The Democracy vs Authoritarianism Debate in Thailand:

A Critical Assessment from 1932 to 2007.

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PREFACE:

Democracy is a very interesting topic among many scholars. Also Thailand is an important nation because it is the only country in Southeast Asia who became able to maintain its independence during the time of colonial domination. But there is no stability in Thai politics. Politics always have taken the shape of a continuous alteration between democratic government and military authoritarian regimes. For this reason, I pick up the democratization process and its failures in Thailand as my Thesis topic.

In the preparation of this Thesis, I have drawn various standard works, journals and newspapers which have been quoted in the endnotes throughout this research work. I have provided bibliography at the end. I have completed my Thesis paper with utmost care.

To complete my research work, I have visited several libraries mainly National Library, Jadavpur University's library (both Central and Departmental Library), Jawaharlal Nehru Central Library and many others. I am grateful to the Library Staff and PHD Cell staff for their help and assistance

I acknowledge my indebtedness to my Supervisors, Dr Rup Kumar Barman (Professor of Department of History and Dr Iman Kalyan Lahiri (Assistant Professor of International Relations) of Jadavpur University for their whole hearted cooperation.

I am also grateful to my parents for their constant support. In the end I want to express my deepest gratitude to my husband, Mr. Ranadip Maitra, for his constant support and encouragement.

Introduction:

Democracy has been an inexhaustible site of intensive research for the scholars across the world. Research studies of democratic experiments in Thailand are no exception. Although Thailand ranks as one of the leading countries of Southeast Asia and maintains its independence as it never became colonized, the politics of Thailand has taken the shape of a "vicious circle": A constitution is promulgated and elections are held for legislative seats, but a crisis is precipitated and this leads to a military coup; then the military promises a new constitution.

As a form of government, democracy is associated with an unstable political identity. In Thailand, government alternates between the military regimes and democracy. But the people of the country often talk about democracy and desire to have a stable government.

My thesis is that the process of democratization in Thailand is cyclical in the sense that democratic government is replaced by authoritarian regimes which again give way to democratic interludes.

The following is the sequence of chapters on which I base my argument and offer evidence in support of my conclusions. These chapters discuss specific events in Thai history when several attempts to consolidate democracy were made. While many believe that these developments produced fruitful results, I disagree and to emphasize that the attempts to restore democracy proved futile.

Chapter I: The first chapter provides a summary of the historical background of Thailand. There is a divergence of views regarding the origins of the Thais. It has been accepted by most scholars that the Thais basically originated from North-western Szechwan in China about 4500 years ago and later migrated to their present homeland.

The world popularly knew this country as Siam till the middle of the twentieth century. Its name was later changed to 'Prothat Thai' or 'Thailand' by an official proclamation on 14th May 1949. The word 'Thai' means 'free' and therefore, 'Thailand' means 'Land of Free'. Surprisingly, it is a fact that Thailand had been remained the only

independent country of the Southeast Asian region during the climax of the European colonialism.

The structure of the present government of Thailand has undergone gradual evolution in response to the changing forms of government. Traditionally Thailand was a monarchy since the beginning of state system.

For centuries, the history of Thailand was a chronicle of the rise and fall of several kingdoms. The first kingdom was Sukhothai (1238-1350). Khun Bang Klang Hao became the first king of Sukhothai. The most renowned king was Ramkhamhaeng. This kingdom had adopted paternalistic system of government. It means while enjoying absolute sovereign power, the king would, like a father, look after all his subjects and personally pay close attention to their well-being.

The kingdom of Sukhothai was followed by the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767). It was founded by U Thong, better known as Ramathibodi. This Kingdom inherited an extensive Khmer tradition and customs, including their system of government with the king presiding as a demigod. A major indigenous development in the governing system was the clear division between civilian and military administrations, and a strong centralized government which came into view during the reign of Boromo Traikanat (1448-1488).

The succeeding Rattanakosin Kingdom was established in 1767 in Bangkok. The most important rulers of this Kingdom were King Mongkut (Rama IV) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). Mongkut (1851-1868) was one of the most remarkable and gifted ruler in Thai history. He believed that establishing friendly diplomatic and trade contacts with the West was an important step in modernising the country.

King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) carried out some major changes with regard to central, regional and local administration, which formed the basic structure of the present system. Thailand was facing the threatening advance of colonialism in Southeast Asia. His administrative reforms and rapid drive for modernization of the country proved successful in maintaining the independence of the state throughout the turbulent years of western colonial threats and creating a solid foundation for the

modern system of government. These attempts ultimately paved the way for consolidation of democracy in Thailand.

King Chulalonkorn was succeeded by his son Maha Vajiravudh, who became Rama VI (1910-1925). For modernizing the country, he introduced some notable reforms. In 1917, he opened Chulalongkorn University and in 1921 the compulsory education law was promulgated in the sphere of education.

After Vajiravudh, Prajadhipok ascended the throne as Rama VII (1925-1935). He continued the modernization process begun by his predecessors. At that time, the country was suffering from an economic crisis resulting from the Great Depression of the 1930s. As a result of this crisis, Prajadhipok was forced to reduce the number of *monthons and chandvads;* to cut salaries and raise taxes. Inevitably unrest began among the civilian and military circles. Ultimately on June 24, 1932, they revolted against the monarch and as a result, 700 years of absolute monarchy came to an end in a bloodless coup and a constitutional monarchy was established.

Although nominally a constitutional monarchy after 1932, Thailand was ruled by a series of military governments interspersed with brief periods of democracy. Prior to 1992, Thailand had witnessed the transition from absolute monarchy through various forms of democratic structures with varying degree viz, part, half and full democracy.

Thailand's first big step toward democracy took place in 1973 after student-led uprising overthrew the military dictatorship. The masses for the first time participated in politics as workers, farmers and labourers formed groups to demand their rights. This was the beginning of the period which was termed by many as the period of half representative democracy. But the 1976 coup by the military destroyed the student revolution and reseized power.

The decade of semi-democracy flourished during the reign of General Prem Tinsulanond (1979-1987). This decade enjoyed a time of stable politics characterized by a viable power sharing scheme between the military-bureaucratic elite on the one hand and elected politicians and non-bureaucratic forces on the other. Here it is to be noted that the middle class became more prominent in size and political strength.

Full representative democracy was established after the 1992 mass demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of people forced out the Suchinda government. In response to mounting popular pressure since 1992 for an overhaul of the system, the first people's constitution was promulgated in 1997. It represents the most extensive democratic reform in modern Thai history. Thus the 1997 constitution confirmed that participatory democracy had been fairly adopted in Thailand.

In the 2001 general elections, Thaksin Shinawatra came to power as prime minister of Thailand. In the 2005 Parliamentary elections, he was re-elected by an even greater majority. He expanded the democratic outreach through his egalitarian pledges. But he was strongly criticized for lack of transparency, human rights violations and misrepresenting democratic rules.

In September 2006. a military group led by general Sonthi, staged a coup. It was a major setback in the towards democratization of Thailand. In August 2007, a new constitution was drafted by an assembly appointed by the coup leaders.

This chapter also highlights the economic and foreign affairs of the country. Thai economy is export-dependent, with exports of goods and services accounting for more than two-thirds of its gross domestic product. Thailand is the second largest economy after Indonesia in the region.

Thailand's foreign policy has contributed to Thai political stability by ensuring conciliatory relations with major powers, mainly with the United States. It is a leader in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and it strongly supports ASEAN's efforts to promote economic development, social integration and stability throughout the region. Thailand also developed close ties not only with major powers but also with other ASEAN members such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Vietnam.

Chapter 2: The second chapter examines several democratic experiments witnessed in Thailand. The first democratic experiment took place in 1932 when a coup group consisting of military officers and civil servants abolished absolute monarchy and established a constitutional monarchy. The first constitution of the country was

promulgated on 10th December 1932. The first prime minister was Phraya Mano, who was a civilian chosen for the office.

After 1932, several attempts were made by different governments to democratize the country. This process achieved a significant success in October 1973 when a student revolution overthrew military dictatorship and established direct democracy. Following this revolution, the military went into temporary eclipse. In the aftermath of the 1973 revolution, a number of new political organizations emerged. A large number of political parties began to function. A new constitution was adopted and elections were scheduled for 1975.

In addition, workers and farmers formed new organizations to raise their demands. Several new interest groups had also emerged. Workers, farmers, fishermen, teachers and numerous other grassroots organization begins to flourish and press their demands.

Thailand had experimented with a semi-democratic system under Prem's government. Chatichai's assumption of office as premier of Thailand also indicated the country's continual experiment with democracy because he was the first fully elected prime minister.

Thailand's next democratic experiment occurred in 1992 when massive demonstrations ousted the Suchinda government from office. It was the first mass demonstration led by the middle class. Many academics, business executives and stock brokers took to the streets along with workers and rural migrants.

Since 1992, Thailand has had several democratic governments under Chuan Leekpai, Banharn Silpa-archa, Chavalit, Thaksin Shinawatra respectively and in 1997 the country appeared to be consolidating its democratic gains by passing a new reform-oriented constitution.

The 2001 and 2005 Parliamentary Elections also marked the country's further journey in the direction of democracy. These two elections brought Thaksin to power as

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prime minister for two consecutive terms. Thaksin and his party Thai Rak Thai gained a landslide victory.

Another attempt was made to achieve democratic consolidation in Thailand in the general election held on December 23, 2007. This was first legislative election after the Council for Security, a military junta overthrew Thailand's elected government and suspended the constitution on September 19, 2006. After the election, Samak Sundaravej, a veteran right wing politician with royalist credentials was sworn in as Thailand's prime minister.

Chapter 3: This chapter deals with the ethnic problems of Thailand. This ethnic issue concentrated mainly in South with periodic explosion of insurgency naturally threatens and hinders the consolidation of democracy in Thailand. In this chapter I have tried to explain the meaning of ethnicity and briefly dealt with several ethnic groups and movements in Thailand.

Divergent views exist with regard to the meaning of ethnicity. Here I have mentioned several authors' view on ethnicity. Thailand is a multi-ethnic country with a great variety of ethnic groups. The ethnic groups can be divided into three categories: I. Thais; II. Hill peoples of the North and III. Other groups which include the Chinese and minorities in the South.

These ethnic groups quarrel and vie with each other for the betterment of their living conditions and sometimes they choose the path of violent action. As a result, Thailand has experienced unrest in each of its peripheral regions.

The situation of the 'Hill people' of Thailand is precarious. For long years the state has neglected these people. They are often harassed by state officials and also deprived of Thai nationality.

The northeast Thai group represents another problem because northeast region is characterized by poverty and low productivity.

The Thai-Muslim confrontation in Southern Thailand constitutes the most serious ethnic group problem. The separatist movement in the South began in the early

1990s and continued till 2007. But in 2004, this separatist movement reached its extreme level as a result of Prime Minister Thaksin's heavy handed approach. Daily assassinations of even the lowest ranks of officials, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens continued; bombings of restaurants and shops and other acts of violence increased day by day.

During 2006-2007, the situation was brought under control by new Prime Minister General Surayud. But he failed to solve the problem in Southern Thailand. So the government should undertake effective measures to solve the problem. More autonomy should also be given to the provinces.

Chapter 4: This chapter outlines the debate between democracy and authoritarianism and its way out. This debate has become a regular discourse feature since 1932, when a group of army men and bureaucrats abolished Thailand's 700 years old absolute monarchy.

Since 1932, Thai politics was dominated by several authoritarian rulers, namely under Phibun, Sarit, Thanom, Prapas, Thanin, and also Thaksin although he began his political career as a democratically elected prime minister. Almost simultaneously however, several attempts were made to consolidate democracy in Thailand.

The first attempt was the promulgation of the "permanent" constitution on 10th December 1932. This constitution outlined several rights and duties of Thai citizens. The second attempt was the establishment of a unicameral legislature.

During the time of Prime Minister Phahon (1933-1938), some attempts were made for the promotion of democracy. He extended the primary education to the vast majority of Thai communities.

Thailand entered into a period of authoritarianism under Prime Minister Phibun from 1938 to 1944 and also again from 1948 to 1957. In his time, the military expenditure increased. He also passed several authoritarian laws such as the press act and an emergency decree which permitted almost unlimited arrest.

A few attempts were made by Pridi, a member of the 1932 coup group. In 1946, Pridi and Seni Pramoj introduced a more liberal constitution which provided a bi-cameral legislature with a fully elected lower house. Elections took place in 1946 which ushered a new era of parliamentary democracy.

But during his second term in office, Phibun made some attempts to promote democratic practices and institutions. He sanctioned political parties, permitted public meetings and paved the way for elections.

Sarit's era marked a period of strict authoritarianism. He abolished the constitution, dissolved the parliament, banned political parties, arrested several politicians, journalists, writers, labour leaders, declared martial law and imposed censorship on mass media and, newspapers.

After Sarit, this period of authoritarianism continued under his deputies, general Thanom Kittikachorn and general Prapas Charusathiarana.

Thailand entered a democratic period in 1973 when a student-led uprising ousted the long lasting authoritarian regime. After 1973, a new civilian government was formed under Prime Minister Dr. Sanya Dharmaskati and a more democratic constitution was promulgated in October 1974.

There was an increase in the number of new and more outspoken political organizations and associations formed not just by students, but by peasants, farmers and workers as well. The ban on labour unions was lifted.

In 1976, Thailand again came under the purview of authoritarian rule under Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichien. He outlawed political meetings and suppressed the union activity.

During Kriangsak's rule, Thailand enjoyed another period of democracy. He eased press censorship and established better relations with labour unions.

Prem's government symbolised the country's entry into the era of semi-democracy. In his period, a number of political parties were allowed to function. Two

general elections were held in 1983 and 1986 respectively. The level of education rose to an unprecedented level.

In July 1988, parliamentary elections were held and Chatichai Choonhavan assumed the prime ministership of Thailand. The smooth transition from Prem to general Chatichai reflected the new optimism about Thailand's evolution toward democracy. After assuming office, Chatichai's government enjoyed considerable legitimacy, as it was the first fully elected government since 1976. It derived its authority from conformity with democratic principles and procedures.

On February 23, 1991, a bloodless military coup ousted the Chatichai government which came as a major setback in the ongoing democratization process. Then the country entered into another era of authoritarianism under General Suchinda. He abrogated the constitution, dismissed the elected government and imposed martial law.

In 1992, massive anti-military demonstrations occurred resulting in the removal of Suchinda as prime minister. Hundreds of thousands of people joined this protest. This dramatically marked the beginning of another era of democracy.

After the September 1992 elections, Leekpai, the soft spoken leader of the Democrat Party who had neither served in the armed forces nor had any links with the aristocracy, became the prime minister. Several reforms were made. More professional soldiers replaced the generals.

In July 1995, general elections were held. These elections can be described as another evolutionary step toward routinizing democratic processes in Thailand because it produced the country's first transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another in 20 years. After the election, Banharn Silpa-archa became the prime minister.

After Banharn, Chavalit assumed the premiership following the November 1996 elections. But Chavalit was replaced by Chuan Leekpai again in November 1997.

In 1997, a new constitution was promulgated and this marked the continuity of democratic progress in Thailand. It was designed to promote the transparency and accountability of the political system and stability and effectiveness of government.

This 1997 constitution diminished military's position in politics by switching from an appointed upper house in the legislature to an elected one. The Thai people referred to it as the Promised Land of a full-fledged and lasting democratic system.

In 2001, general elections were held under the provisions of 1997 constitution. This election can also be seen as a further evolutionary step toward democratic government. This election brought Thaksin to power. Thaksin and his party Thai Rak Thai implemented several policies mainly to improve the conditions of the rural people.

The policies included a three-year moratorium on farmers' debt payments, debt reduction and grants of one million baht ($23,000) to each of the nation's 77000 villages. The government also began a national health care system under which Thais could receive care at public hospitals for only 30 Baht (70 cents).

Thaksin and his party enjoyed another landslide victory in the 2005 Parliamentary elections. This again demonstrated the continuing process of Thai democratization.

Although Thaksin's government came to power in democratic way, his government took on an increasingly authoritarian character. He devalued the importance of parliament, neutralized the check-and-balance bodies created by the 1997 constitution and eroded the mechanisms and principles of democracy. He also indirectly tightened controls on media indirectly by encouraging high-ranking officials of his party to purchase controlling interests in media groups that were critical of the government.

Ultimately, a bloodless coup ousted Thaksin's regime on 19th September 2006. This coup was certainly a setback for democracy and a blessing for authoritarianism. It abolished the 1997 constitution, controlled the media, appointed an interim government and laid the basis for the appointment of the National Legislative

Assembly, a Constitution Drafting Assembly and an Asset Security Committee to investigate 'acts detrimental to the state'. Thus we can say that after the coup Thailand entered another era of military authoritarianism.

