirawong, who was appointed Minister of Commerce in November 2017 (and later served as Energy Minister) (Suehiro 2018, 91).

The concept of Thailand 4.0 came from the German government's idea of "Industry 4.0." Industry 4.0 refers to a new stage of manufacturing industries on the basis of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and smart factories, as opposed to "Industry 1.0," which was based on factory production using water and steam as energy sources, "Industry 2.0," which was based on mass production using electricity, and "Industry 3.0," which was based on flexible production using computer systems (Suehiro 2018, 87–89).

While "Industry 4.0" focused on the manufacturing production system, "Thailand 4.0" considers changes in the overall economic system, as follows: Thailand 1.0 was based on agriculture; Thailand 2.0 on light industry and import substitution; and Thailand 3.0 on heavy industry and export promotion. In this conceptualization, Thailand 4.0 marks a new stage of the economic system, one characterized by innovation through IT and the digital economy. The prototype of Thailand 4.0 was proposed by Suvit in 2016 as depicted in Fig. 8. The idea was then further developed into a master plan for "Thailand Industry 4.0" by the Ministry of Industry in October 2016. Fig. 9 summarizes the Ministry's plan, including its background, three major traps, three major growth engines to overcome these traps, and projected economic outcomes. The plan begins by confirming Thailand's poor performance in the industrial sector during the previous decade (2006–15), with the indicators of sluggish increases in annual industrial growth rates (3.0%), investments in manufacturing (2.0%), and manufactured exports (5.4%), and total factor productivity, or TFP (0.7%). The slow growth in TFP, in particular, is a major factor contributing to Thailand's long-term economic stagnation.

Such poor performance indicators may be attributed to three major traps that Thailand had been experiencing for the previous decade, namely, the middle-income trap, the inequality trap, and the imbalance trap (of growth vs. the environment). To overcome these traps, the government introduced three major growth engines (*konkai khapkhluan khwam mangkhang* กลไกขับเคลื่อนความมั่งคั่ง): the productive growth engine, the inclusive

25) Suvit was further appointed the Minister of Science and Technology in November 2017, and served as the second Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation from July 2019 to July 2020.



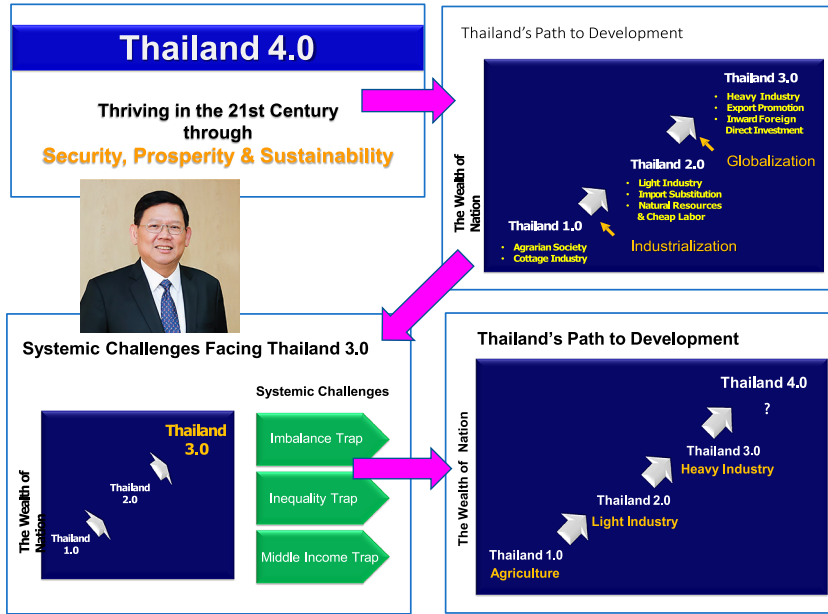


Fig. 8 The Original Idea of Thailand 4.0 Proposed by Suwit Maesincee

Source: Arranged by Suehiro on the basis of Suwit's lecture at the Asian Institute of Technology, Suwit (2016).

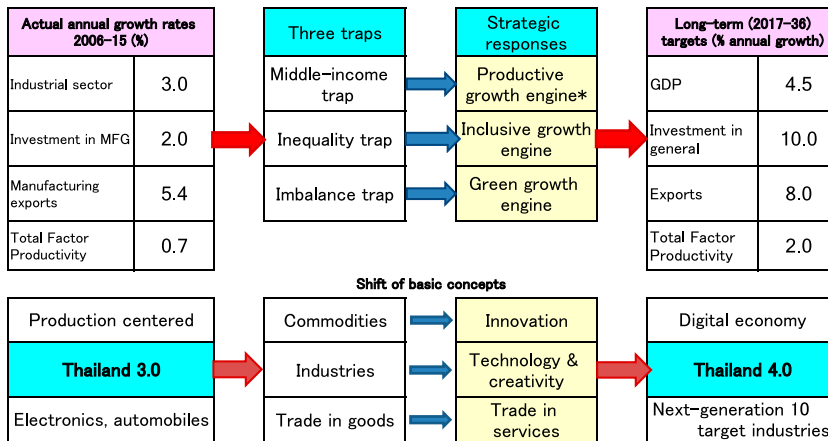


Fig. 9 Thailand 4.0 and Long-Term Economic Strategy, 2017-36

Source: Made by Suehiro based on Thailand, Ministry of Industry (2016).

Note: \* "Productive growth engine" is translated from "innovation-driven engine" in Thai language.

growth engine, and the green growth engine (Thailand, Ministry of Industry 2016, 5).<sup>26)</sup> According to the Thailand 4.0 strategy, if the government successfully promotes these growth engines, Thailand can be expected to shift from an upper-middle income to a high-income country by 2036 (Thailand, Ministry of Industry 2016, 23–24).

In addition to these strategies, the government also reorganized the existing Thailand 3.0 production system, which was based on commodities, industries, and trade in goods, to a new production system based on innovation, technology and creativity, and trade in services. Finally, during the next twenty years, Thailand 4.0 plans to shift the foundation of the economy from manufacturing industries centering on electronics and automobile production to a digital economy accompanying next-generation strategic industries (see Table 3).

The Thailand 4.0 plan thus targets 10 strategic industries for development, which are divided into two groups (Thailand, Ministry of Industry 2016, 9–12). The first is a group of five existing industries (the First S-curve), which should be reshaped in accordance with the progress of new technologies. This group includes: (1) new-generation

**Table 3** Comparison of 13 Target Industries (1997) and 10 Target Industries (2015)

13 Target Industries in the Industrial Restructuring Plan of 1997		10 New-Generation Industries ◎ Dependent on FDI, # BCG Economy Model	
Cabinet meeting in November 1997		Cabinet meeting in November 2015	
1	Food, food processing	<b>A</b>	<b>The First S-curve Industries</b>
2	Textiles, garments	1	New-generation automobiles # ◎
3	Footwear and leather products	2	Smart electronics ◎
4	Natural rubber and products	3	Medical & Wellness tourism #
5	Plastic products	4	Agriculture and bio #
6	Furniture	5	New types of food processing #
7	Automobiles and auto parts	<b>B</b>	<b>New S-curve Industries</b>
8	Electrical and electronics parts	6	Robotics ◎
9	Petrochemicals	7	Aviation and logistics ◎
10	Steel	8	Biofuels and biochemicals # ◎
11	Pharmaceutical products	9	Digital economy ◎
12	Gems and jewellery	10	Medical hub centers # ◎
13	Ceramics and glass products		

Sources: Made by Suehiro based on Suehiro (2010, 147) and Thailand, Ministry of Industry (2016, 10–12).

26) “Productive growth engine” was translated by the Ministry from “นวัตกรรม เพื่อ การยกระดับ ผลผลิตภาพ” (*nawattakam phua kanyokradap phalitphap*) in the Thai language, or “innovation for the upgrading of productivity.” The author uses both “innovation-driven growth engine” and “productive growth engine” in this paper. For the development (or underdevelopment) of innovation and R&D activities in Thailand, see Patarapong (2017).

automobiles, including plug-in hybrid and electric vehicles (PHEVs and EVs); (2) smart electronics, such as flexible printed circuits and microelectronics design; (3) medical and wellness tourism; (4) agriculture and bio (biotechnology); and (5) new types of food processing, such as medical food and food supplements. The second group consists of future-oriented industries (New S-curve) that should be newly targeted for development. These include: (6) robotics; (7) aviation and logistics, including MRO (maintenance, repair, and overhaul) for the aerospace industry; (8) biofuels and biochemicals; (9) the digital economy, including data centers, smart cities, and creative media and animation; and (10) medical hubs.

When comparing these strategic industries with the 13 target industries in the Industrial Restructuring Plan (1997) of the Chuan Leekpai government, we see the ambitious aim of the Prayut government to focus on next-generation industries rather than export-oriented labor-intensive industries, such as textiles, garments, sport shoes, and plastic products (Suehiro 2010).<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, several strategic industries (including 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, and 10 in Table 3) overlap with the 11 industries to be promoted in the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012–16) (Oizumi 2017, 97–98). Needless to say, it is assumed that such overlapping industries will be renovated on the basis of new technology and the digital economy to align with the long-term vision.

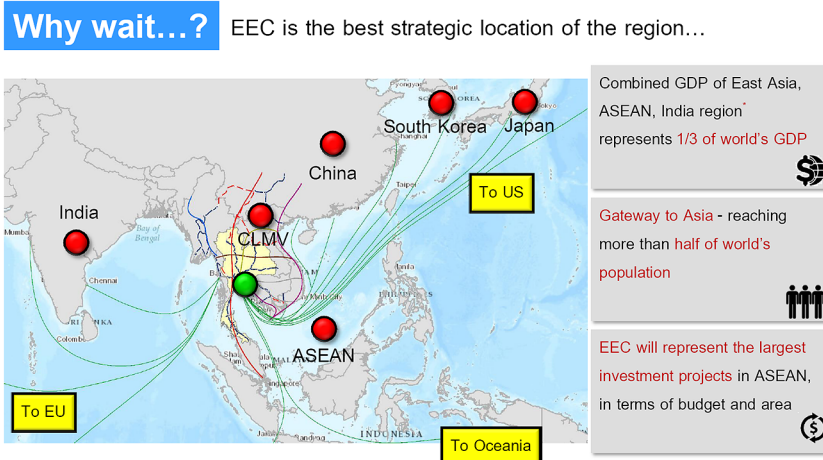
### III-3 *The Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) as the Strategic Area*

Two major characteristics distinguish Thailand 4.0 from previous industrial or economic policies. One is legislation that defines Thailand 4.0 as a part of 20-year state strategy (*yutthasat chat* ยุทธศาสตร์ชาติ). The government presented a draft of 20-year state strategy to the Legislative Assembly and published it in the *Royal Gazette* (2017) after receiving congressional approval. This implies that even if the Prayut government is replaced by another government, the latter is still obligated to promote this state strategy during the target period (2017 to 2036).

The second distinguishing factor of Thailand 4.0 is the legislative selection of a specific strategic area (Eastern Thailand) to advance the strategy, which was done in May 2018 (*Royal Gazette* 2018).<sup>28</sup> The major reasons for choosing Eastern Thailand as a

27) These export-oriented labor-intensive industries to be protected have become sunset ones in Thailand due to rising labor costs since the 2000s.

28) Before issuing the Act of the Eastern Special Development Area in May 2018, the military junta (the National Council for Peace and Order or NCPO) legally guaranteed the implementation of the EEC Development plan through NCPO Chairman (PM Prayut) Order No. 2 (the framework of the EEC Development) on January 17, 2017; NCPO Chairman Order No. 28 (on increasing efficiency) on May 26, 2017; and NCPO Chairman Order No. 47 (on land acquisition by coercive means) on October 25, 2017.



**Fig. 10** Thailand as the Gateway to Asia and the Rest of the World

Source: Thailand, Ministry of Industry (2017, slide 5).

strategic area are as follows. First, the East has a comparative advantage in existing industrial infrastructure, thanks to former Eastern Seaboard Projects, which began in 1981. Available infrastructure includes deep-sea ports, natural gas plants, airport facilities, highways, and railways (although almost all this infrastructure requires comprehensive upgrades) (Kanit 2017).<sup>29)</sup> Second, there are as many as 16 industrial estates in the East centering on automobile, petrochemical, and other related industries. The multilateral accumulation of manufacturing firms in industrial clusters are expected to contribute to the development of EVs, smart electronics, robotics, and biofuels, as well as R&D activities for next-generation industries. Third, the average per capita GDP in the East (in Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao provinces) amounted to 16,741 Baht in 2015, which was three times higher than the nationwide average of 5,937 Baht and exceeded that of Bangkok Metropolis (14,990 Baht) (Suehiro 2018, 96–99). Such economic conditions are considered suitable for experimentation with the development of smart cities. Finally, the East is expected to play not only a strategic role as a hub in mainland Southeast Asia, but also as the gateway connecting Thailand with China and Japan to the north, with the United States to the east, with India, the Middle East, and Europe to the west, and with ASEAN countries to the south, respectively (see Fig. 10).

For these reasons, the government has begun implementing mega projects to

29) Importantly, the secretary-general of the Office of the EEC Development Committee is Kanit Sangsubhan, who had been one of the officers in the NESDB responsible for the Eastern Seaboard Projects, and who served as a special advisor to Prime Minister Thaksin in the position of the Director of the Fiscal Research Institute.

upgrade the deep-sea ports in Laem Chabang and Map Ta Phut and the Sattahap commercial port, to reorganize U-Tapao Airport as an aerospace industry MRO (maintenance, repair, and overhaul) hub, and to construct high-speed railways connecting three international airports (Thailand, Ministry of Industry 2017, slide 9). At the same time, the government has granted comprehensive tax incentives to investors who plan to invest in next-generation industries in the strategic zone of EEC.

According to the estimation of the Ministry of Industry, total investment in the EEC will amount to 1,656 billion Baht (47.5 billion US dollars) (Thailand, Ministry of Industry 2017, slide 11; Suehiro 2018, 101). Given the scale of investment, we see that the mega projects in the EEC are comparable to those in the KTMF of the Thaksin government. At the same time, the direction of Thailand 4.0 can be likened to Thaksin's reforms, in that both aimed to modernize the Thai state and achieve the economic status of a high-income country.

#### III-4 *Alternative Approach of the World Bank Group*

As seen in Fig. 9, Thailand 4.0 identifies three different growth engines to drive Thailand toward high-income country status, namely, (i) the productive growth engine (or innovation-driven growth engine) to raise per capita income, (ii) the inclusive growth engine to more fairly distribute the outcomes of growth, and (iii) the green growth engine to harmonize development and the health of the environment (see Fig. 9).

However, upon closer examination, the content of Thailand 4.0 reveals that this state strategy prioritizes the innovation-driven growth engine alone.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, it is very natural that international agencies as well as Thai economists have presented counter-balancing proposals that favor the two other engines of inclusive and green growth. Among these proposals, the World Bank's *Getting Back on Track* report (see Photo 2) is a useful example to review alternative approaches to Thailand 4.0.

This report was published as part of the World Bank's series "Systematic Country Diagnostic." In the case of Thailand, Lars Sondergaard headed the research team consisting of 17 sub-teams on agriculture, climate change, energy, jobs, governance, education, transport, social protection, and so on. It is important to note that this report was a joint work with Thailand's counterpart working group, which included the NESDB, the Bank of Thailand, the Office of Budget Bureau, the Fiscal Policy Office (FPO), the Office of Public Debt Management in the Ministry of Finance, and the National Statistical Office.

---

30) The master plan of the Ministry of Industry focused on the industrial sector (the innovation-driven growth engine), while other ministries were expected to draft a long term strategy for the inclusive growth engine and the green growth engine. However, there were no efforts to draft these strategies. As a result, the Ministry of Industry's plan effectively represented the essence of Thailand 4.0.



**Photo 2** The World Bank's 2016 Report on Thailand

Sources: World Bank Group (2016, the cover of report and p. 54).

The leader of the Thailand team was Boonchai Charassangsomboon, who was the chief of macro-economy policy in the FPO between 2010 and 2012 and was appointed executive director of the Regional Office (Southeast Asia) of the World Bank in 2013 (World Bank Group 2016, 10–11). In this sense, to a certain extent, the report reflected the official position of the Thai economic-related government agencies at the time, compared to the new approach proposed in Thailand 4.0.

The World Bank Group highlights the following major three problems facing contemporary Thailand: (i) the limitations of the existing development pattern, which depends on low-cost advantage; (ii) increasing economic inequality in terms of income distribution; and (iii) the increasing contradiction between national economic growth and environmental protection targets. These three problems precisely coincide with the three obstacles of the middle-income trap, the inequality trap, and the imbalance trap highlighted in Thailand 4.0.

The report also identifies key measures for Thailand to “get back on track,” revive growth, and secure prosperity through three pathways. The first pathway is to create more and better jobs by boosting investments in infrastructure, increasing competition through FTAs and deregulation, and increasing firm-level competitiveness through innovation. The second pathway is to provide more support to the poorest 40% of the population by improving workforce education and skills, boosting agricultural pro-

ductivity, and building “smarter” social protection systems that provide a safety net for poor people. The third pathway is to make growth greener and more resilient by improving the management of Thailand’s natural resources and environment, reducing vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change, and promoting energy efficiency and clean energy (World Bank Group 2016, 14).

These ideas are partially included in the 20-year national strategy for economic and social development formulated by the NESDB in 2016, which focuses on balancing economic, social, and environmental outcomes to achieve sustainable development (Thailand, NESDB 2016). At the same time, these ideas are also integrated into the Prayut government effort to revise the Thailand 4.0 plan by introducing the national agenda of the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model in 2019.

#### IV Thailand 4.0 vs. the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model

##### IV-1 *Beginnings and Background of the BCG Economy Model*

The BCG Economy Model (the New Sustainable Growth Engine) combines the state strategy of Thailand 4.0 together with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the STI (science, technology, and innovation) strategy, and the international targets of the SDGs (Thailand, MHESI 2021, 54). The “Proposal of BCG in Action” was first submitted by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI) in November 2019, six months after the reorganization of the former Ministry of Science and Technology (Thailand, MHESI 2019). At the time, Suvit Maesincee served as the second Minister of the MHESI (the first Minister was Somkid) and supervised the proposal. According to the MHESI:

The BCG model capitalizes the country’s strength in biological diversity and cultural richness and employs technology and innovation to transform Thailand to a value-based and innovation-driven economy. The model also conforms with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is also intended to align with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) which is also the key principle of Thailand’s social and economic development. (Royal Thai Embassy 2022)

As per the proposal, the BCG Economy Model consists of three major economies: (i) the BIO economy, which produces products based local natural resources and that are environmentally friendly; (ii) the CIRCULAR economy (*setthakit munwian* เศรษฐกิจหมุนเวียน), which aims to shift away from the linear economy (*setthakit choeng sentrong* เศรษฐกิจเชิงเส้นตรง) through the practice of “Make = Use = Return/Recycle”; and (iii) the GREEN economy, which aims to preserve the environment through energy saving and



**Photo 3** Suvit's Report on the BCG Economy Model (May 2020) and a BCG Campaign Poster of the MHESI

Sources: Suvit (2020, the cover of report); website of Thailand, MHESI ([https://www.bcg\\_in.th/eng/](https://www.bcg_in.th/eng/), accessed on March 10, 2022).

increasing usage of clean energy sources (Thailand, MHESI 2019, 2–3; Kumagai 2022a).

Following the initial proposal, in May 2020, Suvit explored the concept of the BCG Economy Model in reference to people's lives in the post COVID-19 era in his report *The World Changes, People Adjust* (*lok plian khon prap* โลกเปลี่ยน คนปรับ). This was published to mark the one-year anniversary of the establishment of the MHESI (see Photo 3).

In October 2020, the Prayut government established the BCG Administration Committee. The National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) was ordered to serve as the secretariat office of the Committee and 23 members were appointed to serve on it.<sup>31)</sup> Finally, in January 2021, the Cabinet approved the “BCG Economy Model 2021–2026” as a six-year plan of national agenda (*wara haeng chat* วาระแห่งชาติ). Unlike Thailand 4.0, the BCG Economy Model is not a state strategy. The BCG, however, is expected to support Thailand 4.0 by focusing on both the inclusive and green growth engines.

31) Committee members consisted of two major groups: 14 members were acting government officers, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of MHESI (Anek Laothamatas), the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Natural Resources, those from the NESDC and BOI, the Secretary-General of NSTDA, and others; and nine were appointed members, including Issara Vongkusolkit (Chairman of the Mitr Phol Group, the largest business group in the sugar and bio industries), Dhevin Vongvanich (the former CEO of PTT PCL), Krit Na Lamliang (from the Digital Council of Thailand), and others (from Order of the Prime Minister Office No. 325/2563, October 22, 2020).



Several factors help explain why the Prayut government dared to introduce the BCG as a national agenda. First, Suvit himself recognized the weakness of Thailand 4.0, in that it inclined to over-prioritize the productive growth engine. Therefore with the BCG Economy Model, he attempted a course correction for Thailand 4.0 by returning to the original idea of three growth engines.

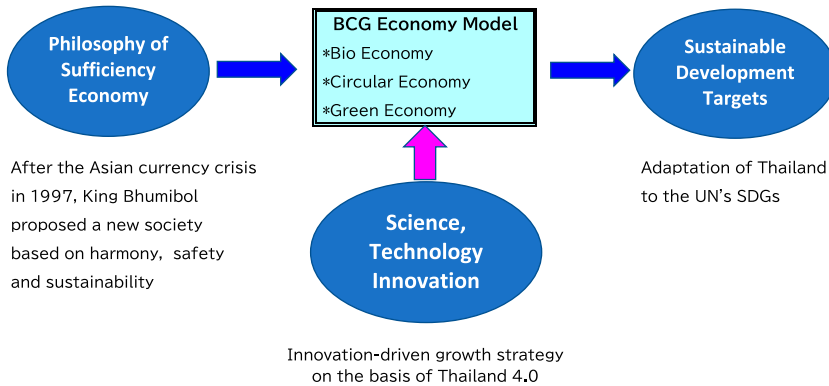
Second, the Prayut government is expected to accelerate its activities in accordance with Thailand's international commitments to the SDGs. Thailand was ranked 43 in the world in terms of the SDGs Index in the *Sustainable Development Report 2021*, which was published by a group of professionals including Jeffrey Sachs. This ranking is not a remarkable one, but it is better than those of other ASEAN countries, such as Vietnam (ranked 51), Malaysia (65), Singapore (76), Indonesia (97), and the Philippines (103) (Sachs *et al.* 2021). As the front runner among ASEAN countries, it is necessary for the government to prepare more concrete plans to present to the international community.

Third, the Prayut government was requested to take some action toward the COP 26 summit in the United Kingdom in November 2021. Accordingly, before joining the COP 26 summit, Prime Minister Prayut announced that Thailand would be a carbon-neutral society by 2050, and a society of net-zero emissions by 2065. However, the original EEC plan encouraged energy-consuming mega projects in Eastern Thailand. Therefore, Prayut needs to propose a roadmap for energy-saving activities rather than energy-consuming projects. These reasons combined to push the government to adopt the BCG Economy Model 2021–26 as a national agenda in January 2021 (Thailand, Cabinet Secretariat Office 2021).

#### IV-2 *The Concept and Targets of the BCG Economy Model*

The BCG Economy Model proposed by Suvit is depicted in Fig. 11. In the model, a BCG economy is driven by the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and a package of science, technology, and innovation policies and activity compiled in Thailand 4.0, and this combination will lead Thailand toward a sustainable development in alignment with the international SDGs (see also Thailand, MHESI 2019, 11; 2021, 54). The model seems to integrate Thaksin's ideas and King Bhumibol's philosophy into a single agenda to face the international pressures of the SDGs and COP 26.

Within this overall concept, the BCG model is applied to focus on promoting four industries, or drivers. These are: (i) **agriculture and food**, the value of which is multiplied with product diversification, product differentiation, high-value products, waste reduction, and resource-use efficiency improvement; (ii) **medical and wellness**, which includes R&D and production technology for vaccines, biopharmaceuticals, and medical devices; (iii) **bioenergy, biomaterial, and biochemical**, which have high potential



**Fig. 11** Interrelation between Thailand 4.0 and the BCG Economy Model

Source: Arranged by Suehiro based on Suvit (2020, 37–38).

due to the government's renewable energy targets; and (iv) **tourism and creative economy**,<sup>32)</sup> which is linked to wellness tourism, eco-tourism, and sports tourism (Thailand, MHESI 2019, 18–19). These four industries overlap with 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10 in the ten target industries of Thailand 4.0 (see Table 3).

Furthermore, in June 2021, the MHESI announced a more detailed BCG plan for the period of 2021 to 2027. This included four major targets and 14 indicators to measure achievement. As Table 4 suggests, each indicator is very ambitious, and some indicators seem to be unrealistic for Thailand to realize.

The indicators include: (i) increasing the percentage of BCG economic activity to 24% or more of total GDP; (ii) improving the economic status of 10 million people suffering from income inequality; (iii) reducing consumption of natural resources to one-fourth of current levels; (iv) reducing consumption of greenhouse gases (GHG) by 20 to 25% by 2030 as compared to 2016 levels; and so on. As for the first target, the MHESI estimated that approximately 21% of Thailand's GDP could be attributed to BCG economic activity in 2021 (Royal Thai Embassy 2022). However, according to Kumagai's estimation of these figures, BIO economy (the largest item in BCG economic activity) as a percentage of GDP declined from 18% in 2011 to 14% in 2020 (Kumagai 2022b, 170). His estimation suggests the difficulty for the government to achieve the target of 24% by 2027.

Another problem is related to the organizations responsible for achieving the targets.

32) The original idea of the creative economy was submitted by Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, Secretary-General of the NESDB, in a March 2011 speech (Arkhom 2011). According to his speech, the creative economy was designed as an economic system on the basis of Thailand's unique competitiveness, or Thai-ness, in industries utilizing cultural assets, people's hospitality, and natural resources (such as tourism, spas, and Thai foods). For his unique approach to Thailand's industrial development pattern, see also Arkhom (2013).

**Table 4** The BCG Economy Model: Four Targets and 14 Indicators, 2021–27

Code	Targets	Indicators to Achieve Targets
I	Increase economic growth rates	1.1 Increase BCG value added to GDP from 3.3 trillion to 4.4 trillion Baht.
		1.2 Increase percentage of BCG activity to 24% or more of total GDP.
		1.3 Increase the percentage of fundamental economy ( <i>setthakit thanrak</i> เศรษฐกิจฐานราก) activity to 50% or more of total GDP.
II	Decrease social inequality	2.1 Improve the status of 10 million people suffering from income inequality.
		2.2 Reduce the percentage of people suffering food shortages and malnutrition to less than 5% of the total population.
		2.3 Provide medicines, vaccines, and medical tools for at least 300,000 people during the pandemic.
		2.4 Retain 20% or more of the total community for self reliance activity.
III	Sustainability of natural resources and environments	3.1 Reduce consumption of natural resources to one-fourth of current levels.
		3.2 Reduce consumption of Greenhouse Gases by 20–25% of 2016 levels by 2030.
		3.3 Increase new forest area by 200,000 <i>rai</i> .
IV	Self reliance การพึ่งพาตัวเอง	4.1 Provide training and new skills to one million people.
		4.2 Commercialize at least 1,000 BCG start-up businesses.
		4.3 Reduce service deficit of patents in balance of payments by 20% or more.
		4.4 Reduce import value of medical/health products by 20 % or more.

Source: Arranged by Suehiro based on Thailand, MHESI (2021, 9).

Among the 14 government officials who are members of the BCG Administration Committee, two core agencies of the MHESI and NSTDA are represented. Unlike the Ministry of Industry and the NESDB (NESDC from 2018) in Thailand 4.0, these two core agencies have little experience in managing a national plan. At the same time, there is no organization to coordinate the activities of the BCG and Thailand 4.0. Needless to say, several hurdles must be overcome to successfully implement the BCG.

In February 2022, the Cabinet approved a 2022–27 action plan to advance the BCG Economy Model with a total budget of around 41 billion Baht (*Bangkok Post*, February 9, 2022). As compared to the large scope of its targets, the budget is small, representing less than 3% of the budget for the EEC Development Plan (1,656 billion Baht) in Thailand 4.0.

## V Limitation of the Thai Style of Balancing Policies

Thai people tend to avoid extreme thoughts and actions. If one group insists on extreme

policy A, another proposes a counter-balancing policy of anti-A, or policy B, to reduce the impact of policy A. Such behavior has generally produced benefits for the whole society rather than particular interest groups. The behavior of avoiding two extremes is also related to choosing the Middle Way (*machimapatitha* มัชฌิมปาฏิททา, 中道), which is perceived as the correct way in accordance with the practical teachings of Buddhism (Nonaka 2009, 5, 79).

Indeed, the two different directions in Thailand's economic policy have produced a similar effect to that of the Middle Way in Buddhism. This is because the two movements have affected each other to lead Thailand toward the creation of a sound macro-economy and a stable society. A good example of this may be found in the interrelationship between the NICs and NAIC approach of the 1980s. The NICs approach aimed to promote export-oriented and heavy industries in favor of big firms in urban areas, while the NAIC approach purposed decreasing the income gap in favor of rural people. The two approaches have maintained a complementary relationship in managing the national economy. Although such dual approaches brought about lower per capita incomes for Thai people as compared to those in Asian NICs (later NIES), they also produced a society that is more flexible and resilient in the face of external shocks.

We can observe a similar relationship between the approaches of Thaksin and King Bhumibol in responding to the post-1997 economic crisis. If the government pushed forward Thaksin's approach by emphasizing competitiveness, efficiency, and economic performance, Thai society, from the author's view, may experience a bi-polarization between the people who could follow Thaksin's policies and those who would be excluded from these policies. In this sense, the SEP has served as a kind of stabilizer to reduce the impact of extreme policies on society.

In recent years, however, the leading figures who manage and supervise national plans and the government agency that effectively coordinates different interests have both faced obstacles.

First, all members of the economic team led by Deputy Prime Minister Somkid resigned from the Prayut Cabinet in July 2020. They include Somkid, Suvit Maesincee (Minister of MHESI), Uttama Savanayana (Finance Minister), Sontirat Sontijirawong (Energy Minister), and Kobsak Pootrakul (deputy secretary-general to the prime minister) (*Bangkok Post*, July 16, 2020).<sup>33)</sup> This implies that currently, there is no core team to manage Thailand 4.0 and the BCG plan inside the Prayut government.

Second, the government has no specific organization to balance the competing

---

33) The major reason for this resignation is a reported conflict between Somkid's team and leading figures of the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), the ruling political party of the Prayut government.

interests of the two national plans: the energy-consuming mega projects of the EEC Development and the carbon-neutral objectives of the BCG Economy Model. It is true that the prime minister chairs both the EEC Administration Committee of Thailand 4.0 and the BCG Administration Committee. Realistically, however, Prayut has neither vision nor capability to supervise the two national plans. At the same time, there is no official channels to exchange information and ideas during the process of implementation.

Third, there is an inherent contradiction between the foreign dependency in Thailand 4.0 and the self-reliance (*kan phungpha tua-eng* การพึ่งพาตัวเอง) in the BCG Economy Model. Despite the BCG plan to improve self-reliance (as its fourth target, see Table 4), the majority of the next-generation industries promoted in Thailand 4.0. depend entirely or partially on foreign capital and technology (with exceptions of [3] medical and wellness tourism, [4] agriculture and bio, and [5] new types of food processing, see Table 3). There is no concrete plan to develop capable local firms to undertake next-generation industries. In addition, even in the sphere of BCG “industries,” Thailand exhibits poor performance in the field of start-up businesses as compared to Malaysia and Indonesia.

More importantly, the two national plans of Thailand 4.0 and the BCG Economy Model are ultimately lacking in original perspective to tackle the following significant issues. First, there is no roadmap to develop human resources in the essential field of the digital economy.<sup>34)</sup> This may become a serious obstacle for Thailand to achieve the targets of Thailand 4.0. Second, during the past two decades, Thailand has experienced the rapid progression of an aging society and shortages in the labor force. Unless the government launches a long-term plan to implement a more comprehensive social security system and to protect migrant workers in labor markets, Thailand will, sooner or later, face further declines in economic growth. Third, if the government truly intends to realize a net-zero emission society, it is necessary to fundamentally reshape the existing structure of energy consumption, which is based mainly on fossil fuels. These three problems seriously challenge the achievement of Thailand’s long-term vision.

What is the alternative way for Thailand? Ever since the Thaksin era, Thailand has sought to achieve the status of a high-income country. To achieve this, however, requires choosing economic growth at the expense of social development, or, to upgrade the country’s economic status at the expense of individual and societal happiness.<sup>35)</sup> Most Thai people do not wish to do this. Therefore, instead of unilaterally pursuing high-

34) Currently both the Prayut government and the private sector rely significantly on Chinese firms (such as the Alibaba Group, China Mobile, and Tencent) to construct the infrastructure for the digital economy.

35) Happiness here is *khvam suk* (ความสุข), which emphasizes peace of mind over material life.

income status, Thailand should seek to achieve a Thai-style social development, even though it may mean continuing to be an upper middle-income country.