The only way out of the above unstable condition is to establish such a government which will be accepted by both pro-democratic and pro-authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 5: This chapter outlines the functions and limitations of Thai democracy. Thai democracy actually began to function after the 1932 revolution which ousted the country's 700-year-old absolute monarchy. But several attempts to promote democratic practices were made by two absolute monarchs namely Mongkut and Chulalongkorn and these efforts show that beginnings, however small and limited in scope, had already been made prior to 1932 in the direction of democratic governance.

Inspired by western democracy, Mongkut put a special emphasis on western education. He invited western tutors into his home for the purpose of teaching his children.

During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the term democracy was first mentioned. In 1885, eleven young men strongly urged the King to move toward a system of parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy.

After 1932, we have seen the varied results of the successful functioning of Thai democracy. Thailand's first constitution was promulgated in December 1932. This outlined certain rights and duties of Thai citizens such as, equality before law, freedom of religion and belief, right to free movement, residence, property, speech, education, assembly and association etc. The duties are: respect the law, protect the country and assist the government by paying taxes.

During the reign of Prime Minister Mano and Prime Minister Phibun, two Manuals for Citizens were issued regarding the ideas of democracy.

When Pridi became prime minister, a new constitution was introduced in May, 1946 which was more liberal than ever before.

During Phibun's second term as prime minister, political parties were legalized, political meetings were sanctioned and press censorship was lifted.

During the reigns of authoritarian rulers under Sarit and then under Thanom and Praphat, some attempts were made to democratize the country which indicated that democratic ideals and practices were gaining ground.

Sarit adopted a national economic development plan and a national educational development plan, because for him, education system and economy provided the foundation for democracy.

Praphas proposed a two-stage development of democracy. The first stage focused on developing self- government at the local level, with the democratic minded bureaucracy acting as guardians, and educating people in democratic ways. In the second stage, with the first stage successfully completed, the 'guardians' should withdraw and let the people be independent, and a parliamentary system would come into being.

In 1968, prime minister Thanom proposed a constitution very similar in many respects to the 1949 constitution. This constitution provided a bicameral legislature with an elected lower house and an appointed senate.

During the period from 1973 to 1976, we see the unprecedented proliferation of protest groups. Workers, farmers, peasants and students had for the first time an organizational base. We can also see the veritable proliferation of political parties. A number of liberal newspapers and magazines were able to develop and proved instrumental as far as revolt was concerned. This marked the success of Thai democratic function.

In the aftermath of 1973 student- led uprising, a civilian government was appointed under Sanya and a new constitution was promulgated which is regarded as the most democratic one yet seen in Thailand. Also two coalition governments were appointed under Kukrit Pramoj and Seni Pramoj.

During Kriangsak's government, several developments demonstrated the continual functioning of Thai democracy. He lifted the ban on freedoms of speech and assembly with the removal of press censorship.

During Prem's era, two general elections were held in 1983 and in 1986. Several political parties contested in these elections. There was an increasing number of pressure groups, including business organizations, that influence the policy making.

The clearest sign of smooth functioning of Thai democracy was the assumption of prime ministership by Chatichai Choonhvan. He was the first elected member of parliament to become prime minister.

Although appointed prime minister by the military, Anand Panyachun was able to win the support not only of the general people but also of an international community. Inspired deeply by the ideals of democracy, he inducted some of the best-known civil servants and businessmen in his cabinet. He also paved the way for the next elections.

The 1992 May uprising also indicated the success of the Thai democratic process. This demonstration was the largest pro-democracy movement since the 1973 student-led uprising. It involved many groups such as academics, teachers, students, workers, poets, slum activists, businessmen, lawyers, politicians etc. Several non-governmental organizations became very much active such as, Campaign for Popular Democracy, Student's Federation of Thailand etc. The role of the press also expanded.

Elections took place on 13th September 1992. After the elections Chuan Leekpai became the prime minister. His call for next elections was another sign of the successful functioning of Thai democracy. In 1994, he set up a Committee named Democratic Development Committee to look into the whole problem of political reform.

The 1995 election brought Banharn Silpa-Archa to power. This election saw the publication of more detailed party policy statements than had previously been the case. A Political Reform Committee was also set up.

The greatest achievement of the well-functioning of Thai democracy was the promulgation of a new constitution in 1997.

The two indicators of the successful functioning of Thai democracy were the 2001 and 2005 Parliamentary elections. Thaksin Shinawatra was elected and re-elected as prime minister of Thailand through these elections.

Another outcome of the functioning of Thai democracy was the promulgation of 2007 constitution and the election of 2007.

In spite of these achievements, Thai democracy has several limitations as follows which are mentioned below.

After 1932, the new powerful elite established a parliament and enfranchised the masses, but the right of free association, especially political association continued to be denied until 1950. Since then, political association in the form of political parties has not been free from controls.

The limitation of the Thai democracy can be attributed to the low level of political institutionalization in Thailand, which is the consequence of three important factors: the frequency of coup d'etat, the discontinuity of elected government and the weakness of political parties. Also frequent occurrence of elections and censorship of media tended to constrict Thai democracy.

From 1932 to 2007, there have been altogether eighteen military coups, eleven of which were successful. As we already know, military intervention was a major setback for democracy. Thus Thai democracy did not always function smoothly.

In Thailand, no elected government was allowed to complete its full term except Thaksin's government. Before completing its term, the government was overthrown by a military coup and new elections were held.

Political parties were not allowed to function in the first fifteen years. When they were allowed to function, they suffered from lack of discipline among their

members. Also after elections, none all of the parties had any significant programs that would link them with the masses.

The frequent occurrence of elections caused and brought into focus the discontinuity of parliament and also the dissatisfaction of the Thai people with their governments.

In Thailand most of the time censorship was imposed on media. So, media could not work freely.

Although seventeen constitutions were promulgated from 1932 to 2007, only two of these can be classified as democratic (the 1974 constitution and 1997 constitution).

Historical Background:

Introduction:

A unified Thai Kingdom was established in the mid-14th century. Known as Siam until 1939, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country never to taken over by a European power. A bloodless revolution in 1932 led to a constitutional monarchy. In alliance with Japan during World War II, Thailand became a US treaty ally following the conflict. A military coup in September 2006 ousted the then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. A rapid overview of Thailand-past and present- is presented below as a prelude to the analytical survey which is the heart of this study.

Thailand, a country rich in its own culture and heritage; is an important nation in terms of contemporary political development. The physical shape of Thailand suggests a revered symbol: The elephant. If one looks at Thailand on a map, it is not difficult to imagine the Southern Peninsula as the elephant's trunk, and the northern and the north eastern regions as the flapping ears, with Bangkok and the delta of the Chao Praya river forming the elephant's mouth.

The Kingdom of Thailand has various geographical features: rough and uneven mountains, dense forests, dry plateau, fertile river valleys, tropical rain forests and sand-covered coastlines. It is also divided into four distinctive regions such as Northern Thailand (Pahk Neuah), North-Eastern Thailand (Pahk Eesahn), Central Thailand (Pahk Glahng), and Southern Thailand (Pahk Dai).

Situated into the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand is bordered on the west and north by Myanmar, to the northeast by Laos and to the southeast by Cambodia. It extends southward along the Isthmus of Kra to the Malay Peninsula where it borders Malaysia. Its total land mass is 513,120 square kilometres (198,114 square meter). It has a maximum dimension of about 2500 KM north to south and 1250 KM east to west, with a coastline of approximately 1840 kilometres on the Gulf of Thailand and 865 kilometres on the Andaman Sea.

According to the latest census, the population of Thailand is approximately 64 million and the annual population growth rate is 0.3 percent. Life expectancy is 68 years

for male and 75 years for female and the annual infant mortality rate - another common indicator of social advance – is fairly low, at about six per thousand. Adult literacy is said – albeit unconvincingly – to be 93 percent. The country has started 12-year compulsory education. There are several ethnic groups, of whom 89 percent are Thais and others 11 percent.

Thailand's population is relatively homogeneous. More than 85 percent speak a dialect of Thai (official language) and share a common culture. English is the second language. Up to   12 percent of Thais are of significant Chinese heritage, but the Sino-Thai community is the best integrated in Southeast Asia. Malay- speaking Muslims of the south comprise another significant minority group (2.3%). Other groups include the Khmer, the Mon who are substantially assimilated with Thai and the Vietnamese.

Thailand's highly successful government- sponsored family planning program has resulted in a dramatic decline in population growth from 3.1 percent in 1960 to less than 1 percent today. Thailand's efforts to promote public health education has showed a positive result. In earlier times, approximately 25-30,000 Thais died from AIDS related causes in each year, but today the number of new HIV infections dropped from over 100,000 annually to around 15,000 annually now.

Theravada Buddhism is the major religion of Thailand and about 95 percent of its people follow this religion. The government also permits religious diversity and other major religions are represented, such as Islam, Christian, Hinduism, Brahmanism etc. Spirit worship and animism are widely practiced.

There is no clear evidence regarding Thailand's pre-history. Hunters and gatherers were the first inhabitants of Thailand. They were using wooden and stone tools and living at relatively permanent sites. Then they settled down in some communities with the introduction of rice, most likely via China. Around 7000 to 6000 years ago, the bronze technology of Ban Chiang in Northeast Thailand had been developed. It is associated with the pre- historic settlements in Thailand.

During the first century BC, Mon people, who were settled in the Chaophaya Valley, the heart of present day Thailand, established the Kingdom of Dvaravati (ca. 1st

century BC – 11th century AD). During this period Buddhism, the primary religion of Thailand, was introduced. Additional migrations took place into the region during this period. There was a Tibetan- Burmese migration from the northwest that formed the basis of hill tribes. But the most important was the migration of the Southern Chinese, known as the Tai would migrate into Northern and Central Thailand which formed the basis of the first independent Thai Kingdom in the thirteenth century. The important cities during this period include Nakhon Pathan, Khun Bua, Phong Tuk and Lopburi.

Between the eleventh and twelve centuries the Dvaravati Civilization of the Mons disappeared due to the increasing expansion and military conquests of the more centralized Khmer Empire (802-1431) that developed in a region just south of the Khorat Plateau, now part of Cambodia. It introduced Hinduism as the state religion and established its capital of Angkor.

Towards the end of the 13th century the power of the Khmers weakened and a new kingdom emerged which was dominated by the Thai race. At this time, the Mongols conquered China and accelerated the flight southwards of the Tai people, enhancing the resources of the northern Thai kingdoms in particular. The most important of them was Lanna Thai.

The controversy over the origin of the Thai people still continues among the scholars today. One group of scholars believes that the Thai people migrated from the Altai Mountain in north western China and travelled into the Southeast Asia. Others hold the view that the Thais migrated from the Sechuan province in central China and formed a kingdom named Nanchao in 651 BC. But in 1253 they were driven out by the Mongols further to the south.

While it is difficult to draw a final conclusion regarding the origin of Thais, it is beyond dispute that the Thais had established themselves in the mainland of Southeast Asia and made considerable territorial gains in the 13th century.

Sukhothai Period (1238-1350):

For centuries, the history of Thailand was a chronicle of the rise and fall of dynasties. Kingdoms expanded and collapsed as a result of internal power struggles and

periodic wars with the neighbouring Burmese[1]. In the 13th century, Thais founded the Kingdom of Sukhothai (1238-1350). This kingdom began life as chiefdom under the influence of the khmer empire and survived for a century.

During the first half of the 13th century the Thai rulers of Sukhothai got rid of Khmers and established an independent Thai Kingdom[2]. This Kingdom intensified popular devotion to Hinayana Buddhism after extensive contact with the Mon people[3].

Sukhothai was a Buddhist state, lavishly supporting a monastic community newly reinforced and invigorated by a celebrated patriarch who had come from Nakhon Si Thammarat[4]. It described the ideal monarch as a king of Righteousness who ruled his people with justice and moderation. The king was expected to uphold the "ten kingly virtues" i.e. alms giving, morality, liberality, rectitude, gentleness, self-restriction, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and non-obstruction[5]. The kings of Sukhothai were referred to as *dharmmaraja*, which translates as "the ideal Buddhist Kingship".

Khun Bang Klang Hao became the first king of Sukhothai (under the name of Sri Indraditya). He was succeeded by his nineteen- year- old son Ramkhamhaeng, also known as "Rama the Brave". He had proved himself as redoubtable warrior as the king of Sukhothai who reigned from 1275 to 1317.

Ramkhamhaeng became a renowned statesman, under whom the T'ais absorbed the best elements of the civilizations with which they came into contact [6]. Siam adopted his alphabet, the Sukhodaya script in 1283. During his reign of forty years he extended his sway to include the Bay of Bengal, Luang Prabang, and the Malay Peninsula, and maintained friendship with the other Kingdoms, notably Chiengmai, which he helped against their mutual foes [7].

According to the famous inscription made during his reign: "… this city of Sukhothai is prosperous. In the water there are fish, in the fields there is rice. The lord of the country levies no taxes on his subjects. Whoever wishes to trade in elephants or horses does so; whoever wishes to trade in silver or gold does so…. If the people, nobles or chiefs disagree, the king makes a true inquiry, and then decides the matter for his subjects with full impartiality; he does not connive with the thief and the dishonest

man; if he sees the rice of another he does not covet it; if he sees the riches of others he is not jealous...."[8].

Rama Khamheng's great inscription paints the picture of a prosperous state governed with justice and magnanimity, and with Pali Buddhism of the Sinhalese orthodox pattern as its official religion. The king, we are told, with his Court and all his magnates, practises the religion of the Buddha with devotion[9]. He built an extensive kingdom by a judicious combination of force and diplomacy. Using this, he ruled over a feudal society. He extended his control southward along the Chao Phraya River and occupied portions of the Malay Peninsula.

King Rama Khamheng is responsible for various achievements during his long reign. He respected the sovereignty of other powerful Thai Kingdoms such as Chiang Mai and Chiang Saen. He maintained diplomatic relations with China, Burma, India and Ceylon. To keep close contact with the general people, he placed a bell at the gate of the royal palace, which could be rung by any person who wanted to appeal to the king.

A benevolent patriarchal rule was emerged under the leadership of king Rama Khamheng. One of the king's titles was *Khun Phaw*, which means "father" and he continued the strong leadership with the benevolence and tolerance. The practice of village autonomy over local affairs was continued and the traditional freedom and equality of the people were maintained [10].

Rama Khamheng was a very paternal and just ruler. According to the 1292 inscription, he maintained a close proximity to his subjects and embodied a spirit of accessibility that in modern times has come to define the ideal Thai monarch. Also Prince Chula Charabongse described him as a "brilliant- diplomat" [11].

Rama Khamheng died in 1317. After his death, the Kingdom of Sukhothai entered into a period of decline. The rulers were not able to maintain the glorious success of this kingdom because they concentrated more on promoting religion than matters of state. The political decline of Sukhothai was not entirely caused by the lack of leadership but also by the emergence of a strong Thai State, the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767).

The Ayutthaya Period (1350-1767):

The Kingdom of Ayutthaya was founded by U Thong, better known as King Ramathibodi who is considered the first monarch of Thailand. The Ayutthaya era has been aptly described by Frank and Darling as the era of absolutism and power [12]. It was located on an island in the Chao Phraya river in the centre of fertile rice growing plains.

Ramathibodi extended its control over the Malay Peninsul as well as over some districts of Burma. He declared war against the Sukhothai and sough to conquer the rebellious Thai Kingdom at Chiengmai. Yet his main aim which was inherited by his successors at Ayutthaya was the destruction of the Khmer empire at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom; and ultimately in 1432, the Thais sacked the Khmer capital. As a result, the Khmer people moved their capital to Phnom Penh and withdrew into the territory that today is known as the country of Cambodia. He also began to make sustained efforts to subdue Cambodia.

Ramathibodi codified Thai laws and customs. With the subsequent assimilation of the classical Indian "Laws of Manu", this system "provided the basic principles of Siamese law for centuries … and has not been entirely superseded by modern legislation" [13]. The laws are as follows-

    i.   The Law of Evidence (1350 A.D);

    ii.   The Law of Offences against the Government (1351 A.D);

    iii.   The Law of Receiving Plaints (1355 A.D);

    iv.   The Law on Abduction (1356 A.D);

    v.   The Law on Offences against the People (1357 A.D);

    vi.   The Law Concerning Robbers (1350 and 1366 A.D);

    vii.   The Law on Miscellaneous Matters (1359 A.D);

    viii.   The Law of Husband and Wife.

Ramathibodi also established and promoted Theravada Buddhism as the official religion to differentiate his kingdom from the neighbouring Hindu kingdom of Angkor.

As a ruler, Ramathibodi did not possess the same gifts as Rama Khamheng, but he did some wonderful things for the glorification of his kingdom. He created a formal political bureaucracy for the administration of his kingdom that included a minister of local government (*Khun meuang*), who was responsible for the maintenance of peace and order, as well as the dispensation of justice; a minister of finance (*Khun Klang*), who was the manager of state properties and collector of taxes; a minister of agriculture (*Khun Nah*), who managed the production and storage of the kingdom's food supply; and a minister of the royal household (*Khun Wahng*), who among other things, acted as a judge in legal disputes [14].

Throughout his reign, Ramathibodi continued the policy of expansion. In 1352 he launched a pre-emptive strike against the kingdom of Angkor.

Ramathibodi died in 1369 and he was succeeded by his son Prince Ramesuen, who was the governor of Lopburi. King Ramesuen (1369-1370) was unable to solve the problems which his kingdom faced during his very short reign. He then abdicated in 1370 in favour of his uncle, who became Boromoraja-I (1370-1388).

Boromoraja-I followed the same aggressive expansionist policy of Ramathibodi throughout his eighteen-year reign. In this respect he is described as a ruler "determined to a fault".

During the early part of his reign the new king devoted his whole attention to re-establishing authority over the upper Menam Valley. Further trouble again broke out as Sukhothai made a determined effort to establish its independence. Boromoraja-I led a series of invasions into Sukhothai territory and in 1378 the King of Sukhothai was finally defeated and transferred his capital to Pitsanulok and ceded certain territories.

After conquering Sukhothai, Boromoraja-I set his sights on Chiang Mai. He proceeded with an army against Chiang Mai forces in 1380, but failed. He led another attack in 1388 but was repelled. Boromoraja became ill and died during the expedition and his army returned to Ayutthaya.

After the death of Boromoraja, his son Tonglun, a boy of fifteen, ascended the throne. But he was immediately dethroned by ex-king Ramesuan. He seized the boy

king and had him put to death according to the traditional royal protocol: Tonglun was placed in a soft velvet sack and slowly beaten to death with a sandalwood stick [15].

Ramesuan thus became the king of Ayutthaya for a second time. During his short reign (1388-1395), he revived his fathers' expansionist policy towards the Khmer lands and dealt the Khmer a major blow in 1393. He also captured Chiang Mai. Finally, in 1431, the Ayutthayan forces overran the Khmer capital of Angkor and by 1432 the Khmers were forced to surrender the once incomparable city for good.

The period 1395-1408 is a blank in Siamese history. A phantom king Ram Raja, son of Ramesuen occupied the throne, but nothing is recorded of his reign [16].

When Intharaja (1408-1424), son of Boromoraja-I succeeded to the throne of Ayutthaya, he tried to establish the kingdom's authority in the Sukhothai domains. He died in 1424 A.D.

Following the death of Intharaja-I, the youngest son among his three sons was proclaimed king as Boromoraja-II (1424-1448). He conquered Angkor. This ended the classical period of Khmer civiliation. In 1438, he took a step towards the consolidation of the kingdom of Siam. He appointed his son, Prince Ramasuen the governor of Pitsanulok and Thus the old kingdom of Sukhothai became a province of Siam [17].

Prince Ramesuen succeeded Boromoraja-II as Boromo Traikanat (1448-1488) usually shortened to Trailok. He made an important contribution by creating a centralized system of administration and also by creating separate ministries to handle the governmental affairs. This structure is survived until the late 19th century. He brought the outlying provinces under the direct control of the central government.

Trailok separated the civil from the military among his Ayuthian officials, regulated the amount of land assigned to each office by way of salary, and retained the old Thai principle of universal military service [18].

The enactment of the Kot Mont'ien Ban or 'Palace Law' in 1450 was another successful achievement of king Trailok. He ordained this law to regulate and define the ranks of all classes of officials in the Siamese Court., including the ranks of the different

queens and princes. It also provided punishments for offences against the dignity of the monarchy, including the death penalty for shaking the king's boat or whispering during a royal audience and the cutting off of an offender's foot for kicking the door of the royal palace [19]. The Palace Code also laid down the unique provision that guilty members of the royal family were to be beaten to death with a sandalwood club.

In 1454 king Trailok regulated the Sakdi Na Grades. In the earlier Tai social system, every man possessed an amount of land varying according to his status. Trailok changed this system and laid down definite rules regulating the status of the different classes of people and assigning amounts of land to each. For officials, it determined their salaries and Sakdi Na prescribed the amount of land which they received. In the courts the amount of fine was determined by a man's Sakdi Na grades[20].

During his reign, King Trailok conducted at least four wars against the Kingdom of Chiengmai. After his military campaigns, king Trailok entered the Buddhist monastery. But after a stay of eight months he emerged again to resume his war with Chiengmai. Prior to his death, he began the practice of designating an heir apparent (Maha Uparat) i.e. Second King or Vice King by elevating his son, Prince Jetta with position. In 1488, the year of his death, he captured Tavoy and also extended the power of Ayutthaya kingdom to the straits of Malacca.

King Trailok was succeeded by his son Boromoraja III (1488-1491). Following the death of king Trailok, Ayutthaya became again the capital of Siam, but Jai Jetta, as Maha Uparat remained at Pitsanulok where he served as the governor of the city.

After the death of Boromoraja III, Jai Jetta succeeded him as Rama Tibodi II (1491-1529) when he was only nineteen. During his time, Thai history entered a new period of progressively expandinng international intercourse. His great innovation was to make the first treaty with a European power, Portugal. Thereafter, Portuguese mercenaries became a regular feature in Siamese history.

King Rama Tibodi II continued the policy of incessant warfare with Chiengmai from 1507-1515 and defeated Chiengmai. He also reorganized the whole military system set up by his father Trailok upon the basis of compulsory service. The kingdom

was divided into military districts and sub-districts and every man of eighteen and above was enrolled and liable for service in the army when required.

King Boromoraja IV (1529-1534), son of Rama Tibodi ascended the throne of Ayuthya and made a peace treaty with the kingdom of Chiengmai, thus establishing a formal peace between the two states for a few years in on otherwise the interminable struggle.

King Boromoraja IV died in 1534 and was succeeded by his five-year-old son Prince Ratsuda (1534). He reigned for five months and then he was succeeded by Prince P'rajai, a half-brother of King Boromoraja IV.

King P'rajai (1534-1546) began his reign by imposing what is known with a piece of legislation known as the Law for Trial by Ordeal (1536). He was unfortunate in his Chiengmai expeditions; but he defeated the Burmese largely through the aid of his Portuguese mercenaries.

Prince Keo Fa (1546-1548), son of King P'rajai became king when he was only eleven. But he was succeeded by Kun Warawongsa (1548). Soon he was executed and Prince T'ien (younger half- brother of King P'rajai) ascended the throne as the king of Siam with the title of Maha Chakrapat on 19th January, 1548. When he was only six months into his twenty-year reign Burma attacked Ayutthaya and in 1569 conquered the Thai capital. The city was plundered and all the members of royal family were taken away captive to Burma. Maha Chakrapat died in 1569 and Prince Mahin, a weaker ruler ascended the throne. But he aslo died in 1569 when he was deported to Burma as captive after Burmese army conquered Ayutthaya.

After that for the next fifteen years Ayutthaya remained a vassal state of Burma. The Burmese placed Thammaracha on the Ayutthayan throne as a puppet king to control the whole Ayutthaya. But their desire was not fulfilled after Thammaracha's son Prince Naret, who was to become King Naresuan drove off the invading Khmers and defeated the Burmese. Known as "Black Prince of Siam", he was successful in establishing Thai independence. He was also being called "Naresuan The Great" and reigned as king of Ayutthaya from 1590-1605.

Naresuen's brother, the 'white king' succeeded him with the title of Ekat'otsarat (1605-1610). He was interested in financial reform and trade, and during his brief reign of five years the Dutch trading connection with Siam was established [21].

In 1610, Etat'otsarat was succeeded by his son Int'araja who is referred to in Siamese history as Songt'am, 'the Just'. He ruled for 18 years from 1610-1628. After his death, his son Jetta, assuming the title of Prasat T'ong, the king of the golden palace ascended the throne. He ruled for 27 years. He was known as "the bottled spider" among the people.

After the death of Prasat T'ong in 1656, there was an uneasy period of a few months during which two kings came to the throne and were murdered. They were followed by Narai, a younger son of Prasat T'ong who became king and reigned from 1656 to 1688. During his period, Ayutthaya was the shining star of Southeast Asia and also a Greek adventurer named Constantine Phaulkon arrived at Ayutthaya and became the favourite adviser of king Narai. Under Phaulkon's guidance, Ayutthaya received so much profit from its foreign trade with the Europeans.

King Narai died in 1688 and after that a military leader named Phra Petraya took over the control and declared himself king. His reign inaugurated a period of virtual isolation from the west that lasted until the mid- nineteenth century.

Phra Petraya was succeeded by his son who is known in Siamese history as Phrachao Sua or King Tiger in 1703. The next king was Thai Sra (1709-1733). During their reign, Siam was beset with a most fearful famine and drought and nothing worthy of record happened.

After the death of king Thai Sra in 1733, King Boromokot (1733-1758) ascended the throne. His reign was called the golden age of Siam. During his reign the arts flourished. King also managed to avoid being drawn into any serious war. In May 1758, the king died.

During the reign of Boromoraja V (1758-1767), the last king of Ayutthaya, peace was shattered by a Burmese invasion. The invasion began in 1763 and the Burmese forces swept across North-Western Thailand. They reached the walls of Ayutthaya in

1766 and in April 1767, after a fifteen-month-long siege, the Burmese overrun Ayutthaya, destroying everything in sight [22].

When in 1767 Burmese forces captured and destroyed Ayutthaya, Pya Taksin, a provincial governor under the former regime assumed royal power and was crowned. He defeated the Burmese. To avoid further Burmese aggression, Taksin moved his capital from Ayutthaya to Thonburi, fifty miles south of Ayutthaya and across the Chaophraya River from the present-day Bangkok.

In 1782, Taksin was overthrown by one of his army leaders General Chakri, who captured the throne as King Rama I, and inaugurated the Chakri dynasty with its capital at Bangkok.

Bangkok Period (1782-Present):

Rama I (1782-1809), who was given the title of Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok was the founder of the presently ruling Chakri Dynasty. As his first acts as king, he moved the capital to Bangkok to protect his country from Burmese attack from the West. His another important task was the construction of Bangkok's famous Grand Palace and the imposition of Buddhist monasteries.

Coming to grips with the crisis of Siamese Buddhism, Rama I issued a series of ecclesiastical laws. He also invited Buddhist scholars and appointed a Commission of Judges to examine, establish, revise and edit old laws of the country. As a result, new laws such as Tra Sahm Duang or "The Law of the Three Seals" were promulgated and served the state for the next century.

Rama I is also credited with translating the ancient Indian literary epic the *The Ramayana* (the Glory of Ram). This is an example of the assimilation and mingling of Indian and Siamese cultures. Thus it can be said that the country became reunified during the reign of Rama I. Rama I and other early Chakri kings did more than "restore" Siamese civilization following the fall of Ayutthaya. They began a new historic era, one that was significantly different from that of Ayutthaya [24].

Rama II also known as Phra Puttalaytia reigned from 1809-1824. His reign was almost free from any major conflict. For that reason, he concentrated his attention on aesthetic and literary endeavours. For example, he funded the construction of the Temple of the Dawn (Wat Arun). He also established the classical dance drama tradition to create the first dramatic version of the *Ramakien*.

Pra Nahngklao reigned as Rama III from 1824-1851. During his reign, first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) occurred. So there was no immediate threat of Burmese invasion. But he saw western economic and colonial expansion as the major threat to Siam's sovereignty. He also established the Baptist mission post in Bangkok in 1833 even though he resisted commercial advances from both Britain and the United States.

King Mongkut called the "rightful heir". He ascended the throne as Rama IV (1851-1868). Among the many rulers of Thailand, he was one of the most remarkable and gifted rulers. He believed that establishing friendly diplomatic and trade contacts with the West was an important step in modernizing his country. To achieve this goal, he actively pursued relations with several European nations as well as the United States and also reversed the traditional isolationist policy of the country.

As far as development of international trade was concerned an important event in the reign of Mongkut was the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855 with Britain. Under its terms, Siam accepted extraterritoriality, the abolition of trading monopolies and transit dues, and the establishment of low ad valorem tax rates of 3 percent on imports and 5 percent on exports[24].

Mongkut effected some important social and political reforms for the uplift of the country. He constructed new canals, roads; appointed European advisers in the administration of the kingdom. He had patronized the printing press introduced by Christian missions, constructed buildings in European styles and begun the reorganization of the army.

Mongkut also hired an English Governess Anna Leonowens to teach English to his children. He abolished and reduced some harsh punishments imposed by the customary legal code. He also restricted gambling, opium-smoking and the import of

liquors. To know the values of western democracy, Mongkut adopted western technology.

Mongkut's concern for education, Western education and women's education in the palace laid the foundation for the modernization of education. "In addition, he attempted to make some social reforms by improving the condition of slaves and allowing women to have some say in their marriage choices"[25].

Mongkut was aware that his country's fate depended on learning from the West. He borrowed and adapted Western ideas and techniques in areas where security was at stake. Foreigners were employed to represent Siam's government abroad, later to be replaced by Siamese officials. A beginning was made by providing new government services- such as telegraph and mail service and paved streets- required for the conduct of international trade or for the convenience of foreigners [26].

Although several attempts were made by Mongkut to modernise the Country, Siam was still in 1868 a backward country. There were no fixed code laws; no system of general education; no proper control of revenue and finance; no postal or telegraph service. Debt slavery was not fully abolished; the opium laws were badly administered.; there was no medical organization to look after the health of the city. There was no modern army; there was no navy at all; there was no railway and almost no roads. The calendar was out of step with the rest of the world. The list could be extended. Yet, in spite of these conditions, Mongkut played a significant role in the history of Thailand.

Chulalongkorn under the title of Phra Chom Klao, was only sixteen when his father Mongkut died and he ascended the throne and became king Rama V (1868-1910). He was the first Siamese monarch to travel abroad- to the Netherlands Indies, Singapore, British Burma, India and Europe. In those days he realized the importance of Western universities and technology. In turn, he sent Thai students to study in Western nations and sent his son in England.

For education he launched a primary program for the children of the royal family and established government schools to train civil and military officers. He

established the first postal and telegraph system as well as many hospitals and railroads.

Chulalongkorn began to modernize the monarchy by bringing his image closer to earth [27]. At his coronation in 1873, he, in a moving ceremony abolished the practice of prostration in the royal presence. Like his father, Chulalongkorn abandoned royal inaccessibility and was often seen driving through the streets of his capital.

Slavery was another intolerable abuse. Chulalongkorn in 1874 struck a powerful blow at its root by decreeing that thenceforward no one could be born a slave and that the practice of selling oneself for debt was illegal[28]. Gambling was the chief cause of slavery and he closed down the public gambling houses. The judicial system was revised, the salaries of officials were adjusted, the farming out of taxes was abandoned.

Chulalongkorn reformed the collection of taxes, re-organized the revenue system, and eliminated the causes of corruption.In the 1880's, when the older members of the court began to die, he appointed western educated princes from his family who were loyal to him to fill their positions. With these princes, he created new branches of government that had "advisory, investigatory, and legislative powers"[29]. "Advised by his European counsels, he gave his government a modern bureaucratic shape. Professional schools were established for the civil service."[30]

Chulalongkorn pursued a subtle foreign policy by 'bending before the wind', accommodating foreign interests and making appropriate territorial concessions, he secured the position of Siam as a buffer between the empires of Britain and France [31].

In 1891, Chulalongkorn formed a Cabinet of 12 Ministers, nominated by him and removable at will. In 1892, he centralized the whole administrative system under the Ministry of the Interior. The whole kingdom was divided into eighteen *monthons* under the immediate control of a High Commissioner and these *monthons* were subdivided into provinces, villages and hamlets. In that way he transformed the country into a nation with a modernizing infrastructure.

Chulalongkorn died on October 23, 1910. "If by 1910 Siam was not yet a modern nation, then at least it was a modernizing nation, and securely so. In the face of foreign

threats and not a little domestic opposition, Chulalongkorn had created a new structure for the state that possessed a dynamic of its own, an orientation toward changes" [32]. The country people celebrates this day as the Thailand's most important national holiday.