## References

- Arkhom Termittayapaisith อัครคม เต็มพิทยาไพสิฐ. 2013. *The Next Generation of Thai Industry*. Bangkok: NESDB.
- . 2011. Setthakit sangsan khong Thai เศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ของไทย [Creative economy in Thailand]. A lecture presented to the senior officers at the Ministry of Culture on March 28, 2011.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2018. *Asian Development Outlook 2018: How Technology Affects Jobs*. April. Manila: ADB. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/FLS189310-3>.
- . 2017. *Asian Development Outlook 2017: Transcending the Middle-Income Challenge*. April. Manila: ADB. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/FLS178632-3>.
- . 2012. *Asian Development Outlook 2012: Confronting Rising Inequality in Asia*. April. Manila: ADB.
- Bangkok Post*. 2022. Cabinet Okays B41bn BCG Action Plan for 2022–27. February 9, 2022. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/general/2261083>, accessed on May 10, 2022.
- . 2020. Somkid Quits before Reshuffle. July 16, 2020.
- Bank of Thailand (BOT). *Sathiti setthakit lae kamgoen* สถิติเศรษฐกิจและการเงิน [Economic and financial statistics]. Quarterly, 2001–08. Bangkok: BOT.
- . *Raingan setthakit raiduean* รายงานเศรษฐกิจรายเดือน [Monthly economic report]. Monthly, 1977–2001. Bangkok: BOT.
- . *Monthly Bulletin*. Monthly, 1961–78. Bangkok: BOT.
- Constituteproject.org. 2022. *Thailand's Constitution of 2007*. PDF generated on April 27, 2022. [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Thailand\\_2007.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Thailand_2007.pdf), accessed December 22, 2022.
- Credit Suisse Research Institute. 2018. *Global Wealth Databook 2018*. Zurich, Switzerland: Credit Suisse Group AG.
- Felipe, Jesus; Abdon, Arnelyn; and Kumar, Utsav. 2012. Tracking the Middle-Income Trap: What Is It, Who Is in It, and Why? Working Paper No. 715, April. New York: Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.
- Forbes, ed. Thailand's 50 (40) Richest List. Annually, 2006–20. <https://www.forbes.com/thailand-billionaires/list/>.
- Gill, Indermit and Kharas, Homi. 2007. *An East Asian Renaissance: Ideas for Economic Growth*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Hewison, Kevin. 2019. Crazy Rich Thais: Thailand's Capitalist Class, 1980–2019. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51 (2): 262–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1647942>.
- Kanit Sangsubhan. 2017. Eastern Economic Corridor: The Prime Gateway to Asia. A lecture presented to the Suehiro's mission at the office of the EEC Development Committee in Makkasan, Bangkok on August 22, 2017.
- Kosit Panpiemras โฉมิต บัณฑิตชัย. 1993. *Kan phatthana prathet Thai: Naewkhit lae thitthang* การพัฒนาประเทศไทย: แนวคิด และ ทิศทาง [Development of Thailand: Ideas and direction]. Bangkok: Samnakhphim Dokbia.
- Kumagai Shotaro. 2022a. BCG (Bio-Circular-Green) Economy in Thailand. *RIM Pacific Business and Industries* 22(84): 2–31. <https://www.jri.co.jp/en/MediaLibrary/file/english/periodical/rim/2022/84.pdf>.
- . 熊谷章太郎. 2022b. BCG (baio, junkan-gata gurin) keizai o suishinsuru Tai (バイオ・循環

- 型・グリーン) 経済を推進するタイ [Thailand with the promotion of the BCG (Bio-Circular-Green) economy]. *Kan Taiheiyo bijinesu joho RIM* 環太平洋ビジネス情報 RIM [RIM Pacific business and industries] 22(85): 157–185.
- McCargo, Duncan. 2009. Thai Politics as Reality TV. *Journal of Asian Studies* 68 (1): 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911809000072>.
- McCargo, Duncan and Ukrist Pathmanand. 2005. *The Thaksinization of Thailand*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Muscat, Robert. 1994. *The Fifth Tiger: A Study of Thai Development Policy*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Natenapha Wailerdsak เนตนาภา ไวลัดสะกิดดี. 2006. *Klumthun-thurakit khropkhrua Thai kon lae lang wikrit 2540* กลุ่มทุน-ธุรกิจครอบครัวไทย ก่อน และ หลังวิกฤต 2540 [Thai family business groups before and after the 1997 crisis]. Bangkok: Brand Age Books.
- Natenapha Wailerdsak Yabushita. 2023. *Business Groups and the Thailand Economy: Escaping the Middle-Income Trap*. London: Routledge.
- Nonaka Koichi 野中耕一 (translated and edited based on the teachings of P. A. Payutto). 2009. *Bukkyo jiten: Buppo-hen (Zouhokaiteihan)* 仏教辞典——仏法篇 (増補改訂版) [Dictionary of Buddhism: Collection of Dharma (enlarged revised edition)]. Bangkok: P. Press Co., Ltd.
- Oizumi Keiichiro 大泉啓一郎. 2017. “Tairando 4.0” towa nanika (zenpen): Koseicho-rosen ni kaji o kiru Tai 「タイランド4.0」とは何か (前編) ——高成長路線に舵を切るタイ [What is “Thailand 4.0” (part I): Thailand switched to the high economic growth policy]. *Kan Taiheiyo bijinesu joho RIM* 環太平洋ビジネス情報 RIM [RIM Pacific business and industries] 17 (66): 91–103.
- . 2008. Shakai fukushi seido kaikaku: Kokka kainyu-naki fukushi senryaku 社会福祉制度改革——国家介入なき福祉戦略 [Reform of social welfare system: Strategy for welfare system without state intervention]. In *Tai seiji gyosei no henkaku 1991–2006 nen* タイ政治・行政の変革 1991–2006年 [Thailand in motion: Political and administrative changes, 1991–2006], edited by Tamada Yoshifumi 玉田芳史 and Funatsu Tsuruyo 船津鶴代, pp. 287–314. Chiba: JETRO Institute of Developing Economies. <http://doi.org/10.20561/00042569>.
- Paiboon Wattanasiritham. 2010. Development and Global Well-Being: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges. A paper presented at the International Conference on “Understanding Quality of Life and Building a Happier Tomorrow.” Bangkok, December 8–11.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, Chris. 2004. *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- . 1996. *Thailand’s Boom!* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Patarapong Intarakumnerd. 2017. *Mismanaging Innovation System: Thailand and the Middle-Income Trap*. London: Routledge.
- Porter, Michael. 2003. *Thailand’s Competitiveness: Creating the Foundations for Higher Productivity*. Bangkok: NESDB
- Prachachat Thurakit ประชาชาติธุรกิจ. 2018. Khruang thang mega project 2 lan lan pi 62 thuk mot reng sang reng poetchai ครึ่งทาง เมกะโปรเจกต์ 2 ล้าน ล้าน ปี 62 ทุกโหมด เร่งสร้าง เร่งเปิดใช้ [Half way of megaprojects with 2 trillion Baht, the year of 2019: Accelerate construction and accelerate launch all projects]. July 20. <https://www.prachachat.net/property/news-193012>, accessed on August 30, 2023.
- Pran Phisitsetthakan ปราณ พิสิษฐเศรษฐการ, ed. 2004. *Thaksinomics ruam suntharaphot samkhan khong pho.to.tho. Dr. Thaksin Chinnawat* ทักษิณมิกส์ รวมสุนทรพจน์สำคัญของ พ.ต.ท. ดร. ทักษิณ ชินวัตร [Thaksinomics, a collection of important speeches by Pol. Lt. Col. Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra]. Volume 1. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Prawase Wasi ประเวศ วะสี, ศ. น.พ. 1999. *Yutthasat chat pheua khwam khemkheng thang setthakit sangkhom lae silatham* ยุทธศาสตร์ชาติเพื่อความเข้มแข็ง ทาง เศรษฐกิจ สังคม และ วัฒนธรรม [National strategy to construct economic, social, and cultural resilience]. Bangkok: Mo Chaoban.

- . 1998. *Setthakit phophiang lae prachasangkhom* เศรษฐกิจพอเพียง และ ประชาสังคม [Sufficiency economy and civil society]. Bangkok: Mo Chaoban.
- Puangchon Unchanam. 2020. *Royal Capitalism: Wealth, Class, and Monarchy in Thailand*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvvvsqcgz>.
- Rangsan Thanaphonphan รังสรรค์ ธนะพรพันธุ์. 2005. *Chak Thaksinomics su Thaksinathipatai* จาก Thaksinomics สู่ทักษิณาธิปไตย [From Thaksinomics to Thaksinocracy]. Bangkok: Open Books.
- Royal Gazette ราชกิจจานุเบกษา. 2018. *Phrarachbanyat khet phatthana phiset phak tawan-ok pho.so. 2561* พระราชบัญญัติเขตพัฒนาพิเศษ ภาคตะวันออก พ.ศ.๒๕๖๑ [2018 Act of the Eastern Special Development Zone]. 135 (34) Ko. May 14: 1–33.
- . 2017. *Phrarachbanyat kanjat-tham yutthasatchat pho.so. 2560* พระราชบัญญัติ การจัดทำยุทธศาสตร์ชาติ พ.ศ.๒๕๖๐ [2017 Act of the Planning of the State Strategy]. 134 (79) Ko. July 31: 1–12.
- Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C. 2022. Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model (BCG). <https://thaiembdc.org/bio-circular-green-bcg>, accessed on December 23, 2022.
- Sachs, J.; Kroll, C.; Lafortune, G.; Fuller, G.; and Woelm, F. 2021. *Sustainable Development Report 2021: The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009106559>.
- Shigetomi Shinichi. 2010. The Social Investment Fund of Thailand: New Intermediaries for Local Development. In *Social Policy and Poverty in East Asia: The Role of Social Security*, edited by James Midgley and Kwong-Leung Tang, pp. 155–166. Abingdon: Routledge.
- . 重富真一. 2000. Nosen kaihatu seisaku: Henkaku ni okeru seido to kojim 農村開発政策——変革における制度と個人 [Rural development policy: Institutions and individuals in changes]. In *Tai no keizai seisaku: Seido, soshiki, akuta* タイの経済政策——制度・組織・アクター [Economic policy in Thailand: The role of institutions and actors], edited by Suehiro Akira 末廣昭 and Higashi Shigeki 東茂樹, pp. 215–258. Chiba: JETRO Institute of Developing Economies.
- Somkid Jatusripitak สมคิด จาคูศรีพิทักษ์. 2001. *Wisaithat khun khlang Somkhit: Waduai naewkhit lae kolayut borisat prathet Thai* วิสัยทัศน์ขุนคลังสมคิด: ว่าด้วย แนวคิด และ กลยุทธ์ บริษัทประเทศไทย [Vision of Mr. Finance Minister Somkid: Concept and strategy of Thailand incorporated]. Bangkok: Matchon.
- Sorakon Adunyanon สรอก อุดุยานนท์. 1993. *Thaksin Chinnawat: Assawin khluenlukthi sam* ทักษิณ ชินวัตร: อัศวินคลื่นลูกที่สาม [Thaksin Shinawatra: The knight of the third wave]. Bangkok: Phikhanet Printing.
- Suehiro Akira ซุเอฮิโร อะคิระ. 2022. *Kanphatthana utsahakam baep laikuat: Senthang lae anakhot khong setthakit Asia Tawan-ok* การพัฒนาอุตสาหกรรม แบบไล่กวด: เส้นทาง และ อนาคต ของ เศรษฐกิจเอเชียตะวันออก [Catch-up industrialization: The trajectory and prospects of East Asian economies]. Bangkok: Fah Diaokan.
- . 末廣昭. 2020. Gendai no keizai shakai 現代の経済・社会 [Economy and society in contemporary Thailand]. In *Seikai rekishi taikei Taishi* 世界歴史体系タイ史 [History of Thailand], edited by Iijima Akiko 飯島明子 and Koizumi Junko 小泉順子, pp. 352–422. Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha.
- . 2018. “Chushotoku-koku no wana” no kokufuku: “Tairando 4.0” to Tai daikigyo no taionoryoku 「中所得国の罣」の克服——「タイランド4.0」とタイ大企業の対応能力 [Getting out of the middle-income trap: Thailand 4.0 and capabilities of the Thai big firms]. *Keizai shirin* (Hosei Daigaku) 経済志林 (法政大学) [Hosei University, Economic review] 85 (4): 67–129. <http://doi.org/10.15002/00014916>.
- . 2014a. *Shinko Ajia Keizai-ron: Kyatchi appu o koete* 新興アジア経済論——キャッチアップを超えて [Study on newly emerging Asian economy: Beyond the catch-up industrialization]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 2014b. Technocracy and Thaksinocracy in Thailand: Reforms of the Public Sector and the Budget System under the Thaksin Government. *Southeast Asian Studies* 3 (2): 299–344. [https://doi.org/10.20495/seas.3.2\\_299](https://doi.org/10.20495/seas.3.2_299).



- . 2010. Industrial Restructuring Policies in Thailand: Japanese or American Approach. In *Sustainability of Thailand's Competitiveness: The Policy Challenges*, edited by Patarapong Intarakumnerd and Yveline Lecler, pp. 129–170. Singapore: ISEAS. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814279482-008>.
- . 2009. *Tai: Chusin-koku no mosaku* タイ——中進国の模索 [Thailand: Challenge to the middle-income country]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 2008a. *Catch-up Industrialization: The Trajectory and Prospects of East Asian Economies*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- . 2008b. Keizai shakai seisaku to yosan seido kaikaku: Takkushin shusho no “Tai okoku no gendai-ka kaikaku” 経済社会政策と予算制度改革——タックシン首相の「タイ王国の現代化計画」 [Socio-economic policies and reform of the budget system: “The Kingdom of Thailand modernization framework” proposed by prime minister Thaksin]. In *Tai seiji gyosei no henkaku 1991–2006 nen* タイ政治・行政の変革 1991–2006年 [Thailand in motion: Political and administrative changes, 1991–2006], edited by Tamada Yoshifumi 玉田芳史 and Funatsu Tsuruyo 船津鶴代, pp. 237–285. Chiba: JETRO Institute of Developing Economies. <http://doi.org/10.20561/00042568>.
- . 1995. Chinawatto gurupu: Tai no johō-tsushin sangyo to shinko zaibatsu チナワット・グループ——タイの情報通信産業と新興財閥 [The Shinawatra group: Information and communication technology industry and newly emerging business group]. *Ajia keizai* アジア経済 [Asian economy] 36(2): 25–60.
- . 1993. *Tai: Kaihatsu to minshushugi* タイ——開発と民主主義 [Thailand: Development and democracy]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Suehiro Akira ชูอะชิโร อะกิระ and Natenapha Wailerdsak เนตนาภา ไวเลิศศักดิ์. 2022. *Tharusadi koet mai nai Asia: Anakhot khong kanlaikuat* ทฤษฎีเศรษฐกิจเกิดใหม่ในเอเชีย: อนาคต ของ การได้กวัด [Study on newly emerging Asia: The future of catch-up industrialization]. *Fah diaokan* ฟ้าเดียวกัน [Same sky] 20(1) January–June: 91–137.
- Suehiro Akira 末廣昭 and Yasuda Osamu 安田靖, eds. 1987. *NAIC eno chosen: Tai no kogyo-ka* NAIC への挑戦——タイの工業化 [Challenge to NAIC: Industrialization of Thailand]. Tokyo: Ajia Keizai Shuppankai.
- Suvit Maesincee สุวิทย์ เมษินทรีย์. 2020. *Lok plian khon prap: Lut chak kap dak khayap su khwam yangyuen* โลกเปลี่ยน คนปรับ: หลุดจากกับดัก ขยับสู่ความยั่งยืน [The world changes, people adjust: Overcoming the middle-income trap and driving towards sustainability]. Bangkok: MHESI.
- . 2016. *Thailand 4.0 Thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through Security, Prosperity & Sustainability*. Pathum Thani: Asian Institute of Technology.
- Thailand, Bureau of the Budget. *Thailand's Budget in Brief*. Annually, 1991–2020. Bangkok: BOB.
- Thailand, Cabinet Secretariat Office สำนักเลขาธิการคณะรัฐมนตรี. 2021. *Yutthasat kankhaphkheuan prathet Thai duai model setthakit BCG pho.so. 2564–2569* ยุทธศาสตร์ การขับเคลื่อนประเทศไทยด้วย โมเดลเศรษฐกิจ BCG พ.ศ. ๒๕๖๔-๒๕๖๙ [Strategy of Thailand BCG economy model 2021–2026]. January 21. Bangkok: CSO.
- Thailand, Ministry of Education and Ruam Duai Chuaikan Printing House กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ ร่วมกับ สำนักพิมพ์ ร่วมด้วยช่วยกัน. 2001. *Tharusadi mai nai luang chiwitthi phophiang* ทฤษฎีใหม่ในหลวง ชีวิตที่พอเพียง [The King's new theory: Sufficient life]. Bangkok: Samnakphim Ruam Duai Chuaikan.
- Thailand, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI) กระทรวงการอุดมศึกษา วิทยาศาสตร์ วิจัย และ นวัตกรรม. 2021. *Phaen pathibatkan dan kankhaphkheuan kanphatthana prathet thai duai model setthakit BCG pho.so. 2564–2570* แผนปฏิบัติการด้าน การขับเคลื่อน การพัฒนาประเทศไทย ด้วยโมเดลเศรษฐกิจ BCG พ.ศ. ๒๕๖๔-๒๕๗๐ [Roadmap promoting Thailand development based on the BCG economy model, 2021–2027]. Bangkok: MHESI.
- . 2019. *Kho sanoe BCG in action: The new sustainable growth engine, model setthakit su kanphatthana thi yangyuen* ข้อเสนอ BCG in Action: The New Sustainable Growth Engine โมเดลเศรษฐกิจ ผู้ การพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน [Proposal of BCG in action: The new sustainable growth engine, economic model

- towards sustainable development]. Bangkok: MHESI.
- Thailand, Ministry of Industry. 2017. Eastern Economic Corridor Development Project: Driving Forward. February 15. Bangkok: MOI.
- . กระทรวงอุตสาหกรรม. 2016. *Yutthasat kanphatthana utsahakam thai 4.0 raya 20 pi: pho.so.2560–2579* ยุทธศาสตร์การพัฒนา อุตสาหกรรมไทย 4.0 ระยะ 20 ปี: พ.ศ. ๒๕๖๐-๒๕๗๙ [20 year development strategy of Thailand Industry 4.0: 2017–2036]. Bangkok: MOI.
- Thailand, National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) สศช. 2016. *Rang khrop yutthasat chat raya 20 pi* ร่างกรอบ ยุทธศาสตร์ชาติ ระยะ 20 ปี [Draft of the framework of 20 year state strategy (2017–2036)]. May. Bangkok: NESDB.
- . 2007. *Khvam yu-yen pen suk ruam kan nai sangkhom Thai* ความสุขเย็นเป็นสุขร่วมกันในสังคมไทย: What is Happiness for Thai Society? [Peaceful life is happiness together in Thai society]. Bangkok: NESDB.
- . 2005. *Rai-ngan kantittam pramoenphon kanphatthana sethakit lae sangkhom khong prathet: 3 pi khong phaenphatthana chabap thi 9* รายงานการติดตามประเมินผล การพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจ และ สังคม ของประเทศ: 3 ปี ของ แผนพัฒนาฯ ฉบับที่ 9 [Evaluation report of national economic and social development plan: Three years of the ninth development plan]. Bangkok: NESDB.
- . 1996. *The Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997–2001)*. Bangkok: NESDB.
- Thailand, NESDB (NESDC). *Phawa Sangkhom Traimat* ภาวะสังคมไตรมาส [Quarterly report on social situation]. Quarterly, 2002–22. Bangkok: NESDB (NESDC).
- Thailand, Sub-Committee for Sufficiency Economy Promotion (SCSEP), NESDB คณะอนุกรรมการขับเคลื่อนเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง. 2015. *Khumue kan khaphkhleuan kanphattana tam pratya khong sethakit phophiang nai phak kankaset lae chonnabot lae dan khvam mankhong* คู่มือการขับเคลื่อนการพัฒนา ตามปรัชญา ของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง ใน ภาคการเกษตร และ ชนบท และ ด้านความมั่นคง [Textbook for promotion of the philosophy of sufficiency economy in the agricultural and rural sectors, and in security of livelihood]. Bangkok: NESDB.
- . 2007. *Pramuan kham nai phraboromarachawat phrabsomdet phrachao-yu-hua Bhumibol Adulyadej tangtae phutthasakharat 2493–2549 thi kiaokhong kap pratya khong sethakit phophiang* ประมวลคำ ในพระบรมราโชวาท พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว ภูมิพลอดุลยเดช ตั้งแต่พุทธศักราช ๒๔๙๓-๒๕๔๙ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับปรัชญาของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง [Collection of speeches by High Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej relating the philosophy of sufficiency economy 1950–2006]. Bangkok: NESDB, Fifth Printing.
- UNDP. 2007. *Thailand Human Development Report 2007: Sufficiency Economy and Human Development*. Washington D.C.: UNDP.
- Veerayooth Kanchoochat. 2015. The Middle-Income Trap and East Asian Miracle Lessons. In *Rethinking Development Strategies after the Financial Crisis, Vol. 1: Making the Case for Policy Space*, edited by Alfred Calcagno et al., pp. 55–66. New York: United Nations.
- Walker, Andrew. 2010. Royal Sufficiency and Elite Misrepresentation of Rural Livelihoods. In *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, edited by Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager, pp. 241–265. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- World Bank. 1993. *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- World Bank Group. 2016. *Getting Back on Track: Reviving Growth and Securing Prosperity for All*. Thailand Systematic Country Diagnostic. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.



# The Thai Middle Class and the Dynamics and Power of Conservative Ideology in Thai Society and Politics\*

Saichol Sattayanurak\*\*

The Thai middle class have long been dominated by and benefited from a conservative ideology. Middle-class intellectuals have not only reproduced the ideology rooted in the meaning of the “Thai nation” and “Thainess” that was established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but have changed its meaning and created new conceptions of it. Various artistic and cultural practices have resulted in conservative ideology having an impact on the mental and emotional makeup of the middle class in general. Although the new way of life introduced by globalization and capitalization has created new ideas, value systems, and emotions that are more liberal and democratic, it has not completely replaced the conservative ideology among the middle class. The middle class therefore manifest many ideological contradictions.

Between 2005 and 2014, both conservative and democratic ideals were used to explain problems of the “Thaksin regime,” which led the middle class to join the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). Throughout the ten years of violent political conflict, middle-class intellectuals convinced the middle class that Thai society was not ready for electoral democracy, and also used an ultra-conservative ideology to instill conservative sentiments. The resulting ultra-conservative ideology became so powerful that it led to the middle class supporting a political role for the monarchy, judiciary, and military.

After the 2014 coup, the ultra-conservative ideology continued to be used by the Thai state and the elites in tandem with a moderate conservative ideology. However, the middle class no longer benefited from conservative ideals. The calls for democracy appeared clearer. Thus, it can be expected that the middle class are in the process of retreating from conservative ideology, although they remain psychologically and emotionally committed to the traditional Thai value system to some degree.

**Keywords:** Thai middle class, dynamics and power, conservative ideology

---

\* This article is part of a research project titled “Changes of Thought, Value Systems, and Emotional Regimes of the Thai Middle Class, 1957–2017,” supported by Thailand Science Research and Innovation and the National Research Council of Thailand.

\*\* สาขาวิชา สัตยปัญญาธิปไตย, Professor Emeritus, Chiang Mai University  
e-mail: saicholnid@hotmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1357-0512>

## Introduction

The study of Thai politics tends to focus on the elite. There are some studies on the middle class, but investigations into the political movements of the middle class still lack a historical perspective. This is so particularly when it comes to the ideology of the middle class, which has changed in complex ways in its ideas, value systems, and emotions. Studying the changes in middle class ideology from a historical perspective may, in addition to better helping understand the middle class, be useful as an approach to the study of ideological change and its complex relationship with politics in other societies.

This article uses the word “conservative” as an ideology that prioritizes the preservation and passing on of “Thainess”; this ideology centers the organization of hierarchical social relationships and power relations on the belief that “Thainess makes Thailand good.” It prioritizes the preservation of the “Thai spirit” as well as the arts, culture, and value systems rooted in the monarchy and Buddhism, which ensure order, peace, stability, and progress in society. For more than a century, elite intellectuals have effectively constructed, instilled, and reinforced such a conservative ideology by modifying its meaning as well as co-opting and countering new ideas (Saichol 2014). However, the power of conservative ideology does not derive only from the work of elite intellectuals. Middle-class intellectuals have also played an important role in reproducing and reshaping the conservative ideology created by the elite. This has greatly increased the mental and emotional influence of conservative ideology on the Thai middle class in general.

The term “middle class” in this article refers to the middle and upper levels of the middle class; it does not include the lower middle class or the younger generation, who have a different socioeconomic and ideological status. The term “middle class” is used in a broad sense and does not recognize the diversity of the middle class in terms of economic status, occupation, age, values, taste, etc. In fact, each section or member of the middle class has, to a greater or lesser degree, a different combination of conservatism and other ideologies. But here we will speak of the ideology of the middle class from only a general perspective or in the context of important trends.

This article intends to show that the middle class play an important role in reinforcing the dynamism and power of conservative ideology in Thai society and politics. It begins by analyzing the benefits that the middle class derive from conservative ideology, leading to an understanding of the reasons why middle-class intellectuals use various kinds of artistic and cultural practices to reproduce and reshape conservative ideology. It then analyzes the emergence of new ideas, value systems, and emotions that create

ideological contradictions in the minds of the middle class, before analyzing the compounding of conservative and democratic ideologies that drove the political movements of the middle class between 2005 and 2014. After that, it addresses artistic and cultural practices involving ultra-conservative and middle-of-the-road conservative ideologies that were used following the coup in 2014 in an attempt to control and dominate the minds of the people. This leads to an analysis of the conditions and factors that help predict that the middle class are in the process of retreating from conservative ideology.

## **I The Benefits to the Middle Class from Conservative Ideology**

The middle class have benefited greatly from conservative ideology. Middle-class intellectuals have selected and adapted conservative ideals through various artistic and cultural practices, which has resulted in the majority of the Thai middle class having a strong mental and emotional attachment to “Thainess.”

The first middle class outside the bureaucracy consisted of Chinese immigrants who prospered in the Thai state; they leveraged conservative ideology by being “Thai-ified” in certain aspects in order to gain rights. In the 1950s–60s, more Chinese “became Thai” because China came under Communist control and the 1955 Thai citizenship law required people in Thailand to hold a single nationality. So Chinese who were unable to return to their country had to take Thai nationality, change their family name to a Thai name, and learn Thai in order to benefit from commerce and contact with the bureaucracy. The Thai government ordered Chinese schools to close, which led the Chinese to send their children to Thai schools. In addition, many Chinese capitalist families who “became Thai” and built networks with the Thai elite were highly successful, investing in various businesses, including those that received state concessions. The success of these Chinese people gave the ethnic Chinese middle class a sense of confidence in the stability of the Thai state and their own ability to prosper in it. Thailand became a land of hope, and both ethnic Chinese capitalists and the middle class benefited greatly from the country’s development policies. They were prepared to accept “Thainess” as part of their lives, while China became a Communist country beset by famine and the fires of war amid the large-scale violence that broke out during the Cultural Revolution.

Since before the development era, the Thai state has pursued policies very beneficial to the middle class, most of whom are of Chinese descent. The country’s partnership with the United States led to huge amounts of money flowing into its economic system, and the United States also provided scholarships under which, between 1950 and 1974, 1,500 “Thais” graduated and returned to enter government service, including

as university professors (Bell 1982, 61–74). Many in the middle class come from rural areas—possibly ethnic Chinese from various regions, or Lao from the Northeast and North, who “made their way up from farmer, landowner or village traders through various state projects” (Nidhi 2018). The rise of tourism has made “Thainess” even more important to the middle class because many significant tourist attractions, activities, and items are cultural in nature.

Both males and females of Chinese and Lao descent with sufficient education entered government service, which intensified the process of “becoming Thai.” There are many among the middle class who play the role of intellectuals, such as intellectually renowned monks, university professors, writers, magazine publishers, theater and film producers, etc. These intellectuals have all been molded by mainstream Thai intellectuals (important Thai intellectuals from the nineteenth century onward who inherited the nationalist ideology). The adoption of “Thainess” (or national culture) in the sense defined by mainstream intellectuals gives this group a higher social status and greater negotiating power with government officials. In addition, the value system in Thailand’s conservative ideology is consistent with the value systems in Hong Kong Chinese arts and culture, which have a great influence on Chinese people in Thailand (Teo 1997, 74; Fu 2008, 12; Kornphanat 2012, 96). Thai intellectuals of Chinese descent reproduced these value systems while combining capitalist ideals emphasizing worldly success with “Chineseness” and “Thainess,” to form an ideology of a “mat and pillow under royal protection” that responded to the needs and ambitions of the Chinese in Thailand and reduced the sense of shame in being Chinese (Sittithev 2015). The Chinese middle class could feel proud of both their “Chineseness” and “Thainess.”

In the case of the ethnic Lao middle class, mostly descendants of Lao immigrants forcibly relocated into the Lower North, Central Region, East, and Northeast from the early Bangkok period (Bung-on 1998)—when they were able to raise their status to middle class through the education system and government service as teachers, nurses, soldiers, police officers, etc.—they and their families were ready to “become Thai.” The similarities between the Lao and Thai ethnicity, language, and religion made it easy for Lao to take on “Thainess.”

For several decades, Thailand was a bureaucratic state. In the 1990s a group of large capitalists were voted into power. Thus, parliament has not been something the middle class can rely on politically. The solution has been to rely on the royal prestige of the monarch to counterbalance, hold to account, and control the power of both the military and parliamentary dictatorships. Therefore, the conservative ideology promotes royal hegemony, which is of great benefit to the middle class. The middle class believe that the reign of King Rama IX helped to lay the foundation of the political order after the 1932

revolution, when the country had to face changes and pressures from divisions and conflicts both internally and with other countries. The historical and cultural resources inherent in the monarchy helped to create national unity at times of crisis (Connors and Ukrist 2021, 5).

In addition, in a political context where the middle class lack institutional mechanisms to oversee and investigate those holding state power, the idea of “rule by righteousness” (or rule by good people) directly benefits the middle class, who use it to control the exercise of power by governments, government officials, politicians, judges, etc. Therefore, the idea of government by good people has always been important in the conservative ideology of the middle class.

The ideology of the patronage system has contributed to the power of conservative ideology, because Thai society accepts social hierarchy. This hierarchy generates great inequality in power, prestige, rights, opportunities, and the possession of resources and creates a complex system of patronage relationships. The middle class use the benefits of patronage relationships for stability in business, progress in government service, and protection of their own lives and assets. Even family and kinship relationships fall under the patronage system in which consciousness of favors and gratitude are more important than blood relationships (Akin 1984, 1–27). The long existence and the morality of the patronage system have therefore contributed to the continued strength of conservative ideology.

The benefits gained from a conservative ideology allow middle-class intellectuals to reproduce conservative ideals through artistic and cultural practices, reinforcing the conservative ideology that is inculcated by the elite and various state institutions and whose influence spreads into wider society. In addition to feeling a strong bond with the monarch and Buddhism at the heart of “Thainess,” the middle class are still committed to the Thai language and Thai virtues, literature, art, manners, etc. The meanings of “Thainess” in all these dimensions create ideals for living and managing social relationships that are believed to be correct and good, giving rise to prestige and a feeling of pride for having acted according to the standards of “Thainess” in all respects. They also affect the middle-class worldview as well as explaining the problems of life, family, society, or the nation along with their solutions. The enormous power of such a conservative ideology persists because of the artistic and cultural practices of middle-class intellectuals who have played an important role in various circles of society in recent decades.



## II Middle-Class Intellectuals and the Artistic and Cultural Practices that Reproduce Conservative Ideology

Middle-class intellectuals have a wide range of statuses and roles, and therefore artistic and cultural practices, but the various forms of their artistic and cultural practices since the 1950s have had the effect of giving the middle class ideas, value systems, and emotions that are deeply committed to conservative ideology.

Famous monks with a reputation as intellectuals have a broad influence because they disseminate ideas in the name of teaching religion: they receive funds from donors to print books for free or cheap distribution. More recently, books have also been disseminated online. One famous monk's teachings emphasize "satisfaction with what one already has," living a "sufficient" life, not clinging to material objects, and aspiring for a peaceful life. Such teachings contribute to turning the middle class against the capitalist system because they project profit making as immoral greed and selfishness. Those who make large profits must therefore make merit or provide substantial help to society so they can be respected as "good people."

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu preached on the "absurdity in the new civilization (*dosa moha*)." He taught:

Please remember the worst evil of mankind, which is selfishness. . . . Technology or industry has given us money. . . . It provokes a lot of sin. . . . It is about unfairness and greed. . . . There is more competition, rivalry, and jealousy. . . . The value of the lives of others is disregarded. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1984)

He added, "This greed and selfishness is about 'materialism'" that results in a political system that "is a democracy that is intoxicated with materialism" (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1984).

Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn (P. A. Payutto), when he still had the monastic name Phra Bhramagunabhorn, presented a sermon on "Buddhist economics," teaching that consuming for pleasure is "desire (*tanha*)." The good path is to develop the mind to a higher plane with help and sufficiency and without exploiting others (Phra Bhramagunabhorn [P. A. Payutto] 2010, 35). His teachings on "Buddhist law" show that secular freedom is used in order to gain benefits as one desires, by "dividing and competing" (Phra Dhammapitaka [P. A. Payutto] 1996, 33), and his "political science of rule by righteousness" teaches that "wealth and power must serve righteousness" (Phra Bhramagunabhorn [P. A. Payutto] 2009, 48). He also proposed that people should be controlled and receive instruction from the state because "people are too weak, so cannot preserve peace" (Phra Bhramagunabhorn [P. A. Payutto] 2009, 97) and explained that

“human beings are at different levels of development.” Those who are “better people” than others should therefore have power over others. “Only when good is really great,” which is when “good people” have power, can there be a government “making good great, with work to create great benefit for the people” (Phra Bhramagunabhorn [P. A. Payutto] 2009, 42).

Buddhist teachings affect people’s way of thinking; people view others through the perspective of “good people” and “bad people” and believe that social problems are caused by “bad people.” The important causes of problems come from “inside the human mind,” comprising “desire (*tanha*),” which is the need for benefit, “impudence (*mana*),” which is the need for power or supremacy, and “erroneous beliefs (*titti*),” which are beliefs, opinions, and adherence to concepts or views that what they see or uphold is the correct truth (Phra Bhramagunabhorn [P. A. Payutto] n.d.). The capitalist system is based on *tanha*; it is a bad system, which makes people in capitalist society “bad people.” “Good people” are those who adhere to

knowing about themselves or knowing sufficiency in pursuit of wealth in a way that they like, and they are not excessively greedy. . . . They must know about spending. . . . They are people who know themselves . . . how much family, rank, position, duty, work, knowledge, and ability they have and who must behave in accordance with these conditions, and not mislead themselves. (DMC TV n.d.)

Buddhism also teaches that the “virtues of the righteous,” which means “the morality of good people,” makes them “truly good people” (MGR Online 2011). The influence of Buddhist thinking even led one economics scholar to declare: “Everyone is born . . . naturally as an innocent baby. . . . As human beings grow up, they are naturally overwhelmed by emotion, passion, desire and lust . . . and want to want without limits . . . and are diverted by base low emotions” (Suvinai 2008a).

Only some people “have eyes to see what is right” or can change into “truly good people” (Suvinai 2008a). Such concepts have become the standard ideas, value systems, and emotional basis for making the middle class accept inequality among humans and accept rule by “good people” while feeling contempt, hatred, or opposition toward “bad people.”

Astrologers play a role in strengthening conservative ideology. Astrology still appears in a great number of newspapers and magazines and is part of the process of socialization and social organization, which involves defining a happy life. As a result, traditional social norms are accepted, such as social class, ideas of karma and the results of karma, and male superiority (Chanokporn 2013). The belief is reproduced that the life of an individual and the life of the nation are already defined by “fate” and the “fate of the

nation.” Success or failure is therefore a matter of destiny (apart from “old karma” and the inspiration of “sacred objects”). The belief in fate and the fate of the nation therefore renders changing political, economic, social, and cultural structures unimportant.

Astrologers continue to play a role in managing political emotions. For example, they make the middle class feel that various serious problems are the result of their fate and the fate of the nation rather than failings by the government. Some astrologers affirm General Prayut Chan-o-cha as being a “good person,” for example: “His fate was that whenever he says anything, his audience doesn’t like it, . . . but he is sensitive, kind, has a teacher. . . . Outside he is rough, but deep inside he is a gentle person” (*Daily News* 2020). As the situation changes, fortune-tellers adapt their prophecies. Some simply recommend living according to Thai virtues, such as Busarin Pattamakom, a prominent astrologer and columnist, who said on April 8, 2020:

It’s been fully five months since Jupiter and Saturn retreated . . . this period is one of turmoil, divisions within the government and the atmosphere of our national society . . .

However, it depends on the stars and whose stars it is. . . . Some people are rich in contrast to the economy. . . . The important thing is to have “gratitude.” . . . If anyone has no gratitude, whatever they do, they will not prosper and be troubled for the rest of their lives. We must focus on gratitude. Diligence, patience, frugality, honesty, and gratitude are the ways of salvation. (*Matichon* 2020b)

Writers reproduce the idea that “this Thailand is good because of Thainess.” Such thinking has always existed in conservative ideologies, such as Sot Kuramarohit’s declaration in 1940 that in comparison with China, “there have never been hundreds of thousands of people who starve to death. This is Thailand—a Buddhist country that has peace. . . . I am a Thai who prides himself on being Thai, as all patriotic Thais should be proud” and “Thailand has never been a colony of anyone else” (quoted in Jirat 2016, 124).

Many Thai writers express love for the nation, religion, and king. For example, the novelist Piyaphon Sakkasem created plots showing that the deep love of a mother for her children and a wife for her husband should not equal love for the nation, even when the protagonist is a woman, ready to use violence to save the nation and realm for her children (Porntada 2007, 173–174). The novels of Prabhassorn Sevikul reproduce a meaning of “Thainess” that emphasizes being helpful, having faith in Buddhism, taking pride in the art and culture of Thailand, having gratitude and loyalty to the monarchy, and taking pride in the honor of being in government service (Nuntarat 2018). Many of Thommayanti’s novels have plots that focus on the struggle for national independence under the leadership of the king and create an image of the king as a righteous person, clever and excellent at war. Some stories offer images of Thai monarchs before the 1932 revolution

that popularized democracy. Thommayanti often emphasizes in her novels that “above love is duty, responsibility, sacrifice of even one’s life to save the nation, to save the realm.” The female protagonists in Thommayanti’s novels are all strong-minded, patient, resolute, and self-confident but still with a Thai female nobility that holds fast to the Thai value system (Teejuta 2015, 256–259).