King Chulalongkorn was succeeded by his oldest son, Maha Vajiravudh who became Rama VI (1910-1926). He was the first Western educated monarch in Thai history. He was a brilliant man with a great love for the arts and the theatre. He wrote or translated, many plays in such beautiful Siamese that some of his writings have become required reading in the schools. He wrote numerous essays under a pseudonym extolling "the Thai nation, the Thai people and Thai virtues"[33].

He was not as much popular as his father. He made some notable reforms for modernization of the country. In 1917, he opened Chulalongkorn University and in 1921, elementary education was made compulsory for boys and girls. In the same year, Siam adopted the Gregorian calendar. Other notable acts were the introduction of surnames, organization of Red Cross Society, the limiting of compulsory labour, the abolition of public gambling houses and of the Lottery Farm and compulsory vaccination[34]. The long-discussed law on weights and measures was promulgated; national savings banks were established; Board of Commercial Development was instituted; and a Finance Commission was appointed, which however, did little beyond studying a few problems [35].

He effected several social reforms. He began many clubs, such as the Enhancement of Knowledge Club, to promote and produce magazines and theatricals which "espoused modern valued and patterns of behaviour"[36].

During the reign of King Vajiravudh, Siam adopted a new national flag. Through several organizations which he founded and headed such as the Wild Tiger Corps (an adult paramilitary movement), the Boy Scouts, the Royal Navy League and his dramatic and literary groups, the king was a vocal advocate of cultural nationalism and its most effective propagandist[37].

From the standpoint of foreign policy Vajiravudh's reign was a great success. His coronation in December 1911 brought together a more representative gathering of European powers than had ever before met in Asia[38]. He aroused opposition to the Chinese who dominated the Thai economy, and labelled them "the Jews of the Orient"[39].

Vajiravudh died in 1925 and his younger brother, Prajadhipok ascended the throne as Rama VII (1925-1935). He had never expected to become king. During his brief reign as the last absolute monarch, Prajadhipok continued the modernization process begun by his predecessors. His reign saw many interesting developments such as the establishment of a wireless service, the preparation of the Dom Muang airport for international air service, and the foundation of the Royal Institute of Literature, Architecture and Fine Arts, with its excellent National Library and Museum. The tical was linked with gold by a new Currency Act in 1928. Public Health Laws were passed and the qualifications for the medical profession made more stringent[40]. The committee of the Privy Council was created in 1927.

In order to restore confidence in the monarchy and government, he created the Supreme Council of State, a super-cabinet comprising the top- ranked and most experienced members of the royal family.

For the time being the situation began to improve for Prajadhipok. The economy was doing better and in the interest of economy Prajadhipok continued his predecessor's policy of dismissing foreign advisers; and by reducing the number of *monthons* and *changvads,* he eliminated a number of unnecessary officials[41]. He also reduced the Civil List and Royal Household expenditures by a single stroke from nine to six million ticals.

But his reign was not a smooth one. Prajadhipok "knew many Bangkonians resented royal privilege and monopoly of high positions, and he knew of the Thai students in Europe who openly discussed alternatives like parliamentary democracy, national socialism and communism"[42]. The world-wide depression of the early 1930s created economic problems during his reign. Criticism and doubts of the government's ability to govern efficiently were raised.

Ultimately on 24th June 1932, a coup was staged by a group of "middle-level officials" consisting of new bourgeois elite, well- educated civil servants and army officers. They numbered only around one hundred. This bloodless coup transformed the Government of Thailand from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. King Prajadhipok initially accepted this change and signed Thailand's first constitution on 10th December 1932. But in 1935, he abdicated the throne in favour of his successor, Ananda (1935-1946), who was then only a boy and living abroad in Switzerland. He recognized that he could no longer play an active role in shaping the Siam's future.

After Ananda, Prince Bhumibol ascended the throne in 1946 and has been there ever since.

Although nominally a constitutional monarchy after 1932, Thailand was ruled by a series of military governments interspersed with brief periods of democracy. From 1932 to 1973 Thai politics was dominated by a military and bureaucratic elite. The military has attempted several coups since 1932. Scholars described Thai politics as a "vicious circle": a constitution was promulgated and an election held, but a government crisis prompts intervention by the military, which then promises a new constitution[43].

Thailand's first step toward democracy occurred in 1973, when a student led uprising overthrew a military dictatorship. The period of 1973-1976 was the most liberal and radical one in which popular movements and radical ideologies were influential in politics. The masses then participated in politics for the first time as workers and farmers formed groups to demand their rights.

In 1976, the generals staged another coup which brought them back to the centre of the political system. And so the democratic experiment that began in 1973 with great promise- but no sufficient foundation or infrastructure- came to a violent end just three years later.

Thailand entered into a period of semi-democracy during the reign of General Prem Tinsulanonda (1979-1987). In this time, the economy grew in "an unprecedented manner, reaching double digit growth rate at the end of the 1980s. Also unprecedented was its integration into global trade, investment communication and informational

system." The level of education rose at an unprecedented rate and the number of people with higher education in the 1980's was up to 15 percent from 2percent in the 1960s[44].

The clearest sign of transition to democracy was the rise to power of Chatichai Choonhavan, the leader of the Thai Nation Party- the first elected member of parliament to become Prime Minister since 1976. But Chatichai's government was not fully applauded and was seen to be highly corrupt.

On February 23, 1991, with the King's support, a coup was carried out by a military junta- called the National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC)- led by General Suchinda which ended Chatichai's three-year term.

Shortly afterward, the military appointed a respected civilian, Anand Panyarachun, to the position of prime minister of the interim government. They made promises reassuring the public they would not be in power for long. They scheduled elections to take place in the near future.

Elections were held in March 1992 and Suchinda sought the prime ministership. But he stayed in office for only 48 days, while anti- military demonstrations took place in May 1992. The public was outraged by the military's blatant attempt to stay in power despite their earlier promises and Suchinda's appointment as prime minister.

The composition of demonstrators was much different than that of the student-led protests of 1973: "Whereas the anti-military movement of the early 1970's was led by and consisted of students and the more radical elements of Thai society, the anti-Suchinda movement was very broad based both in leadership and rank-in-file participation. Prominent among the leaders were elected politicians, former bureaucrats and military officers, NGO leaders and 1970's vintage student activists, many of whom were now involved in successful careers in the private sector"[45].

The demonstrators prevailed and drove Suchinda from office. Their victory was mainly due to support from King Bhumibol Adulyadej and modern technology (copiers, fax machines, e-mail, and cellular phones), which kept the demonstrators aware of their

progress in spite of the government's censorship of the press[46]. It was the first mass demonstration which the press dubbed "the mobile phone mob".

Anand Panyarachun was reappointed to the position of Prime Minister of the interim government until elections could be held. After the September 1992 elections, Chuan Leekpai, the leader of the Democratic party, mobilized a coalition of parties to become prime minister. He set forth the goal of democratizing the political system. He was the first prime minister who could truly claim a humble origin, provincial background, and no experience in the military or bureaucracy.

In 1995, an election was held and can be interpreted as a further evolutionary step toward democratic government in Thailand, because the 1995 election produced Thailand's first transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another in 20 years. After the election Banharn Silapa- Archa became the Prime minister.

At the end of 1996, Banharn was replaced by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudg. In his reign, the country's economic position worsened, culminating in the devaluation of the Thai baht. The baht fell from around 25 to the dollar, a level it had retained for decades, to 56 to the dollar by the following year.

Chavalit was ousted from power and Chuan Leekpai became the prime minister in November 1997. Chuan formed a coalition government based on a prudent economic management and institution of political reforms. The most significant achievement was the adoption of a new constitution in 1997.

The 1997 constitution- the so-called people's constitution was the first real attempt to establish meaningful constitutional authority. It initiated some reforms that could lead to a more accountable and democratic government. There is now a fully elected legislature, comprising a Senate and a House of Representatives, based on universal and compulsory suffrage for both sexes at 18 years of age.

In January 2001, the billionaire communications magnate Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thai) party. Thaksin won a sweeping electoral triumph and became the prime minister of Thailand. "The 6 January 2001 elections completely reshaped the political landscape in Thailand: on 9 February 2001, 339 out of the 500

MP's in the lower house voted for Thaksin to become prime minister. This was an unprecedented parliamentary majority."[47]. In the 2005 general election, Thaksin was re-elected by an even greater majority, sweeping 377 out of 500 parliamentary seats.

After Thaksin's second term in office as prime minister began, allegations of corruption emerged against his government. Peaceful anti-government mass demonstrations began, and thousands marched in the streets to demand Thaksin's resignation. Prime minister dissolved the Parliament and called for a snap election in April 2006. Elections were held and the main opposition party that is People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) boycotted the polls. The judiciary annulled the results of the elections and rescheduled new elections for September 2006.

Before the elections could be held, a military group led by General Sonthi, with the consent of the King, staged a coup on September 19, 2006. The military group named itself the "Administrative Reform Group under the Democratic System with the King as the Head of State" to overthrew the caretaker government of Thaksin Shinawatra, abrogated the constitution, banned political assemblies and authorized censorship. Soon thereafter, the coup group promulgated an interim constitution and appointed Surayud Chulanont as interim prime minister. The 2006 coup came more than 15 years after the military had last played such an overt political and interventionist role in 1991[48].

In a national referendum on August 19 2007, a majority of Thai   voters approved a new constitution drafted by an assembly appointed by the coup leaders. Elections were held under the provisions of new 2007 constitution on 23 December 2007, after a military appointed tribunal outlawed the Thai Rak Thai party of Thaksin and banned TRT executives from contesting elections for five years.

The interim Government held elections in December 2007. The People's Power Party (PPP), a TRT proxy party won the December 2007 election and took 233 seats in the 480 seat house. PPP leader Samak Sundaravej formed a coalition government and formally took office as Prime Minister on February 6, 2008.

The anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in May 2008 began street demonstrations against the new government, eventually occupying the Prime Minister's office in August and Bangkok's two international airports in November. The PAD ended their protests in early December 2008 following a court ruling that dissolved the ruling PPP and two other coalition parties for election violations. The Democrat Party then formed a new coalition government and Abhisit Wetchachiwa became prime minister.

In October 2008 Thaksin went into voluntary exile to avoid imprisonment for a corruption conviction, and has since agitated his followers from abroad. Thaksin supporters reorganized themselves into the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and rioted in April 2009, shutting down an ASEAN meeting in Phuket, and in early 2010 protested a court verdict confiscating most of Thaksin's wealth. Since January 2004, thousands have been killed as separatists in Thailand's southern ethnic Malay-Muslim provinces increased the violence associated with their cause.

Economy of Thailand:

The economy of Thailand is an emerging economy which is highly export-dependent, with exports of goods and services accounting for more than two-thirds of its gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand is the world's top exporter of rice and top producer of natural rubber.

Thailand is the second largest economy in the Southeast after Indonesia. Despite this, Thailand ranks midway in terms of wealth distribution in Southeast Asia as it is the fourth richest nation according to GDP per capita, after Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia. It functions as an anchor economy for the neighbouring developing economies of Laos, Burma and Cambodia.

During the past century, the economy of Thailand has changed from a system of largely self-sufficient production to a system of international trade based on rice- grain surplus, supplemented by forest products, rubber and tin. From the mid-19th century onward, the government of Thailand gave in to the pressure of events and ended the

policy of restricted commercial intercourse with the rest of the world. As a result of this, the Bowring Treaty was signed between Thailand and Great Britain in 1855, the first of a number of commercial treaties with Western powers[49]. This event marked the opening of the Thai economy to the world.

From the early 20th century to the end of the World War II, Siam's economy gradually became globalized. But this emerging economy suffered a serious set-back from the Great Depression of 1930s. From then, (the period from 1945-1955), the Thai economy slid into a downswing. During this time, a multiple-exchange rate system was introduced amid fiscal problems, and the kingdom experienced a shortage of consumer goods. The then Thai government led by Phibun Songkram established many state enterprises.

Phibul also made important changes in the country's fiscal policies, including the scrapping of the multiple- exchange-rate system in favour of a fixed- unified system which was in use until 1984. In his time, Thailand also received economic aid.

During the Sarit era, the government's economic functions were redefined. Rather than expanding state enterprises which were wasteful and inefficient, government resources were concentrated on the task of developing public infrastructure for the use of private enterprise. This change of policy coincided, significantly, with a change in patronage methods and patrons. As Silcock explains: "Sarit was well disposed toward the condemnation of government enterprises. Unlike Phibun (whom Sarit replaced), he did not base his power on patronage within the system of government enterprise, but had extensive private interests in which he used his political power to help his friends"[50].

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, rising interest rates, declining demand and prices for Thai exports, decreasing US investment, budget deficits, inflation and rising petroleum prices had caused a serious economic slump.

From 1980s to mid- 1990s, we have seen some growth in Thailand's economy. In that period, General Prem Tinsulananda's government (in power from 1980-1988) developed a continuity in policies and programs that inspired the confidence of the

private sector in both the government and the economy. This led to a greater willingness to invest in the growing manufacturing industry and support further expansion of export activities.

The government also replaced the country's fixed exchange rate with a "multiple currency basket peg system" in which the US dollar bore 80 percent of the weight. Also the country's improved foreign trade and influx of foreign direct investment (mainly from Japan) triggered an economic boom from 1987-1996. As a result, Thailand's annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) averaged on astounding 9.8 percent from 1987-1995, and it remains impressive[51].

The nation's economic success continued and diversified. Manufacturing contributed 21 percent of the country's gross domestic product, up from 16 percent in 1970. In that same period, agriculture's share declined from 30 percent to 22 percent. A decline in interest rates from over 14 percent in 1985 to 7.25 percent in 1987 led to a rise in construction projects. Application for foreign investment tripled compared to the previous year, while exports increased 20 percent[52].

Also in 1981, a landmark policy was implemented which facilitated the formation of the Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee on Economic Problems that enabled businessmen to influence public policy through their associations. This, in turn, led to an increased participation of the private sector in the development of state enterprises. But this economic development collapsed as a result of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

Thailand's economy was flagging, unemployment went up nearly threefold and foreign debt was increased. Due to low international reserves, the government had to accept a loan from the International Monetary Fund.

Thailand's recovery from the 1997-98 financial crisis largely depended on external demand from the US and other foreign markets. The administration of former prime minister Thaksin (from 2001-2006) evolved a "dual track" economic policy that combined domestic stimulus programs with Thailand's traditional promotion of open markets and foreign investment. During Thaksin's first term as prime minister,

Thailand's economy regained momentum and the country paid its IMF debt by July 2003 (two years ahead of schedule).

Also in 2000, the State Enterprise Labour Relations Act (SELRA) was passed, giving public sector employees similar rights to those of private sector workers, including the right to unionize.

During Thaksin's second term, Thailand's economic expansion averaged 4.5 percent to 5.0 percent of real GDP growth, due to domestic political uncertainty, rising violence in Thailand's four Southernmost provinces, and repercussions of the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004.

As a result, from a healthy 6.1 percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2004, initial projections were revised downward to roughly 3.3 percent. Current accounts show a $6.2 billion deficit for the first half year in 2005, in contrast with a 2004 surplus of $7.1 billion, causing the government to postpone procurement for several large projects, including the double-track project of the State Railway of Thailand and even those of the Thai Airways and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand. The Central Bank has responded by raising its key lending rate from 1.25 percent to 2.75 percent[53].

After the Coup of 2006, the economy slowed down due to inflationary pressures stemming mainly from the high price of oil. According to the Bank of Thailand Statistics, the inflation rate in the first quarter reached 8.7 percent, rising to 6.0 percent in the second quarter[54].

In order to stimulate the sluggish economy, government officials increased spending in the 2007 fiscal budget. The Royal Thai Government welcomes foreign investment and the investors who are willing to meet certain requirements can apply for special investment privileges through the Board of Investment. The Interim Thai government introduced amendments to the Foreign Business Act in 2007 which would have further restricted non-Thais from owing or controlling businesses operating in the Thai services sector.

Thailand is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Cairns Group of Agricultural Exporters. Thailand is part of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and started free trade negotiations with Japan in February 2004, and an in-principle agreement was reached in September 2005.

Tourism contributes significantly to the Thai economy. Tourist arrivals which declined in 2005 due to the Tsunami catastrophe, recovered strongly in 2006.

Because of the increased openness of the Thai economy and its heavy dependence on imported oil, Thailand will continue to face economic problems such as balance of payment squeezes, serious exchange rate fluctuations, accelerating inflation, and increased reliance on foreign borrowing[55]. So future performance depends on continued reform of the financial sector, corporate debt restructuring, attracting foreign investment and increasing exports.

Thailand's Foreign Affairs:

Thailand's foreign policy has traditionally been flexible which has contributed to Thai political stability by assuring conciliatory relations with dominant nations in the area. This happened because throughout their history, the Thais have "bent with the wind"; that is, they have kept their options open and made accommodations as they assessed the power configurations that surrounded them.

Thailand was one of ASEAN's five original members (founded in 1967). It is also a member of other ASEAN- centred regional forums including the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum.

Thailand served as APEC host in 2003, is a member of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). It participated in other regional organizations including the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe where it enjoys observer and partner status respectively.

Thailand continues to take an active role on the international stage. When East Timor gained independence from Indonesia, Thailand for the first time in its history,

contributed troops to the international peacekeeping effort. It joined in the Non-Aligned Movement(NAM) in 1993.

In order to ensure security, increase trade and safeguard independence, Thailand began to develop close ties not only with the major powers such as the United States, Japan, Soviet Union but also with other ASEAN members such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Vietnam. But this re-orientation is especially wrenching given the almost total reliance Thailand had placed on the US in the past several decades[56].

Thailand's alliance with the US was formalised in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) agreement of 1954. Later this relationship reaffirmed by the Rusk- Thanat Statement (named after then Minister of Foreign Affairs Thanat Khanon) of 1962 in which the US declared that she regarded "the preservation of the independence and integrity of Thailand as vital to the national interest of the US and to world peace". The course of Thai-US relations in the subsequent years saw even further commitment of Thai leaders to an almost intractable position of giving full support to American politics in Indo- China[57].

Thailand has a defense treaty with the US, and its annual Cobra Gold Joint Military Exercise is the largest of its kind involving US forces in Asia[58]. Another form of US-Thai relations has been the lease to the US of a number of air-bases in Thailand, numbering seven in all, for use against North Vietnam and Laos. In return for this allegiance, the Thai ruling elite became the beneficiary of American generosity: the Thai government has been receiving annual benefits averaging US $63 million in military aid and about US $200 million in military spending through the maintenance of bases and the keeping of American troops in Thailand[59].

The other important aspect of Thai-US relations has been the impact of the American presence on the Thai economy. Altogether, from 1950-1975, the US provided some $650M for its economic development program in Thailand[60]. Many Thai students from the elite segments of Thai society study in the US and Thai soldiers train there under a large military program.

During 1972, the principal issue of Thai foreign policy was the relationship with China. In September 1972 at the invitation of the Chinese government, a Thai Ping-Pong team went to China. It was led by police Lt. General Chempol Lohachala and had its advisor, Mr prasit Karn- Chanawat, Deputy Director of Economics, Finance and Industry of the National Executive Council. Prasit met with Chau-En-Lai and other Chinese leaders, but apparently little was achieved. No trade announcements emerged, although this was one of the stated purposes of the meeting.

Also on the question of the Chinese role in Thailand's insurgency, the Chinese Prime Minister was ambivalent, commenting that China's policy was not to interfere in the internal affairs of other states but that she would however, continue to support legitimate People's liberation movements in the world[61].

In late 1973, Thailand agreed to establish a satellite link with China for telegraph and telephone services. This was scheduled to become operational in September 1973. In December 1974, the Thai government lifted a fifteen- year ban on trade with China. In march 1975, a month before Saigon fell, Thailand announced its decision to recognize and normalize diplomatic relations with China.

Relations with Laos, bound to Thailand by a shared history, religion, ethnicity, culture and language were tense. In November 1975, Thailand closed the frontier with Laos. This action prevented oil, food and other essential goods from reaching Laos through Thai territory, the historical transit route to the landlocked country. Tension eased somewhat after January 1976, when the border was re-opened following Thai recognition of the new Laotian regime.

The withdrawl of all American troops from Thailand by July 1976 paved the way for the Thai-Vietnamese agreement in August on normalizing relations. In January 1978, Bangkok and Hanoi signed an accord on trade, economic and technical co-operation, agreeing also to exchange ambassadors, re-open aviation links, resolve all problems through negotiations and consult on the question of delimiting sea boundaries.

Thailand's relations with her other regional neighbours continued to be cordial. Thailand has now a mutual agreement with Singapore under which the Republic will

offer military equipment in exchange for guerrilla training facilities. Also Malaysia and Thailand also continue to co-operate over their common border problems. But relations with Burma are complicated by Burmese harassment of Thai fishermen, smuggling and the question of Burmese revolutionary exiles in Thailand.

During the 1980s, the primary concern of Thailand's foreign policy was to normalize relations with Cambodia and Laos- relations that were complicated by the Vietnamese military presence in these countries.

Despite some friction over trade issues, Thai relations with the US were very close, especially from 1979 onwards. Washington steadily increased its security assistance to Thailand and also took part in a series of annual bilateral military exercises.

United States was also a major trading partner and by 1985 had become the largest and most important export market for Thai goods. Bilateral trade reached $18 billion in 1991, more than double the 1990 figure. When President Bill Clinton visited Thailand in November 1996 – the first visit by a US President in 27 years – he said the two countries "share a common vision: the dreams of an Asia-Pacific region where economic growth and democratic ideals are advancing steadily and reinforcing one another"[62].

Thailand remains a trafficking route- the intersection of Burma, Laos and Thailand- to both the domestic Thai and international markets. The US and Thailand work closely together and with the UN on a broad range of programs to halt illicit drug trafficking and other criminal activities, such as trafficking in persons. The US supports the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok, which provides counter-narcotics and anti-crime capacity- building programs to law enforcement and judicial officials from a number of regional countries.

Relations between Thailand and China improved steadily in the 1980s. In 1985, a telephone hotline was established between Thailand and China. Cordiality in Thai-Chinese relations was evident in a military assistance agreement signed in Beijing in

May 1987. This agreement allowed Thailand to purchase on concessional terms, Chinese tank, antiaircraft guns, missiles, ammunition, and armoured personnel carriers

In 1987, a major foreign policy goal for Thailand was the restoration of its traditionally cordial ties with Laos, strained since 1975, when Bangkok came to perceive Laos as a client state of Vietnam.

The Thaksin government's approach to foreign affairs offered little more promise than its economic policies. He himself visited Burma in June. He also took the lead in promoting a high- profile meeting of counter-drugs officials from Thailand, Laos, Burma and China in Beijing in August. His government offered to extend technical assistance to the Burmese authorities in combating the drug trade[63].

New agreements were reached between China and Thailand in 2005, opening up fresh avenues of trade and investment between the two nations. Border crossing with Laos has been made easier through talks on defining the border[64].

Thus the flexibility in Thai foreign policy has enabled the country to avoid conquest or colonization by foreign powers. It is important to keep in mind that, except for the Philippines, Thailand is the freest country in Southeast Asia[65].

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Democratic Experiments in Thailand

Introduction:

The democratization process in the third world countries did not generally achieve desired success. These countries lacked most of the preconditions of democracy such as material prosperity, urbanization, cultures that encouraged tolerance and participation, and political institutions that had developed accepted ways of resolving conflicts. Therefore, they were much less likely to be able to establish a maintainable democratic system. The disappointing results of the democratization effort in these third world countries are often attributed to some conditions that make it difficult for democracy to survive and flourish. Thailand is no exception where we see democratic process as an interlude between military regimes. Before discussing the democratic experiments in Thailand, we need to take a glance at the meanings of democracy.

Defining Democracy:

The word democracy originally derived from the Greek terms 'Demo' and 'cracy' which mean 'the people' and 'to rule' respectively. Therefore, democracy signifies the rule of the people. However, the meaning of democracy is not so simple. This term is all used too frequently but it is a concept still misunderstood and misused in a time when totalitarian regimes and military dictatorships alike have attempted to claim popular support by pinning democratic labels upon themselves.

Yet the power of the democratic idea has also called forth some of history's most profound and moving expressions of human will and intellect from Pericles (c495-429 BC) in ancient Athens to Vaclav Haval (b1936) in the modern Czech Republic, from Thomas Jefferson's (1743-1865) Declaration of Independence in 1776 to Andrei Sakarovs's last speeches in 1989. In the phrase of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), democracy is a government 'of the people, by the people and for the people'.

Aristotle defined democracy as 'rule of many'[1]. John Seeley defined it as 'a government in which everyone has a share'[2]. To Dicey 'it is a form of government in which the governing body is a comparatively large fraction of the entire nation'[3].

S.M Lipset has defined democracy in a complex society "as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office"[4].

Robert A Dahl has discussed about the conceptualization of democracy in many of his studies. According to him, "a key characteristic of democracy is the continuing responsibilities of the government to the preferences of citizens, considered as political equals". There are two somewhat different theoretical dimensions of democratization-public contestation and the right to participate.

Dahl also assumes that in the real world it is possible for any political system to achieve the ideal of democracy, but the system lying at the upper right corner of the space bounded by these two dimensions can be regarded as polyarchies. He uses the term polyarchy as an alternative to democracy because he thinks that it is important to maintain the distinction between democracy as an ideal system and the institutional arrangements that have come to be regarded as a kind of imperfect approximation of an idea.

J. Ronald Pennock, however, distinguishes ideal and procedural or operational definitions of democracy and prefers a procedural definition, according to which a democracy is rule by the people where 'the people' includes all adult citizens and 'rule' mean that "public policies are determined either directly by vote of the electorate or indirectly by officials freely elected at reasonably frequent intervals and by a process by which each voter who chooses to vote counts equally ('one man, one vote') and which a plurality is determinative".

Democracy has got special attention of the political scientists as a political system. Larry Diamond, Juan J Linz and S M Lipset use the term 'democracy' to signify political system. They added the third dimensions of civil and political freedom to Dahl's two dimensions of competition and political participation. George Sorensen uses a similar definition of democracy. According to his formulation, the core of political democracy has three dimensions: competition, participation and civil and political liberties[5].

Raymond Duncan Gastil argues that freedom is the most essential characteristic of democracy. Therefore, the level of democracy varies according to the extent of political rights and civil liberties[6]. Kenneth A Bollen also thinks that political rights and liberties constitute two crucial dimensions of political democracy[7].

Axel Hadenius formulates political democracy at the national level as follows "public policy is governed by the freely expressed will of the people whereby all individuals are to be treated as equals. His basic definition of democracy includes three principles of democracy: a general principle of popular sovereignty, a principle of freedom and a principle of equality. He emphasizes that "it only makes sense to speak of democracy as a model of democracy".

Joseph Schumpeter, however, has defined democracy as a system "for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people's vote".

System approach of democracy has been further extended by Philippe C Schmitter and Terry L. Karl. They defined democracy as "a system of governance in which rules are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives". Democracy therefore, can be regarded as a system of governance that involves the widest participation either through elections or through the administration of the accepted or adopted policies[8].

As a form of government, democracy has been defined as a legitimate one by some political scientists. In this connection David Held's argument is quite relevant. He says that democracy appears to legitimate modern political life: rule making and law enforcement seen justified and appropriate when they are 'democratic'. From ancient Greece to the present day the majority of political thinkers have been highly critical of the theory and practice of democracy[9].

The definitions given by most of the scholars on democracy boils down to the fact that people's participation, competition, civil and political liberties are the key ingredients in the successful functioning of democracy.

A general commitment to democracy is a very recent phenomenon. The history of twentieth century Europe alone makes it clear that democracy is a remarkably difficult form of government to create and sustain: Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism came very close to eradicating it altogether. Democracy has evolved through intensive social struggles and is frequently sacrificed in such struggles. In Thailand also, military governments' authoritarian character and their attempted coups destroyed the country's democratic experiments. Let us examine the various periodic democratic experiments in Thailand chronologically.

Democratic Experiments in Thailand:

Thailand's first democratic experiment occurred in 1932 when the country's 700 years old absolute monarchy ended in a coup staged by military officers and civil servants, including Thai intellectuals who were educated abroad and imbued with the concept of western democracy. After the *coup d' etat,* June of 24th 1932, the government became a constitutional monarchy. An ostensibly genuine parliament was established. It was based on the principle of popular representation and given legal authority to legislate and rule. According to the constitution, authority was vested in the Monarch, the People's Assembly, the Executive State Council, and the Courts of Law[10].

The new state council accepted as its platform the six- point statement of the People's Party (Coup group) in its original statement:

1. The freedom and equality of the people in politics, in the law courts, and in business, must be maintained.
2. Peace and quiet, with no harm to anyone, must be assured.
3. A national economic policy must be drawn up to provide remunerative work for everyone.
4. Equal privilege for everyone must be guaranteed. No one group shall enjoy special privilege at the expense of others.
5. The people shall have freedom and liberty except in those cases where freedom and liberty disagree with the above four points.
6. The people must be given the most complete education possible.[11]

The provisional constitution promulgated three days after the coup imposed specific limits on the power of the king. He had no veto on the functioning of the Assembly, and was liable to trial by the Assembly. The "permanent" constitution drafted over the next six months barred all core members of the royal family (King's grandsons upwards) from the membership of the Assembly or the government[12]. Ultimately on 10th December 1932, His Majesty King Prajadhipok (1925-1935) signed Thailand's first constitution.

The constitution provided for administrative, legislative and judicial departments of government. The supreme state council was to consist of twenty members called *rathamontri,* or state councillors, some of whom were to be in charge of the various ministries. Others members were to be without portfolio.

After the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, political activism expanded considerably. The common people for the first time became vocal in governmental matters that concerned themselves. They now have a medium of expression such as they have never had before[13]. The first prime minister, that is, Phraya Mano was a civilian chosen, it was reported, in preference to the candidate of the military. The first constitution was written by a civilian and the committee for drafting the permanent constitution was mainly civilian[14].

Thus the combined impact of the 1932 overthrow of the monarchy and the founding of a parliament and constitution represented the establishment of a new government, a new regime and the embedding of a new state. Not only was the absolutist political regime and its highly personalised government-dominated by royal relatives and the nobility-thrown out, but the development of a new social, ideological, economic and political logic of power, best described as capitalist, was enhanced[15].

After Mano, the government was formed by Phahon between 1933 to 1938. His government's primary concern was to implement the aims of the 1932 Revolution. He steered the government along a course that was moderate and progressive. The government made progress in social welfare, in education and public health, and in economic affairs. Universal compulsory primary education was extended throughout the kingdom[16].

Thailand's first general election of the people's representatives to the assembly and another indirect election were held respectively in 1933 and in 1937. These elections gave the assembly a half-elected membership, maintaining the pressure on the government to accomplish its liberal program and to maintain its democratic ideals. Phahon's period was also called a period of stabilization.

Phahon's government finally fell in December 1938, when the elected members of the assembly carried out a vote of no confidence. Luang Phibun Songkhram succeeded Phahon as prime minister.

Phibun's first government, which ran from the end of 1938 to mid-1944, was a period thoroughly shaped by his power and personality, much as absolute kings had done a generation earlier[17]. Despite the authoritarian and fascist inclinations of the first Phibun period, parliament functioned. In 1944, parliament forced Phibun to resign and installed a government led by a civilian politician, Khuang Aphaiwong (August 1944- to August 1945).

The overthrow of Phibun's government marked the beginning of a period during which national assembly began to play a more important role in the political process. This period lasted as long as Pridi Panomyong remained the dominant figure in Thai politics. During this period, Pridi and other Thai civilian leaders continued the democratization effort that had started after the 1932 Revolution.

When Pridi became prime minister (March 1946 to August 1946), a constitution, more liberal than ever before was introduced. The constitution of 1946 provided for a bicameral legislature. The lower house was called House of People's Representatives and was to be fully elected. The upper house was to be elected indirectly by an electoral college chosen especially for this purpose.

Elections were held accordingly and by March 1946 a parliamentary democracy was restored. After elections in August 1946, Pridi's allies dominated both houses of Parliament. A new era of democratic growth and liberalism in politics was thus inaugurated.

This new constitution made political parties legal for the first time. As a result, there were a number of such parties which were in fact only parliamentary groups, including the Progressive Party led by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj; the Constitution Front and the Cooperation Party, both of which supported the leadership of Pridi; and the Democrat Party under the leadership of Khuang Aphaiwong. Their appearance may be taken as evidence of the important role that parliamentary activity was playing during this period [18]. Pridi was forced from office in the aftermath of the unexplained, sudden death by gunshot of King Ananda on 9th June 1946, an event for which public opinion held him accountable[19].

But the 1947 coup ended the country's democratic experiment. Then the promoters of the coup established a nominally independent civil government under Khuang. They explained that they had seized power to 'uphold the honour of the army which has been unjustly treated', to resolve the question of the royal 'assassination plot', 'to rid the country once and for all of vestiges of communism', to restore efficient administration, and to install a government 'which will respect the principles of Nation, Religion and King'[20].