The meanings of “masculinity” and “femininity” under patriarchal ideology as part of conservative ideology have also been intensively reproduced by many other intellectuals and through the use of international artistic and cultural media, such as textbooks, Children’s Day books, novels, product advertisements, columns in magazines and newspapers, etc. Even the recent “Boy Love” novels inculcate a conservative ideology. For example, *A Tale of a Thousand Stars* (which came out as a film and TV series in 2020) shows that the collective memory of the reign of King Rama IX is still very powerful and the original value system is still appreciated. The protagonist is a soldier who protects the nation in Pha Phan Dao, a village that “got its prestige from the king, who sent officials to teach how to feed oneself. . . . Now it operates tea plantations, coffee plantations, and a temperate flower nursery.” Even when a school was set on fire, the water used to extinguish the fire was “royal rain,” which caused the villagers to “join together to kneel and raise their hands to the sky from where the raindrops were continuously falling. Every heart was brimming with a feeling of gratitude.” The cunning enemy of the villagers is Sia Sakda, who represents the invasion of capitalism, while the “sufficiency economy philosophy” is glorified throughout the story (Natthanai 2021).

Many filmmakers tried to get their audiences to “yearn for a most splendid past” (Krisda 2007, 79–81). Between 1999 and 2003, all films that earned a lot of revenue showed images of idyllic Thai villages, because the economic crisis and globalization that engulfed Thai society gave the middle class an intense feeling that the last fortress of “Thainess” was the village—the village was invested with a representation of the “Thai nation” and “Thainess.” The images were of beautiful villages with warm relationships among mothers, fathers, and relatives and long-standing peaceful coexistence. The enemy of the village was intrusive economic change and urbanization. There were many films with storylines suggesting that Western nations were the enemy. These films “did not entirely reject Western culture but had the attitude of dealing with the West at a distance, with caution, suspicion, anxiety, or dislike because it will become a threat to Thai society or culture” (Ittidech 2018, 187–212). Some films criticize Western capitalism for causing exploitation: the value of beauty in a society that emphasizes external appearance and consumption results in humans beings being mentally abnormal, engrossed in a passion that leads to catastrophe for everyone (Chutima 2016, 241–284).

Many Thai films are based on popular novels that reproduce conservative ideology.

For example, *Thawiphop* (The Siam renaissance) by Thommayanti highlights the pain of the protagonist, who feels that Thai society “respects Westerners more than compatriots.” The protagonist says, “We still have the king. . . . This is the only thing that makes us feel that we are still us” (Natthanai 2009, 147–179). Many films highlight the Buddhist belief of karma, emphasizing the “consequences of bad karma,” using violence to punish those who make bad karma. Heroes and heroines are often good people. The villains are bad people who suffer “retribution.” In particular, Thai ghost movies often reproduce the belief in a “karma of excessive retribution.” Those who make bad karma “have to pay compensation many times over” (Jesada 2019).

Producers of contemporary Thai musicals choose language, scenes, soundtracks, and action that cater to the tastes of the middle class and are therefore imprinted on the emotions of audiences. Many musicals staged in the 2010s were based on popular novels of the past and intensively reproduced conservative ideology. For example, female protagonists consented to behaving according to the conventions and emotional standards of society, even if some struggled with rebellion in their hearts. In addition, some musicals emphasize that Western democracy is not suitable for Thai society. Democracy already exists in the Thai mind, and the abdication of King Rama VII was brought about by a royal graciousness that prevented the shedding of people’s blood. A popular contemporary musical, *Four Reigns, the Musical*, emphasizes the merits of “Thainess” and the exalted status of the monarch but also his closeness to the people, his concern for their suffering, and the prosperity he brought to the people. The female protagonist in *Four Reigns, the Musical* makes the following moving statement:

In the midst of the changing flow of life, much suffering . . . always passes because life . . . has pillars to hold on to . . . helping support the bodies and minds . . . of Thai people throughout the kingdom. . . . Where the drops of royal sweat fall, suffering will instantly dissolve. . . . He is what we love and rely on.

When “the king of the land” passes away, “our tears fall, flooding the sky, flooding the earth, flooding our hearts, and there is no candlelight that used to shine. It grows dark. All hope is extinguished . . . fade away.” Opposition to the capitalist economic system in order to preserve “Thainess” appears in this contemporary musical through the role of a merchant character who is so selfish that he has no regard for people’s lives or his impact on the nation (Arthri 2012, 237–263).

Pramoth Thatsanasuwan, a Thai documentary writer whose work has long been popular and reproduces conservative ideology, said, “I write so that Thai people know their own land. I write so that Thai people love their land, and cherish the land as our ancestors cherished it in the past” (Pramoth 1980). Travel documentaries in many

magazines and books that relate the “good things” in the provinces play a similar role to the writings of Pramoth Thatsanasuwan. In addition, publications of the Tourist Organization of Thailand (since 1979 the Tourism Authority of Thailand) offer a picture of the abundance and beauty of nature and the value or importance of ancient monuments and ancient artifacts that former monarchs have produced. The monuments and artifacts showcase the artistic and cultural progress of the nation and patronage of Buddhism. There are also field trips or excursions to places with “good things” that help emphasize to tourists that “Thailand is good because it has Thainess” (Pinyapan 2015, 139–149).

Humanities scholars intensively reproduce the meaning of the “Thai nation” and “Thainess.” Art history academics have constructed a meaning of art in Thailand to establish a nationalist ideology (Chatri 2018). When the Thai government turned to traditional art in the 1950s, it “reverted to a style that was claimed as the traditional architectural style, full of complex details and patterns, especially buildings related to the monarchy and Buddhism” (Chatri 2004, 420). It also led to art schools and institutions having art teachers with the responsibility of producing graduates with an appreciation of the beauty of Thai art, where appreciating a Thai style of beauty would naturally preach a firm love of, commitment to, and pride in the Thai nation and Thainess.

The creation of literary, musical, song, and drama knowledge also played a huge role in reproducing conservative ideology. For example, Chetana Nagavajara, the most influential humanities scholar between the 1970s and 2010s, uses a methodology of valuation and comparative studies to show that Thai art and culture is highly developed, equal to the West or even superior:

The inscriptions of Wat Pho are the strongest evidence . . . the monarch acted as an intermediary in bringing the knowledge of the people back to the people. The spirit of democracy was born here before we got to know the word. (Chetana 1989, 89)

The writings of Chetana Nagavajara reflect disgust with the capitalist system: capitalists and workers are “materialists,” placing importance on money and property until they forget their human values (Chetana 1983, 56). Even Bertolt Brecht’s Marxist drama has a moral evaluation, aiming to consider the characters as “good people” and “bad people,” even going so far as to say that poverty is caused by immorality. For example, “That evil comes from poverty is something we can’t deny. . . . These poor people never work because they don’t have work. When they have work, they do not want to work” (Chetana 1983, 56, 69, 117, 128–129). New concepts and theories from the West—such as post-structuralism and postmodernism—that aim at the deconstruction of mainstream thought include the ideas of “Thainess,” gender, ethnicity, etc., and independence from the dominant discourse. The ideas from these theories have been deliberately turned

by Chetana Nagavajara into Buddhist concepts in order to prevent humanities circles from deconstructing the discourse of “Thainess,” masculinity, femininity, and the view of most ethnicities in Thailand as inferior to ethnic Thais (Saichol *et al.* 2018, 230–285).

Knowledge of the humanities that gave power to conservative ideology also stemmed from the cultural practices of many other intellectuals. For example, Ekkawit Nathalang (2016) said, “Knowledge of the liberal arts . . . resulted in my later work in education founded on a conceptual principle based on Thai cultural society, especially the establishment of ‘Thai education’ without following the Western world too much.” Many academic books and journals in the humanities reproduce the meaning of “Thainess,” focusing on Thai cultural values. Some journals and books aim to criticize capitalist economic systems that undermine Thai culture (Reynolds 2022, 194).

Medical knowledge, especially psychiatry from the 1950s to the present day, is consistent with Buddhist teachings and humanities knowledge in Thai society in the sense that it sees the important problems as “mental”: the capitalist economic system creates psychological problems for Thais because it breaks up families and degrades society. Many leading psychiatrists have therefore disseminated information focused on mental development and proposed to the government that in addition to making Thai people more knowledgeable, “it is also important to develop the people psychologically, which is considered the most important thing” (Buntharika 2022, 6). Such conceptual compatibility has led some Thai doctors to become intellectuals with an interest in studying Buddhism as an approach to solving problems and developing the country in a conservative way, which this group of doctors submit has been recognized by various government organizations and civil society. And some doctors also tell stories about the royal duties of King Rama IX that have made citizens grateful for his kindness and made them believe that they should follow in his footsteps in helping the people (Kridikorn 2022, 168–216).

It is evident that middle-class intellectuals play a significant role in artistic and cultural practices as well as the creation and dissemination of academic knowledge, allowing conservative ideology to deeply influence the minds and emotions of people. However, the fact that conservative ideology has been able to remain powerful for a long time is not just the result of its being reproduced consistently. It is also the result of new meanings being created for old concepts and the meanings being changed for new concepts that have come to play a great role in Thai politics, such as “democracy” and “civil society,” which have the effect of giving the middle class the hope that Thai society will improve.

### III Modification of the Focal Point and Meaning of Conservative Ideology by Middle-Class Intellectuals

Middle-class intellectuals are aware that in a changing and challenging social context with other ideologies, it is necessary to construct new concepts or modify the existing focal point and meaning of the original ideology in order to give it the power to explain problems and offer alternatives to Thai society in a significant way. This helps to prevent rapid and radical social changes as well as changes in undesirable directions. The cultural politics of middle-class intellectuals have created several new concepts, and since the 1990s—before which the state and the elite did not have their own outstanding intellectuals—these new concepts have been included in state policies or projects in order to closely direct, control, and govern the people. In the process, the people have been molded to have “virtues” specified by the state and the elite, so that they can control themselves from within and behave socially and politically within the framework desired by the state and the elite. This applies to their behavior in their roles as individuals, communities, and civil society, as will be analyzed below.

The concept of “rule by righteousness” was constructed in the early 1950s to offer an alternative to government and was different from a Marxist approach. By the late 1960s, Gen. Sawaeng Senanarong had applied this concept to support the power of the government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and reduce the importance of the elections:

[W]e must believe principally in rule by righteousness and use it with democracy . . . of the people and by the people, which can sometimes be a lack of perfection according to the stage of democratic development, but . . . if it is not for the people and then it is not democracy, according to this meaning . . . There must be faith in virtue. . . . Democracy is a matter of virtue. (Sawaeng 1977, 89)

After the 1997 constitution was enacted, elections became more important. The meaning of “rule by righteousness” was modified from emphasizing leaders being “good people” to emphasizing the people also being “good people,” because the people were the voters. Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto) played an important role in modifying the meaning of “rule by righteousness” to emphasize the virtues of the people, explaining that “if the people are of low quality, democracy will be bad democracy, because the quality of democracy depends on the quality of the people.” Therefore, people should be “good people,” knowledgeable, and able to think, see the truth, and make the right decisions (Phra Dhammapitaka [P. A. Payutto] 2000, 5–6; Surapol 2005). Such ideas have been abundantly reproduced to control the political power and behavior of the people. For example, Sangwon Liptapanlop stated:



A leader comes from election by citizens. To have leaders who are good and moral, they must come from citizens who are good and moral and support him with their votes. A society of rule by righteousness is therefore decided by its own citizens. (Sangwon 2016, 2)

It may be said that middle-class intellectuals increasingly see the importance of “the people,” but they also try to make people accept and behave according to the Thai value system because they want them to

live together happily under rights and freedoms, equality and impartiality under the rules of society, with harmony, mutual assistance, generosity to each other, compromise and interdependence, to allow society to live together in peace . . . protesting in opposition without violating the rights of others. (Anucha *et al.* 2020, 51–53)

Some scholars have adapted the ideas of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu as the concept of “Dhammic Socialist Democracy” to ensure the rule and coexistence of people in Thai society according to Buddhist or Thai virtues. They stress that “Liberalism is an opportunity for selfishness. . . . Liberal democracy is fully free. . . . Once it has power in its hands, passion (*kilet*) takes over the exercise of freedom following the force of passion,” as opposed to “Dhammic Socialist Democracy,” which promotes benevolence and the fair distribution of material wealth in the spirit of charity and sharing (Thaweewat 1997, 84–104).

The “Dharma Land, Golden Land” project was initiated by a civil servant named Pacha Laphanan, who went to South Korea to observe village development, a form of rural development with the participation of the people. The process started with a phase of mental indoctrination, and then the minds of the villagers became a foundation for effective economic development. Pacha Laphanan introduced the concept by combining it with Buddhist principles. In 1983 villages in this project had the status of “Dharma Land, Golden Land Villages,” signifying both mental and economic progress. Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda made it a government project and established the Committee to Promote and Coordinate the Dissemination of the Dharma Land, Golden Land Ideology with the responsibility of encouraging the people to have virtues according to Buddhist principles. Another of the project’s responsibilities was to help the weak with four “factors” of living (food, shelter, clothing, and medicine), to increase individuals’ income, and to create national economic stability while conserving natural resources (Anek 1987, 17–35). A dhamma lecture by Phra Vikrommuni on Dharma Land, Golden Land reflected the idea of preventing people from turning back to Communism or losing hope in “the Age of Maitreya” by strengthening the “Thai mind” to make “the era of His Majesty the King now the era of ‘Dharma Land, Golden Land.’ . . . The three institutions—nation, religions, and monarchy—must progress at the same time” (Chao Khun Phra Vikrommuni n.d.).

Later came the concept of a “volunteer spirit (*jit asa*),” similar to the “Dharma Land, Golden Land” project, focusing on the development of “hearts” to be virtuous, to be ready to help others, and to work with others to help Thailand escape problems and experience prosperity and calm. “Civil society” came together under the support of the state. The meaning of “volunteer spirit” and “public spirit,” according to the Office of the National Research Council, was

empathy . . . joining in matters of the common good that benefit the nation . . . being conscious of and upholding to a good moral and ethical system, shame of doing what is wrong, an emphasis on order, thrift, and a balance between man and nature. (Thailand, Office of the Civil Service Commission n.d.)

This is consistent with the meaning of “Thainess” in the moral or ethical sense as recognized by the Thai middle class. The agency established by the government in 2011 to implement this is the Moral Promotion Center. It encourages people to uphold the national virtues of “sufficiency, discipline, honesty, volunteerism, and gratitude” in order to create “good people, good society” (Moral Promotion Center [Public Organization] 2021), which is the “Dharma Land, Golden Land,” focusing only on the good heart of people (disregarding the issue of economic prosperity).

The economic goals—the prosperity of both the people and the nation—that were once important in the “Dharma Land, Golden Land” project were erased by those who created and disseminated the concepts of “volunteer spirit” and “moral society.” The change came as the government and the Thai elite wanted to lessen people’s desire for rapid economic prosperity and overconsumption of goods, which could lead to opposition to the government and the elite. Therefore, they wanted people to have “sufficiency,” which was an attempt to reduce the tide of the “new politics of desire,” namely, politics to achieve success and happiness through capitalism (Thanasak 2014) and prevent calls for a democratic liberal government that emphasized civil rights and political equality, as was the case with the political movement of the Red Shirt masses.

One part of the implementation of the “volunteer spirit” of the middle class was in the form of “civil society,” which became “civil society” Thai style. The concept of “civil society” gained influence among Thai intellectuals after the decline of Marxist-Maoist ideas, which emphasized revolution to radically change society. “Civil society,” which emphasized gradual social change through social forces or non-state forces by the “middle path,” wielded great influence among Thai intellectuals, e.g., academics, the mass media, social activists, and NGO workers. Later, the concept of “civil society” was incorporated into the idea of “community culture” and the Buddhist value system, giving “civil society” a meaning in line with conservative ideology, as has been shown in many writings and social activities since the 1990s—for example, the idea that “the integration

of diverse civil society groups needs to be built on the basis of love, kindness, mutual assistance, harmony, and conformity as a nexus creating powerful cooperation” (Nathapong and Adisorn 2000, 39–41).

Many middle-class intellectuals in recent times, especially since the early 2000s, have not viewed “civil society” as nongovernmental organizations with their own goals or choices, or as organizations that can direct, monitor, and balance state power. Instead, there is an emphasis on cooperation between “civil society” and the state. For example, Prawase Wasi pushed for “quinquepartite” collaboration among villagers, government officials, NGOs, the media, and academics, which he called “*prachakhom* [community]” or “people-state collaboration [*pracharat*]” (Prawase 1997), until it became an approach upheld by many in “civil society.” This opened a convenient opportunity for the state to take control and dominate civil society by issuing laws, providing budgets, and instilling the form of morality or ethics wanted by the state and elite.

The dominance of the state and elite was seen in the ideas of political reform among middle-class intellectuals during the 2000s–2010s, which were weak compared to the political movement for the 1997 constitution. The ideas that intellectuals presented to society in the 1990s were clearly liberal and democratic, such as prioritizing rights and freedoms, prioritizing the free market system, and creating mechanisms to monitor the use of power in accordance with the law, emphasizing public participation on the basis of equality. The establishment of independent organizations was tied to elected political institutions. However, during the 2000s–2010s the state and the elite instead established organizations that had power over elected political institutions, implementing reforms that focused on liberalism but not democracy, or were increasingly hostile to democracy (Somchai 2017). Thus, the state and the elite used conservative ideology to maintain the power structure. Middle-class intellectuals made efforts to establish a political system in which each party participated appropriately. For example, villagers participated with “Thai virtues” (such as sacrifice) or as part of a “community with the virtues of self-sufficiency”; they did not engage through greed or desire or capitalist selfishness, which in the past caused problems of “vote-buying” and “exercising excessive freedom” in demanding rights and equality.

It can be seen that the concept of “community culture” has changed a lot and has also been taken over and controlled by the state and the elite. This is evident from the bringing in of nongovernmental development workers (or NGOs) and academics who work for villagers in community organizations or civil society via development institutions established by the state and the elite, such as the Community Organizations Development Institute (Public Organization). From 2007 the state introduced several laws to regulate community organizations and civil society.

One intellectual who played an important part in creating the concept of “community culture” was Chatthip Nartsupha. His aim was to create a kind of cultural nationalism that valued the “villager community.” But when this concept became widely known, it instead gave more power to the value system contained in “Thainess” because it advocated a “community with Thai virtues”: charity, generosity, harmony in managing resources and solving problems, and a negative view of capitalism-globalization. These characteristics are evident in the 24 volumes of the *Khrongkan Withithat* (Vision project) published in the 2000s. Many volumes note that accepting Western culture destroys “Thainess.” It is necessary to restore “community culture” to make “strong communities” (Reynolds 2022, 204–212). Some volumes emphasize the peacefulness of the Thai and Buddhist ways of solving national crises (Pitthaya 1998), while others demonstrate the benefits of a return to studying and living in a traditional way along with a sufficiency economy following royal thinking, which makes strong communities self-reliant through sufficiency (Suthitham 2006).

Prawase Wasi was one person who changed the idea of “community culture” with an emphasis on the Buddhist mind, including the concepts of “good people” and “good life,” in which a “good life” meant “free from mental oppression . . . with access to diversity and natural beauty, with peace giving rise to a love for fellow humans and nature, and with a consciousness and concentration free from the oppression of selfishness.” And a “good society” is a “dhammic society or a society that creates love and kindness, has the capacity and wisdom to solve problems, knows how to manage conflicts through peace and has harmonious strength and knowledge” (Yos 1996, 30).

It can be said that there has been a convergence of “rule by righteousness,” “community culture,” “volunteer spirit,” and “civil society,” where these concepts have points of ideological agreement and consistency with each other and have also been influenced by each other. They have been shaped by a Thai value system derived from Buddhism, thus greatly strengthening conservative ideology to become a “neo-conservative ideology.” There are many intellectuals and general members of the middle class who practice a political culture under these concepts, such as by writing academic texts and literature, producing movies and TV series, doing rural development work, implementing community rehabilitation with collaboration among social activists and community members both urban and rural, etc. The mass media plays a large role in conveying these ideas to the public. For example, the public broadcaster Thai PBS has programs aimed at telling stories of the peaceful way of life and culture of communities persuaded to turn to organic crops or sufficiency agriculture (Samchai 2020, 192–193). These artistic and cultural practices have led the middle class to believe that Thai life and society in the past were good, and that there were hopes and dreams of

being able to restore these good attributes both in the countryside and in the cities. This tied the middle class more closely to conservative ideology, and by the early 2000s the middle class had joined together to oppose the “evil capital” that destroyed their hopes and dreams.

By the early 2010s, the state and the elite, ruling by authoritarianism, applied the concepts of “community culture” and “virtues of community members” to help control and govern people more effectively by reducing the power and rights of the people to negotiate with the state and capitalists. This meant the people were subjected to moral disciplinary rules without demanding rights out of greed or selfishness. The method the state and the elite tried to use was to make “communities” and “civil society” nationwide conform to Thai virtues or the value system that existed in “community culture.” The Moral Promotion Center was set up with different activities to make the people conform to a value system of “sufficiency, discipline, honesty, volunteerism, and gratitude” (Moral Promotion Center [Public Organization] 2021). A large number of “communities” and “civil society organizations” joined the network (Thanyalak 2021). The aim was to

create a moral society in which everyone in the organization is virtuous, loyal to the institutions of nation, religions, and monarchy, conforms, upholds religious principles, and embraces the philosophy of the sufficiency economy and Thai cultural ways in making a living. (Thailand, Office of the Cane and Sugar Board 2020)

The Moral Promotion Center and network organizations continue to hold activities to enable conservative ideology to remain a force in Thai society.

### III-1 *Changing the Meaning of “Democratic Form of Government with the King as Head of State”*

Middle-class intellectuals offer varying meanings of a “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state.” Some scholars emphasize that sovereignty belongs to the king or to the king and the people, but the monarch exercises constitutional sovereignty. The clearest explanation of this idea is given by Bowornsak Uwanno (2008), who notes the legitimacy of the monarch in exercising sovereignty on behalf of the people as he has the ten royal virtues. Thirayuth Boonmee offered his views on the monarchy and the “democratic form of government with the king as head of state,” emphasizing the importance of the monarchy in many aspects. For example, in the late 1980s, when royal hegemony was in the ascendant (Asa 2021), Thirayuth Boonmee implied that politicians and liberal business groups should “rely on royal prestige” to establish leverage with the military leadership. He saw that the era of “semi-democracy” was coming to an end. The people should therefore join in replacing it with a “democratic

form of government with the king as head of state.” This would have the effect of reducing the importance of the military and political parties, while the “system” or political totality would have greater importance until no side had power over the others. He emphasized:

[T]he political worldview of a democratic system with the king as head of state is therefore the linking of the monarchy to the people as the bastion of the democratic system through the institutions of parliamentary political parties, which is considered to be a great step forward in the principles of democracy in Thailand. (Thirayuth 1993, 39–43, cited in Thikan 2012, 535–536)

When there were calls for the use of Article 7 by the PAD in 2006, Thirayuth Boonmee explained “democratic form of government with the king as head of state” as meaning that the monarch was above politics and politically neutral, thus being “the one who decides and ultimately resolves conflict, or who ultimately resolves crises, which academically are states of dysfunction of the country’s various institutional mechanisms.” However, he also stressed that “in today’s world, it is even more necessary for the monarch to be a symbol of democracy, in the sense that he is the defender of the constitution, not the one who abolishes the constitution” (Thirayuth 2006, 273–274).

In 2012, when King Rama IX was very ill, Thirayuth Boonmee said:

I disagree with some ultra-conservative academics who are trying to revert to admiring the monarchy as a supposed god with greater political power. This would be a regression. For the monarchy to be able to have a sustainable existence in a free, democratic society and an information-era world, it must be an institution with the status of being truly symbolic of the country. In addition to having responsibilities for tasks according to a democratic constitution, there are also tasks based on tradition, religion, culture, and social expectations, such as being the spiritual center, the source of honor, ethics, morality, rituals. (*Komchadluek* 2012)

Thirayuth Boonmee warned against

the emphasis on the monarchy as the heart of this center in every aspect, which is an attempt to rely on one person as the center of political stability, as the center of economic development, as the center of virtue. This is excessively risky, because the current monarch is respected by the people at an unprecedented level. The continuation of the institution of many more future monarchs should be taken into consideration. (*Komchadluek* 2012)

In 2006 Nakharin Mektrairat devised a clear definition for the “democratic form of government with the king as head of state” by portraying the monarch as the “protector of democracy,” allowing the evolution of democracy in a way unique to Thai society. The king’s resolution of important political conflicts turned him into a “pure force” at the center of the highest power of Thai political society that various power groups relied on.

If consideration is given to the idea of consolidating democracy, it is evident that the monarch plays a role in creating a state of political stability and adopts a neutral position. The wave of calls for a “royal prerogative” from different political groups, which led the Thai elite and middle class to accept the recommendations made by the monarch in his speeches in 2005–6, shows that the monarch has royal hegemony to lead and set a pattern for the monarchy under the constitution as head of state in the Thai democratic system. Citizens rely on him, and therefore he is a pillar of the country’s nationhood and democracy (Nakharin 2006).

The meaning of the “democratic form of government with the king as head of state” was modified to emphasize a “reliance on royal prestige” to resolve political crises and counterbalance the power of various power groups. As a result, the middle class continued to maintain a conservative ideology. This was especially true after the success of the middle class in pushing for the 1997 constitution and supporting the Thai Rak Thai Party in the 2001 elections. However, the 1997 constitution and the 2001 elections led to the emergence of the “Thaksin regime,” which ended up disappointing the middle class despite the good constitution. The middle class were also disappointed with electoral democracy and the existence of independent organizations tied to parliament, whose members were elected by the Thai people. This intense frustration led the middle class to join the PAD and the PDRC, which used a conservative ideology mixed with democracy to stoke emotions, particularly the ideology of a “democratic form of government with the king as head of state,” which integrated the meanings of “democracy,” “monarch,” and “Thai virtues.” This ideology’s emphasis on certain ideas and use of language with intensely emotional overtones led the middle-class masses to oppose the “Thaksin regime,” as will be explained below.

Amidst the disappointment with the independent organizations set up according to the 1997 constitution and electoral democracy in the 2000s, conservative ideology dominated the minds of the middle class. This was due to the artistic and cultural practices of conservative middle-class intellectuals that continued to exert an influence along with the creation or modification of concepts such as a “democratic form of government with the king as head of state,” “community culture,” “civil society,” etc. The concepts were given a Thai context and thus made conservative ideology a powerful presence in the minds of the middle class. They helped to give hope to the middle class that there would be “rule by righteousness,” a “strongly harmonious society,” and a revival of “community culture” and “Thai virtues.” But while hope is not yet reality, the middle class must live in a society that they themselves perceive as deteriorating in several ways, in both the natural environment and the mental state of people as a result of the expansion of industry and urban society. This gives the middle class a strong feeling of nostalgia for the

past, which serves to strengthen conservative ideology.

The feeling that Thai society is deteriorating, which makes the middle class yearn for and wish to revive the past, appears in various artistic and cultural practices. For example, several short stories from the 1990s portray villagers falling victim to an economic and political system in which capitalists and power holders collaborate to exploit the masses, resulting in the destruction of communities and villagers' way of life, dehumanization, the turning of life into a commodity, and the creation of environmental problems. According to one short story, "The business of buying and selling seaside land is so intense that blood floods the sand" (Phacharawan 2019, 412–416). Such problems bring into question the legitimacy of development policy. Short stories from 1995 to 1999 are also filled with desperation over social issues such as family problems, violence against children, loss of freedom, people becoming slave to material objects that entered the community in the name of prosperity, capitalists grabbing local resources, an inefficient government bureaucracy, etc. Urban life is portrayed as being fraught with difficulties, haste, materialism, and the risk of unemployment. Some short stories satirize the rich and the destruction of the environment. These short stories reflect the psychological oppression of people in society, often ending in the defeat of the characters. This defeat represents the defeat of mankind's common sense and virtue—in interpersonal relationships, relationships between mankind and fate, and relationships between mankind and the social environment (Attapol 2002).

The middle class's perception that capitalism destroys "Thainess" and degrades Thai society (Reynolds 2022, 200) creates a strong sense of nostalgia. Public intellectuals such as Sulak Sivaraksa and Prawase Wasi, academics of the Withithat group, and many other leading scholars have also highlighted the problem of deterioration in Thai society due to the state and capitalist groups working together to grab resources from the villagers. However, the perception of a beautiful countryside where there is still "community culture" or a legacy of "Thainess" from the past is greatly exaggerated. The perception leads to encroachment into the countryside by the state and capitalists being seen as the worst situation. However, the emergence of new concepts and new meanings for old concepts, such as the "democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state," "rule by righteousness," "civil society," etc., has given the middle class the dream of "restoring the beautiful past" both in the countryside and in the cities.

A review of the S.E.A. Write book *Banana Tree Horse*<sup>1)</sup> reflects the feelings of

---

1) *Banana Tree Horse* by Paiwarin Khao-Ngam won the S.E.A. Write Award in 1995. It is outside reading for lower secondary school. (Translator's note: *Banana Tree Horse* is the official English translation of the literary work. It refers to a form of hobbyhorse made from the stalk of a banana leaf.)



nostalgia and “hope” of restoring the countryside and towns to their former “beauty”:

Paiwarin Khao-Ngam . . . rushes into a world of natural beauty in a rural way . . . admires beauty at a spiritual level. . . . The love of traditional cultural values is being irretrievably lost . . . but mourns and yearns for the past when Isaan was still a beautiful countryside . . .

. . . The depiction of life . . . and the oppressive problems of urban society . . . and the profound melancholy of realizing that the past cannot return . . . until we are brave enough to hope for a beautiful future . . . (*Ma kankluai* n.d.)

Implementation of the Livable City project took place in a context where the middle class had a nostalgia for the past and a desire to revitalize cities to make them livable once again. For example, the Bangkok Forum, which was the template for urban regeneration across the country, placed importance on the Thai value system of restoring each city as a warm and vibrant community, a city of art that helped the mind to be sensitive and charitable, where people gathered for social activities, a “civil society” bound with “local wisdom,” with historical roots and a strong “community culture” (Attama 2003, 57–66).

After the economic crisis in the late 1990s, shortly before the “Thaksin regime” came to power, the nostalgia of the middle class rooted in conservative ideology was greatly intensified. For example, in late 1999 the Banglamphu community held cultural alms-giving activities from time to time. People dressed in Thai clothes listened to sermons and played soothing traditional music. People in the community had a feeling of pride that Banglamphu was once the site of a palace (the palace of Prince Krom Muen Mahesuan Siwawilas, a son of King Rama IV, which burned down in 1869). Chinese, Mon, and Muslim communities came there to “rely on royal protection and lived happily for generations,” and it was also “home to the traditional Thai music community.” Groups involved in the Livable City project in the provinces, such as the Songkhla Lovers Group, saw society as degenerating because it was permeated with social problems, competition, and alienation. This led to the dissemination of the Buddhism of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu to revive morality and strengthen the will of local people (Attama 2003, 63–77).

In their nostalgia and belief that a beautiful past could be successfully restored, the middle class often gave importance to the “virtues” of the community. For example:

[T]ruth, mutual assistance, generosity, charity, mutual trust . . . and an optimistic view of people . . . are an important basis for a democratic society . . . with respect for human dignity . . . leading to a peaceful life . . . in the spirit . . . of cherishing resources and the land for farming/traditions of the village community/peasantry . . . and with pride in the community and a willingness to protect the community. (Surawut 2002)

The creation of nostalgic television series, contemporary plays, and films reflects the nostalgia of the middle class and their hopes that the power of “community culture” and

Buddhism, which overcomes human desire, will restore peace to rural areas and Thai society in general. For example, high-grossing Thai films from 1997 to 2003, after the economic crisis, responded to the nostalgia for the past by showing images that “Thailand was good”: rural areas with beautiful scenes of nature and peace. They showed that when the nation was attacked, there was unity and mutual help in fighting the enemy through the use of violence, and often fighting that relied on monarchs or monks. Many films implicitly opposed Western nations or the capitalist system (Ittidech 2018, 171–219).

An anti-capitalist form of nostalgia resulted from the influence of Buddhist ideas and the concepts of “community culture” and “Thai-style civil society.” It also resulted from the ideologies of conservatism, humanism, and Marxism. Those who subscribed to the concepts of “community culture” and “Thai-style civil society” may have been influenced by all three of these ideologies. Although the three ideologies have very different conceptual bases, they all hold a negative view of capitalism. For example, humanists see capitalism as destroying human values or goodness and making humans selfish. They also see it as destroying the freedoms that human beings naturally enjoy because it sets time frames. Marxist thinkers view the capitalist class as oppressing and exploiting workers. Conservative ideologues see capitalism as destroying “Thainess,” especially Thai virtues such as sufficiency, kindness, charity, and mutual assistance. Intellectuals who are influenced by these ideologies have anti-capitalist artistic and cultural practices, since all three ideologies are opposed to capitalism. The artistic and cultural practices of such intellectuals affect the sentiments of the middle class, who have come to hate and oppose “evil capital.”

#### **IV New Ideas, Value Systems, Emotions, and Contradictions in the Minds of the Middle Class**

Under the power of conservative ideology, the middle class have experienced economic changes affecting social relations. In the 1990s there was an influx of capital from Japan and other countries, coupled with Gen. Chatichai Choonhavan’s policy of turning Indochina from a battlefield into a marketplace. The promotion of tourism, etc., led to an increase in investment. The middle class then expanded rapidly, and social relations changed. Leaving home to study, working in a big city, and finding new forms of entertainment heightened the sense of individualism. There was a desire for independence and freedom in lifestyles. Although there remained a psychological attachment to a system of Thai-style values, even those with a strong nostalgia for the past wanted freedom. For example, the author of the S.E.A. Write Award for *Banana Tree*

*Horse used*

the words “spirit” and “free” . . . which have implications of the ideological values of bourgeois liberalism . . . which are that the countryside is a land of freedom. . . . Using birds as a symbol of freedom . . . is the ideal image which city people construct. (Chusak 2004, 202–203)

Travel books placed great importance on freedom. Individual tourism expanded rapidly. Individual tourists were middle class, some of them women over the age of 60, traveling alone, projecting a sense of self-confidence, able to successfully reach their intended destination with patience, strength, wisdom, courage, and planning. Traveling solo was all about creating a sense of confidence, independence, and high self-esteem (Tuangtong and Sukanya 2017, 50). Many prominent intellectuals and columnists called for democracy or criticized the problems caused by decades of continuous undemocratic regimes and unbalanced national development policies that led to family and community breakdown.

When the middle class entered the neoliberal economic system, commercial relations focused on profit and loss increased in their daily lives. There was also a heightened sense of individualism, with a view of “the good life” incorporating a sense of comfort, independence, freedom, and the authority and right to make one’s own decisions without meeting anyone else’s criteria and standards. There did not have to be any commitment to family, relatives, or community according to the old values, and one had to be prepared to meet fluctuations in life.

In self-help books, the saying “life is a journey” is the most common, followed by “life is a struggle/war.” Such books often offer advice such as the following: “we must have hope based on the real world . . . live with things that are always changing, live through it and live one’s life like no one else to know one’s own worth . . . and enjoy the satisfaction of that worth” (Phuwanat 2008, 104, cited in Surachet 2010, 78).

Self-help books also teach that “When it’s time to break the rules, don’t think about it much. . . . Break them. It’s about finding ourselves and being how we are” (Surachet 2010, 63–65). Statements like these reflect the importance of having independence and freedom and accepting change in life and society rather than adhering to traditions and old value systems.

The new ideas, value systems, and emotions of the middle class are evident also in literature. For example, short stories by many female writers from the period 1977–97 show that the fundamental principles of the democratic system—equality, freedom, and human dignity—exist in Thai society. Even though there have been no real changes of power relations in the lives of the middle class, this literature illustrates the problem of unequal power relations between women and men and calls on women to fight for their

rights, freedoms, and equality (Areeya 2014, 68–95). Simultaneously, the novels by many famous female writers value “Thainess,” they encourage women to be conscious of gender equality and to be ready to fight for it. They question the moral framework that unfairly defines women’s lives and emphasize the rights and freedoms of women to exercise discretion in determining their own lives (Porntada 2007, 100–101).