From 1947 to 1973, Thai politics was dominated by the military, with a few brief intervals of electoral politics between 1949 and 1951 under the royalist constitution that gave power to the privy council. The 1949 constitution provided for a new form of parliament. It was a bicameral assembly of which the lower house was elected by universal adult franchise. Members of the upper house were appointed by the king upon the countersignature of the president of his Privy Council, whom he appointed with the countersignature of the president of the lower house of parliament. The military leaders were thrown into a position of dependence upon elected members of parliament[21].

Ultimately the army and police, frustrated by the largely verbal activities of the elected deputies, staged a "silent coup" (November 1951): the 1949 constitution was abolished, parliament dissolved, and a half-nominated Assembly (as in 1932) restored[22].

Again during his second government, Phibun visited the United States and Britain where he was influenced by western democracy. After his return in mid-1955,

his government initiated a series of reform measures designed to broaden the area of public political participation and to secure greater popular support for official policies.

The reform program, which was called *Prachathipatai* (democratization), resulted in the enactment of laws providing for the formation of political parties, the liberalization of electoral laws to permit direct popular election, the decentralization of power to local governments and the institution of regular press conference by the prime minister. The democratization program was apparently Phibun's effort to counter the increasing strength of the army and the police, and it was undertaken in anticipation of the approaching elections in February 1957[23]. Thus it was announced that a new era of democracy had arrived.

The establishment of democracy ushered in one of the most colourful and active periods in Thai politics. Political parties were registered numbering more than 25. But the most important achievement was the sudden and violent outburst of public discussion. After years of repression the public of Bangkok was given carte blanche to discuss politics[24].

The September 1957 Coup led by Sarit Thanarat again halted the country's democratic experiment. As a result, the constitution was suspended, parliament was dissolved, political parties and unions were outlawed. Thus the 1957 coup led to dictatorship under Sarit Thanarat, Yhanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Charusathian from 1957 to 1973 before the student uprising. In between, a constitution was promulgated in 1968, ending ten years of absolute monarchy providing for an elected lower house of parliament. Political activity was legalized. Elections were held in early 1969 that initiated a brief period of democratic relaxation before Thanom again stepped in to reinstate military rule in late 1971.

In November 1971, the government announced the failure of its democratic experiment; martial law was declared, the legislature was closed, the parties were disbanded, and a military junta exercised complete control over the country. Over the next few years, Thailand experienced democracy of the most thoroughgoing sort, with an orgy of political parties, demonstrations, strikes, debates, activism, and turmoil. All shades of political commitment were expressed, from communism to monarchism.

Democratic experiment in Thailand got a significant success in October 1973 when student uprising succeeded in transforming the military dictatorship into direct democracy (14th October 1973). The student revolt was triggered on October 6, 1973, by the arrest of thirteen professors, students and politicians handing out leaflets demanding the speedy promulgation of a new democratic constitution, thereby violating the official ban on political activities.

To protest this action, "massive demonstration involving between 200,000 and 500,000 persons, including university students, secondary and technical school students, and many young members of the middle class, demanded the release of the critics and the promulgation of the constitution"[25]. Police opened fire and soon army tanks rolled, killing a hundred persons in a single day, October 14, 1973[26]. In an article written by David Morrell titled "Political Conflict in Thailand," the events are outlined:

"The number of protestors in Bangkok and other major cities swelled to nearly 100,000 as the atmosphere of tension and fear turned to violence. Antiriot police and soldiers turned on protestors, first with tear gas and within a matter of hours, with hand grenades and rifles. By October 14th.nearly a hundred demonstrators were dead, and many hundreds had been injured"[27].

The King of Thailand supported the demonstrators and ordered generals Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Charusathian and Colonel Narong Kittikachorn to leave the country. Bereft of the support of the King, Thanom and his counterpart were forced to resign and flee the country into exile. With that a quarter century of almost uninterrupted army rule came to an end. In the euphoric atmosphere of the time, students rejoiced over the "power to the people", expecting the new government to perform wonders through a clean, honest administration dedicated to the well-being of the common people instead of merely serving the interests of the bureaucratic- military elite [28].

After the 1973 revolution, certain changes took place which unveiled the actual democratic experiment taking place in Thailand. King Phumipol Adunyadet, whose prestige was greatly enhanced by the October incident, appointed Thailand's first civilian government since the immediate post- World War II era. Sanya Thamasak, the

rector of Thammasat University, former Chief Justice, and close adviser to the King as a Privy Councillor, became Prime Minister [29]. The new government began work on a constitution and elections were scheduled for 1975.

Under Sanya, the National Assembly passed one law that specifically earmarked money for the welfare of farmers and another that established rent controls [30]. The Sanya government established a debt arbitration committee to prevent the farmers from being exploited, and passed a land reform legislation.

Thailand's ninth constitution was promulgated in October 1974 providing two chambers with the Senate appointed by the King and an elected House of Representatives. It barred serving civil or military officials from sitting in either house. It gave more power to the elected representatives and less to appointed senators. It required at least half of the Cabinet to be chosen from the MPs.

The election, Thailand's eleventh since the 1932 revolution, took place in January 26, 1975. Forty-two different political parties fielded candidates, only twenty-two of which were able to place at least one member in the lower house. No one party secured a majority of the 269 seats in the Assembly. The Democrat Party won the most seats (72), giving that party's leader, Seni Pramoj, the opportunity to form the new government. Seni was finally able to put together an unstable coalition government with support from the leftist parties, the Social Action Party, and the opportunistic Social Agrarian Party. Even with this support, and that of three members of minor parties, the Seni government held 133 out of the 269 seats in parliament [31].

But Seni's minority-supported coalition government lasted only eight days. In order to sustain the parliamentary system of government, Kukrit Pramoj, Seni's brother and head of the Social Action Party was able to form a new government with the support of the right-wing parties. Kukrit won a vote of confidence (140 to 124) on March 19, 1975, with Democrat, Social Agrarian, socialist, and New Force parties voting in opposition[32].

Kukrit Pramoj, who presented his government's policies to the National Assembly for a vote of confidence in March 1975, included a $125 million plan to

allocate funds to some 5,000 commune councils (*sapa tambon*) for development projects[33]. He also attempted to assist the farmers by agreeing to establish agricultural courts and to siphon off more credit and development funds to the rural areas[34].

The April 1976 election for 279 seats in the National Assembly eliminated the leftist parties, defeated Kukrit Pramoj and returned traditionalists-conservatives in large numbers, bringing in a shaky, diffident government under Seni Pramoj.

In the aftermath of 1973 student uprising, several new interest groups had emerged, and the politicians who were more accountable to the people took up high positions of government. Between 1973 and 1976, student activism as well as other forms of protest against the government of the day gained momentum and became a significant means for political change in Thailand. Workers, farmers, fishermen, teachers and numerous other grass roots organizations began to mobilize and press demands upon the fragile civilian governments of Sanya, Seni Pramoj (1975) and Kukrit Pramoj (1975-1976)[35].

But the experiment in constitutional democracy lasted only three years and during this period there were four governments, one of them lasting barely a week. Also in mid-1975, a variety of new right-wing groups emerged, such as Red Gaurs, Nawaphon (new resolve) and Village Scouts. Red Gaurs (*krating daeng*) was probably the one with the most clearly defined military backing[36]. The Nawaphon operated at the national, provincial and district levels with the clandestine collaboration of bureaucrats and army and police officials, including the anti-Communist Internal Security Operations Command[37]. Village Scouts had been founded in 1971 by the Border Patrol Police with the support of the Ministry of Interior as a government sponsored program to mobilize villagers in security-sensitive areas in support of the state and against communism[38].

These rightist organizations mobilized on a scale never seen before[39]. Their motto was to save the nation, religion, and king, the three acknowledged pillars of Thai society, from total ruin by the student Communists. With this "ideology" they were able to "convince many Thais that the student-farmer-labor movement was indeed dedicated to destruction of the institutions and values they held dear"[40]. Thus rather

than a society moving towards democracy, there was growing polarization of right and left, causing instability and fear.

"People in Bangkok were afraid. They recalled the haunting refrain that a nation with problems cannot afford democracy. No, they did not want Praphas and Thanom back; but yes, the present unstable situation was unacceptable"[41].

Ultimately, the October 1976 coup ended Thailand's democratic experiment of three years. The top military coup leaders formed a "National Administrative Reform Council" that appointed the Thanin government. The 1974 constitution was abrogated, political parties were banned, martial law was declared. Several students were arrested while others fled to join the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the hills.

Although democracy was crushed, the country's democratic experiment continued. The military was gradually subordinated, even when a general or former general ruled. Politicians, technocrats and business leaders all became more active in the political realm.

In 1977, Thanin was ousted by a coup and replaced by General Kriangsak who initiated a more moderate and conciliatory policy. He promised more relaxed internal and external policies, to be followed by elections. A new constitution was promulgated in 1978 whose power sharing arrangements and institutions amounted to what has been described in this thesis as semi-democracy. The 1978 constitution featured representative rule, albeit with an appointed Senate in the bicameral legislature, universal suffrage, free and open campaigning for office, and the right of political parties to mobilize votes for their candidates[42]. Also a general election was held in April 1979. But the Kriangsak government, like the previous military regime, maintained its control over the legislature through the appointed Senate to ensure political stability.

Thailand experimented with a semi- democratic system under Prem Tinsulanonda's government (1980-1988). During this period, the conventional view of Thai politics was that all was well, the capacity of the government to cope was high, the future was bright for all segments of the nation, democracy was flourishing (at least

compared to other developing nations), and the remarkable stability of the kingdom was constant.

Prem Tinsulanonda beginning his eighth year as prime minister, had served longer than any previous democratically elected government. He used his integrity and professionalism as well as his personal connections to secure legitimacy for his government. He also used the support received from the military, the King, and the people to strengthen democratic institutions.

Thus, his impeccable reputation, his moderate image, the support he received from key military generals, his ability to mobilize civilian politicians into a broad-based parliamentary majority, and his strong backing from the King have strengthened Prem's position[43].

Prem reshuffled his cabinet several times as well as dissolved the Parliament twice and refused to use military force to settle political conflict in 1981 and 1986. In ten years, no successful military coup d'état took place.

During his rule, Thai economy grew at an impressive double-digit growth rate. There were also the manageable foreign debt and the end of communist insurgency. Prem's government also combined elements of military, parliamentary-constitutional and monarchical rule. His performance led the prominent political analyst, Chai-anan Sumodavanija to label Thai politics during the 1980s as a "stable semi-democracy"[44] where civilian forces appeared to have gained power at the expense of the military.

Prem Tinsulananda's tenure of premier had entered its eight year in 1988 with five coalition governments during this period, displaying an inclination towards a democratic system. Though he was able to meet the challenges from the army and was responsible for economic boom, he became unpopular in the seventh year of office allegedly for lack of leadership, aloofness, and for refusing to stand for elective office. Then Prem dissolved the Parliament on 29th April 1988 and elections were held on 24th July 1988[45]. This paved the way for Thailand's next democratic experiment.

The parliamentary elections of 1988 also failed to give majority to any single party. After refusing to form once again a coalition government, the leader of the

largest party in the House, Chatichai Choonhavan of the conservative, probusiness Chart Thai (CT) or Thai Nation Party, assumed office as the country's first democratically elected prime minister in more than a decade. This was the clearest sign of democratization. The smooth transition from Prem to former general Chatichai reflected the new optimism about Thailand's evolution toward democracy. The constitutional provisions for elections worked well in transferring political power [46].

The Chatichai government (1988-1991) enjoyed considerable legitimacy, as it was the first fully elected government in twelve years. It derived its authority from conformity with democratic principles and procedures. Thus, beginning with a brief experiment in democracy during the mid-1970s, civilian democratic political institutions slowly gained greater authority, the process culminating in 1988 when Chatichai became prime minister.

Thus we can say that by 1990 there had been no successful coup since 1977, and Chai-Anan Samudavanija felt able to write of Thailand's 'gradually moving toward full membership of the new and larger comity of liberal democratic nations'[47].

Three years later in 1991, another bloodless coup ended Chatichai's term as prime minister and also ended the country's democratic experiment. With the support of the King, the coup was organized by a military junta called the National Peacekeeping Council-led by General Suchinda. He dismissed the elected government, imposed martial law and suspended the 1978 constitution.

Suchinda, announcing the takeover on State Television and radio proclaimed "we-the army, the navy, the air force and the police have taken over power in the country. We are in a control of everything"[48]. This military coup shattered the notion that Thailand had been successful in institutionalizing democratic and civilian government.

Not wishing to entirely swept out the country's democratic experiment, the coup group appointed a respected civilian, Anand Panyarachun to the position of prime of the "interim" government, although democratic experiment has been halted. Anand

paved the way for elections. His activities and autonomy surprised the nation and his administration turned out to be most effective in modern Thai politics.

During his thirty months in office, the Chatichai government had passed 105 new laws whereas Ananda's government from 1st March to 6th December 1991 passed 127 new laws. He encouraged foreign and economic expansion. Joseph J. Wright Jr. states optimistically, "Beyond its show of economic expansion, the interim government was even more remarkable for its positive examples of how a civilian government could function" [49].

Towards the end of 1991, a constitution was drafted which was in progress. Chavalit's New Aspiration Party joined forces with the other more established parties known for their consistent stand against military interference in politics. Along with the Democratic Party (headed by veteran parliamentarian Chuan Leekpai) and the newer Palang Dharma Party (under Bangkok's two-term elected governor, a retired General Chamlong Srimuang), New Aspiration spurred a mass public campaign to force changes in the Junta-approved charter[50]. Also there were extremely large mass demonstrations in Bangkok in December 1991 by people from all over the country demanding revisions in the charter and guarantee against a return to military rule[51].

Following the Parliamentary elections of March 1992, General Suchinda became prime minister despite his assurances before the election that he would not accept the prime ministership. In May 1992, massive demonstrations broke out against Suchinda, centred particularly in the middle stretch of Rajadamnoen Avenue near the Grand Palace in mid-Bangkok. This demonstration spearheaded by Chamlong Srimuang, the one-time Young Turk member who now headed Palang Dharma.

Chamlong sat outside the parliament and claimed that he would undertake a Gandhi-like fast to until either Suchinda stepped down in favour of an elected prime minister or he himself died. Soon, more than 80,000 Thais joined him in peaceful protest. But Suchinda refused to resign. To quote General Suchinda: "If the prime minister were to resign because someone threatened to fast to death unless he stepped down, then future prime ministers would have to resign daily"[52].

The Protests began to grow. Many academics, business executives and stock brokers took to the streets along with workers and rural migrants. It was the first mass demonstration led by the middle-class. Furthermore, because the state controlled the media, most of the coverage of events was "sharply slanted" towards the military-led government and "conveyed the impression that the protestors were troublemakers threatening law and order"[53]. This also made them very angry. Then a series of violent confrontations erupted between army units and protesters in Bangkok, an upheaval as Black May in which many were killed and injured.

Casualty Figures from the May 17-21, 1992, Shootings

	Casualty Figures		Bangkok population
	Dead	Injured	Total	
White collar/professional	6	78	38	43
Sales	4	15	9	17
Laborers	16	49	29	32
Students	10	22	14	7
Unemployed	1	6	3	2
Other	1	6	3	0
Unkhown	5	3	4	NA
Total	43	179	100	100

Source: Vorawidh Chernlertin in Sungsidh and Pasuk,eds., *The Middle Class and Thai Democracy,* pp. 144-147, and the National Statistical Office, *Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics* 42:1 (March 1994), pp. 17-19.

Fearing another bloodletting like that at Thamasat in 1976, King Bhumibol came on 7television with both Suchinda and Chamlong at his feet. Thus with the King's intervention, the violence ended and Suchinda resigned finally. Then the King reappointed Anand as acting prime minister until new elections could be held in September.

In an ironic way, the 1991 coup and the subsequent demonstrations against Suchinda's power grab were indicative of the new sense of democratic aspirations that had begun most clearly during the 1973-1976 democratic period, and evolved during Prem and Chatichai administration. The demonstrators sought to change the elite view that democracy, even semi-democracy, is mostly about constitution and elections. They, along with nongovernmental organization networks, sought to show that citizen involvement is also crucial in a democracy[54].

In September 1992, parliamentary elections were held and the pro-democracy coalition won with a total of 185 seats, distributed as follows: Democrats-79, New Aspiration-51, Palang Dharma-47, Solidarity-8. The other parties won 175 seats: Chart Thai-77, Chart Pattana-60, Social Action-22, Seritham-8, Muan Chon-4, Prachakorn-3 and Rassadorn-1[55]. This election was a further sign of democratic experiment in Thailand.