The middle class, however, still yearn for a past that was good. They are committed to “Thainess,” or conservative ideology, and want a liberal capitalist economy, but they also view the effects of capitalism negatively and want to maintain a “community culture.” They want democracy but are suspicious of politicians and want to be ruled by “good people,” with the monarchy as “something to rely on,” etc. This makes the ideology of the middle class contradictory, unsystematic, overlapped, and adulterated with an emphasis and meaning that shifts according to the context. It is evident that when the middle class resisted the power of elected politicians in 2005–14, the old ideology of conservatism was powerfully revived, while the democratic ideology was used to show the protesting middle-class masses that elected governments violated the principles of democracy. The leadership of the masses defined “democracy” in terms of giving the middle class hope for a “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state.” This was portrayed as “true democracy,” “fitted to the peculiarities of Thai society and culture,” while the electoral democracy that was used to legitimize the government was portrayed as a false democracy.

The middle class recognize “democracy” as having many elements, such as elections, balance of power, checks on the use of power, and the importance of a “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state” in order to “rely on royal prestige” in controlling and monitoring governments of military leaders and politicians. But from the early 2000s until the 2014 coup, many in the middle class were aroused by sentiments opposing elections and elected governments, giving special importance to the monarchy’s role in overseeing the political system. A meaning of “democratic form of government” was created that Thai society should achieve in the future. This proposed “political reforms” to achieve a participatory form of democracy and decentralization to citizens, communities, and civil society that had Thai virtues to combat “electoral democracy,” which had resulted in governments with excessive powers and no effective monitoring by either parliament or independent organizations. The middle class had to turn to relying on the idea of rule by “good people” and “relying on royal prestige” to control rulers, because they saw politicians as bad and there were no effective political institutions to use as tools; also, elections did not have much effect on the country’s policies or direction. However, elections were “more meaningful” even under the 2017 constitution (Nidhi 2021a). The middle class therefore face a psychological paradox between the need

for democracy and suspicions about democracy, and they cannot find “good people” according to the principle of “rule by righteousness” to be the rulers that they want. At the same time, they worry that people lack morality and may sell their votes to politicians. The need for democracy and the concern that democracy will bring politicians who are bad people back to power is a contradiction that remains in the minds of the middle class to the present day.

Both the need for democracy and suspicions about democracy led one middle-class intellectual, Chai-Anan Samudavanija, to propose the concept of “sufficiency democracy” to “prevent capitalism from destroying communities” (Chai-Anan 2011). The solution is to “create citizens in a democratic society” by giving people Thai-style virtues such as “seeing only the common good . . . mutual help . . . compromise . . . an emphasis on harmony . . . sympathy, an emphasis on sufficiency” (Chai-Anan 2010b). “In this sense, real decentralization is not the distribution of power from the center to local government, but it must be down to the people, allowing the people to organize their own activities” (Chai-Anan 2011). Although the middle class saw villagers as “stupid-poor-sick,” they also admired “community culture” as well as “villager wisdom,” and so they valued “community culture” and the Thai virtues in village communities, such as kindness, charity, sharing, support, sacrifice, etc. Even if the middle class wanted to succeed in the capitalist system, which was contradictory to Thai virtues, they appreciated the “community culture.” This reflects a contradiction between the real life of the middle class in the capitalist economic system and their ideology, especially Thai virtues. This appreciation of “community culture” has become one of the important emotions leading the middle class to oppose “evil capital,” which they believe will destroy “community culture” in rural areas.

Conservative ideology, including the above dimensions of thought, value systems, and emotions that are distilled, compounded, and self-contradictory, brought the middle class out in political movements against the “Thaksin regime” between 2005 and 2014. Middle-class intellectuals and leaders chose both conservative and democratic ideologies to instill feelings in the masses in order to explain problems, create a feeling of pride, and build hope (this will be analyzed below). Some ideas from democratic ideology were used to point out the political problem that elections were based on a popular vote-buying policy so were not true democratic elections. Governments that emerged from the elections did not have democratic legitimacy. Rule by evil capital gaining power from vote-buying would lead to severe corruption, and this government would rule by disobeying the advice of the king and violating the morality of Buddhism, which taught the importance of good deeds without selfish power or personal gain. Such conservative ideological explanations made the middle class proud to feel that they were fighting

against nefarious capital that would destroy nations, religions, and monarchs. They were proud to protect the nation, religion, and king. The middle class also hoped that the battle would end in victory that would make Thai democracy a real democracy, not a democracy in name only. And it would be a democratic system that was suitable for the characteristics of Thai society, that is, a democracy with the king as head of state.

## **V Conservative and Democratic Ideologies of the Middle Class and the Political Movements of 2005–14**

While the middle class constructed and modified various concepts that became part of a “neo-conservative ideology”—such as “rule by righteousness,” “Dharma Land, Golden Land,” “community culture,” “Thai-style civil society,” etc.—“democratic” ideology was also blended into the ideas and emotions of the middle class. This is evident in the definition of a “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state.” Although the definition gives great importance to the role of the monarch in the Thai political system, it is important for the middle class to rely on the monarch in solving Thailand’s political crises and sustaining the security of the Thai democratic system, as well as balancing and monitoring the military’s use of dictatorial power and parliamentary dictatorship. The definition does not refer to the direct use of royal powers in the executive, legislative, and judicial spheres in normal situations. In addition, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the middle class played an important role in pushing the “People’s Constitution,” which was characterized as being very democratic, from its drafting to its content (iLaw 2019). The middle class strongly supported the 1997 constitution because it sought to build strong political institutions. Elections were to be held under the supervision of an impartial Election Commission. There were good systems for balancing power and for monitoring the use of power. However, the middle class ended up being greatly disappointed with the constitution because it led to the accession to power of “evil capital,” which the middle class deemed capable of dominating the government, parliament, and independent bodies. Even the courts could not establish guilt in the “evil capital’s” false declaration of assets and debts. The “evil capital” also behaved in a way that would destroy the “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state.”

This adulteration of ideas, value systems, and emotions deriving from conservative and democratic ideologies led the middle class to describe the “Thaksin regime” not as a true democracy but as a “parliamentary dictatorship” that used populist policies to buy votes in order to “stay long” and take Thai politics “into a dead end.” This anxiety drove

the middle class to participate in political movements. The middle class hoped for “judicialization,” which emerged in the early 2000s. They realized that the political power of courts had emerged around the world to counterbalance the power of politicians who were derived from capitalists; in Thailand’s case this power emerged also with the support of the monarch, who the middle class believed was a “pure force” because he had the ten virtues of a king and had long performed royal activities for the security and development of the nation (Saichol 2021, 187–216). However, the middle class were still not sure whether the political role of the courts would help overturn the “Thaksin regime,” which claimed legitimacy from the majority of votes in elections. Large political demonstrations took place to eliminate the “Thaksin regime,” where leaders and middle-class intellectuals used both conservative and democratic ideologies to arouse the emotions of the masses. They pointed out that the crisis caused by the “Thaksin regime” had brought “Thai politics to a dead end.” It was necessary to use “informal politics,” or undemocratic methods that were not provided for in the constitution, to resolve the national crisis.

Due to the influence of conservative ideology, the middle class began to believe that Thai society was degenerating and that the “Thaksin regime” made it worse by, for example, implementing populist policies that made villagers more money minded. They believed villagers were becoming selfish, wanting to get rich quickly, and forgetting traditional values such as generosity, all of which would lead to the destruction of village communities. The middle class therefore accepted the use of violence if the violence was used to prevent corrupt political parties from returning to power or to bring down corrupt governments and/or eliminate people trying to destroy the nation, religion, and kings (Wanwiphang and Apichat 2017, 39–51). The concept of a “mat and pillow under royal protection” also gave the middle class a sense of self and an identity as “patriotic Chinese descendants” (Sittitthep 2015, 112–155) who offered deep loyalty and gratitude to the Thai nation, religions, and monarchy. Middle-class intellectuals encouraged these “patriotic Chinese descendants” to feel the arrogance and pride of sacrifice and unity in fighting to protect “Thainess.”

It may be said that conservative ideology is fundamental to explaining and creating meanings that evoke intense emotions among the masses and prepare them to fight politically. For example, the meaning created for the “Thaksin regime” was that it was a “frightening regime” that wanted to be the “leader of the masses” and compete for prestige against the king. The regime was also portrayed as wanting to change the country into a republic, as being “evil capital” that would accelerate the ruin of “community culture” or the communities of villagers through capitalism. Middle-class leaders believed that due to capitalism’s rapid expansion to the countryside, villagers’ debts had

increased. The masses were used as a tool to maintain power along with former Communists and foreigners like Burmese and Cambodians, who were viewed as enemies of Thailand. The various methods used by the “Thaksin regime” to maintain power would lead to uncontrollable violence in society. Thai politics had therefore “reached a dead end,” and conventional democratic mechanisms and methods may not be able to solve the problem. Therefore, “Western-style democracy is not suitable for Thai society,” which had to rely on politics outside the parliamentary system, such as the judicialization process, coups, and joining the People’s Alliance for Democracy and the PDRC, which were considered “direct democracy” and “participatory democracy” (Saichol 2018).

The concept of “rule by righteousness” and the system of conservative ideals derived from Buddhism, with values such as generosity, selflessness, and honesty. Great emphasis was placed on the problem of corruption, which had long been a concern in the minds of the middle class, in order to make the middle class recognize that elected governments had lost legitimacy, to create anger and hatred toward “evil capital,” and to support authoritarianism and violence in the management of problems. For example, Thirayuth Boonmee explained:

[T]he roots of capital power have supplemented political power for the last two decades . . . causing an economic crisis and creating a capital group whose wealth has grown more than in the past. . . . This has become evil capital that hopes for a long-standing total dominance. . . . Corruption in the country is at its highest level in history . . . and is shameless. (Thirayuth 2008)

The use of power for corruption has been attacked in harsh language for being contrary to “rule by righteousness” and having serious consequences for the nation. For example:

[C]orruption has developed in all forms . . . people in all groups have given up their interest in virtue and duty to the country. There is a conspiracy to tear the nation apart. . . . As the ancient saying has it, “flocks of vultures copulating with flocks of vultures.” This causes Thai society to fragment into interest groups . . . and it will fragment increasingly by region, locality, class, occupation, etc. This will doom the country to its worst fate ever. (Thirayuth 2013a)

Although democracy is mixed into the ideology of the middle class, those who join political movements are driven by conservative ideology more than democracy. Interviews with a middle-class woman in Udon Thani revealed the way she had been shaped culturally from her youth:

Seeing grandfather, father, mother paying homage to the king since childhood, lighting votive candles, offering blessings, accepting fanaticism, not being a colony of anyone because of King Rama V . . . being a country because of the kings . . . But there must be Section 112 . . . there must be no infringement of the institution. . . . See that the PAD protects the institution. . . . Thaksin



threatens to overthrow the institution . . . cheating. (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 150–151)

One Udon Thani man said, “the number one priority from young to old is ‘nation, religion, king’ . . . when there is an attack on the institution, we can’t just stay at home” (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 150–151).

A Nakhon Si Thammarat woman said, “I’m angry at Thaksin, cheating on the nation, cheating on the country, but what I can’t bear concerns the king” (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 150–151).

Kanokrat Lertchoosakul’s middle-class interviewees had ideas, value systems, and emotions that clearly derived from conservative ideology and corresponded to the concepts and value systems advocated by leaders of the protests and middle-class intellectuals. For example, many of those who supported the Palang Dharma Party gave identical reasons for their support: the party had the image of “good people” and did not suffer from corruption; “It supports good people, people with morals, honesty, and the sacrifices of Chamlong and members of the Palang Dharma Party”; “We like Chamlong’s observance of the precepts, and he does not do anything for himself”; “We like Chamlong a lot . . . his honesty and sacrifice”; “We like his approach of seclusion, being a plain man, helping society.” One middle-class man from Bangkok said, “Thaksin is a greedy man.” Another interviewee said:

Thaksin was ambitious, wanted to change the form of government, wanted to be president. . . . What Thaksin did was for his cronies, grabbing benefits. . . . I must admit that he is smarter than Banharn and Chavalit. It makes it scary, and he even had academics in his group to give him the opportunity of being very successful, and it makes the people in the country quarrel to the point where they kill each other. (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 148)

A woman from Bangkok said, “It’s a special protest . . . everyone has the same feeling, love of the country, love of the king. We believe that everyone who comes thinks like this” (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 182).

Meanwhile, another person said, “I don’t know if we win or not, because if we don’t fight, the country will be completely gone. . . . You should not . . . set up a movement to overthrow the king” (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 149).

The *Manager Daily* newspaper and other affiliated media outlets played a big role in the use of conservative ideology. One columnist wrote:

[P]eople who rob the nation or sell the nation are called thieves or mega-thieves . . . and the misfortune of Thailand and the Thai people. Despite the settlement of the IMF debt, Thailand cannot end the sale of the nation. The nation has been brazenly plundered and sold in an unprecedented way. (Suthipong 2014b)

The columnist Suthipong Prachayapruit (2014a, cited in Kanokrat 2020, 191) also criticized “evil capital” as using an extreme and aggressive new liberal policy that destroyed businesses, local community ways, and natural resources in an unprecedentedly severe way.

Democratic ideology plays a less active role than conservative ideology in pushing the middle class to protest, because the middle class is disappointed with the democratic form of government and is fighting governments that claim legitimacy from elections. Democratic ideology, however, has been used to arouse the feelings of the middle class.

After 1997, many in the middle class hoped that the existence of independent constitutional organizations and guarantees of community rights to manage natural resources and arts and culture would help improve the democratic form of government and Thai society. Middle-class intellectuals like Chai-Anan Samudavanija believed, like many academics, that the Thai political structure or system was good in the 1997 constitution. So the real problem with Thai democracy was unethical politicians: “The behavior of leaders is directly contrary to the values of democracy. Leaders rely on formal rules to intervene in independent organizations and use the Election Commission for political advantage” (Chai-Anan 2006h). This rendered the key mechanisms of the democratic system inefficient, so people needed to rely on the “last refuge” of the monarchy or the judiciary (Chai-Anan 2006a) and “deal with dishonest, corrupt politicians decisively” (Chai-Anan 2006f).

The influence of liberal or democratic ideologies is evident from those in the middle class who participated in or supported the PAD and PDRC protests. Many appeared to have experience of and exposure to the basic ideas of liberal politics (Kanokrat 2020, 194). Some disagreed with the call for Article 7 to be used but attended the protests for other reasons, such as one Udon Thani Rajabhat University lecturer who believed Thaksin was creating “a very serious problem. . . . At that time, I was very dissatisfied with Thaksin. . . . I began to form a core organization of twenty people” (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 195).

A male teacher in Bangkok said in an interview that part of his reason for joining the protests to chase out Thaksin was due to the Phra Wihan case: “I agreed with the PAD . . . on the watershed boundary. I think that the International Court did not provide justice.” But another reason was “dissatisfaction with Thaksin’s use of violence, especially in regards to the Krue Se incident . . . which caused many deaths” (cited in Kanokrat 2020, 190–191).

An NGO worker from Udon Thani, apart from being dissatisfied with the government cooperating with capitalists who destroyed the environment and violated human rights, was also dissatisfied with interference in the media, which went against liberal democracy (Kanokrat 2020, 190–191).

It can therefore be said that the feelings of the middle class were aroused by analyzing and explaining problems using not just conservative ideology but also, in part, democratic ideology. Middle-class intellectuals tried to point out that the political system “was not yet a true democracy.” They defined the middle-class mass movement as “extra-parliamentary politics,” which followed democratic principles because it was “direct democracy” and “participatory democracy.” It was a struggle to achieve “true democracy” and a “peaceful people’s revolution” (Chai-Anan 2006b) or opposition to the “Thaksin regime” rather than opposition to democracy (Chai-Anan 2006d). The article “Democratic State” by Chai-Anan Samudavanija emphasizes that the PAD are the defenders of the democratic system and “prevent the democratic system from being taken over by a single interest group” (Chai-Anan 2008a). The PAD is considered a form of “citizen politics,” which is “a solution and an alternative to prevent a single-party system and a dictatorship” (Chai-Anan 2008a).

The early phase of the PAD political movement was driven by a wide range of ideologies since it was a coalition of several groups (Kanokrat 2020, 22), and throughout the period of the movement, democratic ideology played a large part in driving it. However, extremist conservative ideology played the most important role because the core leaders and some middle-class intellectuals relied on this ideology to constantly arouse the feelings of the masses who came to the demonstrations.

Thirayuth Boonmee praised the PAD masses as adherents of “goodness” who were fighting “bad people” through “peaceful means” “for the right to live in good moral conditions where cheating is dealt with really strictly, to live in a society that separates good from bad” (Thirayuth 2014). He also said, “If this force is maintained, we may be able to make allies in strong anti-corruption procedures to make the political sector accountable in the future” (Thirayuth 2013a).

The middle-class intellectual most clearly inclined toward using extremist conservative ideology was Chai-Anan Samudavanija. He convinced the middle class that “a coup will happen soon because . . . the government has blocked the possibility of changing (the government) in accordance with the rules (in a democratic regime)” (Chai-Anan 2008b). He proposed that the Thai people should offer a petition asking His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej to exercise his royal power under Section 7 (Chai-Anan 2006c). He also introduced the idea that *rachaprachasamasai* (monarch-people collaboration) be reinstated, arguing:

[I]f this lasts for another three to four years, Thailand will have a presidential democracy with the monarchy as head of state. . . . *Rachaprachasamasai* gives people the opportunity to participate in relying on the prestige of the monarchy in case irregularities occur without the possibility of being able to rely on constitutional mechanisms and processes. (Chai-Anan 2006g)

On July 16, 2006, Chai-Anan Samudavanija (2006e) affirmed the legitimacy of the monarchy's use of "royal prerogative" because "the role of the monarchy is focused on stabilizing the democratic system." He said, "at present, the monarchy is the refuge of the people. In an era when politics has decisive power, the clear role of the monarchy is to be an institution that prevents political power that is a totalitarian dictatorship" (Chai-Anan 2013). Before that, in mid-2011, Chai-Anan Samudavanija proposed a "sufficiency democracy," which made "democracy" similar to the concept of "civil society" in terms that were integrated into the concept of "community culture," the "sufficiency economy," and "Buddhist virtues" to make "liberal democracy" less important.

Chai-Anan Samudavanija also created an image of the "enemy of the nation." He spoke of the "Red Shirt masses" that clashed with state officials, calling them "crazy crowds." He stated that there had been many "enemies of the nation" in the past who gathered to "riot," such as "foreign workers, especially Burmese workers, and some Khmer workers from the border" and "people who formerly joined in developing the Thai nation from Nan and Southern Isaan who specialized in using weapons" and "armed units joined by foreign forces, i.e., Burmese and Khmer" (Chai-Anan 2010c). He used violent language such as "kleptocracy" and "terrorism." Chai-Anan Samudavanija (2010a) stated that "in the wake of the last bloodshed . . . the black-shirted armed forces are Khmer soldiers. . . . They have been turning the state into a 'failed state' for some time." Talking about the long-term ill effects, he said: "the hope of giving our society the same peace as it has had is at an end, because the wounds and infections of hatred have spread widely everywhere. . . . The feeling of resentment and the need for violence will persist" (Chai-Anan 2010c).

In addition to middle-class intellectuals, there were leaders who spoke on the PAD platform using conservative ideology in live broadcasts and many forms of media. For example, Asia Satellite Television had—and still has—live broadcasts and many websites with links to a network of websites. It also uses the *Manager Daily* newspaper, cartoons, stickers, books, community radio, etc. (Wichan 2011, 150–166). Those who were influenced by these forms of media included the urban middle class: intellectuals, academics, NGO networks, lawyers, politicians, state enterprise groups, the Santi Asoke network, artists, the mass media, etc. (Wichan 2011, 70–86, 166–173). In speeches, the criteria of democratic ideology were used to show that the government was undemocratic, by, for example, referring to interference in the judicial process and the media. One of the issues highlighted in speeches, newspapers, and statements was the attempt to amend Section 237 of the constitution: "This amendment to the constitution by the government overthrows the constitution that was passed by a referendum of the people and is being made to wipe out the wrongs of Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin Shinawatra and his cronies" ("Guard

Column,” May 23, 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 88).

According to a statement:

The People’s Alliance for Democracy has never refused to allow constitutional amendments as long as . . . they are based on the public interest, are not contrary to the rule of law and equal enforcement of the law . . . are not contrary to the principles of good governance and do not undermine the balance of power between legislature, the executive and the judiciary, . . . have no conflict of interest for those who will amend the constitution. (“Statement No. 6” [April 9, 2008], cited in Wichan 2011, 265)

One can clearly see the use of values deriving from democratic ideology. Similarly, the next statement goes on to say:

We invite all brothers and sisters who love the nation and who love democracy to join in the sacred mission of defending this constitution and opposing those who would wipe out the constitution that was passed in a referendum of a majority of the public with more than 14 million votes to the end. (“Statement No. 7” [April 22, 2008], cited in Wichan 2011, 270)

Issues based on conservative ideology, such as corruption, defamation of or inappropriate infringement on the monarch, the use of violence at rallies, and the Phra Wihan case, can be seen in certain speeches. For instance:

The People’s Alliance for Democracy must condemn the Thai government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for being the lackeys of the puppets selling out the nation, who allowed the Kingdom of Thailand to lose territory to Cambodia by fraudulently plundering the land. (16 People’s Alliance for Democracy 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 81)

Statement No. 26/2008 states that the PAD must “oppose the amendment to the 2007 constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand” and

expel the . . . tyrannical government, which acts as puppets for a criminal fugitive from the realm . . . which supports the destruction of the system of justice, which spends the national budget with no transparency so that the nation is on the verge of collapse . . . (*Thairath*, October 8, 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 93–94)

These are deemed to be “ethical offenses, and so destroy their legitimacy and bring an end to them administering the country” (*Thairath*, October 8, 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 93–94).

The issue of the constitutional amendment highlighted in the statement was as follows:

[T]he political parties have shown the power of parliamentary dictatorship that will be able to change the democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state at any time. . . . The

puppet government is focused only on finding a way to overthrow the constitution to whitewash its own faults and those of its cronies by ignoring the crisis that has occurred. (Statement No. 9, cited in Wichan 2011, 275)

The statement also says that the government's offenses are "dangerous to the people." It adds:

[T]he puppet government has gone back to overthrowing the basic policies of the state that will help to create the people's self-reliance, has erased the philosophy of the sufficiency economy from the constitution, and has reduced the people's power to monitor political parties and the crisis facing the institutions of nation, religions, and monarchy and the people. (Statement No. 9, cited in Wichan 2011, 275)

Another statement called on groups to "prepare movements in all forms to build a good governance society" in order to solve the problem of corruption (*Manager Daily*, February 26, 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 126).

In speeches, expressions such as "last war" and "army of the people" were used to ready the masses to devote all their power to the struggle for the nation, religions, and monarchy, such as: "It will really be the last war. . . . Death is dead, and was never feared. If we do it for what is right, for the throne, for the king, for the Chakri Dynasty . . . we must fight to the end" (*Manager Daily*, September 1, 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 131–132).

Statement No. 11/2008 points out: "the nation is on the verge of collapse. . . . Now the people's army . . . is ready to carry out the supreme sacred mission to save the country . . . and at the same time oust those who have stolen the country" (*Manager Daily*, August 26, 2008, cited in Wichan 2011, 132).

The Buddhist idea of "karmic retribution" was also used, such as calling on some politicians to "prove . . . allegations of corruption . . . and be subject to the judicial process and their own karmic retribution" (Statement No. 19, cited in Wichan 2011, 142). Superstition and astrology were used to create a sense of faith in the leader of the PAD and build confidence that the fight would achieve success. This contributed to strengthening extremist conservative ideology. For example, Suvinaï Pornavalai discussed the ritual of creating Jatukham Rammathep amulets:

The Jatukham Rammathep organization allowed Sondhi Limthongkul to create a national guardian version of Jatukham Rammathep amulets (2007). . . . His historical role . . . that dared to rise up against Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin Shinawatra . . . gathered people who were "brave" throughout the land . . . in the eyes of the great gods. . . . Sondhi Limthongkul was in the position of a true national savior. (Suvinaï 2008b)

Suvinaï Pornavalai further stated that the Thailand Watch Foundation of Sondhi Limthongkul emerged in order to continue the sacred mission of protecting the Thai

nation: “It is a people’s movement that has sacred objects or sacred thoughts behind it” to help solve problems of the nation in a situation where “Saturn . . . and the moon align in the zodiac of the nation (*duang muang*). . . . The country will fall into very serious misfortune in 2007” (Suvinaï 2008b).

The emotions of the middle-class masses were provoked also through songs and music at rallies. The songs used at PAD protests often showed love, unity, gratitude to the nation, loyalty to the king, and opposition to corruption. The songs at PDRC protests focused on the struggle of the people to achieve democracy and the protection of the nation. Some songs emphasized that the masses were on the righteous side (fighting the unrighteous), such as the “Candle of Dharma” song, which likens each person to a little candle, but when these come together they become a “candle of righteousness” that protects the nation, religion, and beloved monarch and helps light the way to love, harmony, and prosperity (Pume 2016, 92–103). Listening to conservative music that created a feeling of appreciation or aroused a feeling of arrogance in the fight for the “nation, religion, and king” intensified the conservative ideology in the hearts and minds of the middle class throughout the protests, especially when there were speeches and statements by the leaders, and explanations and guidance from middle-class intellectuals who had already aroused basic emotions.

Having their feelings aroused by conservative ideology both before and during demonstrations eventually prepared the middle class to support the use of violent methods to bring down corrupt governments. These methods included occupying important locations and removing group of people and the regime that were seen as attempting to overthrow and destroy the nation, religion, and monarchy or debasing morality and making society worse. In the end, the middle class felt “glad that there was a coup” because “at that time, I thought that these people would come to make the country peaceful and then move on” (Khaosod 2021). After the 2014 coup, conservative ideology—both moderate and extremist—continued to play a role in Thai society.

## **VI Artistic and Cultural Activities Using Extremist and Moderate Conservative Ideologies from the 2014 Coup until the Present**

After the 2014 coup, conservative ideology was used to sustain the power structure, weaken “politicization” among the people, and bring Thai capitalism under the control of the state and capital. The Thai state after the 2014 coup was different from the Thai state in the aftermath of the 2006 coup because high-ranking military officers took control of all major organizations, including state-owned enterprises and large capital as close

allies of the state (Prajak and Veerayooth 2018). Large capital relied on capital and networks not only to give them a competitive advantage in the market system and enable them to monopolize major businesses, but also to collaborate with the state through projects including the “Pracharat Rak Sammakkee Project,” which aimed to bring villagers under the auspices of the state and capitalist groups and reduce the political strength of communities and civil society; this would stop communities and civil society throughout the country from opposing the state and capitalist groups that were grabbing resources or monopolizing businesses. To reach this goal, conservative ideology was intensively used.

There were many phenomena demonstrating the role of conservative ideology after the 2014 coup, such as the erasure of commemorations of the People’s Party and the 1932 revolution, the use of violence and laws such as Section 112 and Section 116 to suppress the “new generation” who called for the drafting of a new constitution and reform of the monarchy, written attacks on individuals viewed as enemies of the “nation, religions, and monarchy,” etc. Other artistic and cultural activities dominated by conservative ideology continued.

One section of middle-class intellectuals continue to reproduce extremist conservative ideology. For example, Naowarat Pongpaiboon’s article “Constitutional Authority” declared that “demo + cracy means that the authority of the people is supreme” and not that “the people are supreme.” According to Buddhism it was not the people who were supreme, because if the people were thieves the country would experience catastrophe (ruin). According to him, democracy must mean “the happiness and welfare of the people is supreme,” emphasizing that democracy was a government “for the people,” not “of the people and by the people.” He cited three works of literature—*Traibhumikatha* from the Sukhothai era, *Mahachat Khamluang* from the Ayutthaya period, and *Ramakien* (Ramayana) of the Rattanakosin (Bangkok) period—to assert that the Sukhothai period “aimed at people doing good, not doing evil”; the Ayutthaya period “aimed at people sacrificing, not thinking only of themselves”; and the Rattanakosin period, which continues until the modern era, aims to “suppress the devil by using the power of god” (Naowarat 2021, 51). It is evident that this is an attempt to emphasize that the use of violence to suppress “bad” or “devil” people is a correct and legitimate act, and that the use of violence is also an ordinary method of the Rattanakosin period (Naowarat 2021).

Movements under extremist conservative ideology in 2014 appeared in many circles and often focused on protecting the monarchy,<sup>2)</sup> such as saying “there are groups that

2) For more on these groups, of which there are many—such as 33 Vocational Student Groups Defending the Institution (Monarchy); Black Warriors, Two Peninsulas; THCVC (Thailand Help Center for Victims of Cyberbullying) (Minion Army Defending the Institution); Thai Raksa Group; etc.—see “Know the ‘New Right’ People’s Groups” (October 20, 2021), <https://voicetv.co.th/read/5Vn4LDAO1> (in Thai).



have tried to disseminate inaccurate information and ideas in order to incite infringements on the institution of the monarchy. . . . As days go by, there will be more and more that will affect national security” (Voice Online 2021b). One columnist attacked Western academics who criticized the monarchy as

Western gangsters . . . who come to “engineer the overthrow of the nation.” . . . they’re in luck, these days, they’re just expelled! If it was the time of “King Narai the Great” . . . there was a chance of being put on display . . . stomach cut open, head chopped, arms and legs “dismembered” and the pieces thrown for the vultures and crows to eat, as was done to Constantine Phaulkon. (Pleo Si-ngoen [pseudonym] 2021)

Fortune-telling is also part of the use of extremist conservatism to fight progressives. For example, one fortune-teller predicted:

[T]he Rahu planets and stars that are the enemies of the fate of the city have resulted in omens, . . . the enemies of the country, . . . ‘Free Youth’ and ‘People’s Party’ groups, people’s groups which hope to bring down the government, bring down the monarchy . . . in 2021, which will cause Thais throughout the land to fall into hardship because of the activities of this group. . . . But the strength of the country and the secure fate of the king ensure that the agitators, however they fight, do not win. (*Daily News* 2020)

There are also many groups in the middle-class movement that use extremist conservative ideology, such as Vocational Students Defending the Institution, which exalts the motto “Live Faithfully, Die Loyally”; Black Warriors, Two Peninsulas; Minion Army Defending the Institution; the Thai Raksa Group; etc. (Voice Online 2021b). Some groups have played a continuous role, such as the group of Maj. Gen. Dr. Rienthong Nanna, who founded the Rubbish Collection Organization 2020 (MGR Online 2020), and the Thai Phakdee Group, which was set up as a political party in 2020. The Thai Phakdee Group declared, “We will fight the Move Forward Party, the Progressive Movement, the Three-Fingered Mobs,” calling them the “movement to overthrow the monarchy” (BBC News Thai 2021). The Thai Move Institute declared:

The true direction of Thainess is therefore within the country and in us. Lessons are not outside the country or derived from the study of the achievements of other nations, especially Western nations that have never wished us well. . . . Thais who hate Thainess and admire the world outside are those who see a rowel as a lotus. Our true self is the glory of the past that we have left behind. So we should turn around and go back and find inspiration from the prosperity of the Thai nation before democracy, under the leadership of 53 monarchs . . . over the past 770 years. (Isara 2020)

After the 2014 coup the elite continued to use conservative ideology as a tool, although the 2017 constitution was promulgated and elections were held. In the political context of the 2010s, the elite were unable to rely on “royal hegemony” to create political

stability by counterbalancing and sharing power and benefits to the satisfaction of all elite parties as they had done in the 1980s and 1990s (Asa 2021). The elite were forced to choose moderate and extremist conservative ideologies to continue to maintain power while minimizing “democratization” and “politicization” among the people and civil society.

The use of moderate conservative ideology can be seen from government policies and projects. A clear example is “Asa Pracharat” (public-state volunteerism), which comes from a mix of the concepts of Thai-style “community culture” and “civil society” and was created by middle-class intellectuals. The concept of “civil society” in other countries is focused on nongovernmental organizations with goals and roles that are independent of the state. But in Thai society it appears instead that the concept of “civil society” has been integrated into the concept of “community culture” and Buddhist ideas. This significantly alters conservative ideology. The state and the elite have adopted the concept of civil society as a major state policy and project, where the state has expanded its authority to control and promote “civil society” in various forms since the 1997 constitution. In addition to being written into the 1997 constitution, the concept of Thai-style civil society appeared in the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997–2001) and in several laws defining the roles and responsibilities of representatives from the civil society sector, such as the 2007 National Health Act, the 2008 Political Development Council Act, and the 2008 Community Organization Council Act (Choochai and Yuwadee 1998).

One project that has been widely implemented since the 2014 coup to control and co-opt “civil society” nationwide while giving “civil society” “Thai virtues” is “Asa Pracharat: Operation Drive Thailand 4.0,” with the issuance of the 2015 Regulation of the Office of the Prime Minister on the Promotion and Development of Civil Society Organizations and the Project to Develop Mechanisms to Support Provincial-Level Asa Pracharat Networks and to Enhance Social Well-being, 2017–19. The 2015 regulation and the 2017–19 project anticipate

the best concrete features of volunteer work in linking development policies and strategies to Thailand 4.0, because they can reflect the characteristics of a society whose members do not neglect each other, a society that is strong, and a society that is virtuous at the same time. (Thailand, Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being 2017)

It appears that in two months of 2017, 2,305 middle-class provincial leaders nationwide joined “Provincial Asa Pracharat Working Groups”—43 percent from civil society, 27 percent from the state sector, 16 percent from the business sector, and 14 percent from the academic sector (Thailand, Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being

2017). These “leaders” were tasked with driving the project by broadly expanding networks and encouraging members of “communities” and “civil society” to have “virtues” such as sufficiency, honesty, gratitude, and a “volunteer spirit,” for instance by sacrificing to help others without seeking personal gain.

Many artistic and cultural activities took place under the central conservative ideology, for example, the publication of books such as *Asa Pracharat Project: Drive to Thailand 4.0* (Thailand, Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being 2017), *Volunteer Civilians: A Force to Treat the World* (Sineeporn 2019), *Asa Pracharat Good Stories of Local Workers* (Thailand, Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being 2019), etc. In addition, events were arranged such as “Oun I Rak” (warm heart with love) “to reflect the beauty of Thai traditions, culture and art,” first held in 2018 (Prachachat Business 2018), and the exhibition “Music of the MHESI in Honour of the King in the Hearts of Thais Forever.” The television and online media channels of True Corporation were used to broadcast the program *Novices Cultivate Righteous Wisdom* over 24 hours to present stories of the moral communities of nice, charming, and impressive little novices, etc.

The use of extremist conservative ideology by the elite can be clearly seen in the use of provisions of Section 112 to suppress those seeking to change the power structure, and even the Constitutional Court turned back to using the meaning of “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state,” stressing the authority of the monarch passed down from earlier forms of government since the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Rattanakosin periods. The Constitutional Court banned similar movements by others in the future. Worachet Pakeerut commented: “This ruling is confirmation of a change in the authority of the monarchy after the 2014 coup. As a result, the democratic space has narrowed, while that of the king as head of state has expanded” (Prachatai 2020).

Delays in the adaptation of the courts and other organizations in the judicial system to a liberal democratic system, while still being conceptually committed to conservative ideology, can be seen by the interpretation of the law and actions against defendants by the police, prosecutors, and courts in cases such as flag throwing, spray painting, fiction writing, not standing up in cinemas during the royal anthem, translating foreign books, selling foreign documentary CDs. The court also imposed punishment on one man for “slandering and insulting King Rama IV, a former monarch, by comparing his era to slavery, with no freedom and a bad administration . . . with the intention of causing the people to lose faith and not revere him” (Prachatai 2013). In addition, the courts did not grant bail to many of those accused of *lèse-majesté*. This situation was the result of government personnel in the judicial process becoming used to using power “freely” without adhering to the principle of the sovereignty of the people, while the Thai judiciary had always been identified with “good, talented, loyal, and diligent people” (Kitpatchara

2019). This gave the judiciary the legitimate authority to judge in the name of the monarch.

## VII Conservative Ideology and the Middle Class Now and in the Future

In the midst of the use of moderate and extremist conservative ideologies by many parties to achieve their political goals, such as preserving a power structure from which they benefit, climbing to power or serving the power of the elite, and controlling or governing people through “communities” or “civil society” Thai style (by means of putting people in “communities” or “civil society” under a regime of rule by righteousness through exercising the right to vote like a person who is virtuous, satisfied with a life that is “sufficient” and “peaceful,” and ready to sacrifice for the common good with “volunteerism”), some members of the middle class remain committed to conservative ideology. However, there are also many in the middle class who are starting to back away from conservative ideology because they are no longer benefiting from it as they did in the past.