Following this election, Chuan Leekpai, the soft spoken leader of the Democrat Party who had neither served in the armed forces nor had any links with the aristocracy, became prime minister. This showed the beginning of a new emerging pattern in Thai politics. Civilian control over the military was now greater than before demonstrating a more rigorous trend towards democratic norms. With civilian control over the military greater than ever been, Thai democracy was perhaps healthier than it was before the last coup. Yet no coalition government has ever lasted very long in Thailand.

Important reforms also followed. More professional soldiers replaced the generals. Constitutional amendments decreased the power of the military dominated senate and required that the prime minister be an elected legislator[56]. Chuan made important improvements in land tenure and education. From then on civilian governments dominated Thai politics till the 2006 coup.

Chuan Leekpai dissolved the parliament in May 1995 and in July another general election was held. This 1995 election can be treated as yet another Thai democratic experiment. Chart Thai Party won the largest number of seats in the election under the leadership of Banharn Silpa-archa, a businessman and a veteran politician. He became

prime minister as his six party (Chart Thai Party, New Aspiration Party, Social Action Party, Palang Dharma, Prachakorn Thai and Muan Chon with addition of a seventh party, the Nam Thai) coalition got 218 seats in the 391-member parliament. He held the office for a little more than a year only.

Observers said that they did not expect the new government to bring in any sweeping economic, foreign or domestic change, since there were no major ideological differences among Thailand's main political parties. It is alleged that Banharn was elected in a vote buying exercise estimated by one Bank at 18 billion baht ($720 million)[57]. "Everyone acknowledges that election was rife with practices that are not generally acceptable as democratic" says a western diplomat in Bangkok and adds "money flowed"[58].

Following elections held in November 1996, Chavalit Youngchaiyudh formed Thailand's third coalition government since re-democratization in 1992 and became prime minister. He would soon come undone amid the country's growing economic crisis. Many banks, industries, and property companies failed. The ensuing political chaos finally concluded with new elections that resulted in Chavalit's replacement by the durable Chuan Leekpai as prime minister in November 1997[59].

During 1992 to 1997, demands for a new constitution and people's participation in the drafting process grew. Thus, following the collapse of the Suchinda government, there were many attempts to reform the political system in a more liberal direction, eventually resulting in the promulgation of a new constitution in 1997[60]. The Constitutional Drafting Assembly was summoned in early 1997 and it became clear that the 1997 constitution was the most advanced and updated in terms of political reforms in the whole region. It differed from previous charters in its attempt to promote transparency and accountability of the political system and stability and effectiveness of government.

The 1997 constitution is the first Thai constitution ever written by people's representatives. So it is called 'People's Constitution. The drafters sought public opinion in writing the document and then circulated it for debate at public forums nationwide[61]. It stipulated a fully elected bicameral legislature. It guaranteed media freedom,

required officials to disclose their assets and empowered the electorate to impeach unscrupulous cabinet ministers.

The constitution proposed changes to the National Assembly and its electoral procedures to strengthen the party system and improve governance. It reorganized the National Assembly into three kinds of elected representatives: senators, constituency MPs and Party list MPs. The Senate was directly elected from each province[62]. Senators have to be "pure": candidates cannot be members of political parties, and there were severe restrictions on election campaigning[63].

The House of Representatives consisted of 400 constituencies and 100 party list MPs. Ministers could not be constituency MPs. Hence they either had to be elected from the party list, or they had to resign their seats and cover election costs for their vacated seat[64]. The party list ballots would encourage voters to think of politics in terms of parties and policy rather than personalities and vote buying[65].

The 1997 constitution sanctioned various checks and balances, including the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC), the National Election Commission (NEC), the Constitutional Court, and the establishment of a National Commission of Human Rights[66].

The constitution also made voting a duty for all Thai citizens; the hope was that expanded electoral participation would make vote buying too expensive[67]. Under this new constitution and related organic laws, new rules were introduced to make elections "clean and fair". For example, the power to supervise local and general elections was transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the National Election Commission, an independent organization, in order to cut what Sombat (2002;204) called "the crucial ties that exist between politicians, and the civil servants responsible for administering elections."[68]. The electoral system was also changed from multi-member constituencies to single-member constituency in order to encourage party cohesion and greater voter equality.

The vast majority of the Thai people, particularly Bangkok's middle class, civil society groups, and the business community hailed it as the great foundation of a full-

fledged and lasting democratic system, a long awaited document meant to eliminate graft from politics by promoting ability and integrity. Since then the 1997 constitution has certainly confirmed that participatory democracy has been fairly adopted in Thailand.

Instead of money-free politics, the economic crisis and the new constitution paved the way for the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra. In the January 2001 elections, the Democrats were trounced by the newly formed Thai Rak Thai (THai Love Thai) Party led by the billionaire communications magnate Thaksin Shinawatra[69].

In the 2001 general elections TRT won 248 of the 500 parliamentary seats (Mc Cargo,2002,248). For the first time in a generation, vote buying was down in the January 2001 general election[70]. As a prominent election-monitoring non-governmental organization (NGO) declared, "Money and intimidation no longer produced the desirable results [71]." Because the election was organized by a neutral organization-ECT-for the first time in history, some candidates were disqualified. The voting turnout was also strong at 69.9 percent. Also this election held under the provisions of 1997 constitution.

The 2001 general election results

Party	National Seats won
Thai Rak Thai	248
New Aspiration	36
Chart Pattana	29
Seritham	14
Chart Thai	41
Democrat	128
Ratsadorn	2
Social Action	1
Tin Thai	1

Source: National Election Commission (2001: 161, 381-464)

According to a survey by the ECT, for constituency MPs 41 percent of the electorate voted on the basis of parties and platforms. On the party list ballot, 59 percent chose according to party and platform. Indeed, party membership was up nationwide: Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party recruited over 11 million party members, roughly one quarter of the entire electorate[72].

Soon after assuming power, the new prime minister Thaksin allegedly forced the resignation of independent minded members of impartial government agencies such as the National Counter Corruption Commission. He also quickly tried to gain control of the Bangkok-based forces, elite universities, NGOs and also the media that helped take away Thai politics and business out of the hands of oligarchs over the previous decade.

As prime minister, Thaksin moved to implement policies he had promised on the campaign trial. He used the populist 'new idea' to win the support he needed to consolidate power and restore the anti-reform 'old ideas' that, in reality, he cherished. Even as he included younger, reform-minded politicians in his entourage, Thaksin reserved several key positions for conservative, old guard politicians like Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a former general and prime minister.

Several policies which Thaksin implemented were quickly launched. Thai Rak Thai inaugurated village fund, providing micro-credit grants and loans to each of the nation's 77000 villages, began developing a national health care system under which Thais could receive medical care at public hospitals for only 30 baht (70 cents).

The government also announced that it would implement a three-year moratorium on farmer's debt payments; enact regulations on the retail industry to help Thai shops compete against foreign owned 'hyper markets' like the France-based Carrefour; reduce foreign ownership in Thailand's telecommunications sector, and buy the non-performing loans of large companies, many of which were headed by conservative businessmen whose opaque, cronyistic practices had helped spark the financial crisis[73].

Some of these policies had a powerful economic effect, but they were not as successful as Thaksin had promised. He and his allies also undermined Thailand's

nascent democratic institutions, many of which were created in 1997 to foster the rule of law and make Thai politics less dependent on personalities. Thaksin also removed the leading bureaucrats from power who disagreed with him, including the governor of the Bank of Thailand and the head of the stock exchange.

In summer, 2002, Thaksin fired Thepchai Yong, a well-known columnist of an independent newspaper, The Nation. because he wrote: "since Thaksin came to power more than one and a half years ago, media manipulation and intimidation have become commonplace". It signified that he would tighten controls on the media, in part by encouraging high ranking officials of his party to purchase controlling interests in media groups that were critical of government[74].

On February 1, 2003, Thaksin began a 'war on drugs' in Thailand. The war, he said, would involve intensive and harsh new police measures. But his campaign resulted in numerous deaths that were deemed suspicious.

But by eliminating virtually all voices of dissent around him, Thaksin appeared unable to judge and restructure his own policies. According to several Thai politicians, Thaksin, unlike former prime ministers, no longer attended sessions of parliament to tackle questions from legislators and solicit advice. Then there is the sacking of independent- minded bureaucrats and members of Thaksin's cabinet.

The prime minister could not acknowledge either the flaws of his anti-drug campaign, which had resulted in the death of more than 2200 Thais and seriously damaged Thailand's international image, or the potentially destructive impact of his economic policies, which were boosting growth in the short term but amassing an unprecedented public debt burden.

Another major concern in the Thaksin era was the resurgence of violence in Thailand's Southernmost provinces, which have a Muslim Majority population. Although the source and cause of the violence are still not completely understood, a common assumption was that Thaksin's heavy handed approach in the South had exacerbated tensions [75]. On human rights and social justice, Sondhi, a well-known critic of Thaksin, was critical of Thaksin's erratic and heavy-handed approach to these issues.

Ragarding the need for just rule and recognition of cultural diversity he noted, "They [Malay-Muslim] are under our jurisdiction… we must give real justice to every group, right… Have we answered their need for justice?... Are we brave enough to apologise for the past because the old officials did no good?"[76].

An important experiment in democratic consolidation was the 2005 Parliamentary elections. These elections were held under 1997 constitution in which Thaksin was re-elected to lead the nation for the first time in Thai history. In this election, the governing party, Thai Rak Thai (TRT) gained a stunning majority of 377 seats in the 500 seat House of Representatives. This landslide victory indicated the vast popular approval of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's leadership during the previous four years.

The 2005 general election result

Party	Percentage of Vote	National Seats Won
Thai Rak Thai	60.7	377
Prajadhipat	18.3	96
Chart Thai	11.4	25
Mahachon	8.2	2

Source: National Election Commission (2005: 273, 281)

The most notable feature of the elections was the virtual implosion of Thai politics into a two-party system. Only the governing TRT; the major opposition party Prajadhipt (Democrat); Chart Thai (Thai Nation); and a new party, Mahachon (Great People's Party), fielded a full slate of 100 candidates in the party list balloting. These four parties accounted for 98.7 percent of the popular vote, but TRT and Prajadhipat combined took 79 percent of all votes[77]. The election results ended the traditional system of coalition governments.

But the election results disappointed many Thais. Social and political activists were dejected; even intimidated by this result. They feared that another era of democratically elected authoritarianism would start. As a result, huge protest movements occurred.

The anti-Thaksin Movement was given cause to rally against him when it was announced that Thaksin's family had sold their Shin Corporation business to Temasek Holdings, an investment firm connected to the Singapore government in January 2006 in a tax free sale. "The Shinawatra family sold 49.61 percent of its share to Temasek Holdings, a Singapore government investment company, for 73.3 billion baht, (US $ 1.7 billion)"[78].

Sondhi blasted Thaksin's "policy corruption", including his alleged improbity regarding the gaining of state concessions, tax breaks and how Shin Corp's business ventures benefited from import credits granted to Burma. Sondhi also claimed that Thaksin was using his position to create favourable conditions for the sale of Shin Corp[79].

Demonstrations began as a result on 4th February and attracted more than 50,000 participants. The anti-Thaksin movement was huge. Over a period of two months, from the beginning of February until March 2006, hundreds of thousands of people took part in a series of demonstrations that were led by a coalition called the "People's Alliance for Democracy" (PAD, *Phanyhamit Prachanan Prachathippatai*).

According to Suriyasai, the PAD was formed by 40 organizations representing "academics, businessmen, farmers, urban poor, non-governmental organizations, labour and students". It was led by five men: Sondhi Limthongkul, Chamlong Srimuang, Phipop Thongchai, president of Campaign for Popular Democracy, Somsak Kosaisuk and Somkiat Phongpaiboon, university lecturer[80].

A range of protest ensued. School students developed initiatives, university campus demonstrations were held, women's marches were organized, and rallies, marches and protests in towns and cities up and down the country held[81]. During the second PAD demonstration on 26 February, 5000 state enterprise workers gathered in

front of the Democracy Monument and threatened strike action to force Thaksin to resign. Some rural networks also joined the protests. By the 4th PAD demonstration on 4th March, activists from the Southern Community Forestry Network, the Federation of Small Scale Fishers from the south, the Isan Network of Small-Scale Farmers and the Northern Peasants Federation had joined the movement[82].

At the beginning of 2006, facing massive protests, Thaksin suspended parliament on 24th February and an election was held in early April. PAD boycotted the election and called on Thaksin to resign so that a new royally appointed government could temporarily assume office to initiate a round of political reform. The newly formed PAD accused Thaksin of abuse of power, insulting monarchs, policy corruption favouring sectional interests, human rights abuses and of interference in the independent agencies of the state[83].

Elections were held, leading to a farcical outcome; although the election remained incomplete by the end of April, TRT had won 486 seats in the 500-seat house. Responding to pressure to directly intervene in the crisis, King Bhumipol (2006) implored the courts to examine the matter, indicating his view that recent events were not in accordance with 'democracy'. In May, the Constitution Court annulled the election. It rescheduled new elections for September 2006.

Assuming that Thaksin would win the election once more, the military staged a coup on the night of 19th September on the immediate pretext that the care-taker government was planning a bloody crackdown on a PAD rally, scheduled for the following day. The coup group abolished the constitution, appointed an interim government and laid the basis for the appointment of the National Legislative Assembly (NLA), a Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA), and an Asset Security Committee (ASC) to investigate 'acts detrimental to the state'[84].

The coup leaders organized a "Council for Democratic Reform under the King as the Head of the State". It issued a statement explaining their reasons for the coup and stating that they would return democracy to the people. A month after the coup, one of the best known academics and social critics in Thailand, Thirayuth Boonmi, who was

also a key leader of the 1973 uprising, made a public comment endorsing the coup as a necessary step for democracy[85].

But the 2006 coup halted democratic experiment in Thailand halted and its future became uncertain. The main motive behind this coup was the re-establishment of military regimes. The coup has already produced numerous political and economic pay offs for coup leaders and coup supporters. It seems certain that military officers are not going to fade away easily. The military has also revived the long-gone tradition of once again receiving the lion's share of the national budget. Thus the 2006 coup was a major setback for democratic experiment in Thailand. A number of armed forces personnel were appointed by the CDR to the National Legislative Council, formed in late 2006[86] (Table).

CDR-appointed National Legislative Assembly,2006

Position at appointment	Number	Percentage
Retired government officials	43	17.8
Military Officers	35	14.5
Business	30	12.4
Media and artists	20	8.3
Permanent secretaries of various ministries	17	7.0
Judiciary	12	5.0
Academics	11	4.5
State enterprise officials	8	3.3
Police	7	2.9
Legal experts	7	2.9
Bankers	6	2.5
Other	46	19.0

Source: The Nation, 14th October 2006

The political ramifications were clear with the promulgation of the new constitution in the aftermath of the 2006 coup, transferring power from the people to the military. The 2007 constitution was not the best basis on which to begin a new

democratic phase; it was viewed by many as enabling further repression of pro-Thaksin forces. Article 309 for example conferred a legal status on the coup, and decrees issued by junta.

The 2006 coup against Thaksin has led to the heightening of military prerogatives. But as the armed forces' influence has grown, civilian control by elected representatives has diminished on the other hand.

General elections were held on December 23, 2007, which marked another experiment with democracy by the country. This was the first legislative election after the Council for Security, a military junta overthrew Thailand's elected government and suspended the constitution on September 19 2006. But the December 2007 election was also conducted under manipulated circumstances, with many regions subjected to martial law[87]. Thus the future of democratic growth was now uncertain.

Conclusion:

This survey clearly shows that the Thai army's reluctance or willingness to allow the restoration of democratic rules is the key factor in Thailand's return to democratic transition and further consolidation. Thus the future of democracy in Thailand hangs in the balance and sustainable democracy both in form and quality continues to be an elusive goal.

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Ethnicity, Identity and Power: a study on Contemporary Thailand

Sociopolitical movements of ethnic communities are not a recent phenomenon. It became the main concern for the whole world. Ethnic movements received worldwide attention as one of the destabilizing factors troubling nation states in the post-cold war era. It was no more confined to the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in Europe, but also spread to the two other big continents like Asia and Africa. The countries where the ethnic tension has become a center of concern are Myanmar, Srilanka, India in Asia; Sudan and Rwanda in Africa. But more ethnic movements in Asia are found in the Southeast. Here Thailand is no exception. Hence we discuss the ethnic movements in Thailand in its entirety.