Those in the middle class who are committed to conservative ideology are mostly people who are in institutions of power—the judiciary, the military, the police—Ministry of Interior officials, teachers, etc. They have often been indoctrinated with conservative ideals by state educational institutions. Once they enter the government service system, with authority over the people, their lives become firmly bound to state power—whether through income, obligations, privileges, prestige, identity, or social status. These things remain important in their lives and those of their families even after they have retired, because they still have a pension and social prestige. They therefore remain firmly committed to conservative ideals. In the case of teachers, it is also worth noting that they have been indoctrinated by the Rajabhat Institutes (Rajabhat Universities) and faculties of education which aim to charge teachers with the duty to reproduce and instill “Thainess” as well as Thai virtues and the concept of the “sufficiency economy” among young people, and not to give young people knowledge and understanding of issues important to adapting to the system of social relationships in a changing world. Teachers therefore continue to have a strong psychological and emotional attachment to “Thainess.”

However, for the middle class in general, after the 2014 coup and the passing of King Rama IX, all that was left was the need to prevent the return of the “Thaksin regime” and the psychological and emotional commitment that they had to the value systems of conservative ideology. But these members of the middle class did not benefit from conservative ideology as they had during the previous reign.

At present, problems of ethnicity in the case of both the Chinese and the Lao have not affected the status, rights, and benefits of the middle class, because the middle class of Chinese and Lao descent have become “Thais,” and both the state and Thai society accept ethnic diversity. The politically active middle class have even declared themselves “patriotic Chinese descendants.” “Relying on royal hegemony” to counterbalance the power of the military and capital groups may be impractical for the middle class, and the government in the period after the 2014 coup, which created legitimacy using conservative ideology, did not meet the needs of the middle class in terms of either political power or economic interest. According to one prominent columnist’s analysis:

The state . . . wants to keep the country calm by using government parties, using patronage politics in a “big house” regime, holding power, managing benefits for big capital, and feeding populism to lower-class people. But they destroy the bargaining power of the middle class economically and politically. . . . The conservative network has a complete hold on power: the military, the police, the judicial system, the independent organizations, firmly unified under extreme ideas. . . . But what’s different from the periods after the coups of 2006 or May 2010 is the transformation of the urban middle class, which . . . has economic, social, and ideological power.

Extremist state powers do not realize that the middle class is moving away. (Baitongheang 2021)

Today’s middle class generally have ideas that are more in line with the “younger generation.” Research by the Bank of Thailand found that although the middle class is different from the “younger generation” because “the younger generation has significantly more liberal values than older generations,” differences in thought are often seen as greater than they actually are. “In fact, the two groups of people have the same opinions on a number of policies, such as that the state should collect more taxes to improve basic services of high quality, everyone’s vote should have equal value in elections, etc.” (Prachachat Business 2021). Even Prawase Wasi accepted the “younger generation” for the following reasons:

The protests by students are a good tendency toward BBD, or Broad-Based Democracy. . . . The younger generation will replace the older generation, and are the future of the country. . . . The more expert they are, the better, and the better the future of Thailand. . . . When children don’t believe their parents, it’s not that they’re worse people. . . . Currently, information comes in several ways. So if you want them to believe only their parents and teachers like before, that goes against reason. . . . They want to move forward. But the older generation may be living in the past, so they can learn from the younger generation by learning together. (*Matichon* 2020a)

At present the middle class outside the bureaucracy, which wants to increase its competitiveness in different markets, also has a desire to reform the country to a more liberal democracy. Even high-ranking businesspeople have expressed the need for constitutional amendment or a redrafting of the constitution. Newspapers have reported inter-

views with several businessmen. For example, Sarath Ratanavandi said: “The global economy is becoming more complicated . . . so I agree with amending the constitution to make the country stronger” (Prachachat Business 2020).

Srettha Thavisin said:

I agree . . . with constitutional amendments. . . . Having as many as one third of parliamentarians in the senate . . . is the cause of conflict. . . . We must really try not to cause clashes that end in bloodshed . . . and lead to disaster for the nation. . . . Live with equality. Equality should bring about lasting happiness. (Prachachat Business 2020)

Veerathai Santiprabhob said, “Young people aged 35 to 45 should be given the opportunity to change the state sector . . . to meet new challenges, not focus on the past” (Lom Plianhit [pseudonym] 2021).

Supanutt Sasiwuttawat, a TDRI academic, said, “The traditional Thai civil service state can no longer go on. It cannot solve the problem in matters that need a new kind of response. . . . It should build cooperation with the private sector and society” (Lom Plianhit [pseudonym] 2021).

NGOs and development activists also began to oppose the government. For example, a network of 1,867 not-for-profit organizations issued a joint statement opposing the Draft Act on the Operations of Not-for-Profit Organizations, saying that it was inconsistent with freedom of association and “used an authoritarian government service system of a military dictatorship to control the people, which is completely opposed to and undermines participatory democracy and contravenes key principles of the 2017 constitution and international human rights law” (Prachatai 2022).

One of the changes in the middle class in general today that will affect the rejection of or retreat from conservative ideals is the modern way of life in an expanding neoliberalism—i.e., the “enterprising self,” focusing on the freedom of the free market and reduced state intervention. This causes people to start thinking intensively about themselves, taking responsibility for all dimensions of their own lives, being aware of independence and freedom of choice, and trying to surmount limitations to reach happiness by training themselves (Krittapak 2021, 253–275).

However, the Thai Cultural Revolution, or the overthrow of “Thainess” in order to change social relations at all levels, is something that the middle class in general is not ready to accept because they still have some conservative ideology deep in their hearts and minds (Nidhi 2021b). Although they desire independence and freedom, many in the middle class still feel “nostalgia,” wanting people in Thai society to help each other, be kind to each other, and see that the social order of “knowing one’s place” (or acceptance of the hierarchical structure of society) is a good thing.

One of the political viewpoints of the middle class is that “good governance should be achieved without any need for a democracy complete with elections.” As Chai-Anan Samudavanija said, “China’s experience and Singapore’s show that even with little democracy, if it focuses on good governance, people will accept it . . . leading the country to prosperity and progress” (Chai-Anan 2010e). What the middle class want is “good people” who can “establish good governance in the political and bureaucratic system” (Chai-Anan 2010d). If the leaders of the country, both the current and future elites, cannot create “good governance,” the middle class will no longer support them, especially in cases where the middle class suspect or find excessive corruption.

The middle class have not fully supported democracy, but middle-class intellectuals accept that becoming a democracy may be inevitable. Thirayuth Boonmee in his October 14, 2013 speech indicated that eventually democracy in the sense that the “Red Shirts” wanted would win over democracy in the sense that the central conservative power wanted (Thirayuth 2013b). He also pointed out:

[C]onservative ideas are limited to issues of the nation and monarchy. . . . The Red Shirts are justified in terms of democracy from elections, which is the universal legitimacy of today’s world, while the legitimacy of the conservatives is historically a tradition which is old and worn out. . . . In the long run, the chances of grassroots power are greater. (*Komchadluek* 2012)

Chai-Anan Samudavanija (2009) said: “In the future, no matter who is in power, the creation of power in dictatorial regimes must be avoided because it runs opposite to global trends and the feelings of the majority of the people, who now have broader and deeper information.”

The elite’s maintenance of power using both moderate and extremist conservative ideologies has not brought economic or political benefits to the middle class. The Thai state after the 2014 coup devoted a large budget to the countryside to determine the direction of change in the villages and to control the mindset affecting the political behavior of the new middle class. The elites, who use conservative ideology, do not have the capacity to spur economic development and liberate Thailand from the trap of being a middle-income country. Therefore, they have not given the middle class a sense that their own lives and those of their families are secure or that they can expect to experience greater success. It is easy for the middle class to see that a government that fails to build economic growth is a government with no legitimacy, especially when the middle class value both security and development. In addition to “national security” in terms of preserving Thai virtues, the state and the elite also need to prove to the middle class their potential for economic development; but at present Thailand’s economic growth rate has gone down a lot, and public and household debt have increased greatly. The difference

in income and assets between the richest and middle classes has widened (Apichat 2019), and the middle class feel that they have to bear much of the burden of income taxes for the state. The government and the elite in their network are instead more focused on controlling the people psychologically or morally than on providing effective services and creating efficient economic growth.

A major problem that the middle class have always encountered in the media is the inefficiency of educational management to promote intellectual development, innovation, and competitiveness in the global market. As a result, the middle class worry about the future of their children and the long-term economic security of the nation. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) from 2000 to 2015 found that the scores of Thai youth in language, science, and math were steadily declining and were lower than in other Asian countries, many of which ranked among the top ten (Thailand, Ministry of Education, Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology [IPST] n.d.). The 2018 evaluation appeared to show a decrease in reading ability of Thai students, while science and mathematics remained at the same level, and Thailand lost to Vietnam in all three areas of evaluation (BBC News Thai 2019). Such inefficiencies on the part of the state inevitably increase middle-class dissatisfaction with the government and the ruling elite.

Efforts by the state and the elite to instill “Thainess” in order to make the youth and general public accept the social structures that divide people into hierarchies and power structures, and accept that a life of “sufficiency” is a good life, have given Thailand’s education system and major media no role in increasing the capacity to analyze and explain the diverse and complex changes in the world around them, or the capacity to modify their perspectives on different matters in an intelligent way. They have instead instilled ways of thinking that explain the problems of life and society in terms of morality. Conservative ideology can retain its power if there are intellectuals who can adapt its focus and meaning to changing situations or problems faced by the middle class. However, it appears that today’s middle class does not have intellectuals capable of performing this task effectively. Given the dynamic economic and social context of today’s digital world, the conservative ideology that was formulated in the past cannot help to explain new problems or provide suitable alternatives for the middle class to adapt in today’s fast-changing world. Conservative ideology has therefore not adapted, and the middle class are unable to capitalize on conservative ideals in new contexts, especially in a digital world where information from new ways of thinking and perspectives is in constant competition. Thus, it is difficult for conservative ideology to maintain its power to explain the problems of life and society or to provide the best alternatives to the current and future middle classes.



As for the ideology of the patronage system, which is one part of that conservative ideology, its importance to the middle class who are outside the bureaucracy is beginning to decline. As a result of socioeconomic changes, such as the proliferation of new forms of credit, the ideology of the patronage system has become less influential. In the past, when the middle class had to invest money, do business, or buy expensive things such as houses or cars, they often had to borrow money from people who were better off, such as rich relatives or employers, whom they repaid with feelings of loyalty. But now that there are new forms of credit, such as from financial institutions, the middle class have become less dependent on borrowing from people in return for their gratitude. Freelancing or working on digital platforms means not having to please a supervisor or company owner. The average person can criticize services provided by government agencies through social media. These changes have all led the middle class to reduce their reliance on the patronage system in everyday life. Even though the patronage system remains, it manifests more as commercial relationships. The conservative ideological dimension of the patronage system is quickly disintegrating.

The great changes of economic system, such as the expansion of tourism, selling products through the online system, etc., make the local middle class less dependent on the patronage of their local patrons. Their customers are mostly people from all over the country and foreigners. What they need more is to reform the Thai state in every aspect, including making good national policies that reduce the costs and increase the customers. They also realize that patronage in the bureaucracy and between officials at all levels and capital groups increases their costs and adversely affects market competition. Free market and competitive equality are increasingly preferred among the middle class.

During the reign of King Rama IX, the middle class relied on the king, who had great cultural powers, to oversee the use of power by politicians and political parties. Since the death of King Rama IX the middle class are no longer able to scrutinize politicians and political parties by relying on “royal hegemony.” The middle class also recognize that investment by both domestic and foreign capitalists depends on confidence in Thailand’s economic and political stability. The use by the Thai elite of conservative ideology is inevitably opposed by the “new middle class” and the “younger generation,” which can lead to protests at any moment. The more the government uses violence to suppress the young, the children of the middle class, the more tension there is in the hearts of the middle class—both from attacks on their children and from the political turmoil that breaks out from time to time. There has even been international condemnation of the Thai state for human rights violations. In the midst of these tensions and frustrations, the conservative ideology cited by the elite to maintain power is likely

to lose much of its force in the minds and emotions of the middle class.

When conservative ideology has less influence on the minds of the middle class, the political regime that the middle class desire is likely to be the one that Anand Panyarachun calls “democratic governance”:

Democratic governance is a true democracy based on legitimacy. . . . The fact that we listen to many opinions from a broad group of people will allow the government to give weight to more well-rounded and sustainable development. . . .

We need a revolution in thinking. . . . The paradigm of society and the people as a whole should be more open and accept a diversity of ideas, including cultivating shared values that lead to change in society. (Isranews Agency 2015)

The use of both moderate and extreme conservative ideals to continue in power, without a government made up of “good people” of virtue and wisdom, does not therefore meet the needs of today’s middle class. The political system under the 2017 constitution has not created any new hope for the middle class. There has been no national reform in political and bureaucratic areas, as the PDRC masses demanded. Corruption has not decreased. Transparency International published its 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index scores from 180 countries around the world. Denmark and New Zealand again ranked jointly in first place, while Thailand ranked the same as in 2019: 104th in the world and fifth in ASEAN (Voice Online 2021a).

As for attitudes toward the countryside, after the emergence of the political movement of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, or the “Red Shirts”—the “new middle class” from the countryside of Northern and Northeastern Thailand—many in the middle class realized that the countryside had changed a lot. It could no longer be expected to restore “community culture” and “Thai virtues” under the conservative ideology. With the demise of the “Father of the Nation” in 2016, not only the royal hegemony has ended but the middle class no longer had the “Father” in the center of their hearts. Conservative ideology therefore held less meaning for them. This became especially true during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had a serious and widespread impact: the middle class now had no “refuge” to investigate the use of state power by the government, high-ranking government officials, parliament, politicians, the courts, and even large capital groups. Against this background, the abandonment of both moderate and extreme conservatism and questioning of the legitimacy of the elites’ power based on conservative ideology is likely to become more evident in the near future.

## Conclusion

In recent decades, the middle class—especially Thais of Chinese and Lao descent, who make up a large part of the Thai middle class—have benefited greatly from conservative ideology. Middle-class intellectuals have played an active role in reproducing conservative ideology through artistic and cultural practices. In addition to the reproduction of conservative ideology, new concepts or new meanings for old concepts have been created, such as “rule by righteousness,” “the democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state,” “community culture,” and “civil society,” with a strong emphasis on “Thai virtues.” Finally, when elections became more important, middle-class intellectuals changed the meaning of “rule by righteousness,” which once emphasized the virtues of rulers, to an emphasis on the importance of citizens being “virtuous good citizens” so that people could make the correct decisions in elections without being deceived by populist policies. In addition, the core virtues have been greatly modified. The concept of “Dharma Land, Golden Land,” which focused on the development of minds or virtues that would lead to economic success, emphasized the specific virtues of “sufficiency, harmony, sacrifice, honesty, and peace” of “good citizens” throughout the country. Even a new meaning of “civil society” was created, with an emphasis on a “virtuous civil society” that would cooperate with the state sector, the private sector, and the general public in pushing Thai society toward a “moral society,” reducing people’s “desire for success in the capitalist system” that was caused by the “Thaksin regime.”

The artistic and cultural practices of middle-class intellectuals committed the middle class to a deep psychological and emotional attachment to “Thainess” in various dimensions, such as their bond with the king as “Father of the Nation” and the “beloved king” who performed an important duty in the “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state,” with constant middle-class “reliance on the royal prestige.” For them, the governing of Thais, in addition to being a “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state,” should also be “rule by righteousness” and should also make Thailand a “Dharma Land, Golden Land” through the Buddhist teachings and the “sufficiency economy.” It should revive “community culture” to create “strong communities” or to unite as a “civil society” Thai style to push people to be satisfied with a life of “sufficiency” and adhere to morals such as conformity, charity, etc. As virtuous citizens, every time there is an election, people will decide to choose “good people” rather than politicians who use populist policies to buy votes and turn villagers into a consumerist group until debt increases and they forget about their own good community culture.

Although the modern socioeconomic context gives the middle class new ideas,

social values, and emotions, these do not replace the former conservative ideology. The middle-class thinking instead contains an ideological contradiction until it can be said that the middle class want a “conservative democracy” regime. This requires elections and controls and checks on the use of state power, along with success in capitalism as well as independence and freedom in personal life, but at the same time a nostalgia for the past. There is a desire to preserve good “Thainess.” The middle class are anxious that “Thainess,” both nationally and at the village level, will be corrupted by capitalism and globalization, until the morals of the villagers deteriorate and Thai society degenerates, even though they themselves live in a capitalist system and desire greatly to succeed within this system.

The adulteration of the ideologies of conservatism and democracy had the effect of explaining the national crisis in an era when the “Thaksin regime” had great power and influence. Middle-class intellectuals legitimized their opposition to the “Thaksin regime” on the grounds that it was “evil capital,” where greed and desire led politicians, who belonged to a group of large capitalists, to use their power for shameless corruption and turn Thai politics into “parliamentary dictatorships,” not “real democracies.” Also, the hubris of political leaders on various issues was likely to destroy national unity and security, even bringing in foreigners, such as Burmese and Khmer, to riot, leading the country to a dead end. The masses needed to fight to overthrow them using “extra-parliamentary” politics, both “participatory democracy” and “direct democracy,” or even supporting the military to carry out a coup to open the way to a “sufficiency democratic system” or a moral democracy, without the need to give importance to elections.

It is evident that the meaning of a “democratic form of government with the monarch as head of state” in which the middle class “rely on royal prestige” under the concepts of “rule by righteousness,” “Dharma Land, Golden Land,” “community culture,” “civil society” Thai style, and “volunteer spirit”—all of which increase the psychological and emotional bonds with “Thainess,” especially the bonds with various value systems—has led to the view that capitalism-globalization is bad for Thai society, and that the “Thaksin regime” rapidly shifted Thai society, especially rural society and community culture, along a bad path. When this was accompanied by emotions aroused by the explanations of intellectuals and leaders of the PAD and PDRC political movements between 2005 and 2014, the middle class felt violently angry; they believed that they needed to sacrifice their own happiness to preserve “Thainess” in its various dimensions; they felt the need to fight and resist “evil capitalist” politicians who destroyed “Thainess” for personal gain, whether through “judicialization,” “direct democracy,” or a “coup,” along with the use of violence in various forms.

The need to inspire the middle-class masses to participate in a broad movement led mass leaders and middle-class intellectuals to use conservative ideology to arouse feelings through artistic and cultural media, as well as superstition and astrology. Conservative ideology had an ongoing influence, while democratic ideology was used to attack the government and political system of the “Thaksin regime,” saying that it was not a “true democracy.” The middle class expected that a “true democracy suitable for Thai society and culture” would emerge after “political reform” or “national reform.” Such explanations and raising of hopes resulted in the middle class accepting authoritarian regimes at the time of the 2006 and 2014 coups. The middle class were hopeful that Thailand would achieve a form of “democratization” suited to Thai society and culture in the days to come.

The extremist and moderate conservative ideologies that gained power from the times of the PAD and PDRC political movements between 2005 and 2014 became the ideological basis for an elite network after the 2014 coup. They were chosen to maintain power and block the ideological power of the “Red Shirts,” who called for equality and opposed the *ammāt* (privileged) and subsequently sought to restrain the power of the “new generation” who called for the drafting of a democratic constitution and reform of the monarchy. The factors that made radical and moderate ideology more powerful included the fact that the government and elite had changed the goals of “Dharma Land, Golden Land,” “community culture,” and “civil society,” which originally focused on the economic aspect, to stress instead virtues such as “sufficiency,” “harmony,” etc. The elite network after the 2014 coup also tried to govern through “communities” and “civil society,” by controlling “civil society” across the country through cultural activities, legislation, and funding.

Conservative ideology has been used to weaken “politicization” and bring capitalism under the control of the state and big capital—a new kind of state in which the military expands its authority to control all major organizations, including state enterprises, and where big capital is a close ally of the state. Big capitalist groups not only rely on funds and networks that give them a competitive advantage in the market system and enable them to monopolize many businesses, but also cooperate with the state through projects such as the “Pracharat Rak Sammakkee Project,” which allow villagers to fall under the auspices of the state and capitalist groups and reduce the political strength of communities and civil society to the point where they can no longer join with the people in opposing the state and capitalist groups that are scrambling for resources or monopolizing businesses.

At present, although the middle class still places importance on virtues or Thai-style value systems, it has not benefited from conservative ideology as it did before the 2014

coup. While extremist conservative ideology intensified conflict and violence, moderate conservative ideology has not created the unity and mutual help that the middle class expected: conflict and violence still occur. The middle class, who have entered an economic liberalism and have new values such as freedom and equality, are likely to distance themselves from conservative ideology, even though many minds and emotions are still bound to the old value system.

Also, in a neoliberal era that is highly competitive and requires personal responsibility, individualism is growing among the middle class. But the middle class lack a sense of stability, due to the death of King Rama IX, the military coup, the network that has held power for nearly ten years, youth movements, and violent suppression. The progress toward an aging society, problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and inequalities in income and wealth that create social tensions have combined to impact the emotions of the middle class. The paradoxical situation in terms of concepts, value systems, and emotions of the middle class may therefore be moving to a conceptual dead end, confusion over value systems, and emotional despair until the middle class fall into a state of “not longing for the past and fearing future changes” at the same time.

However, a portion of the middle class has changed their thinking, value system, and emotions to the point that they are much more inclined towards liberal democratic ideals. Therefore, it may be hoped that the middle class will join in artistic and cultural practices to push for a new regime in which the sovereignty belongs to the people and the social relations based on equality, fairness, and justice.

## References

- Akin Rabibhadana. 1984. Kinship, Marriage, and the Thai Social System. In *Perspectives on the Thai Marriage*, edited by Aphichat Chamrathirong, pp. 1–27. Bangkok: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University.
- Anek Sanamchai อเนก สนั่นชัย. 1987. Satsana kap kan phatthana: Sueksa wikhro khwam ruammue rawang chao thai phut lae chao thai mutsalim nai kan phatthana muban na tai tambon khokloi amphoe takuathung changwat phangnga ศาสนากับการพัฒนา: ศึกษาวิเคราะห์ความร่วมมือระหว่างชาวไทยพุทธและชาวไทยมุสลิมในการพัฒนาหมู่บ้านนาใต้ ตำบลโลกกลอย อำเภอดงแก้วทุ่ง จังหวัดพังงา [Religion and development: An analysis of cooperation between Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims in village development in Ban Na, Khok Kloi Subdistrict, Takua Pa District, Phang Nga Province]. Master's thesis, Mahidol University.
- Anucha Bhalakula อนุชา พละกุล; Surapol Suyaprom สุรพล สุขะพรหม; Yuttana Praneet ยุทธนา ประณีต; Phrasamu-arkom Arkamathiro พระสมุห์อาคม อาคมธีโร; and Dawnapa Kettong ดาวันภา เกตุทอง. 2020. Thamma thiptai: Naewokhit tritsadi lae kan songsoem kan tuentua thang kanmuang rabop prachathiptai khong yaowachon ธรรมาธิปไตย: แนวคิด ทฤษฎี และการส่งเสริมการตื่นตัวทางการเมืองระบอบประชาธิปไตยของเยาวชน [Good governance: Concepts, theory, and promotion of political awakening of democratic governance of the youth]. *Journal of MCU Phetchaburi Review* 3(1): 40–60.

- Apichat Satitniramai อภิชาติ สถิตนิรามัย. 2019. Khon chanklang krungthep phu mai yut man nai rabop prachathiptai kap tritsadi kan thamhai pen samai mai (Modernization Theory) คนชั้นกลางกรุงเทพฯ ผู้ไม่ยึดมั่นในระบอบประชาธิปไตยกับทฤษฎีการทำให้เป็นสมัยใหม่ (Modernization Theory) [The Bangkok middle class' non-commitment to democracy and modernization theory]. *Journal of Social Sciences, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University* 49(2): 7–32. <http://www.library.polsci.chula.ac.th/dl/69036e2de04c33ff8aa9619618f66e42>, accessed March 10, 2021.
- Areeya Hutinta อริยา หุตินตะ. 2014. Meua sattri tam ha prachathiptai nai sangkhom pitathiptai เมื่อสตรีตามหาประชาธิปไตยในสังคมปิตาธิปไตย [When women long for democracy in patriarchal society]. *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University* 39(1): 68–95.
- Arthri Vanichtrakul อาริ วณิชตระกูล. 2012. Chak wannakam su lakhon phleng thai ruam samai: Khwam rak kap kan prakop sang tua lakhon ek ying จากวรรณกรรมสู่ละครเพลงไทยร่วมสมัย: ความรักกับการประกอบสร้างตัวละครเอกหญิง [From literature to contemporary Thai musicals: Love and creating leading female characters]. Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University.
- Asa Khampa อาสา คำภา. 2021. *Kwa cha khrong amnat nam* กว่าจะครองอำนาจนำ [Before taking leading power]. Nonthaburi: Same Sky.
- Attama Pocapanishwong อัฐมา โภคาพานิชวงษ์. 2003. Kan ruefuen muang nayu: Kan hoiha adit lae kan sang phunthii thang sangkhom khong khon chanklang การรื้อฟื้นเมืองน่าอยู่: การโหยหาอดีตและการสร้างพื้นที่ทางสังคมของคนชั้นกลาง [Reviving livable cities: Nostalgia and creating social space for the middle class]. In *Manusayawittayasuksa kab karn sueksa prakottakarn hoiha adid nai sangkom thai ruam samai* มานุษยวิทยาศึกษาเกี่ยวกับการศึกษาปรากฏการณ์โหยหาอดีตในสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย [Anthropology and the study of the phenomenon of nostalgia in contemporary Thai society], edited by Pattana Kitiarsa พัฒนา กิติอาษา, pp. 49–88. Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre.
- Attapol Songseang อัญชลี สงแสง. 2002. Phap sathon sangkhom nai rueangsan thai rawang phutthasakrat 2538–2542 ภาพสะท้อนสังคมในเรื่องสั้นไทยระหว่างพุทธศักราช 2538–2542 [Reflection of society in Thai short stories 1995–1999]. Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University.
- Baitongheang ไบตองเหียง. 2021. Khleuan tua thang chonchan เคลื่อนตัวทางชนชั้น [Class mobility]. Kaohoon. November 17. <https://www.kaohoon.com/column/494680>, accessed December 10, 2021.
- BBC News Thai บีบีซีนิวส์ไทย. 2021. Thai phakdi: Nopo. warong poet tua “phak thai phakdi” pratkat chutyuen su phak kao klai - khana kaona - mop sam niu ไทยกักดี: นพ.วงศ์เปิดตัว “พรรคไทยกักดี” ประกาศจุดยืนสู่พรรคก้าวไกล-คณะก้าวหน้า-ม็อบสามนิ้ว [Thai Pakdee: Dr. Warong introduces the Thai Pakdee Party, announces standpoint toward Move Forward Party-Progressive Movement-Three-Finger Mob]. January 20. <https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-55728825>, accessed January 22, 2022.
- . 2019. Phon PISA phop kan an khong nakrian thai yaelong reuai-reuai suan kanit-wit mai pianplaeng ผล PISA พบการอ่านของนักเรียนไทยแยลงเรื่อย ๆ ส่วนคณิต-วิทย์ไม่เปลี่ยนแปลง [PISA results find Thai students' reading getting worse, no change in math-science]. December 3. <https://www.bbc.com/thai/international-50642536>, accessed June 18, 2021.
- Bell, Peter F. 1982. Western Conceptions of Thai Society: The Politics of American Scholarship. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 12(1): 61–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472338285390051>.
- Bowornsak Uwanno บวรศักดิ์ อุวรรณโณ. 2008. Klaonam กล่าวนำ [Introduction]. In *Phramahakasatri nai rabop prachathiptai* พระมหากษัตริย์ในระบอบประชาธิปไตย [The king in a democratic system of government], pp. 13–15. Bangkok: Education Subcommittee, Celebrations Organizing Committee and the National Legislative Assembly. <http://archive.is/9zFmO#selection->, accessed March 10, 2020.
- Buddhadasa Bhikkhu พุทธทาสภิกขุ. 1984. *Kharawattham* ฆราวาสธรรม [Virtues of a good lay life]. Third Edition. Bangkok: Dhammadana Foundation.
- Bung-on Piyabhan บัณเฑาะว์ ปิยะพันธุ์. 1998. *Lao nai krung rattanakosin* ลาวในกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ [The Lao in early Bangkok]. Bangkok: Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks

Project.

- Buntharika Phuangkham บุญทริกา พวงคำ. 2022. *Phuying khwamba lae chittawet nai prathet thai chuang thotsawat 2500–2520* ผู้หญิง ความบ้าและจิตเวชในประเทศไทยช่วงทศวรรษ 2500–2520 [Women, madness, and psychiatry in Thailand 1957–1977]. Thesis Progress Report, Second Term, Academic Year 2021 (mimeographed).
- Chai-Anan Samudavanija ชัยอนันต์ สมุทวณิช. 2013. Wichan sathaban pai thammai วิจารณ์สถาบันไปทำไม [Why criticize the institution?]. MGR Online. March 31. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9560000038876>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2011. Prachathipatai baep phophiang (2) ประชาธิปไตยแบบพอเพียง (2) [Sufficiency democracy (2)]. MGR Online. August 7. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9540000098104>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2010a. Cho ra thip pa tai โจรธิปไตย [Kleptocracy]. MGR Online. June 6. <http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000077925>, accessed October 11, 2020.
- . 2010b. Kan sang phonlameuang nai sangkhom prachathipatai การสร้างพลเมืองในสังคมประชาธิปไตย [Building citizens in a democratic society]. MGR Online. December 9. <http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000178133>, accessed October 11, 2020.
- . 2010c. Meuang thai mai meuan deom ik to pai laew เมืองไทยไม่เหมือนเดิมอีกต่อไปแล้ว [Thailand is no longer like it was]. MGR Online. May 23. <http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000070377>, accessed October 11, 2020.
- . 2010d. Seriphap thang kan muang kap seriphap thang setthakit เสรีภาพทางการเมืองกับเสรีภาพทางเศรษฐกิจ [Political freedom and economic freedom]. MGR Online. November 28. <http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000167990>, accessed November 3, 2020.
- . 2010e. Thammaphiban thang kanmuang ธรรมภิบาลทางการเมือง [Political good governance]. MGR Online. November 21. <http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000164733>, accessed October 11, 2020.
- . 2009. Rat diaw kap prachathipatai รัฐเดียวกับประชาธิปไตย [The state and democracy]. MGR Online. November 14. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9520000141395>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2008a. Ratprachathipatai รัฐประชาธิปไตย [Democratic state]. MGR Online. December 19. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9510000149879>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2008b. Rattaphrahan cha koet khun nai sathanakan dai รัฐประหารจะเกิดขึ้นในสถานการณ์ใด [In what conditions will there be a coup?]. MGR Online. August 12. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9510000091057>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006a. Cha koet arai khuen nai deuan karakadakhom จะเกิดอะไรขึ้นในเดือนกรกฎาคม [What will happen in July?]. MGR Online. June 4. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9490000073233>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006b. Kanmuang thai lang kanleuak tang song mesa การเมืองไทยหลังการเลือกตั้ง 2 เมษายน [Thai politics after the April 2 election]. MGR Online. April 2. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9490000044174>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006c. Kan ngot chai ratthammanun bang mattra การงดใช้รัฐธรรมนูญบางมาตรา [Suspending the use of some sections of the constitution]. MGR Online. February 26. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9490000026368>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006d. Khong ching rue khong plom ของจริงหรือของปลอม [True or false]. MGR Online. April 23. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/94900000053746>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006e. Phu mi barami nok ratthammanun ผู้มีบารมีนอกรัฐธรรมนูญ [Person of prestige outside the constitution]. MGR Online. July 16. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9490000091103>, accessed September 1, 2023.



- . 2006f. Prachathipatai kap setthakit phophiang ประชาธิปไตยกับเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง [Democracy and the sufficiency economy]. MGR Online. October 22. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/949000131218>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006g. Ratchaprachasamasai ราชประชาสมาสัย [*Rachaprachasamasai* (monarch-people collaboration)]. MGR Online. March 19. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9490000037259>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- . 2006h. Rawang khon kap rabop ระหว่างคนกับระบบ [Between people and the system]. MGR Online. April 30. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9490000056968>, accessed September 1, 2023.
- Chanokporn Puapattanakun ชนกอพร พัวพัฒนกุล. 2013. Khwam samphan rawang phasa kap udomkan nai watakam phayakon duang chata: Kan wikhro watakam choeng wiphak ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษากับอุดมการณ์ในวาทกรรมกรพชากรณัฒวษะดา: การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมเชิงวิพากษ์ [The relationship between language and ideology in the discourse of fortune-telling: Critical discourse analysis]. PhD dissertation, Chulalongkorn University.
- Chao Khun Phra Vikrommuni เจ้าคุณพระวิกรมมุนี. n.d. *Phaendin tham phaendin thong* แผ่นดินธรรมแผ่นดินทอง [Dharma Land, Golden Land]. <http://www.kiriwong.ac.th/trrm/kv8.htm>, accessed April 5, 2021.
- Chattri Prakitnontakan ชาตรี ประกิตนันทการ. 2018. Kan prakop sang sinlapa thai chabap thangkan: Prawattisat sinlapa kap kanko arang sang chat pho.so. 2408–2525 การประกอบสร้างศิลปะไทยฉบับทางการ: ประวัติศาสตร์ศิลปะกับการก่อร่างสร้างชาติ พ.ศ.2408–2525 [The creation of a formal style of Thai art: The history of art and nation building, 1865–1982]. Master's thesis, Chiang Mai University.
- . 2004. *Kanmeuang lae sangkhom nai sinlapa sathapattayakam sayam samai thai prayuk chatniyom* การเมืองและสังคมในศิลปะสถาปัตยกรรม สยามสมัย ไทยประยุกต์ ชาตินิยม [Politics and society in Siamese-era architecture and Thai applied nationalism]. In Special Architecture Edition. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Chetana Nagavajara เจตนา นาควัชระ. 1989. *Prasopkan thang phasa nai pheua khwam yu rot khong manutsayasat ruam botkhwam thang wichakan* (pho.so. 2525–2532) ประสบการณ์ทางภาษา ใน เพื่อความอยู่รอดของมนุษยศาสตร์ รวบรวมบทความทางวิชาการ (พ.ศ. 2525–2532) [Experiences of language in the survival of the humanities: Collected works (1982–1989)]. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- . 1983. *Wannakam lakhon khong bertolt brecht kan suksa choeng wichan* วรรณกรรมละครของแบร์ทอลท์ เบรคท์ การศึกษาเชิงวิจารณ์ [Plays of Bertolt Brecht: A critical study]. Bangkok: Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project.
- Choochai Supawongse ชูชัย สุวงษ์ and Yuwadee Kardkarnklai ยุวดี คาคการณ์ไกล, eds. 1998. *Pracha sangkhom: Thatsana nak khit nai sangkhom thai* ประชาสังคม: ทรรศนะนักคิดในสังคมไทย [Civil society: Viewpoint of thinkers in Thai society]. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Chusak Pattarakulvanit ชูศักดิ์ ภัทรกุลวานิชย์. 2004. *Ma kan kluai klap mai dai pai mai thueng*. nai an (mai) aoruang. ม้าก้านกล้วย กลับไม่ได้ไปไม่ถึง. ใน อ่าน (ไม่) เอาเรื่อง. [Banana tree horse: Can't go back, can't get there in read, take (no) action]. Bangkok: Aan.
- Chutima Pragatwutisarn ชุตินา ประภาสวุฒิสาร. 2016. Pisat thunnayom lae “kankin manu duai kan eng” khwam runraeng choeng setthakit nai suai lak sai lae yeuaman ปีศาจทุนนิยมและ “การกินมนุษย์ด้วยกันเอง” ความรุนแรงเชิงเศรษฐกิจในสวลาไกไส้ และเหยื่อมาร [Capitalist monsters and “cannibalism”: Economic violence in *Sick Nurses* and the victims]. In *Nueng thotsawat wethi wichai manutsayasat: Waenta arom sangkhom kwamjing* หนึ่งทศวรรษเวทีวิจัยมนุษยศาสตร์ไทย: แวนดา อารมณ์ สังคม ความจริง [A decade, Thai humanities research forum, glasses, emotions, society, truth], edited by Suwanna Sathaanan สุวรรณาสถาอาณันท์ and Suradet Chotiudomphanสุเรศ โชติอุดมพันธ์, pp. 241–284. Bangkok: Office of the Research Fund (TRF).
- Connors, Michael K. and Ukrist Pathmanand, eds. 2021. *Thai Politics in Translation: Monarchy, Democracy and the Supra-constitution*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, University of Copenhagen.

- Daily News*. 2020. *Sinsae kheng pha duang muang pi hoksipsi 'biktu' rap suk nak - duang tok* “จีนแซ่ข่ง” ค่ำดวงเมืองปี 64 ‘บักตุ’ รับสิ๊กหนัก-ดวงตก [“Zinsae Kheng” casting the national horoscope for 21 “Big Tu” is big battle, stars decline]. December 31. <https://www.dailynews.co.th/politics/816116>, accessed January 30, 2021.
- DMC TV. n.d. Sap pu rit tham chet สัปบุริชธรรม 7 [Seven virtues of the righteous]. [https://www.dmc.tv/pages/top\\_of\\_week/20100830-DMC-A08.html](https://www.dmc.tv/pages/top_of_week/20100830-DMC-A08.html), accessed September 7, 2023.
- Ekkawit Nathalang เอกวิทย์ ณ ถลาง. 2016. Raluk thueng phra khun khru ba achan khana aksontat nai aksontat chula 100 roi pi sak lae si kawi niran Samakhom nisit kao khana aksontat chulalongkon maha withthayalai ระลึกถึงพระคุณครูบาอาจารย์คณะอักษรศาสตร์ใน อักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาฯ 100 ปี สักคิมและศรีกวีนิรันดร์ สมาคมนิสิตเก่า คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย [Recollections of teachers of the Faculty of Arts, 100th anniversary of Arts Chula, privilege and honor forever, Chula Arts Alumni Association, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University]. Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. <https://www.arts.chula.ac.th/AlumWeb/100years/NarrativesOfTeacher.php>, accessed April 18, 2021.
- Fu Po Shek, ed. 2008. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- iLaw. 2019. Ratthammanun 2540 pen yangrai khrai khrai ko phut thueng รัฐธรรมนูญ 2540 เป็นอย่างไร ใครๆ ก็พูดถึง [How is the 1997 constitution? Everyone is talking about it]. <https://ilaw.or.th/node/5426>, accessed September 7, 2021.
- Isara Choosri อิสระ ชูศรี. 2020. Thit thang thai: Yang yam rue yon? ทิศทางไทย: ย่าง ย่ำ หรือย้อน? [Thailand's direction: Step, tread, or return?]. *The 101.World*. <https://www.the101.world/thai-move-institute/>, accessed May 25, 2021.
- Isranews Agency สำนักข่าวอิศรา. 2015. Pathakatha ngan tho po tho. chabap tem “anan panyarachun” thammaphiban nai rabop po cho to ปาฐกถาจากนรปท.ฉบับเต็ม “อานันท์ ปันยารชุน” ธรรมภิบาลในระบบปชช [BOT lecture: Complete version “Anand Panyarachun” good governance in a democratic system]. [https://www.isranews.org/content-page/item/41697-open01\\_41697.html](https://www.isranews.org/content-page/item/41697-open01_41697.html), accessed December 24, 2021.
- Ittidech Prapech อิทติเดช พระเพชร. 2018. Chak hoiha Thueng moho: An akan sangkhom nai phappayon thai lang wikrit setthakit tomyam kung (phutthasakrat songphan haroi sisip thung songphan haroi sisiphog) จาก “โหยหา” ถึง “โมโห”: อ่านอาการสังคมในภาพยนตร์ไทยหลังวิกฤตเศรษฐกิจต้มยำกุ้ง (พ.ศ. 2540–2546) [From “yearning” to “angry”: Reading the social symptoms in Thai films after the Tom Yam Kung economic crisis (1997–2003)]. *Thammasat Journal of History* 5(2): 171–219. <https://doi.org/10.14456/thammasat-history.2018.13>.
- Jesada Buaban เจษฎา บัวบาน. 2019. Kot haeng kam mai yuttitham: Kan longthot lae phuk akhat thi lon koen nai nang phi thai กฎแห่งกรรมไม่ยุติธรรม: การลงโทษและผูกอาฆาตที่สิ้นเกินในหนังผีไทย [The law of karma is unfair: Excessive punishment and retribution in Thai ghost movies]. *Prachatai*. April 23. <https://prachatai.com/journal/2019/04/82172>, accessed December 24, 2021.
- Jirat Chalermpanyakorn จิรัฏฐ์ เฉลิมแสนยากร. 2016. Kan sang attalak khwam pen chai nai phairat niyai thai rawang pho.so. 2484–2489 การสร้างอัตลักษณ์ความเป็นชายในไฟรัชนีชายไทยระหว่าง พ.ศ. 2484–2489 [Creating a masculinity identity in Thai fiction between 1941 and 1946]. Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University.
- Kanokrat Lertchoosakul กนกรัตน์ เลิศชูสกุล. 2020. *Chak mue top thueng nok wit phatthanakan lae phonlawat khong khabuankan totan thaksin* จากมือตบถึงนกหวีด พัฒนาการและพลวัตของขบวนการต่อต้านทักษิณ [From hand clap to whistle: The development and dynamics of the anti-Thaksin movement]. Bangkok: Illuminations.
- Khaosod. 2021. *Cha phet dang yom rap phit khoei hen duai rathaprahan sam khoei mong suea daeng wumwai rap tonni phangphinat* จำเพชรดัง ขอมรับสิคิ เลขเห็นตัวชัฐประหาร ซ้าเคยมองเสื้อแดงุ่นวาย รับคองนี้ฟั้ง ฟินาศ [Sergeant Famouspage, I've seen coups, I've repeatedly looked at the chaotic Red Shirts, and

- now it's ruined]. May 22. [https://www.khaosod.co.th/special-stories/news\\_6412812](https://www.khaosod.co.th/special-stories/news_6412812), accessed September 6, 2023.
- Kitpatchara Somanawat กฤษณ์เพชร โสมณวัตร. 2019. Kanprakop sang amnat tulakan thai nai sangkhom samai mai การประกอบสร้างอำนาจตุลาการไทยในสังคมสมัยใหม่ [Construction of Thai judicial authority in contemporary society]. Master's thesis, Chiang Mai University.
- Komchadluek. 2012. Poet bot wikhro kanmuang thai thamklang khwam khatyaeng thirayut bunmi chabap tem เปิดบทวิเคราะห์การเมืองไทย ท่ามกลางความขัดแย้ง 'ธีรยุทธ บุญมี' ฉบับเต็ม [Analysis of Thai politics in the midst of conflict: "Thirayuth Boonmee" complete version]. March 18. <https://www.komchadluek.net/news/125702>, accessed October 14, 2021.
- Kornphanat Tungkeunkunt. 2012. The Urban Culture of Chinese Society in Bangkok: Cinemas, Broadcast and Literature, 1950s–1970s. PhD dissertation, National University of Singapore.
- Kridikorn Wongswangpanich. 2022. Sick Kingdom: The Role and Politics of Thai Health Care in the Domination of Bhumibol's Narrative. PhD dissertation, Kyoto University.
- Krisda Kerdee กฤษดา เกิดดี. 2007. *Wichan nang thai: Ruam bot wiphak phapphayon thai 2540–2549*วิจารณ์หนังไทย: รวบรวมทวิพากษ์ภาพยนตร์ไทย 2540–2549 [Thai film criticism: Collected Thai film reviews 1997–2006]. Pathum Thani: Rangsit University Press.
- Krittapak Ngamvaseenont กฤตศักดิ์ งามวาสินนท์. 2021. Kan prakop sang tuaton phaitai rangkai lae attalak khong khwam cheppuai bon phunthi chittawetchasat samai mai การประกอบสร้างตัวตนภายใต้ร่างกายและอัตลักษณ์ของความเจ็บป่วยบนพื้นที่จิตเวชศาสตร์สมัยใหม่ [History of depression in contemporary society: Subjectivity and somatic identity in the domain of modern psychiatry]. *Journal of Human Sciences* 22(2): 253–275.
- Lom Plianthit (pseudonym) ลม เปลี่ยนทิศ (นามแฝง). 2021. Tong rue rabop ratrachakan thai ต้องรื้อระบบราชการไทย [Must dismantle the Thai government service system]. *Thairath*. November 19. [https://www.thairath.co.th/news/politic/2244607?#ins\\_sr=eyJwcm9kdWN0SWQiOiJyMjQ0NjA3In0=](https://www.thairath.co.th/news/politic/2244607?#ins_sr=eyJwcm9kdWN0SWQiOiJyMjQ0NjA3In0=), accessed November 28, 2021.
- Ma kankluai ม้าก้านกล้วย. n.d. [Banana tree horse]. Wikipedia. <https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/ม้าก้านกล้วย>, accessed October 27, 2021.
- Matichon. 2020a. #flashmob chamaithon Kanmeuang thai nai saita sattrachau naiphaet prawase wasi lua thang diao khue chai okat chakwikrit #แฟลชม็อบจะไม่ทน การเมืองไทยในสายตา ศ.นพ.ประเวศ วะสี : เหลือทางเดียวคือใช้โอกาสจากวิกฤต [#flashmob won't stand for it: Thai politics in the eyes of Prof. Dr. Prawase Wasi "the only way left is to use the opportunity of the crisis"]. August 23. [https://www.matichon.co.th/prachachuen/interview/news\\_2318219](https://www.matichon.co.th/prachachuen/interview/news_2318219), accessed February 2, 2022.
- . 2020b. Pha duang mueang lang songkran! Hon dang chi khowitz - 19 bao long huang sethakit phang kanmueang yae tuan bik tu ผ่าดวงเมืองหลังสงกรานต์! โหรดั่งชี้ โควิด-19 เบาลง ห่วงเศรษฐกิจพัง การเมือง แต่เดือนบิกตุ [National horoscope after Songkran! Astrologers indicate Covid-19 will abate, fears of economic collapse, bad politics, warning for Big Tu]. April 8. [https://www.matichon.co.th/lifestyle/horoscope-lifestyle/news\\_2129334](https://www.matichon.co.th/lifestyle/horoscope-lifestyle/news_2129334), accessed June 25, 2021.
- MGR Online. 2020. Mo rianthong nat ruampon lan phrurap sipsi tulakom phua patibat kan kep khaya phaendin “หมอเหรียญทอง” นัดรวมพลลานพระรูปฯ 14 ค.ค.เพื่อ “ปฏิบัติภารกิจขยะแผ่นดิน” [Dr Rienthong gathers his forces on October 14 to “do some rubbish collection”]. October 12. <https://mgronline.com/onlinesection/detail/9630000104287>, accessed October 23, 2021.
- . 2011. Thamma kap chiwit pracham wan: 7 lak tham bongchi khwam pen khondi thi thae ching ธรรมะกับชีวิตประจำวัน: 7 หลักธรรม บ่งชี้ความเป็นคนดีที่แท้จริง [Dhamma and daily life: Seven principles of dhamma indicate truly good people]. October 4. <https://mgronline.com/dhamma/detail/9540000125558>, accessed December 20, 2021.
- Moral Promotion Center (Public Organization) ศูนย์คุณธรรม (องค์การมหาชน). 2021. Sun khunnatham prat chettanarom khaphkleuan “ongkon khunnatham” pracham pi ngoppraman 2565 phrom pen phalang

- samkhan nai kan khaphkleuan sangkhom khunnatham duai phalang buak ศูนย์คุณธรรม ประกาศเจตนารมณ์ขับเคลื่อน “องค์กรคุณธรรม” ประจำปีงบประมาณ 2565 พร้อมเป็นพลังสำคัญในการขับเคลื่อนสังคมคุณธรรมด้วยพลังบวก [Moral Promotion Center announces intention to drive “moral centers” in 2022 annual budget as an important force in driving a moral society through positive energy]. <https://moralcenter.or.th/>, accessed June 20, 2021.
- Nakharin Mektrairat นครินทร์ เมฆไตรรัตน์. 2006. *Phra phusong pokkklao prachathiptai: 60 pi sirirajsombat kap kan meuang kan pokkhrong thai* พระผู้ทรงปกเกล้าฯ ประชาธิปไตย: 60 ปีสิริราชสมบัติกับการเมืองการปกครองไทย [Royal protector of democracy: 60th anniversary celebrations]. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press.
- Naowarat Pongpaiboon นาวรัตน์ พงษ์ไพบูลย์. 2021. Amnat sathapana ratthammanun อำนาจสถาปนารัฐธรรมนูญ [Constitutional authority]. *Matichon Weekly* 41(2119): 51.
- Nathapong Chitniratna ณัฐพงศ์ จิตนิรัตน์ and Adisorn Saksoong อติสร สักดิ์สูง. 2000. Naewkhit pracha sangkhom thai bot samruat beuangton แนวคิดประชาสังคมไทย บทสำรวจเบื้องต้น [Thai concept of civil society: Preliminary survey]. *Parichart Journal* 12(2): 39–41.
- Natthanai Prasannam นัทธนัย ประสานนาม. 2021. Chai chat thahan kap chat nai nawaniyai yaoi reuang nithanphandaw ชายชาติทหารกับชาติในนวนิยายชายไอโอเรื่อง นิตานพันดาว [Military masculinity and nationhood in the Yaoi novel *A Tale of a Thousand Stars*]. *Journal of Human Sciences* 22(1): 162–180.
- . 2009. Thawiphop (The Siam Renaissance) nai thana phapyon naew toklap‘ananihom ทวิภพ (The Siam Renaissance) ในฐานะภาพยนตร์แนวโต้ที่ สับ อาณานิคม ใน [*Tawiphop* (The Siam renaissance) as an anticolonial film]. In *Lakhon rakhon tuaton manut wannakam kap natakam sueksa* ละครระคน ตัวตน มนุษย์ วรรณกรรมกับ นาฏกรรมศึกษา [Plays combining identity, humanity, literature and drama studies]. Bangkok: Department of Literature and the Research Committee; Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University and the Bangkok Bank Research Section.
- Nidhi Aeusrivongse นิธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์. 2021a. Duang mueang ดวงเมือง [National horoscope]. *Prachatai*. September 15. [https://prachatai.com/journal/2021/09/94999?ref=internal\\_relate](https://prachatai.com/journal/2021/09/94999?ref=internal_relate), accessed September 16, 2021.
- . 2021b. Watthanatham phadetkan thai วัฒนธรรมเผด็จการไทย (4) [Thai dictatorship culture (4)]. *Matichon Weekly*. November 26–December 2. [https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article\\_490726](https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article_490726), accessed December 4, 2021.
- . 2018. Khon chan klang kap rabop kanmeuang คนชั้นกลางกับระบอบการเมือง [The middle class and the political system]. *Matichon*. March 19. [https://www.matichon.co.th/columnists/news\\_879814](https://www.matichon.co.th/columnists/news_879814), accessed January 5, 2021.
- Nuntarat Phiemphichai นันทรัตน์ เปี่ยมพิชัย. 2018. Phaplak khwam pen thai nai nawaniyai khrongkan wannakam pheua ASEAN khong prapatsorn sewikun ภาพลักษณ์ความเป็นไทยในนวนิยายโครงการวรรณกรรมเพื่ออาเซียนของประภัสสร เสวิกุล [The images of Thainess in Prapassorn Sewikul’s ASEAN novels]. Master of Arts Independent Study, Department of Thai for Career Development, Silpakorn University.
- Phacharawan Boonpromkul พชรวรรณ บุญพร้อมกุล. 2019. Niwet wichan: Wannakam thammachat singwaetlom lok นิควิจารย์: วรรณกรรม ธรรมชาติ สิ่งแวดล้อม โลก [Ecocriticism: Literature, nature, environment, world]. In *Nawawithi: Withi withthaya ruam samai nai kansueka wannakam* นาวีถิ วิถีวิทยา ร่วมสมัยในการศึกษาวรรณกรรม [New way: Contemporary methodology in literary studies], edited by Suradech Chotiudompanit สุรเดช โชติอุดมพันธ์, pp. 373–437. Bangkok: Siam Review Publishing House.
- Phra Bhramagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto) พระพรหมคุณาภรณ์ (ป. อ. ปยุตโต). 2010. *Pathakathatham reuang setthasat naew phut* ปาฐกถาธรรมเรื่อง “เศรษฐศาสตร์แนวพุทธ” [Sermon on “Buddhist economics”]. Fifth Edition. Bangkok: Komol Keem Thong Foundation.
- . 2009. *Jaruek asok (thamchak bon sian sising) Ratthasat haeng thammathiptai* จารึกอโศก (ธรรมจักรบนเศียรสี่สิงห์) รัฐศาสตร์แห่งธรรมาธิปไตย [Ashoka inscriptions (the wheel of the law on the heads of four lions): Political science of rule by virtue]. Samut Prakan: Phalitham Publishing.

- . n.d. *Photchananukrom phuttasat chabap pramuantham* พจนานุกรมพุทธศาสตร์ ฉบับประมวลธรรม [Dictionary of Buddhism, dharma code]. Wat Nyanavesakavan. [https://www.watnyanaves.net/uploads/File/books/pdf/dictionary\\_of\\_buddhism\\_pra-muan-dhaama.pdf](https://www.watnyanaves.net/uploads/File/books/pdf/dictionary_of_buddhism_pra-muan-dhaama.pdf), accessed July 20, 2021.
- Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto) พระธรรมปิฎก (ป. อ. ปยุตฺโต). 2000. *Krabuankan rianru pheua phatthana khon pai su prachathiptai* กระบวนการเรียนรู้เพื่อพัฒนาคนไปสู่ประชาธิปไตย [The process of learning to develop people for democracy]. Bangkok: Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya Press.
- . 1996. *Nitisat naew phut* นิติศาสตร์แนวพุทธ [Buddhist law]. Bangkok: Sahadhammika.
- Pinyapan Potjanalawan กัญญาพันธุ์ พงษ์นลาวัลย์. 2015. *Kamnoet prathed thai phaitai phadetkan* กำเนิด “ประเทศไทย” ภายใต้เผด็จการ [Origin of Thailand under dictatorship]. Bangkok: Matchon.
- Pitthaya Wongkul พิทยา วงศ์กุล, ed. 1998. *Thai yuk watthanatham that* ไทยยุควัฒนธรรมทาส [Thais in an era of slave culture]. Bangkok: Withithat.
- Pleo Si-ngoen (pseudonym) เปลว สິงเงิน (นามแฝง). 2021. Tong ‘sang son man’ sabang ต้อง ‘สั่งสอนมัน’ ชะบัง [Must “teach” them]. *Thai Post*. November 29. <https://www.thaipost.net/columnist-people/34687/>, accessed December 24, 2021.
- Porntada Suvattanavanich พรธาดา สุวัธนานนิช. 2007. Phuying kap botbat khwam pen mae nai nawaniyai thai tangtae phutthasakrat 2510–2546 ผู้หญิงกับบทบาทความเป็นแม่ในนวนิยายไทย ตั้งแต่ พ.ศ. 2510–2546 [Women and motherhood in Thai novels, 1967–2004]. PhD dissertation, Chulalongkorn University.
- Prachachat Business. 2021. Topoto. Chi reng kae 5 chut probang phlaepen setthakit Thai ธปท. 5 จุดเปราะบาง “แผลเป็น” เศรษฐกิจไทย [BOT press urgent solution, five fragile points “scar” Thai economy]. October 13. <https://www.prachachat.net/finance/news-781010>, accessed December 28, 2021.
- . 2020. Mop nak thurakit pina manae settha-sarat chong kae ratthammanun ม็อบนักธุรกิจ ปีน้ามานเน่ เศรษฐฯ-สาร์ชาติ ชงแก้รัฐธรรมนูญ [Businesspeople mob, next year Setha-Sarath to concoct constitutional amendment]. December 10. <https://www.prachachat.net/politics/news-572050>, accessed January 26, 2021.
- . 2018. Sampat withi thai yonyuk nai ngan ‘un ai rak khelai khwam nao sainam haeng rattanakosin’ สัมผัสวิถีไทยย้อนยุค ในงาน “อุ้นไอรัก คลายความหนาว สายน้ำแห่งรัตนโกสินทร์” [Feeling the Thai way of regression in the program *Boy’s Love Relieving the Cold, Currents of Rattanakosin*]. December 12. <https://www.prachachat.net/spinoff/lifestyle/news-263902>, accessed November 14, 2021.
- Prachatai. 2022. NGO keup 1900 onkon ruam ok thalaeng kan khan rang pharart cha banyat khum NGO khong rathaban yan phrom hai truatsoptae kotmai mai sotkhlong sitthi ratthammanun lae katika sakon เอ็นจีโอเกือบ 1,900 ออกักร่วมออกแถลงการณ์ค้านร่าง พ.ร.บ.คุมเอ็นจีโอ ของรัฐบาล ันพร้อมให้ตรวจสอบ แต่กฎหมายไม่สอดคล้องสิทธิ รม.และกคกาศกท [Almost 1,900 NGOs issue joint statement on the draft NGO control bill of the government, insisting they are ready to scrutinize only a law that does not comply with constitutional rights and international norms]. January 8. <https://prachatai.com/journal/2022/01/96721>, accessed February 2, 2022.
- . 2020. Worachet phakhrat: Prachathiptai cha hotkhaep an mi phra mahakasatri song pen pramuk cha khayai phuenthai วรเจตน์ ภาคีรีรัตน์: ประชาธิปไตยจะหดแคบ อันมีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุขจะขยายพื้นที่ [Worachet Pakeerut: Democracy will shrink with the monarch as head of state expanding scope]. December 14. <https://prachatai.com/journal/2021/12/96391>, accessed June 25, 2021.
- . 2013. Rai ngan: Khadi du min ratchakanthi si sen baeng wela mai khong mattrra 112 รายงาน: คดีดูหมิ่นรัชกาลที่ 4 เส้นแบ่งเวลาใหม่ของมาตรา 112 [Report: King Rama IV defamation case: New time limit on Section 112]. November 22. <https://prachatai.com/journal/2013/11/49912>, accessed July 19, 2021.
- Prajak Kongkirati and Veerayooth Kanchoochat. 2018. The Prayuth Regime: Embedded Military and Hierarchical Capitalism in Thailand. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6(2): 279–305. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.4>.
- Pramoth Thatsanasuwan ปราโมทย์ ทัศนาศูวธรรม. 1980. Khamnam คำนำ [Introduction]. In *Rak meuang*

- thai thiaw meuang thai* รักเมืองไทย เที่ยวเมืองไทย [Love Thailand, tour Thailand]. Bangkok: Siam Review Publishing House.
- Prawase Wasi ประเวศ วะสี. 1997. Bot samphat sattrachan naiphaet prawase wasi บทสัมภาษณ์ ศาสตราจารย์ นายแพทย์ประเวศ วะสี [Interview with Professor Dr. Prawase Wasi]. In *Pracha sangkhom: Thatsana nak khit nai sangkhom thai* ประชาสังคม: ทรรศนะนักคิดในสังคมไทย [Civil society: Viewpoint of thinkers in Thai society], edited by Choochai Supawongse ชูชัย สุกวงศ์ and Yuwadee Kardkarnklai ยุวดี คาคการณ ไกล, pp. 1–36. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Pume Puangkim ภูมิ พ่วงกิม. 2016. Dontri kap kankhleuanwai thang kanmeuang thai phutthasakrat 2547–2557 คนตรีกับการเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมืองไทย พ.ศ. 2547–2557 [Music and political movements 2004–2014]. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabruk University* 1(3): 92–103.
- Reynolds, Craig J. เรย์โนลด์ส, เครก เจ. 2022. *Chotmai chak sut khop lok: Khit khamnueng thueng adit nai patchuban* จดหมายจากสุดขอบโลก: คิดคำนึงถึงอดีตในปัจจุบัน [Letters from the end of the world: Thinking of the past in the present]. Bangkok: Siam Review Publishing House.
- Saichol Sattayanurak. 2021. Historical Legacy and the Emergence of Judicialisation in the Thai State. In *Thai Politics in Translation: Monarchy, Democracy and the Supra-constitution*, edited by Michael K. Connors and Ukrist Pathamanand, pp. 187–233. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, University of Copenhagen.
- . สายชล สัตยานุรักษ์. 2018. *Nak wichakan thai kap kan tosu chuangching khwammai prachathiapai nai phawa wikrit thang kanmeuang* นักวิชาการไทยกับการต่อสู้ช่วงชิงความหมาย “ประชาธิปไตย” ในภาวะวิกฤตทางการเมือง [Thai academics and the struggle for the meaning of “democracy” during a political crisis]. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund.
- . 2014. *Sip Panyachon siam lem nueng panyachon haeng rat sombunnayasitthirat* 10 ปัญญาชนสยาม เล่ม 1 ปัญญาชนแห่งรัฐสมบูรณาญาสิทธิราชย์ [Ten Siamese intellectuals, Vol. 1: Intellectuals of the absolute monarchy]. Bangkok: openbooks.
- Saichol Sattayanurak สายชล สัตยานุรักษ์; Kritphachara Somonwat กฤษณ์เพชร โสมณวัตร; Kesara Srinakha เกษรา ศรีนาคา; Natthapong Sakulliao ณัฐพงษ์ สกุลเดี่ยว; Sarawut Visaprom สราวุฒิ วิสาพรม; and Asa Khampha อาสา คำภา. 2018. *Withi withaya lae ong khwamru kiaawkap manut lae watthanatham chak phon ngan kong nak manutsayasad nak manusayawithaya lae nak rattasat thai: Bot sangkhro: Rai ngan wichai chabap sombun* วิถีวิทยาและองค์ความรู้เกี่ยวกับมนุษย์และวัฒนธรรมจากผลงานของนักมนุษยศาสตร์ นักมานุษยวิทยาและนักรัฐศาสตร์ไทย: บทสังเคราะห์: รายงานวิจัยฉบับสมบูรณ์ [Methodology and body of knowledge related to humanity and culture from the work of Thai academics in the humanities, anthropology, and political science: Synthesis: Final research report]. Bangkok: Thailand Science Research and Innovation.
- Samchai Sresunt สามชาย ศรีสันต์. 2020. *Bot samruat watkam chonabot lae bannok nai khwam pen thai* บทสำรวจวาทกรรมชนบทและบ้านนอกในความเป็นไทย [Survey on the discourse of rural and remote areas in Thainess]. Krung Thep: sommotti.
- Sangwon Liptapanlop สัจวรรณ ลิปตพัลลภ. 2016. Thamma thippatai kap prachathipatai nai boribot sangkhom thai ธรรมาธิปไตยกับประชาธิปไตยในบริบทสังคมไทย [Rule by righteousness and democracy in the context of Thai society]. In *Ruam botkhwam thang wichakan khong sammakngan san rathammanun chut thi 19 san rathammanun yut lak nititham khamchun prachathiapai huangyai sithi lae seriphap khong prachachon* รวมบทความทางวิชาการของสำนักงานศาลรัฐธรรมนูญ ชุดที่ 19 ศาลรัฐธรรมนูญยึดหลักนิติธรรม คำจูนประชาธิปไตย ห่วงใยสิทธิและเสรีภาพของประชาชน [Office of the Constitutional Court: 19th compilation of academic articles of the Office of the Constitutional Court: The Constitutional Court upholds the rule of law, supports democracy, and safeguards the rights and freedoms of the people]. Bangkok: Institute of Constitutional Studies, Office of the Constitutional Court.
- Sawaeng Senanarong แสงวง เสนาณรงค์. 1977. *Khambanyai reuang yaowachon kap 'udomkan haeng chat khong phanathan sawaeng sena narong rathamontri pracham sammak nayokrathamontri na mahawithayalai songkhla nakharin meua wan thi 20 mokarakhom 2516. Anuson ngan phraratchathan*

- phloeng sop phon ek sawaeng senanarong* คำบรรยายเรื่องเยาวชนกับอุดมการณ์แห่งชาติของฯพณฯ แสวง เสนาณรงค์ รัฐมนตรีประจำสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี ณ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ เมื่อวันที่ 20 มกราคม 2516. อนุสรณ์งานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ พลเอกแสวง เสนาณรงค์ ม.ป.ช. ม.ว.ม. ท.จ.ว. วันที่ 23 เมษายน 2520 [Lecture on youth and national ideology by Gen. Sawaeng Senanarong, minister in the Prime Minister's Office, at Prince of Songkla University, January 20, 1973. Cremation memorial book for Gen. Sawaeng Senanarong, April 23, 1977], pp. 73–93. Bangkok: Royal Thai Survey Department Press.
- Sineeporn Mareukphithak สินีพร มฤคพิทักษ์. 2019. *Phonlameuang asa phalang yaiwya lok* พลเมืองอาสา พลังเสียสละโลก [Volunteer civilians: A force to treat the world]. Nonthaburi: Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being.
- Sittitthep Eaksittipong สิทธิเทพ เอกสิทธิพงษ์. 2015. “Luk chin rak chat”: Samnuek prawattisat lae niyam prachattipatai “ถูกจีนรักชาติ”: สำนักประวัติศาสตร์และนิยามประชาธิปไตย [“The patriotic Thai-born Chinese”: Their historical consciousness and defined democracy]. *The Journal of Human Sciences, Faculty of Humanities*, Chiang Mai University 16(2): 112–157.
- Somchai Preechasinlapakun สมชาย ปรีชาศิลป์. 2017. 20 pi rattthammanun 2540 haroisisip: Kan patirup kanmeuang thai nai ungmue nak kotmai mahachon 20 ปี รัฐธรรมนูญ 2540: การปฏิรูปการเมืองไทยในอุ้งมือ นักกฎหมายมหาชน [20th anniversary of the 1997 constitution: Political reform in the hands of mass lawyers]. *The 101.World*. March 16. <https://www.the101.world/20-year-constitution-2540/>, accessed June 20, 2020.
- Surachet Phichitphongphao สุรเชษฐ์ พิชิตพงศ์คำ. 2010. Uppalak chiwit nai nangsue naenam kan damnoen chiwit: Kan sueksa khwam samphan rawang phasa kap manothat อุปถัมภ์ชีวิตในหนังสือแนะนำการดำเนินชีวิต: การศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษา กับ โนทัศน์ [Life metaphors in the lifestyle books: A study of the relationship between language and concept]. Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University.
- Surapol Suyaprom สุรพล สุขะพรหม. 2005. Khwam khit thang kan meuang: Prachathiptai tam naew khit phra thampidok (po ao payutto) ความคิดทางการเมือง: ประชาธิปไตย ตามแนวคิดพระธรรมปิฎก (ป.อ. ปยุตโต) [Political thought: Democracy according to the concept of Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto)]. <https://www.mcu.ac.th/article/detail/14340>, accessed June 24, 2020.
- Surawut Padthaisong สุรวุฒิ ปัดไธสง. 2002. Watthanatham chumchon ngeuankhai khwam khemkhaeng khong chumchon/muban วัฒนธรรมชุมชนเงื่อนไขความเข้มแข็งของชุมชน/หมู่บ้าน [Community culture conditions for community/village strength]. *Journal of Behavioral Science* 8(1): 11–20.
- Suthipong Prachayapruit สุธิพงษ์ ปรัชญพฤกษ์. 2014a. *Choak rai. Prathet thai mai samat yuti kan khai chat dai* โชคร้าย. ประเทศไทยไม่สามารถยุติการขายชาติได้ [Bad luck. Thailand cannot stop selling the nation]. MGR Online. March 13. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9570000028900>, accessed June 24, 2020.
- . 2014b. *Thaksin khai chat ching: Thai tok pen meuang khun thang setthakit singkhaop laew* ทักษิณขายชาติจริง ..ไทยตกเป็นเมืองขึ้นทางเศรษฐกิจสิงคโปร์แล้ว [Thaksin sells the country: Thailand has become an economic colony of Singapore]. MGR Online. April 12. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9550000046109>, accessed January 25, 2023.
- Suthitham Lekwiat สุธิธรรม เลขวิวัฒน์. 2006. *Khreua khai chumchon phophiang* เครือข่ายชุมชนพอเพียง [Sufficiency community network]. Bangkok: Withithat Institute.
- Suinai Pornavalai สุวินัย ภรณวลัย. 2008a. Pharakit saksit kap botrian kan ku chat thang chit winyan khong si oraphintho (tonthi sisiphok) chit saksit haeng chatukham ramthep (to) การกิจศักดิ์สิทธิ์กับบทเรียนการผู้ชาติทางจิตวิญญาณของศรี อรพินโธ (ตอนที่ 46) จิตศักดิ์สิทธิ์แห่งจตุคามรามเทพ (ต่อ) [Sacred mission and the lessons of spiritual salvation of Sri Aurobindo (No. 46), holy spirit of Jatukham Rammathep (continued)]. MGR Online. February 26. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9510000023922>, accessed July 18, 2020.
- . 2008b. Pharakit saksit kap botrian kan ku chat thang chit winyan khong si oraphintho (tonthi 48) chit saksit haeng chatukhamramthep (to) การกิจศักดิ์สิทธิ์กับบทเรียนการผู้ชาติทางจิตวิญญาณของศรี อรพิน

- โธ (ตอนที่ 48) จิตศักดิ์สิทธิ์แห่งจิตคามรามเทพ (ต่อ) [Sacred obligation and lessons from spiritually saving the nation of Sri Aurobindo (No. 48), holy spirit of Jatukham Rammathep (continued)]. MGR Online. March 11. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9510000030026>, accessed July 18, 2020.
- Teejuta Makhin ซีร์จุชา เมฆิน. 2015. Naewkhithang kan meuang baep racha chatniyom thi prakot nai nawaniyai khong thomayanti แนวคิดทางการเมืองแบบราชาชาตินิยมที่ปรากฏในนวนิยายของทมยันตี [Political concept of royal nationalism in Tamayanti's novels]. Master's thesis, Chiang Mai University.
- Teo, Stephen. 1997. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. London: British Film Institute.
- Thailand, Ministry of Education, Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (IPST) กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ, สถาบันส่งเสริมการสอนวิทยาศาสตร์และเทคโนโลยี (สสวท.). n.d. *Sarup phon kan pramoen PISA songphan sipha withayasad kanan lae khanitsat* สรุปผลการประเมิน PISA 2015 วิทยาศาสตร์ การอ่าน และคณิตศาสตร์ [Summary of 2015 PISA assessment, science, reading, mathematics]. <http://www.oic.go.th/FILEWEB/CABINFOCENTER6/DRAWER056/GENERAL/DATA0000/00000070.PDF>, accessed June 18, 2021.
- Thailand, Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being สำนักงานกองทุนจิตอาสาพระราชารัฐเพื่อสังคมสุขภาวะ. 2019. *Chit asa pracharat reuang rao khong khon tham ngan nai phuenthi* จิตอาสาพระราชารัฐ เรื่องราวดีๆ ของคนทำงานในพื้นที่ [Asa Pracharat good stories of local workers]. Nonthaburi: Office of the Asa Pracharat Fund for Social Well-being.
- . 2017. *Khronkkan chit asa pracharat: Patibatkan khap khluan prathet thai si chut soon* โครงการ “จิตอาสาพระราชารัฐ: ปฏิบัติการขับเคลื่อนประเทศไทย 4.0 [Asa Pracharat Project: Drive to Thailand 4.0]. Nonthaburi: National Health Commission Office.
- Thailand, Office of the Cane and Sugar Board สำนักงานคณะกรรมการอ้อยและน้ำตาลทราย. 2020. *Pra kat chetanarom kan pen ongonk songsoem khuntham* ประกาศเจตนารมณ์การเป็นองค์กรส่งเสริมคุณธรรม [Announcement of intention to be an organization promoting morals]. <https://www.ocsb.go.th/2020/press-release/11712/>, accessed September 6, 2023.
- Thailand, Office of the Civil Service Commission สำนักงานคณะกรรมการข้าราชการพลเรือน. n.d. Naewkhith chit satharana แนวคิดจิตสาธารณะ [Public mind]. <https://www.ocsc.go.th/sites/default/files/attachment/article/7.2aewkhidchitsaathaarna.pdf>, accessed December 15, 2021.
- Thanasak Saijampa ธนศักดิ์ สายจำปา. 2014. *Kanmeuang khong khwam prarattana kap kansueksa kan khleuanwai khong phanthamit prachachon phua prachathipatai* การเมืองของความปรารถนากับการศึกษาการเคลื่อนไหวของพันธมิตรประชาชนเพื่อประชาธิปไตย [The politics of wishes and a study of the People's Alliance for Democracy movement]. PhD dissertation, Thammasat University.
- Thanyalak Srisanga ธัญลักษณ์ ศรีสง่า. 2021. *Ongkon khunnatham: Kan phatthana ongonk kap kan songsoem khunnatham khu reuang diau kan* องค์กรคุณธรรม: การพัฒนาองค์กรกับการส่งเสริมคุณธรรมคือเรื่องเดียวกัน [Moral center: Organizational development and the promotion of morals are the same thing]. Digital Repository Moral Center. <https://dl.moralcenter.or.th/>, accessed December 10, 2021.
- Thaweewat Puntharikwiat ทวีวัฒน์ ปุณฺหริกวินวัฒน์. 1997. *Phutthathat phikkhu nai boribot khong sangkhom Thai* พุทธทาสภิกขุในบริบทของสังคมไทย [Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in the context of Thai society]. *Journal of Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University* 4(2): 84–104.
- Thikan Srinara ธิกานต์ ศรีนารา. 2012. *Khwam khithang kanmeuang khong panyachon fai khan phailang kan toktam khong krasae khwam khith sangkhomniyom nai prathet thai pho.so. 2524–2534* ความคิดทางการเมืองของ “ปัญญาชนฝ่ายค้าน” ภายหลังการตกต่ำของกระแสความคิดสังคมนิยมในประเทศไทย พ.ศ. 2524–2534 [The political thought of “opposition intellectuals” in the decline of socialist thought in Thailand 1981–1991]. PhD dissertation, Chulalongkorn University.
- Thirayuth Boonmee ธีรยุทธ บุญมี. 2014. *Sut thai khong rabot taksin sang rakthan mai hai prathet thai? Thaiphaplika* สุดท้ายของระบอบทศ.สร้างรากฐานใหม่ให้ประเทศไทย? [End of the Thaksin regime: Building a new foundation for Thailand?]. *Thaipublica* ไทยพับลิก้า. January 15. <https://thaipublica.org/2014/01/thirayuth-boonmee/>, accessed September 7, 2023.



- . 2013a. Kan patiwat nokwit mong cheuamyong kap panha anakhot kanmeuang thai “การปฏิวัติ นกหวีด” มองเชื่อมโยงกับปัญหาอนาคตการเมืองไทย [“The whistle revolution”: A look at the links with future Thai political problems]. ISRANEWS. December 10. <http://www.isranews.org/isranews-article/item/25781-%E0%B8%B5ui.html>, accessed June 20, 2020.
- . 2013b. 40 pi 14 tula udomkan hai pai nai mot? 40 ปี 14 ตุลาอุดมการณ์หายไปไหนหมด? [Forty years on from October 14: Where has all the ideology gone?]. ISRANEWS. October 14. <https://www.isranews.org/content-page/item/24399>, accessed June 17, 2020.
- . 2008. *Thop thuan thit thang prathet thai* ทบทวนทิศทางประเทศไทย [Reviewing Thailand’s direction]. <http://www.14tula.com/activity/p-2551-teerayut.pdf>, accessed June 21, 2020.
- . 2006. Lang leuaktang cha koet wikrit prachathipatai thang rabop phadetkan phak diaw phanthamit phak yok pheua ching panha hai thot หลังเลือกตั้งจะเกิดวิกฤตประชาธิปไตย ทั้งระบบเผด็จการพรรคเดียว พันธมิตรพักยกเพื่อซึ่งปัญหาให้ไทย [After the election, there will be a crisis of democracy, a one-party dictatorship, a temporary alliance to run away from damaging problems]. In *Sam thotsawat prathet thai yuk thunniyom lai la 3* ทศวรรษประเทศไทย ยุคทุนนิยมไล่ล่า [Three decades in Thailand in the era of predatory capitalism]. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Tuangtong Soraprasert ดวงทอง สรประเสริฐ and Sukanya Sompiboon สุกัญญา สมไพบูลย์. 2017. Krabuankan sang lae susan attalak khong phuying thi doenthang thongthiaw tam lamphang กระบวนการสร้างและสื่อสารอัตลักษณ์ของผู้หญิง ที่เดินทางท่องเที่ยวตามลำพัง [Identity construction and communication of Thai solo female travelers]. *Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 25(48): 37–56.
- Voice Online. 2021a. Datchani khorapchan Thai rang 104 khong lok dai 36 chak tem 100 yu andap ha ASEAN ดัชนีคอร์รัปชันไทยรั้ง 104 ของโลกได้ 36 จากเต็ม 100 อยู่อันดับ 5 อาเซียน [Thailand ranks 104th in the world on corruption index with 36 out of 100, fifth in ASEAN]. January 28. <https://voicetv.co.th/read/CNMMkNOK1>, accessed December 26, 2021.
- . 2021b. Ruchak klum khwa mai yuk ratsadon รู้จักกลุ่ม “ขวาใหม่” ยุคราษฎร [Learn about “new right” groups in the age of citizens]. July 6. [https://voicetv.co.th/read/5Vn4LDAO1?\\_trms=c9f26f6760ce55e5.1641454767081](https://voicetv.co.th/read/5Vn4LDAO1?_trms=c9f26f6760ce55e5.1641454767081), accessed October 9, 2021.
- Wanwiphang Manachotphong วรณวิภากร์ มานะโชติพงษ์ and Apichat Satitniramai อภิชาติ สถิตนิรามัย. 2017. *Phuenthan thatsanakhati lae kan hai khunkha thang sangkhom watthanatham lae kanmeuang khongkhon krungthep* พื้นฐานทัศนคติและการให้คุณค่าทางสังคม วัฒนธรรมและการเมืองของคนกรุงเทพฯ [Foundation for social, cultural, and political attitudes and evaluations of people in Bangkok]. Research Report on the Political Research Project on Good People Proposed to the Thailand Research Fund (TRF).
- Wichan Champakhao วิชาญ จำปาขาว. 2011. Kan suesan thang kanmueang khong klum pantamit prachachon pheua prachathiptai: Sueksa korani kan chumnum prathuang lang kan leuaktang 23 thanwakhom 2550 การสื่อสารทางการเมืองของกลุ่มพันธมิตรประชาชนเพื่อประชาธิปไตย: ศึกษากรณีการชุมนุมประท้วงหลังการเลือกตั้ง 23 ธันวาคม 2550 [Political communications of the People’s Alliance for Democracy: Case study of protests after the December 23, 2007 elections]. PhD dissertation, Krirk University.
- Yos Santasombat ชย สันตสมบัติ. 1996. *Prawase wasi achan phaet phu yiwya sangkhom* ประเวศ วะสี อาจารย์แพทย์ผู้เชี่ยวชาญสังคม [Prawase Wasi teacher of medicine treating society]. Chiang Mai: Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.

# Disguised Republic and Virtual Absolutism: Two Inherent Conflicting Tendencies in the Thai Constitutional Monarchy\*

Kasian Tejapira\*\*

The current inclination towards monarchical absolutism of the Thai government and politics is in essence the actualization of one of the two conflicting tendencies that have been inherent in Thai constitutional monarchy from the start. I intend to trace the political and scholarly discourse about them at some key junctures in modern Thai history. My main argument is that it had been the royal hegemony of King Rama IX that managed to maintain a relatively stable if tilted balance between the opposing principles of monarchy and democracy and keep the two opposite tendencies at bay. The perceived threat of a disguised republic under the Thaksin regime and the waning of royal hegemony led to a hyper-royalist reaction from the monarchical network that disrupted the pre-existing balance and prepared a potential ground for a virtual absolutism which has been taken over and actualized under the present regime.

**Keywords:** disguised republic, virtual absolutism, Thai constitutional monarchy, the military, *shogun*, palladium, Walter Bagehot, Atsani Phonlajan

Good afternoon, dear friends, colleagues, and those who are interested in Thai studies. I would like to thank Kyoto University and the Japanese Society for Thai Studies for organizing this long-delayed conference. I would like to also thank Professor Tamada Yoshifumi and Professor Hayami Yoko.

Today's topic, in English, is "Disguised Republic and Virtual Absolutism: Two

---

\* This is a translated transcript of my keynote speech “สาธารณรัฐจำลองกับเสมือนสัมบูรณาญาสิทธิราช: 2 แนวโน้มสิ่งแฝงที่ขัดแย้งกันในระบอบราชาธิปไตยภายใต้รัฐธรรมนูญไทย,” originally given in Thai for the 14th International Conference on Thai Studies organized by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, on May 1, 2022. I would like to thank Ajarn Piya Pongsapitaksanti of the Division of Sociology, Graduate School, Kyoto Sangyo University, and Professor Hayami Yoko of CSEAS for the initial transcription and translation of my talk. I have taken this opportunity to extensively revise, elaborate and improve upon its style and content. Final responsibility for the article of course lies with me. As supplementary materials, English slides from the presentation can be accessed from the link below: [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/seas/12/SupplementaryIssue/12\\_105/\\_article/-char/en](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/seas/12/SupplementaryIssue/12_105/_article/-char/en).

\*\* เกษียร เตชะพีระ, Professor, Thammasat University  
e-mail: [kasiantj@gmail.com](mailto:kasiantj@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1701-521X>

Inherent Conflicting Tendencies in the Thai Constitutional Monarchy.” Why did I choose this topic? First, it is a response to the contemporary situation. During the last few years, prominent political and academic figures in Thailand have observed that the Thai political regime is changing in some strange and unexpected new directions. This is something that we should consider and respond to academically. So, on the one hand, it is the contemporary situation.

On the other hand, I am thinking of the overall study of modern Thai politics. In the past, the main axis of consideration has been the “2D-axis,” of either Democracy or Dictatorship. However, the political situation of the last decade, and particularly of the last few years, presents us with another axis—one that cuts across the original axis. That is, modern Thai politics is not only about “Democracy and Dictatorship,” but also about “Disguised Republic” and “Virtual Absolutism.” In plotting the characteristics of the Thai political order of a certain period, we may have to consider not only its authoritarian or democratic nature, but also other relevant characteristics that may make it either a disguised republic or a virtual absolutism. With this additional lens, I believe such a combined approach may help us to analyze Thai politics over a long period.

What I intend to do is to highlight the process by which I slowly came up with this idea, rather than to detail the idea, because the details are included on the slides, which can be read later. Today I would instead like to emphasize how the sequence of the logical thinking for this idea began.

Let us begin with a snapshot of the Thai political situation in the early 1990s. Thai politics at that time had come to a fairly stable state after experiencing three tumultuous trials and tribulations: the two-decade long civil war against the Communist Party of Thailand in 1985 (Saiyud 1986, 179–188), the Cold War on a global and regional level in the early 1990s,<sup>1)</sup> and the mass uprising against the military government in the 1992 Black May incident (Charnvit 2013, 3–117). Having overcome these significant threats and crises, Thai politics settled into a political order called the Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State.<sup>2)</sup> This reasonably stable regime lasted until 2006, when it faced a new crisis, which began with a mass movement and coup d’état against the popularly elected government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and has not stopped since. So far, this protracted crisis has continued for roughly 15 years.

---

1) Regionally speaking, the Third Indochina War ended when Vietnam completed the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia in 1989. Globally speaking, the US government dates the end of the Cold War as December 26, 1991, when the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. See Oxford Paperback Encyclopedia (1998: 240–241, 1259–1260, 1398–1399) and United States Army Human Resources Command (accessed October 12, 2023).

2) According to Chapter 1 General Provisions, Section 2 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2534 (1991). See Thailand, Legal Information Service Center and Senate Liaison Unit (1991).

Politically speaking, it has been a turbulent 15 years: during this period Thailand has had six prime ministers, not including the acting ones,<sup>3)</sup> experienced two coups,<sup>4)</sup> and adopted four constitutions.<sup>5)</sup> On top of that, nine waves of huge anti-government mass protests by both the yellow-shirt and red-shirt sides<sup>6)</sup> have resulted in five major bloody repressions by state security forces, with hundreds of civilians killed and thousands wounded, not to mention economic damage worth hundreds of billions of Baht.<sup>7)</sup>

Given the situation, some people began to draw public attention to the political malaise as an anomaly that deviated further and further away from the traditional Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State. Out of the hitherto stability, there seemed to emerge a threat in the form of a regime that could replace *in toto* a constitutional monarchy, or the Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State. Contrary to the former threat during the Cold War, the current threat to the Thai constitutional monarchy does not come from outside the system in the form of an anti-system communist armed struggle. Rather, this round of threats is unique in that it is embedded within the constitutional monarchy itself as latent inherent tendencies. Two specific conflicting tendencies have manifested themselves alternately during the last 15 years.

The matrix of the two conflicting tendencies was clearly articulated in 2006 by Professor Dr. Nakharin Mektrairat, a member of the current Constitutional Court who was elected by the coup-installed National Legislative Assembly in 2015. In the foreword to his book *The Case of King Rama VII's Abdication*, he notes that Thai politics is extraordinary in that the conceptually incompatible notions of “monarchy,” i.e., rule by one person, and “democracy,” i.e., rule by many or by all the people, have been made compatible in practice in the form of the Democratic Regime of Government with the

---

3) See Thailand, Secretariat of the Cabinet (accessed July 1, 2021).

4) A comparative analysis of the two coups can be found in Kasian (2016) and Prajak and Veerayooth (2018).

5) Thailand, Legal Information Service Center and Senate Liaison Unit (1991). The final version was drafted by the Constitution Drafting Commission chaired by Mr. Meechai Ruchuphan (see list of Constitution Drafting Commission at [https://cdc.parliament.go.th/draftconstitution2/committee\\_list.php](https://cdc.parliament.go.th/draftconstitution2/committee_list.php), accessed July 1, 2021). The draft constitution of the constitutional drafting commission under Dr. Bowonsak Uwanno's presidency was not approved by the National Reform Council, reflecting how difficult it was to make the constitution “fit” with the political situation (for Constitution Drafting Commission, “List of Commissioners,” see [https://cdc.parliament.go.th/draftconstitution/committee\\_list.php](https://cdc.parliament.go.th/draftconstitution/committee_list.php), accessed July 1, 2021; Hathaikan [2019]).

6) See Aim (2021); Kanokrat (2020); Uchen (2011, 9–19); Sopranzetti (2018); *BBC Thai* (October 30, 2020; June 24, 2021).

7) Chaitawat *et al.* (2012). For various assessments of the economic damage caused by the protracted political conflict during the past 15 years or so, see for example, Kasikorn Research Center (2008); Positioning Magazine (2009); Bank of Thailand (2014); Prachachart Business Online (2020).

King as Head of State. Nakharin commends this merging of monarchy and democracy Thai style as an ingenious, phenomenal intellectual and political construct in the modern world (Nakharin 2006, 5). However, developments in Thailand since 2006 have deeply destabilized the said regime and put it out of sync with itself.

An early and significant alarm came in 2007 from Jaran Pakdithanakul, the deputy chairman of the constitution drafting commission formed after the 2006 coup d'état against the Thaksin government. He had played a key role in the judiciary as a former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, and later as a member of the Constitutional Court. He criticized the 1997 constitution for introducing a mixed-member majoritarian representation with an unlinked partial party-list electoral system that had a countrywide single constituency. This change from the previous block voting system, Jaran argued, deformed Thai politics, transforming it from a parliamentary regime to a *de-facto* presidential one. This led to the unfortunate opportuneness by the head of the party that won the most party-list votes to mistakenly arrogate to himself/herself the monarch-like stature of the Lord of the Land.<sup>8)</sup>

On the other hand, in 2019 Ajarn Nidhi Aeusrivongse, a foremost Thai historian and public intellectual, cautioned against the 2017 constitution in view of its actual non-observance. This came after the Constitutional Court's ruling in the case of the Cabinet, led by PM General Prayut Chan-o-cha, taking an incomplete (as specified by the constitution) oath of allegiance to King Rama X. The Court ruled that the Cabinet's oath-taking to the King was an exclusive mutual relationship between the two institutions in which no one could interfere. Therefore, if the King raised no objection to the incomplete oath, then it was acceptable (although it went against the provision of the Constitution). In view of the ruling, Nidhi suspected that Thailand no longer had a Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State, but a Democratic Regime of Government with the King above the Constitution. We must remember that this new regime had been furtively ushered in neither by a coup nor a new constitution. And yet, it was not a pure monarchy either, since the prime minister was nominated by a Parliament consisting of an elected House of Representatives and an appointed Senate. What resulted was a peculiar regime that did not conform to the usual principles of constitutional monarchy (Nidhi 2019).

The next group of people that called out this peculiar regime was the Move Forward Party (พรรคก้าวไกล), a newly reconstituted version of the Future Forward Party (พรรคอนาคตใหม่), which had been disbanded by the Election Commission. In March 2022,

---

8) See Thailand, Secretariat of the House of Representatives (2007). As for the "Thaksin regime," see Kasian (2008, 89–164). Prior to this, Jaran gave several interviews to the press that expressed similar views. See for example Sorawit and Arin (2007).

they vowed to undertake as their political mission the defense of democracy from “an absolutist authoritarian dictatorship (เผด็จการอำนาจนิยมสมบูรณาญาสิทธิราช)” (Move Forward Party, March 25, 2021).

I would like to argue here that the aforementioned disparate voices represent a call to the Thai public on the emergence of two separate and opposing anti-system political alternatives to the Thai constitutional monarchy, or the so-called Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State. These alternatives were, namely, a Disguised Republic (*à la* Jaran Pakdithanakul) and Virtual Absolutism (*à la* Nidhi Aeusrivongse and the Move Forward Party). Both alternatives are conflicting tendencies that have been inherently embedded in the Thai constitutional monarchy from the start, i.e., the 1932 constitutionalist revolution that held on to the monarchy while ridding it of absolute power. However, they have become politically manifest during the last 15 years or so due to the unravelling of the conditions that had made “democracy” and “monarchy” compatible and coexistent until then in Thai politics.

The said conditions, as commended by Nakharin, consisted mainly of the largely moderate and compromised character of Thai democratization since its inception in the 1932 unfinished revolution as well as the later cautious conservative reformist hegemony of King Rama IX’s reign (1946–2016) that developed intermittently in the 1970s and reached its apogee in the early 1990s, resulting in the Bhumibol consensus.<sup>9)</sup> The rise of the strong, popularly elected Thaksin government in the early 2000s, the subsequent protracted political polarization and violent conflict between the anti-Thaksin yellow-shirts and the pro-Thaksin red-shirts, the glaring politicization and increasing authoritarianization of the monarchy in two successive coups in 2006 and 2014, and the aging and declining health of King Rama IX led to the waning of royal hegemony in the final years of his reign amid a burgeoning new wave of progressively radicalized democratization. The conditional ties between monarchy and democracy thus loosened and unraveled to the extent that a new generation of audacious young activists have begun to seriously question their compatibility and coexistence.

Next, I would like to probe, in a manner similar to “conceptual digging” or excavation work, the discourse and concepts of the two alternative regimes of Disguised Republic and Virtual Absolutism as they appeared in Thai politics, culture, and literature, so as to unearth a preliminary archaeology of the said concepts. I would like to show how past Thai scholars and poets, activists, and revolutionaries spoke about or alluded to these two inherent anti-system tendencies.

My point of entry is Walter Bagehot’s classic *The English Constitution*, first pub-

---

9) I first presented this line of argumentation in Kasian (2017).

lished in 1867. This book was used as an authoritative reference when I studied Thai government and politics in university, as it helped clarify the fundamental principles of the Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State in Thailand. Leading mainstream senior Thai scholars who wrote about the Thai monarchy and politics, be they the late Dr. Kasem Sirisamphan (former Dean of the Faculty of Journalism, Thammasat University, who was a minister during the government of MR. Kukrit Pramoj in the 1970s), or Professor Bowornsak Uwanno and Professor Tongthong Chandransu (two foremost royalist legal scholars and government advisors who published standard textbooks and a thesis on the Thai monarchy and politics), also always referred to this book. In particular, they referred to the same single point in the book: what political rights the monarch as a sovereign had in a constitutional monarchy. In summary, Bagehot argues that three rights belong to the constitutional monarch in relation to the government of the day: the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn (for the application of this in Thailand, see Kamnoon 2005; Tongthong 2005, 60–62, 74–76).<sup>10</sup>

The frequent referencing of the text aroused my mounting curiosity and interest in the book, which was finally satisfied when nearly forty years ago I found and bought a 1963 edition in a used book store near Cornell University, my alma mater. Much to my surprise, the relevant text concerning the monarch's political rights in a constitutional monarchy occupies only a single paragraph (Bagehot 1963, 111) in a four-page-long overall discussion of this topic. The discussion is included only in one chapter (Chapter 2, "The Monarchy") of the eight-chapter book. Needless to say, the above-mentioned conventional Thai scholars' usage was a highly selective reading of Bagehot's classic text, which is generally considered an authoritative reference work on the British model of constitutional monarchy. In short, Thai scholars of the Thai constitutional monarchy have arbitrarily and bafflingly made use of a single paragraph from a few pages in a single chapter of the 208-page book as their main point of reference. The question is, why?

My further research indicates that knowledge of the author's professional and political background is important in understanding his realistic and reflective position toward the English constitutional monarchy. Who, then, was Walter Bagehot? Bagehot lived from 1826 to 1877 in England and he was responsible for making *The Economist* weekly magazine famous across the globe. *The Economist* was originally founded, owned, and edited by Bagehot's father-in-law, James Wilson (1805–60), a Scottish businessman, economist, and Liberal politician, but as he aged and had health problems, Bagehot succeeded him in 1859. Bagehot developed the magazine, turning it into a leading liberal

10) On the royal power to receive a government report and offer consultation, see Tongthong (2005, 137–52).

business elite publication in the Western world (*The Economist*, August 8, 2019).

What were Bagehot's political and economic views of England? Based on *The English Constitution*, his other writings, and his biographies (of which there have been several in recent years), one can conclude that he was a hard-boiled bourgeois political analyst. He analyzed the English constitutional monarchy in very realist and instrumentalist terms. That is, he began from the actual role the monarchy played as a tool for the existing regime. One might be inclined to think that, since *The English Constitution* has been cited by Thai scholars who highly value the role of the monarchy in Thai politics, Walter Bagehot must have been a devotee of the monarchy. This was not the case. Actually, Bagehot had an extremely cold-hearted view of the British monarchy (Collini 2020).

Many passages in the book reflect Bagehot's view, but I would like to highlight two of them. First, Bagehot's answer to the question of why the British monarchy should continue to exist—that most English people were still stupid—is very blunt and brutal, although it may sound familiar to the Thai public. He argued that the British monarchy was still needed, to enchant, tame, and shepherd the uneducated populace. In case anyone did not believe this, he said, they should try striking up a conversation with servants in a kitchen and they would surely find that the servants could not comprehend what was normally easy to understand. As long as the British were like this, Bagehot said, the British monarchy was still necessary (Bagehot 1963, 62–63).

Second, Bagehot describes royal ceremonies or official celebrations in Britain—those of a spectacular parade of mounted cavalry, line infantry, and carriages for VIPs on the streets of London—to point to the monarchy's utility. Usually, the magnificently decorated royal carriage would lead the procession, followed by more plain carriages for the PM, Cabinet members, and so on. The English people, Bagehot explains, keenly watched and highly appreciated such parades as a kind of theater. Their gaze naturally focused on the royal carriage at the head of the procession, which carried the King and Queen of England, while scant attention was paid to the carriages that followed. And yet, the real power to govern the country lay precisely in those carriages behind, those that the spectators were less interested in. The function and utility of the front carriage, then, was to win the consent of the English people to the new political order that was in fact run by the back carriages. Hence, the real function and utility of the monarchy in the English constitutional monarchy (Bagehot 1963, 248–249).

From these examples, we can clearly see that Walter Bagehot was no sentimental, heartfelt “royalist” in the usual Thai sense of the term. Rather, he provided clear-eyed, searing analysis of the British monarchy from a “realist” and “instrumentalist” perspective.

Now, in terms of conceptual tools for analyzing the English constitutional monarchy, what did he propose? He proposed the following: a division of the unwritten and tradi-



tional English constitution into two main parts, namely the “Dignified Parts” (or the prestigious and “exciting” parts), which aimed to “preserve the reverence of the population.” These were the parts of the constitution that people honored and respected, and they included the monarchy and the House of Lords. The other main part of the English Constitution consisted of the “Efficient Parts,” which were in fact, those that governed. These included the Cabinet and the House of Commons (Bagehot 1963, 61).

Bagehot used the changing relationship between these two parts to describe the evolution of the English constitutional monarchy: that in the “Absolute Monarchy” era of English politics, the dignified and the efficient parts of the English constitution were united in the King.<sup>11)</sup> Later, as the power of the English monarch became limited, sovereign powers were shared between the King and the landed aristocracy in a period called “Early Constitutional Monarchy,” when the House of Commons exerted some checks as the people’s representative.

Bagehot paradoxically described England since 1832, in a period dubbed “Mature Constitutional Monarchy,” as “a Republic [that] has insinuated itself beneath the folds of a Monarchy” (Bagehot 1963, 94). That is, the dignified and efficient parts of the constitution were separated and then welded together. The dignified parts were maintained to conceal from the public the revolutionary shift in power that took place behind the scenes. In fact, sovereign powers moved decisively from the dignified parts to the efficient parts, i.e., to the Cabinet and the House of Commons. Consequently, according to Bagehot, the true if oblique nature of the mature English constitutional monarchy was “a disguised republic.”<sup>12)</sup>

In other words, a sub-component of the monarchy was converted into a republic-like quintessence. What used to be a subordinate, supporting element was transformed into the superordinate essence of the regime, which was still dubbed a constitutional monarchy, but, for all intents and purposes, functioned as a republic. The constitutional façade was meant to obscure from the public that real power had already moved from the dignified and enchanting monarchy and House of Lords to the ordinary and mundane Cabinet and House of Commons.

Thus, simply put, there begot an inherent potential within a mature constitutional monarchy to become a disguised republic wherein executive power lay in the hands of bourgeois commoner politicians. The monarchy was accordingly merely a symbolic

11) Based on the discussion by R.H.S. Crossman in Bagehot (1963 edition, 14–15).

12) Bagehot’s whole passage containing the term “a disguised republic” deserves to be quoted in full: “So well is our real government concealed, that if you tell a cabman to drive to ‘Downing Street,’ he most likely will never have heard of it, and will not in the least know where to take you. It is only a ‘disguised republic’ which is suited to such a being as the Englishman in such a century as the nineteenth” (Bagehot 1963, 266).

figurehead that served to decorate and sanctify the utilitarian capitalist state power of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, far from simply inscribing the three political rights of the sovereign monarch in a constitutional monarchy, the main thrust of Bagehot's political arguments in *The English Constitution* is that a mature constitutional monarchy is essentially a disguised republic, with the monarchy retained as a cultural-ideological apparatus for the purpose of placating and duping the working-class public and defeating, or neutralizing, their democratic demands.

Such a blunt message clearly strikes a discordant note to the ears of Thai mainstream conservative scholars, both past and present. Furthermore, it coincides with the anxiety of Thai royalist public intellectuals, who detest any meaningful changes to the Democratic Regime of Government with the King as Head of State à la King Rama IX. And it is precisely such changes that have taken place since the Thaksin government came to power in 2001.

Prominent among the said royalist public intellectuals at that time was Mr. Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, a well-known veteran journalist and columnist, as well as a leader of the right-wing, royalist People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) mass movement who later became a junta-appointed Senator (and who remains a Senator today). In his memoir of the PAD's initial rallies against the Thaksin government in 2006, *The Sondhi Phenomenon: From Yellow Shirts to Blue Scarves* (2006), Kamnoon avows that he cannot possibly accept a key principle of the constitutional monarchy, that "the King can do no wrong," if it means in practice that "the King can do nothing" (Kamnoon 2006, 70–71).

Implicitly, Kamnoon wanted the King, within the Thai constitutional monarchy, to retain the royal prerogative to independently carry out important political tasks, especially in times of crisis. Chief and most urgent among these at the time was the replacement of then elected PM Thaksin Shinawatra with a new royally appointed prime minister to lead an essentially anti-democratic and counter-majoritarian political reform process. Kamnoon perceived the same threat that alarmed Jaran Pakdithanakul in the foregoing discussion, namely the emergent tendency toward a disguised republic, represented by the Thaksin regime.

At this point, I want to take you in another direction, to review some landmarks in the political, literary, and scholarly literature on Thai politics that have reflected on and discussed the two tendencies of disguised republic and virtual absolutism in the Thai constitutional monarchy.

Two key works first caught my attention. One is an essay written by Thailand's late Senior Statesman, Dr. Pridi Banomyong (1900–83) entitled "Defend the Spirit of Complete Democracy of the Heroes of October 14th." It was written in late 1973 in

commemoration of the historic student and popular rising against military rule on October 14 of that year. Residing in Paris at the time, Pridi was 26 years into his exile following a military coup in 1947. He wrote the essay in response to the Thammasat University Student Union's supplication (Pridi 1992, 171–195). The second work is “Withdrawal Symptoms” (1977), a celebrated scholarly intervention by the late Professor Benedict Anderson, a world-renowned scholar of Southeast Asian Studies and Nationalism and a beloved teacher of mine at Cornell University, in the aftermath of the bloody state massacre and coup on October 6, 1976 in Thailand (Anderson 2014a).

Coincidentally, both these works mark historic incidents in modern Thai politics. I read them on different occasions for unrelated purposes. But one day I came to notice that both Ajarn Pridi and Khru Ben<sup>13</sup>) happened to cannily use the same couple of terms in their comparative analyses of Thai politics, namely *shogun* (general) and *roop thepharak* (image of palladium).

Ajarn Pridi said that in eleventh century-Japan, the emperor had no real power, even though he was supposed to descend from the Sun-God. In fact, ruling power rested with the *shogun*, who was a dictator (Pridi 1992, 192). Ajarn Pridi raised this point to compare the actual power relationship between the emperor and the *shogun* in age-old Japan with the relationship between the king and the military dictator in modern Thailand.

Khru Ben made much the same point when he stated that the regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat actualized the *shogun's* autocratic characteristics latent in early military rule under Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram. Therefore, real effective ruling authority lay in the *shogun*-like prime minister, or the efficient parts of the constitution *à la* Bagehot, not in the king, or the dignified parts (Anderson 2014a, 69).

What then is the function of the king under Thai military dictators? Both Ajarn Pridi and Khru Ben also compared the monarchy to a sacred object without real power. Ajarn Pridi, writing in Thai, used the word *roop thepharak*, while Khru Ben, writing in English, used the word “palladium” (Pridi 1992; Anderson 2014a, 68). *Thepharak* denotes “an angel who protects a certain place” (Royal Institute 2011), whereas a palladium signifies “a safeguard or source of protection,” or “a protecting deity” (Fowler *et al.* 1995). Their meanings are evidently close enough to be considered equivalents. Therefore, without any premeditated plan or coordination, two different acknowledged authorities on Thai politics who wrote on two different occasions concurred on the use of *shogun* and palladium to describe and conceptualize the power relationship obtained between military rulers and the king in the Thai constitutional monarchy under military dictatorship.

What does this tell us? It tells us that in the Thai constitutional monarchy, a

---

13) Ajarn and Khru are honorific addresses in Thai, meaning teacher.

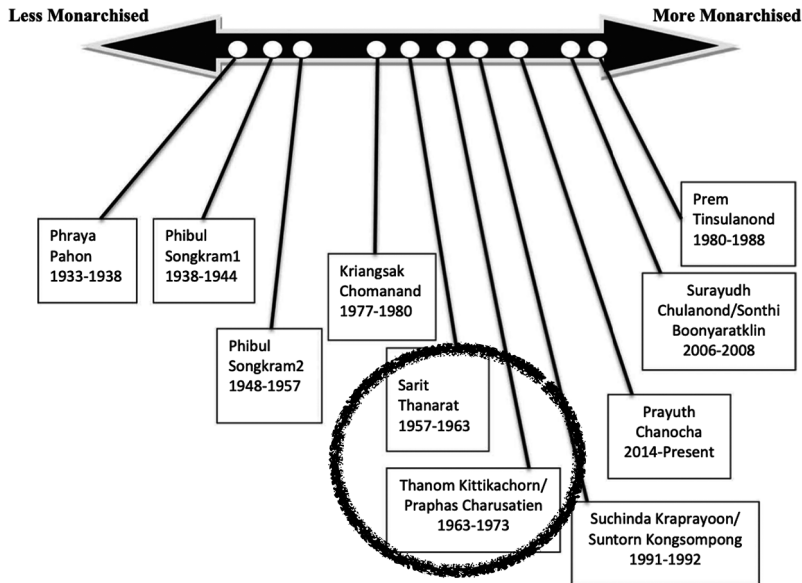
“military dictatorship” can also be a “Disguised Republic,” as was the case under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1959–63) and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963–73). The analyses of both Ajarn Pridi and Khru Ben reached the same conclusion. One should also note at this point that a similar concern about a “Disguised Republic” has been raised during the past two decades in Thailand; this was caused by the Thaksin regime, comprising various governments of Thaksin Shinawatra and his nominees between 2001 and 2014. These were all civilian administrations that came to power via elections, unlike those of Field Marshal Sarit and Thanom. Therefore, a “Disguised Republic” can emerge either in the form of a military dictatorship via coup or a civilian democracy via election.

Then, where does the other inherent tendency, of virtual absolutism, in the Thai constitutional monarchy come from? Although Walter Bagehot never mentioned it in *The English Constitution*, by following the same logic that Bagehot used in his conception of a “Disguised Republic” in reverse, one can conceive of a virtual absolutist eventuation. Instead of having the all-powerful efficient parts of the constitution welded together with the essentially symbolic dignified parts, as in a mature constitutional monarchy or “Disguised Republic,” one can have it the other way round. That is, the dignified parts of the constitution can become more and more powerful to such an extent that the conjoined and politically dependent efficient parts are under their *de facto*, if not *de jure*, thumb, resulting in a “Virtual Absolutism.”

To my surprise, I found that some Thai revolutionaries of yore had already remarked on and cautioned against such a possibility when they contemplated and conspired to overthrow the absolute monarchy back in 1912 under King Rama VI or Vajiravudh (1910–25). Of course, I am referring to radical members of the *Kek Meng* (“revolutionary” in Teochew dialect) rebel group of junior army officers led by Captain Leng Srichan (*silpa-mag.com*, February 15, 2021).

Discontented with their professional prospects and meager pay, disillusioned with the undignified personal behavior and anti-regular armed forces disposition of King Rama VI, and influenced by democratic ideas and movements from China and the wider world, these junior army officers came to agree on the need for the removal of absolute monarchy and a regime change early in the king’s reign. Formed as a clandestine conspiracy inside the army, the *Kek Meng* group secretly, if not very discreetly, held anti-monarchist lectures, recruited new members, and expanded rather rapidly. Initially, the radical wing that comprised the group’s majority preferred an outright republic as their revolutionary goal. However, the moderate wing, which came to dominate the group numerically afterwards, opted for a constitutional monarchy instead and outvoted the radical wing.

With hindsight, what is interesting is the reasoning provided by the radical wing of the *Kek Meng* group for their republican preference, i.e., they were afraid of a possible



**Fig. 1** Degree of Monarchization in Thai Military-Dominant Regimes

Source: Chambers and Napisa (2016, 430; circle added by the author).

“reversal” or “return” of the *ancien régime*. They feared that the continued existence of the monarchy, albeit with no real power in a “limited monarchy,” might provide the King with an opportunity to restore his status above the law. Simply put, they dreaded that in a constitutional monarchy, the “dignified parts” of the constitution, under conducive circumstances, might find it opportune to rise above the “efficient parts” and reclaim ruling power. Therefore, they found it politically prudent to simply change to a republic (Nattapoll 2012, 76–94).

In the end, the *Kek Meng* group was betrayed to the absolute monarchy authorities by a newly recruited member; its members were arrested, tried, and jailed for treason; and the whole conspiracy came to naught politically (see Kullada 2004). And yet its radical wing was the first to anticipate and sound the alarm about a possible emergence of a “Virtual Absolutism” in a Thai constitutional monarchy. Recent political developments in Thailand seem to have proven them prescient indeed.

Let us turn next to some recent academic works that have picked up and discussed this tendency toward “Virtual Absolutism.” First is a 2016 article entitled “The Resilience of Monarchised Military in Thailand” (Chambers and Napisa 2016). The authors propose that to explain the political action of the Thai military, it is inadequate to merely look at their economic and/or corporate interests. One must also focus on the crucial relationship between the Thai military and the monarchy. The former’s loyalty

to the latter and its royalist ideology is key to understanding their political behavior. The authors coin the term “monarchized military” to capture the asymmetrical relationship between the two political actors and to signify the monarchy’s ideological hegemony and command over the Thai military, which usually yields to the royal will.

To illustrate the changing configurations of the “monarchized military” in Thailand, the authors devise a graphic depicting the degrees of monarchization of military rulers in Thailand since the 1932 constitutionalist revolution (Fig. 1 above and on p. 430 of the article). Those that appear on the left of the graphic are military prime ministers considered “less monarchized,” while those on the right are deemed “more monarchized,” so to speak. Thus, the less monarchized military PMs include Phraya Pahon and Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, whereas those considered more so include General Prem Tinsulanonda and General Prayut Chan-o-cha.

To put it in Bagehot’s parlance, in a less monarchized military government, “the efficient parts” dominate “the dignified parts” (i.e., a “Disguised Republic”) while a more monarchized one indicates vice versa (i.e., a “Virtual Absolutism”).

The dynamics of the monarchization of the Thai military can be gleaned from a recent important work on the Thai network monarchy, namely, “To Achieve Royal Hegemony: The Evolution of Monarchical Network in Interaction with the Thai Elites, BE 2490s–2530s” (2021), a doctoral thesis-based book by Dr. Asa Kumpha, a researcher at the Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University (Asa 2021). Asa depicts the dynamics of royal power during the reign of King Bhumibol or Rama IX (1946–2016), specifically, how he achieved royal hegemony as well as influenced and upheld a political consensus among Thai elites of different power bases, which I dub the Bhumibol consensus (Kasian 2017). These political achievements of the King made possible the paradoxical coming together of democracy and monarchy under his reign, as extolled by Nakharin.

Asa also analyzes the fluctuating nature of royal hegemony. In the case of King Bhumibol, his royal hegemony was gradually built up and accumulated through royal-nationalist discourse, monarchical network, and royal-initiated development projects under Field Marshals Sarit and Thanom’s absolutist military dictatorship (1958–73). It reached maturity on the October 14, 1973, when the King sided with the student protest movement against military rule. The power vacuum in the aftermath of the fall of the military government allowed the King to reclaim sovereign powers and step in to reconstitute the Thai polity in a democratic and reformist, if conservative, direction (Kasian 2016).

Subsequently, the American military withdrawal from Indochina and Thailand, the growing regional influence of the People’s Republic of China, the spreading communist-led

guerrilla war in the Thai countryside, the counter-hegemony of the increasingly radicalized Thai student movement, domestic political polarization, and state-sponsored far-right activism and terrorism, all led to an increasing fanaticization of royal-nationalism, the decline of royal hegemony, and the October 6, 1976 inhumane massacre and coup (Anderson 2014a, 47–76).

Unexpected and fortuitous developments in the 1980s helped salvage royal-nationalism and royal hegemony from a blind, suicidal rightist extremization. A moderate, if opportunistic, military coup in 1977 put a timely end to the royal-backed, right-wing Thanin Kraivixien government. Under the rule of the loyal, reformist, semi-democratic government of General Prem Tinsulanonda, both the far-left alternative of communist revolution and the far-right military dictatorship were defeated. At the same time, the Thai economy greatly benefited from a new policy direction of export-oriented industrialization, the windfalls of natural gas discovery in the Gulf of Thailand, the stronger Yen, and an enormous incoming wave of Japanese FDI (Anderson 2014b, 101–115).

In particular, the auspicious celebratory occasion of the 200th anniversary of the founding of Bangkok in 1982 followed close on the heels of the bloodless subjugation of the Young Turk rebellion against the Prem government staged by a group of hot-headed rising army colonels one year earlier. The royal family's publicized and unequivocal siding with PM General Prem was decisive in turning the political tide against the Young Turk rebels and proved to the Thai business class and public that royal hegemony trumped even greater firepower (Asa 2021, 377–417).

King Bhumibol's royal hegemony reached its zenith in the form of the Bhumibol consensus in the aftermath of the May 1992 popular uprising against the military government of PM General Suchinda Kraprayoon. Nothing captured the essence of royal hegemony better than the televised newsreel showing PM General Suchinda and Major General Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the anti-government mass protest movement, kneeling in audience with the king and listening docilely to his majesty's admonition as to the importance of peace and national reconciliation (Asa 2021, 419–496).

The next scholarly work to note is one that most students of recent Thai politics know: the 2016 "deep state" essay by Eugénie Mérieau entitled "Thailand's Deep State, Royal Power and the Constitutional Court (1997–2015)." In this important work, Mérieau describes and analyzes the Thai ruling elite's efforts to adapt to the then imminent post-Bhumibol era, given King Rama IX's deteriorating health and the challenges to royal hegemony and the Bhumibol consensus posed by the resilient Thaksin network and militant mass movements. The upshot, according to Mérieau, is the deep state's institutionalization of its judicial component—in the form of the Constitutional Court—to function as a "surrogate king"-like legitimizing substitute for the aging king in an attempt

at hegemonic preservation during the approaching crucial period of transition of the reign.

Mérieau notes that at key moments since its establishment, the Constitutional Court has exercised sovereign powers that it is not constitutionally entitled to, as those powers rightfully belong only to the people and their legitimately elected representatives. This specifically includes the power to amend the constitution. In 2013, the Constitutional Court blocked the House of Representatives from doing precisely that, thus arbitrarily usurping *le pouvoir constituant originnaire ou absolu* (the original or absolute constituent power), which belongs properly and exclusively to the people or their rightfully elected representatives (Avril and Gicquel 2013; *Toupictionnaire*). From then on, we can observe a tendency toward “Virtual Absolutism.”

What were some key conditions for the emergence of “Virtual Absolutism”? I think there are a few. First, it is imperative that the Thai monarchy is not a “political object” (as had been the case in Japan after the Meiji Restoration), but rather it retains the inclination and capacity of a “political subject” (or actor) even in a presumably constitutional monarchy. This was pointed out by Professor Benedict Anderson in his consummate, wholesale, pathbreaking and iconoclastic review of Thai studies in the US academy, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies” (Anderson 2014c, 25–27). Obviously, only when the king is a “political subject” and can do something as wished for by Kamnoon, could a “Virtual Absolutism” be possible.

Second, as observed by Ajarn Thongchai Winichakul in his 2016 research entitled *Thailand’s Hyper-Royalism: Its Past Success and Present Predicament*, there had been a high tide of “hyper-royalist” ideological campaigns and mass movements in the previous ten years.<sup>14)</sup> This can also be considered an enabling factor contributing to the rise of “Virtual Absolutism.”

The third factor is presented in a penetrating historical analysis entitled *The Invention of History* (2001) by Dr. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a former Thammasat lecturer specializing in Thai monarchy studies who became a political refugee in France in the aftermath of the 2014 coup by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) (*Prachatai English*, June 27, 2015). Commenting on the political turmoil following the 1932 constitutionalist revolution in Siam, he points out that the prime ministership was the key strategic position in the overall configuration of the new Thai constitutional monarchy regime. Thus, to have a loyal and obedient king’s man, like the first Prime Minister Phya Manopakorn Nitithada, in office would be enough to satisfy King Rama VII or Prajadhipok. What really bothered the king and eventually led to his abdication in

---

14) By such benighted rightist organizations and groups as the People’s Alliance for Democracy, the Protect Siam Organization, the People’s Democratic Reform Committee, as well as the Thai Pakdee Party, and the Thai Move Institute in the present. See Thongchai (2016).



1935 was not the December 10th, 1932 permanent constitution *per se*, but rather the removal of PM Phya Mano from office via a coup by Colonel Phya Phahon Phonphayuhasena, Head of the revolutionary People’s Party and the new congenial but unyielding PM. In other words, for the Thai constitutional monarchy to effectively become a “Virtual Absolutism,” the king must have the right prime minister in place (Somsak 2001, 9–19).

In conclusion, to sum up my entire argument in a nutshell, let me present an extraction from a long Thai poem by Naiphi (or Mr. Specter, a penname of Mr. Astani Phonlajan, 1918–87), entitled “Change” and composed around 1952 (Astani 2014, 67–118). Born to a noble family, Astani was among the first batch of graduates from Thammasat University (back when its name was still the University of Moral and Political Sciences) after it was founded by Pridi Banomyong in 1934 to train adult citizens in law and politics for the new constitutional regime. Astani was a famed poet, a radical columnist, and an incorruptible prosecutor during and after WWII before joining the banned Communist Party of Thailand as a convinced communist and going underground in 1952.<sup>15)</sup>

It was around that time that he penned “Change,” not as a stylized narrative of his personal profile and family background, as suggested by Mr. Naowarat Pongpaiboon, the first Thai S.E.A. Write Awardee for poetry and later a pro-NCPO senator, in his forward (Naowarat 1990) to the 1990 edition of Naiphi’s poem (Astani 1990). Rather, I would like to argue, he wrote it as a running, incisive and prescient commentary on Thai politics past and then, more precisely on the 1932 revolution against absolute monarchy and the unsettled and problematic power nexus between the monarchy and the military at the heart of the Thai constitutional monarchy as well as its alternate dynamics toward a “Disguised Republic” or a “Virtual Absolutism.”<sup>16)</sup>

Let us hear from the melodious, wise, and prophetic words of Naiphi (in my translation):

Mr. Specter’s poetic riddle (excerpts from the poem “Change,” 1952)

	<i>“What where why Listen, who’s that . . . Good or bad!</i>
<i>Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!</i>	<i>Bombs explode and people die.</i>
<i>From early till late morning</i>	<i>The roaring never dies down.</i>
<i>Artillery fires rain down upon us</i>	<i>Like gushing fireworks,</i>
<i>Shaking the earth,</i>	<i>Rumbling all over Thailand.</i>

15) Astani’s bio-profile is gathered from Kasian (2001); Sujira (1983); Naowanit (2014, 67–118); Kanokwan (2021); and Aphirak (2014).

16) My interpretation is based on Naiphi’s letter dated May 10, 1980 to a young poet cited in Sathian Janthimathorn (เสถียร จันทิมาธร) (1982, 314–15); and Astani (2014, 114–15).

*The age of commotion arrives  
 Burning earth and sky  
 The old corpse has become rotten  
 Lying on the pyre for years  
 Foul smell spreads  
 Rice husk ashes used to cover it  
 The corpse's bereaved descendants  
 In an artificial coffin  
 Weaving a garland  
 And yet it's no match for  
 The unrelated folks  
 They want very much to cremate it  
 For this is no common corpse  
 Whose descendants  
 Then the four fierce warriors  
 Rush in to burn the corpse  
 The lying-down rats  
 It becomes engulfed in flames  
 A Javanese musical pipe  
 As though the solid earth  
 Saddened by the Lacrimosa  
 The heart is pierced  
 Wailing sobbing female mourners  
 That the retinue  
 The reign will come to an end  
 The longstanding law and rule  
 The cumulative culture and philosophy since time immemorial  
  
 Whatever resists karma and fatality  
 Birth, aging, sickness and death*

*The voices of bourgeois commoners  
 That aren't worthy  
 Then the bourgeoisie  
 And rise up to burn down  
 They are the four fierce warriors  
 Who rush in to burn  
 While the peasant serfs  
 The feudal lords feel distressed  
 They ask for the ashes  
 They then erect a shrine  
 And the four fierce warriors  
 Then put it in the shrine  
 Of connivance and conflict  
 To dupe people into*

*With horrendous volatile chaos.  
 Crackling flames on the pyre.  
 Covered with crawling worms.  
 Waiting to be cremated.  
 From the ancient cadaver.  
 Fail to prevent its odor from spreading far and wide.  
 Keep it for memorial sake  
 Made of myrrh wood.  
 Of refreshing floral scent,  
 The pungent smell of cadaver.  
 Harbor no longing for the cadaver.  
 And yet fear the dangers involved.  
 But that of the Leonine,  
 Still jealously guard it.  
 With defiant courage  
 Firm in their merciless resolve.  
 Jump around the coffin.  
 And the angels vanish away.  
 Cries resoundingly  
 Shrinks with cold fear.  
 Weakened by the final farewell,  
 By torturing chants.  
 Cry their hearts out  
 Will suddenly disappear;  
 In squirming wriggling sorrow;  
 Will completely vanish;  
  
 Will become extinct.  
 Will be destroyed  
 Are the fate of everyone. . . .*

*Are irrelevant sound effects  
 Of thy attention.  
 Could no longer bear it  
 Their misery into ashes.  
 With defiant courage  
 The utterly rotten cadaver.  
 Stay neutral and refuse to fight,  
 And deeply disheartened.  
 And longingly worship them.  
 To shelter and honor the ghost.  
 Set up a figurehead  
 To serve as a contrivance.  
 Circumstances necessitate pretense,  
 Being forever fearful.*

*One side tries to resurrect the ghost                      So that it may become omnipotent*  
*While the other side flanks the shrine                      To cast on people a spell.*

The telltale sign is “*the four fierce warriors*,” or “สี่ทหารเสือ,” which evidently refer to the four colonels who led the army faction of the People’s Party (see *Matchon Weekly*, June 24, 2017). With that, most of the above-cited stanzas are an oblique narration of the eventual overthrow of the Thai absolute monarchy in 1932, allegorically portrayed as a long-delayed cremation of an ancient, stinking corpse. However, the most interesting stanza is the last one of the excerpt, which describes the possible alternate power relationship between the two sides, namely the monarchy and the military, in the shrine-like political setting of a constitutional monarchy regime.

While the monarchy and its allies try to resurrect royal power and monarchize the military so that the constitutional monarchy regime may become a “Virtual Absolutism,” the military in turn attempt to flank and effectively control the monarchy as a praetorian guard in order to enchant the people in a “Disguised Republic” under their rule.<sup>17)</sup>

That, in a rhyming nutshell, is the real political equation of the Thai constitutional monarchy, detected and revealed long before the fact by the piercing and prophetic Mr. Specter.

## References

- Aim Sinpeng. 2021. *Opposing Democracy in the Digital Age: The Yellow Shirts in Thailand*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11666233>.
- Anderson, BOG. 2014a. Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup. In *Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam over Forty Years*, edited by Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, pp. 47–76. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University.
- . 2014b. Murder and Progress in Modern Siam. In *Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam over Forty Years*, edited by Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, pp. 101–115. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University.
- . 2014c (first published in 1978). Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies. In *Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam over Forty Years*, edited by Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, pp. 15–45. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University.
- Aphirak Kanchanakhongkha อภิรักษ์ กาญจนคงคา. 2014. Astani phonlajan อัสตินี พลจันทร์ [Astani Phonlajan]. HUMAN EXCELLENCE. <http://huexonline.com/knowledge/15/67/>, accessed July 6, 2021.
- Asa Kumpha อาสา คำภา. 2021. *Kwaa ja khrong amnat nam: Kan khlikhlai khayai tua khong khreuakhai nai luang phaai tai patisamphan chon chan nam thai thosawat 2490–2530* กว่าจะครองอำนาจนา: การคลี่คลายขยายตัวของเครือข่ายในหลวงภายใต้ ปฏิสัมพันธ์ชนชั้นผู้นำไทย ทศวรรษ 2490–2530 [To achieve royal hegemony: The evolution of monarchical network in interaction with the Thai elites, BE 2490s–2530s].

17) As to the enabling external dimension of the monarchy-military power nexus during the Cold War, see Zawacki (2017) and Phimmasone (2012).

- Nonthaburi: Same Sky Publishing House.
- Astani Phonlajan (Naiphi) อัสตานี พลจันทร์. 2014. *Khvam plianplaeng, lae phak phanuak, raw chana laew mae ja lae kapklon khvam plianplaeng* “ความเปลี่ยนแปลง”, และ “ภาคผนวก”, เราชนะแล้วแม่เจ้า. และภาพปกตอน “ความเปลี่ยนแปลง” [“Change,” and appendix, we have already won mother, and the poem “change”]. Executive Editor, Aida Arunwong, Original Editor, Naowanit Siriphatiwirat. Bangkok: Read Publishers.
- . 1990. *Khvam plianplaeng ความเปลี่ยนแปลง [Change]*. Bangkok: Kiaoklaaw-Pimpakarn.
- Avril, Pierre and Gicquel, Jean. 2013. *Lexique de droit constitutionnel* [Glossary of Constitutional Law]. Paris: Presses universitaires de France. (Entry for *pouvoir constituant*).
- Bagehot, Walter. 1867 (1963). *The English Constitution*. London: Collins.
- Bank of Thailand ธนาคารแห่งประเทศไทย. 2014. Praden setakit nai rop pii 2557 lae naewnom pii 2558 ประเด็นเศรษฐกิจในรอบปี 2557 และแนวโน้มปี 2558 [Economic issues in 2014 and trends in 2015]. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiTntu3-O-BaxVoe2wGHWPdBr4QFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bot.or.th%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fbot%2Fdocuments%2Fth%2Fthai-economy%2Fthe-state-of-thai-economy%2Fannual-report%2Fannual-econ-report-th-2557.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3xGTrrK8ioAO\\_jfjdsOAhN&opi=89978449](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiTntu3-O-BaxVoe2wGHWPdBr4QFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bot.or.th%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fbot%2Fdocuments%2Fth%2Fthai-economy%2Fthe-state-of-thai-economy%2Fannual-report%2Fannual-econ-report-th-2557.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3xGTrrK8ioAO_jfjdsOAhN&opi=89978449), accessed October 12, 2023.
- BBC Thai. 2021. 89 pi apiwat sayam kap kan chumnum khrang raek lang ok jak reuam cam khong kaen nam raasadon 89 ปี อภิวัตน์สยามกับการชุมนุมครั้งแรกหลังออกจากเรือนจำของแกนนำ “ราษฎร” [89 anniversary of the Siamese revolution and the first rally after leaving prison of the “people” party’s leaders]. June 24. <https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-57597789>, accessed July 2, 2021.
- . 2020. Flash mob naksueksa thueng chumnum yai khong khana raasadon 2563 lamdap hetkan chumnum thang kan meuang pii 2563 แฟลชม็อบนักศึกษาถึงชุมนุมใหญ่ของ “คณะราษฎร 2563” ลำดับเหตุการณ์ชุมนุมทางการเมืองปี 2563 [Students’ flash mob to the big rally of “People’s Party 2020” timeline of political rally events 2020]. October 30. <https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-54741254>, accessed July 2, 2021.
- Chaitawat Tulathon ชัยวัช คุลาธนและคณะ *et al.* 2012. *Khvam jing pheua khvam yutitham: Hetkan lae ponkrathob cak kan salai kan chumnum mesa-phrutsaphaa* ความจริงเพื่อความยุติธรรม: เหตุการณ์และผลกระทบจากการสลายการชุมนุมเมษา-พฤษภา 53 [Truth for justice: Events and effects of the April–May 2010 protest dispersal]. Bangkok: Information Center for people affected by the protest dispersal in April–May. February 2010, 2012.
- Chambers, Paul and Napisa Waitookiat. 2016. The Resilience of Monarchised Military in Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46(3): 425–444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1161060>.
- Charnvit Kasetsiri ชาญวิทย์ เกษตรศิริ, ed. 2013. *Phrutsapha-phrutsapha: Sangkhom rat-thai kap khvam runraeng thang kan meuang* พฤษภา-พฤษภา: สังคม-รัฐไทยกับความรุนแรงทางการเมือง [May–May: Thai society-state and political violence]. Bangkok: Social Science and Humanities Textbook Project Foundation.
- Collini, Stefan. 2020. Review of *Liberalism at Large: The World According to the ‘Economist’* by Alexander Zevin. *London Review of Books* 42(3). February 6. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n03/stefan-collini/in-real-sound-stupidity-the-english-are-unrivalled>, accessed July 2, 2021.
- Fowler, H. W. *et al.*, eds. 1995. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hathaikan Treesuwan หทัยกาญจน์ ตรีสุวรรณ. 2019. Rattamanuun 2560: Witsanu-michai law thi maa meuang rattaman chabab disain ma pheua phuak raw รัฐธรรมนูญ 2560: วิษณุ-มีชัย เล่าที่มาอีร่างรัฐธรรมนูญฉบับ “คืนใจมาเพื่อพวกเรา” [The 2017 Constitution: Witsanu-Meechai tells the source of the draft constitution designed for us]. BBC Thai. December 8. <https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-50703356>, accessed July 1, 2021.
- Kamnoon Sidhisarn คำบุญ สิทธิสมาน. 2006. *Prakot kan sonthi: Cak seua si leuang thueng phaa phankhaw*

- si fa* ปรากฎการณ์สนธิ: จากเสื้อสีเหลืองถึงผ้าพันคอสีฟ้า [The Sondhi phenomenon: From yellow shirts to blue scarves]. Bangkok: Ban Phra Athit Publishing.
- . 2005. Phra racha amnat nai mum mong khong nakwichakan พระราชอำนาจในมุมมองของนักวิชาการ [Royal prerogatives in the view of scholars]. MGR Online. August 29. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9480000117067>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Kanokrat Lertchusakul กนกกรัตน์ เลิศชูสกุล. 2020. *Cak muetop thueng nok wit: Phattanakaan lae phonwat khong khabuankaan tawtan thaksin* จากม็อบถึงนกหวีด: พัฒนาการและพลวัตของขบวนการต่อต้านทักษิณ [From clappers to whistles: Development and dynamics of the anti-Thaksin movement]. Bangkok: TRF & Illuminations Editions.
- Kanokwan Peamsuwansiri กนกวรรณ เปี่ยมสุวรรณศิริ. 2021. Kamnoet lae botbat khong sathanii withayu siang prachachon haeng prathet thai nai thana khabuankaan totan rat khong kulab saipradit lae pannyachon fai sai rawang pi p.s. 2505–2517 กำเนิดและบทบาทของสถานีวิทยุเสียงประชาชนแห่งประเทศไทย (สปท.) ในฐานะขบวนการต่อต้านรัฐของ กุหลาบ สายประดิษฐ์ และปัญญาชนฝ่ายซ้าย ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2505–2517 [The origins and roles of the people's voice of Thailand radio station as an anti-state movement of Kularb Saipradit and left-wing intellectuals during 1962–1974]. Draft Chapter of a Masters Thesis. Faculty of Political Science Thammasat University.
- Kasian Tejapira เกษียร เตชะพีระ. 2017. Phumithat mai thang kan meuang ภูมิทัศน์ใหม่ทางการเมือง [A new political landscape]. *Matichon Weekly*. June 17. [https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article\\_42308](https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article_42308), accessed July 21, 2021.
- . 2016. The Irony of Democratization and the Decline of Royal Hegemony in Thailand. *Southeast Asian Studies* 5(2): 219–237. [https://doi.org/10.20495/seas.5.2\\_219](https://doi.org/10.20495/seas.5.2_219).
- . 2008. *Thang phraeng lae phongnam: Thang phan su prachathipatai thai* ทางแพร่งและพงหนาม: ทางผ่านสู่ประชาธิปไตยไทย [Crossroads and thickets: Passageway to Thai democracy]. Bangkok: Matichon Publishing House.
- . 2001. *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927–1958*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press; Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
- Kasikorn Research Center ศูนย์วิจัยกสิกรไทย. 2008. Pit Suwannaphum . . . sankhlon khwamcheuaman to kan pen sunklang thurakit nai phumiphak lae at tong chai weelaa nan kwa ja fuen khuen ปิด สุวรรณภูมิ . . . สั่นคลอนความเชื่อมั่นต่อการเป็นศูนย์กลางธุรกิจในภูมิภาค และอาจต้องใช้เวลานานกว่าจะฟื้นคืน (กระแสทรรศน์ ฉบับที่ 2119) [Shutting down Suvarnabhumi . . . confidence as a business center in the region shaken and may take a long time to recover (Current Issue No. 2119)]. December 1, 2008. <https://www.kasikornresearch.com/th/analysis/k-econ/economy/Pages/17912.aspx>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead. 2004. *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Matichon Weekly. 2017. Yon pum si thahaan seu khana raasadon sahai ruam aphiwat roiraaw khwaam phaiphae ซ่อนปุม “สี่ทหารเสือคณะราษฎร” สหราชร่วมอภิวัฒน์-รื้อรว้า-ความพ่ายแพ้ [Tale of “the People Party’s four musketeers” revolutionary comrade-in-arms, divisions, and defeat]. June 24. [https://www.matichonweekly.com/scoop/article\\_41978](https://www.matichonweekly.com/scoop/article_41978), accessed July 21, 2021.
- Mérieau, Eugénie. 2016. Thailand’s Deep State, Royal Power and the Constitutional Court (1997–2015). *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46(3): 445–466. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1151917>.
- Move Forward Party พรรคก้าวไกล. 2021. Pokpong prachathipatai totan phadetcakan amnatniyom sonburanayasit ปกป้องประชาธิปไตยต่อต้านเผด็จการอำนาจนิยมสมบูรณาญาสิทธิ [In defense of democracy against absolutist authoritarian dictatorship]. March 25. Facebook Post. <https://www.facebook.com/MoveForwardPartyThailand/posts/285124786452882/>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Nakharin Mektrairat นครินทร์ เมฆไตรรัตน์. 2006. *Karani ram 7 songsala rachasombat kan tikhwam lae kan santo khwammai thang kan meuang* กรณี ร. 7 ทรงสละราชสมบัติ: การตีความและการสานต่อความหมายทางการเมือง [The case of King Rama VII’s abdication: Interpretation and continuation of political meaning].

- Bangkok: Torch Publishing Project and the Research Fund Office.
- Naowanit Siriphatiwirat เนาอนิจ สิริพิศติวิรัตน์. 2014. Maaihet cak samnak phim หมายเหตุจากสำนักพิมพ์ [Notes from the publisher]. In *Khwam plianplaeng, lae phak phanuak, raw chana laew mae ca lae kapklon khwam plianplaeng* ความเปลี่ยนแปลง, และ “ภาคผนวก”, เราระชนะแล้วแม่เจ้า, และกาพย์กลอน “ความเปลี่ยนแปลง [“Change,” and appendix, we have already won mother, and the poem “change”], edited by Astani Phonlajan อัสติน พลจันทร์, pp. 67–118. Bangkok: Read Publishers.
- Naowarat Pongpaiboon เนาวารัตน์ พงษ์ไพบูลย์. 1990. Khamnam คำนำ [Forward]. In *Khwam plianplaeng* ความเปลี่ยนแปลง [Change] by Naiphi (Astani Phonlajan). Bangkok: Kiawklaw-Phimpakaan.
- Nattapoll Chaiching ณัฐพล ใจจริง. 2012. Sayam bon thang song phraeng: 1 satawat khong khwam phayayam patiwat RS 130 สยามบน “ทางสองแพร่ง”: 1 ศตวรรษของความพยายามปฏิวัติ ร.ศ. 130 [Siam at “a crossroads”: A century of revolutionary efforts, 130 RS]. *Silapa wattanatham* ศิลปวัฒนธรรม [Arts and culture] 33(4) (February): 76–94.
- Nidhi Aeusrivongse นิธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์. 2019. Na mai khong prawattisat หน้าใหม่ของประวัติศาสตร์ [A new page in history]. *Prachatai*. September 29. <https://prachatai.com/journal/2019/09/84547>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Oxford Paperback Encyclopedia. 1998. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Phimmasone Michael Rattanasengchanh. 2012. Thailand’s Second Triumvirate: Sarit Thanarat and the Military, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the Monarchy and the United States. 1957–1963. Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Washington.
- Positioning Magazine. 2009. Hetkaan runraeng chuang songkran kranam sam thong thiaw pii 52 . . . thoy lang pay 5 pii เหตุการณ์รุนแรงช่วงสงกรานต์ กระหน้าซ้ำท่องเที่ยวปี 52 . . . ถอยหลังไป 5 ปี [Violent incidents during the Songkran period: The 2009 tourism thrashed again . . . sliding back 5 years]. April 27. <https://positioningmag.com/47468>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Prachachart Business Online ประชาชาติธุรกิจออนไลน์. 2020. Thurakit rarchaprasong uam mob tangchat kum khamap chalaw longthun ธุรกิจราชประสงค์อ่วมมี mob ต่างชาติกุมขมับชะลอลงทุน [Ratchaprasong business overwhelmed by the mob, foreigners slow down investment]. October 17. <https://www.prachachat.net/economy/news-539209>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Prachatai English. 2015. *France Grants Refugee Status to Thai Political Exiles*. June 27. <https://prachatai.com/english/node/5213>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Prajak Kongkirati and Veerayooth Kanchoochat. 2018. The Prayuth Regime: Embedded Military and Hierarchical Capitalism in Thailand. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6(2): 279–305. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.4>.
- Pridi Banomyong ปรีดี พนมยงค์. 1992. Cong phithak cetanarom prachathipatai sombun khong wirachon 14 tulakhom จงพิทักษ์เจตนารมณ์ประชาธิปไตยสมบูรณ์ของวีรชน 14 ตุลาคม [Defend the spirit of complete democracy of the heroes of October 14th]. In *Naew khwamkhit prachathipatai khong pridi phanomyong* แนวความคิดประชาธิปไตยของปรีดี พนมยงค์ [Pridi Banomyong’s idea of democracy], edited by Waanee Phanomyong-Saaipradit วาณี พนมยงค์-สาายประดิษฐ์, pp. 171–195. Bangkok: Pridi Banomyong Foundation and the 60th Anniversary of Democracy Project.
- Royal Institute. 2011. *Phocananukrom chabab rachabandit sathan BE 2554* พจนานุกรมฉบับราชบัณฑิตยสถาน พ.ศ. 2554 [Royal Institute dictionary 2011]. <https://dictionary.orst.go.th/>, accessed December 22, 2022.
- Saiyud Kerdphol. 1986. *The Struggle for Thailand: Counter-Insurgency 1965–1985*. Bangkok: S. Research Center Col, Ltd.
- Sathian Janthimathorn เสถียร จันทิมาธร. 1982. *Saithan wannakam pheua chiwit khong thai* สายธารวรรณกรรม เพื่อชีวิตของไทย [The current of Thai literature for life]. Bangkok: Chao Phraya Publishing House.
- Silpa-mag.com. 2021. *Anusorn ngansop khana “kek meng” sayam RS130 itkon raek prachathipatai thai* 130 อนุสรณ์งานศพคณะ “แก้กหนึ่ง” สยาม ร.ศ. 130 อิฐก้อนแรกประชาธิปไตยไทย [Cremation volume of the “Kek Meng (change of regime)” Siamese RS 130, The first brick of Thai democracy]. February 15. <https://>

- www.silpa-mag.com/history/article\_63104, accessed December 31, 2021.
- Somsak Jeamteerasakul สมศักดิ์ เจียมธีรสกุล. 2001. Ram 7 sala raat: Rachamnak kan aenti khommiwnit lae 14 tula ร. 7 สลระราชย์: ราชสำนัก, การแอนตี้คอมมิวนิสต์และ 14 ตุลาคม [King Rama VII abdicated: The Royal Court, Anti-Communism and October 14]. In *Prawattisat thii pheng sang: Ruam bothkwam kiawkap karanii 14 tula lae 6 tula* ประวัติศาสตร์ที่เพิ่งสร้าง: รวบรวมความเกี่ยวกับกรณี่ 14 ตุลาคมและ 6 ตุลาคม [The invention of history: Collected articles on October 14 and October 6], pp. 9–19 Bangkok: October 6 Publishing House.
- Sopranzetti, Claudio. 2018. *Owners of the Map: Motorcycle Taxi Drivers, Mobility, and Politics in Bangkok*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Sorawit Chumsri สุวิศ ชุมศรี and Arin Jiajunphong อริน เจียจันทรพงษ์. 2007. *Thot rahatcai charan phakdithanakul thot khwam prathanathibodi baep loplop* ถอดรหัสใจ ‘อริญุ่ ถักคิชนากุล’ ถอดความ ‘ประธาณาธิปไตยแบบลับๆ’ [Decoding the mind of ‘Charan Phakdithanakul’, deciphering the covert presidential system]. *Matchon Daily*. February 5.
- Sujira Guptarak สุจิรา กุปดาร์กษ. 1983. *Wikhraw bot roikrong khong nai phi* วิเคราะห์บทร้อยกรองของ ‘นายผี’ [An analysis of the poetry of ‘Naiphi’]. Unpublished Master’s Degree Thesis, Srinakharinwirot University Prasarnmit.
- Thailand, Legal Information Service Center and Senate Liaison Unit ศูนย์บริการข้อมูลด้านกฎหมายและหน่วยประสานงานวุฒิสภา. 1991. *Ratthamanuun haeng raacha aanaachak thai* รัฐธรรมนูญแห่งราชอาณาจักรไทย [Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand]. Bangkok: Secretariat of the Senate.
- Thailand, Secretariat of the Cabinet สำนักเลขาธิการคณะรัฐมนตรี. *Prawat naayok ratamontri thai (PS 2475–pajjuban)* ประวัตินายกรัฐมนตรีไทย (พ.ศ. 2475–ปัจจุบัน) [Biographies of the Prime Ministers of Thailand (1932–present)]. [https://www.soc.go.th/?page\\_id=182](https://www.soc.go.th/?page_id=182), accessed July 1, 2021.
- Thailand, Secretariat of the House of Representatives สำนักงานเลขาธิการสภาผู้แทนราษฎร สำนักกรรมการประชุมและชาวเลข. 2007. *Raingan kan prachum khana kammathikan yokrang ratthamanuun khrangthi 39 wanthi 7 mithunaayon 2550* รายงานการประชุมคณะกรรมาธิการยกร่างรัฐธรรมนูญ ครั้งที่ 39/วันที่ 7 มิถุนายน 2550 [Minutes of the Meeting of the Constitution Drafting Commission No. 39/7 June 2007]. Bangkok: The Secretariat of the House of Representatives.
- The Economist. 2019. A New Biography of Walter Bagehot, “the Greatest Victorian” and The Economist’s Greatest Editor. *The Economist*. August 8. <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2019/08/08/a-new-biography-of-walter-bagehot-the-greatest-victorian>, accessed July 21, 2021.
- Thongchai Winichakul. 2016. *Thailand’s Hyper-Royalism: Its Past Success and Present Predicament*. Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Tongthong Chandransu ชงทอง จันทรางศุ. 2005. *Phrarachamnat khong phramahakasat nai thang kotmai rattamanuun* พระราชอำนาจของพระมหากษัตริย์ในทางกฎหมายรัฐธรรมนูญ [Royal prerogatives of the King in Constitutional Law]. Bangkok: S.C. Print and Pack Co., Ltd.
- Toupictionnaire: Le dictionnaire de politique* [Topictionary: The dictionary of politics]. Entry for *Pouvoir constituant originaire*. [https://www.toupie.org/Dictionnaire/Pouvoir\\_constituant\\_originaire.htm](https://www.toupie.org/Dictionnaire/Pouvoir_constituant_originaire.htm), accessed July 6, 2021.
- Uchen Chiangsen อุชนทร์ เชียงเสน, ed. 2011. *19–19 Phap chiwit lae kan tosu khong khon seu daeng cak 19 kanya 49 thueng 19 phrutsapha* 53 19-19: ภาพชีวิตและการต่อสู้ของคนเสื้อแดงจาก 19 กันยายน 49 ถึง 19 พฤษภาคม 53 [Portraits, lives and struggles of Red Shirts from September 19, 2011 to May 19, 2010]. Bangkok: Same Sky.
- United States Army Human Resources Command. Cold War Recognition Certificate Program Overview. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064282135689/search?q=cold%20war%20certificate>, accessed October 12, 2023.
- Zawacki, Benjamin. 2017. *Thailand: Shifting Ground between the US and a Rising China*. London: Zed Books Ltd.