Understanding Ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity is somewhat multidimensional. It consists of aspects such as race, origin or ancestry, identity, language and religion. The term ethnicity derives from the ancient Greek term ethnos which originally means heathen or pagan[1]. It appeared in the English language only in the 1950s and was first recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary of 1953[2]. According to Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, "Ethnicity seems to be a new term"[3].

Earlier no such attention was paid to ethnicity by scholars. But the situation changed during the decade of 1960-1970. Since the late 1960s, ethnicity has been a main preoccupation in social and cultural anthropology and it remains a central focus for research after the turn of the millennium[4].According to Abner Cohen ethnicity is a set of descent-based cultural identifiers used to assign persons to groupings that expand and contract in inverse relation to the scale of inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the membership.[5]

There are different of views about the meaning of ethnicity. According to Thomas Hylland Erikson "ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of a regular interaction. It can thus also be defined as a

social identity (based on a contrast vis-à-vis others) characterized by metaphoric of fictive kingship"[6].

Craig Calhoun on his part contends that "notion of ethnicity become pronounced when they are used to distinguish one social group from another within a specific territory"[7]. Fredrik Barth and Eric Wolf define ethnicity as a product of specific kinds of inter-group interactions, rather than essential quality inherent to human groups[8].

Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by De Vos as consisting of the "subjective, symbolic or emblematic use of culture, or a perceived separate origin and continuity" by "a group of people in order to differentiate themselves from other groups"[9]. The term "ethnic identity" can, for example, refer to origin, uniqueness, passing on of life, 'blood', solidarity, unity, security, personal integrity, independence, recognition, equality, cultural uniqueness, respect, equal economic rights, territorial integrity and so on, in all possible combinations, degrees of emotional content and forms of social organization[10].

Okwadiba Nnoli conceives of ethnicity as a "social phenomenon associated with some forms of interaction between the largest possible cultural-linguistic communal groups (ethnic group) within political societies such as nation states"[11]. According to Young, ethnicity refers to "the active sense of identification with some ethnic units"[12].

Ethnicity is social in nature and is also an alternative form of social organization and social identification based on the presumption of shared history and a common cultural inheritance. It also shares certain distinctive features such as language, culture, physical appearance, religion, values and customs. For Horowitz "ethnicity" is an umbrella concept that "easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language and religion"[13].

Through ethnicity, ethnic groups can make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, their economic well-being, their civil rights, or their educational opportunities are engaged in a form of inherent group politics[14]. According to Anthony Smith, an ethnic group is a "named population with myths of common

ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity"[15].

Ethnicity is also interpreted as an ideology which individuals employ to resolve insecurities arising from the power structure within which they are located[16].

There are also several approaches to the study of ethnicity. The most important approach is that of the so called 'primordialists'. This term was first used by Edward Shills (1957). In the primordialist view, the ethnic ties are treated as a coercive social bond. In contrast to 'primodialists', the 'instrumentalists' treat ethnicity as a social, political and cultural resource for different interest and status-groups (Brass, 1991; Cohen, 1974).

In short it is clear that ethnicity can be used to build unity and solidarity within a fragmented, weak community that is seeking to attain some form of equality. It also benefits society only to the extent that it aids individuals and groups in the transition from one state to another[17].

Most of the countries in the world are multiethnic and the population is divided into heterogeneous groups within the framework of existing state structures. The groups are distinguished according to certain ethnic attributes and may be referred to as ethnies. Through ethnicity, these groups deman equal opportunities in social, economic and cultural fields. Sometimes their ways to achieve these goals have proved violent, and then comes ethnic conflict.

There are again several sources of ethnic conflict. Economic inequalities and transformations are particularly important. But the major sources are cultural, linguistic and religious differences. Also there are international conflicts triggered by ethnic differences: conflicts between national states which are caused or exacerbated by ethnic movements of secession and irredentism[18].

These above causes of ethnic conflict have been seen in Thailand. In order to discuss ethnic disparities in Thailand, we should first explain its location and the number of ethnic groups.

Thailand: Its Location and Ethnic Groups:

The Kingdom of Thailand is located in the center of mainland Southeast Asia. It is bordered on the west and north by Myanmar, to the northeast by Laos and to the southeast by Cambodia. It extends southward along the Isthmus of Kra to the Malay Peninsula where it borders Malaysia. It has a maximum dimension of about 2500 km north to south and 1250 km east to west.

Thailand is a multiethnic country with a great variety of ethnic groups. Ethnically Thailand is a heterogeneous nation but in terms of population Thailand is homogeneous, with more than 85 percent speaking a Tai language and sharing a common culture (*Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs,* January 2010). The ethnic group of Thailand can be divided into three categories: 1. Thais; 2. Hill peoples of the North; 3. other groups include the Chinese and minorities in the South[19].

Estimates in 1957 concerning ethnic groups in Thailand are as follows:

Thai	18,585,000
Chinese	3,000,000
Malay	670,000
Cambodian	185,000
Vietnamese	25,000
Indian and Pakistani	60,000
Mon	60,000
Karen	60,000
Westerners	5,000
Others	150,000
Total	22,800,000

Source: The 1957 Population and Housing Census, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand.

Census Year	Number of Population
1911	8,266,408
1919	9,207,355
1929	11,506.207
1937	14,464,105
1947	17,442,689
1960	26,257,916
1970	34,397,374
1980	44,824,540
1990	54,548,530

Source: 1. Report of the Survey of Family Registration 1911, 1919, 1929, 1937 and 1947.

2. Population and Housing census 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990.

Year	Population	Source
2009	67.8million	UN Department of Social Affairs (DESA), Population Division (2009)
2007	64.1million	UN DESA, Population Division (2006)
2006	63.5million	UN DESA (2006)
2005	63.0million	UN DESA (2006)
2004	62.6million	UN DESA (2006)
2003	62.1million	UN DESA (2006)
2002	61.7million	UN DESA (2006)
2001	61.2million	UN DESA (2006)
2000	60.7million	UN DESA (2006)

Table below indicates land use in Thailand

Legend	Land Use Scheme	Area	
1.	Agriculture	Rai	Percentage
1.	Irrigation areas potential	168,047,857	52%
	Irrigation	67,277,601	20.98%
	Rice Culture	43,824,203	13.67%
1.1	Field Crop	23,453,398	7.31%
1.2	Rain fed area	100,770,256	31.42%
	Rice Culture	10,581,939	3.30%
1.3	Field crop	85,716,928	26.73%
1.4	Fruit/Perennial	4,471,389	1.39%
1.5	Pasture	48,699,633	15.19%
2	Forestry	101,078,391	31.52%
3	Mangrove	1,128,494	0.35%
3.1	Peat Swamp	261,860	0.08%
3.2	General Forestry	99,688,037	31.09%
3.3	Fisheries	2,871,069	0.89%
	Total	320,696,950	100%

Source: Wanchai Chanchay: Land Use in Thailand. (Department of Land Development, 1993).

Thais may be divided into four major groups: Central Thai (Siamese) of the Central valley; the Northeastern Thai (Lao) of the Northeast (Khorat); the Northern Thai (Lanna) of North Thailand; and Southern Thai (Chao Pak Thai) of Peninsular Thailand. The Thai's migration from southern China began during the 11th century.

Central Thai have been the dominant group culturally, politically and economically. It comprises about 32 percent of Thailand's population. Central Thai retain their prestigious identity irrespective of whether they live in the core Central Thai regions of Central Thailand or elsewhere in the nations[20].

Ethnic Groups:

Thai	75%
Chinese	14%
Others	11%

Source: The 2000 Population and Housing Census, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand.

Religions:

Buddhist	94.6%
Muslim	4.6%
Christian	0.7%
Other	0.1%

Source: The 2000 Population and Housing Census, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand.

The Northeast Thai, the second largest Thai Group are also known as the Thai Lao or Lao Isan which indicates their similarity to the Lao across the border. They are more like the Lao than like Central Thai in language and in some customs. This group comprises about 30 percent of the population. They live in the northeast region which has been run by Central Thai Administration for over 100 years and their living standard is very poor. They survive by growing rice and other crops and raising cattle and water buffalos for sale. The northeast thais are the followers of Theravada Buddhism, although they also celebrate regional festivals not celebrated by other Thais[21].

Another major Thai- speaking group are the 'Northern Thai'. Although the Northern Thai are assimilated into Central Thai Society, they desire to see themselves as a distinct and major Thai group in Northern Thailand and also continue to use their own written language. Like the Northeast, they are also similar to the Lao of Laos. Culturally they are influenced by southern Chinese culture and view the major northern city of Chiang Mai as their political and cultural centre[22].

'Southern Thai' are another major Thai speaking group. They live in the poor rural southern region. The Southern Thai have been influenced by the Malays of

neighboring Malaysia. The majority are the Buddhist, but when they came into contact with the Malays, a small Muslim minority appeared in the region. The southern region has become an area of considerable environmental degradation and it has also been exploited for its rubber trees and tin mines. In the southern region there are some fishermen. The economic condition of the Southern Thai is very critical. For that reason, many southern Thai people have migrated to other countries for employment[23].

In addition to these four major Thai speaking groups, there are also a number of ethnic minority groups in the North and North-east, most of whom have either been assimilated into the larger Thai population or retain ties to co-ethnics in Laos, Myanmar or China. Minor groups are Phuthai, Shan, Lue, Phuan, Saek and Kharat Thai[24].

The Hill people of Thailand live in the North West region. This region is also known as the Golden Triangle, one of Asia's main illicit opium producing areas. It is an area of 950,000Km2 that overlaps the mountains of four countries of Southeast Asia: Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. Principal tribal groups are Khis and Kaleung in the northeast; the Mons living in the Peninsula along the Burmese border and the Karens living along the Northern Burmese border. They migrated from China.

The total number of population is unknown because some individuals or communities have assimilated into Thai society, while some others live isolated in the hills. The Chaobons are also classified as a Hill people and live in the South and the East of the North West territory. There also exist Yamburi, indigenous hunter gatherers. They have also been assimilated into Thai society. There are also some 20 other minority groups including Akha, Musso, Meo, Kamuk, Tin, Lawa, and so on. Those communities which are not assimilated into Thai society survive by shifting cultivation in rugged, isolated mountain or dense forest terrain. Most of the people are Buddhist in assimilated societies.

There are also a large number of national minority (defined as a group of people which has culture, language, race etc. distinct from those of the rest of the population and also small in number) groups in Thailand. A major ethnic minority is the Chinese (about 14%) who live in cities and towns in the central and southern regions. They are engaged in business and commerce throughout the country. The Chinese migrated to

Thailand and easily assimilated into Thai society. They remain a distinct minority group due to continued use of the Chinese language, membership in trading networks, and adherence to their traditional Buddhist- Taoist- confucionist religion- all important markers of Chinese society.

In Thailand there are also some Vietnamese and Khmer who have mostly come from Cambodia. The Vietnamese number about 70,000 (source) and Khmer close to 1million. Also small numbers of residents from India, Europe and US live mainly in the urban areas in Thailand. With the existence of multiple ethnic groups, Thailand is facing various ethnic movements among these groups.

thnic Movement in Thailand:

These ethnic groups which we mentioned above live in Thailand with their cultures, attitudes and religions. In spite of these differences among ethnic groups, they lived peacefully in the past. But now they quarrel with each other for the betterment of their living conditions and sometimes they choose the way of violent action. As a result, Thailand has experienced unrest in each of its peripheral regions and become an attractive subject for study by the scholars. Here we examine the nature of the problems which have not yet disappeared.

The situation of the 'Hill people' of Thailand who are living inside the Thai border is under threat. They migrated from China and live in the northern part of Thailand. The state's policy towards these people remained one of neglect rather than active political and economic intervention until the early 1950s.Since then the government has proclaimed policies to promote the economic development and national integration of the Northern communities. In practice, however, the relative underdevelopment of the region and the political subordination of its communities have intensified[25]. The hill peoples are also harassed by the state officials who often violate their human rights. The hill people are deprived of Thai nationality though there is a policy to grant Thai nationality. Historically, Thai government policy towards the hill people has been framed with a view to preventing them from becoming a threat to national security; curbing opium cultivation in the hilly terrain region along the Burmese and Laotian borders and preventing de-forestation. Thai officials claim that through

shifting cultivation hill people destroyed the forests. They are also treated as second class citizens. Overall, hill people have been facing some major problems including the inability to participate in the larger Thai society and economy equally, limited access to government services, lack of land rights and citizenship and increasing disruption of social system leading to drug addiction, prostitution and gradual loss of cultural identity[26].

The Northeast Thai group represents another restive ethnic group in Thailand. The sole problem among the ethnic groups is communist insurgency. The northeastern region lacks internal cultural homogeneity in that it consists of a variety of related dialect and cultural groups[27]. It includes Puthai, Yuai, So, Saek and Kaleung. There are also Chinese and Central Thais and migrant groups such as Vietnamese refugees who have migrated recently. Other groups are Kha Brao, Khmer, Kui and the hill tribe Chaobon. Some of them are not interested in assimilating into the Thai society. But some desire to be included in the Thai society.

For that reason, there exist inter-ethnic problems within the society. Those ethnic groups who are not assimilated are always trying to separate themselves and form an independent society. In order to achieve this goal, they follow the path of rebellion. As far as the economic perspective, the northeast region is characterized by poverty and low productivity. Until very recently the northeast region was relatively isolated and neglected. Hence the North-easterners are still somewhat hostile to central government[28].

The Thai- Muslim problem in Southern Thailand constitutes the most serious ethnic group problem. It is now attracting much attention today because it is the most violent movement and threatening regional stability. This problem has now changed the polical landscape of entire Thailand.

The Southerners are different from the majority Thai of the country- physically, linguistically and culturally. They look like Malays, and speak Yawi, Malay dialect as well as follow the Islamic code of life. Their geographical distance from Bangkok and closeness to Malaysia pushes them to lean on their immediate neighbor. The overall aim of the southerners is the establishment of an independent Islamic State. For

achieving this goal, they have begun a separatist movement which is threatening the stability of the country Thailand.

The separatist movement in Southern Thailand began in the early 1900s. The root causes of this movement are a complex mixture of history, ethnicity and religion, fueled by socio- economic disparities, poor governance and political grievances[29].

The problem in Southern provinces started when King Chulalongkorn decided to speed up the process of assimilation and centralize the administration in 1901. After that the three provinces wrapped by violence, Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani originally formed the part of an independent entity called the Pattani Kingdom which was slowly included by the Thai state from the late 18th century onwards. The two anglo Siamese treaties in 1902 and 1909 resulted in the formal incorporation of the three provinces into Thailand, while the rest of the Pattani kingdom became part of British Malaya[30].

After 1910, the Siamese government began to emphasize the use of Thai language. There was a concerted attempt to educate the Malays in Thai (Dulyakasem 1991, p.141) and this led to periodic protests in the southern provinces. The elites feared that the introduction of Thai language would lead to the erosion of the Malay language and culture[31]. Siam then embarked on a centralizing policy that led to the imposition of Thai administrative officials in the three southern Malay provinces. Most of these officials were Thai Buddhist and unfamiliar with the local Malay language and Muslim culture that led to social antagonism.

In the three provinces of Yala, Nrathiwat and Pattni, the majority of population were Malay- Muslim. They spoke Malayu and adhered to Islam. Soon after the introduction of 1921 Primary Education Act, a major rebellion was organized in 1922 by Tengku Abdul Kadir from Kalatan, where he moved in 1915. Beginning in the 1920s the Thai government initiated the policy of forced assimilation with the aim of turning this Malay Muslim into Thai- Muslim[32]. The old local government structure which had allowed some autonomous Malay political representation was replaced by a Bangkok oriented system. A modernization program was also introduced to eliminate 'backward' Islamic customs and dialects and impose uniformity in language and social behavior. Some forcible steps were taken to completely abolish Shari'a law.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the government declared that Pondoks (religious schools), Madrassa like schools should give instruction in Thai instead of Malay and Arabic. Local Malay Muslims saw this as a threat to their identity and Pondoks began to encourage Pan- Malay Nationalism and Islamic revivalism through their curricula[33]. After that thousands of Thai Muslim youth after completing their pondok education started going to other Muslim universities. They were influenced by the religio theological trends of Islamic resurgence there and after their return these Thai Muslim students have promoted Islamic reform and the growth of local Thai Muslim communities along puritan and sectarian lines.

The Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand realized that national integration is the source of their own cultural disintegration. They also believed that Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslims belong to two different cosmological orientations. According to Surin Pinsuwan 5"If the Thai state is the manifestation of the Buddhist cosmology, the Malay Muslim do not want to be a part of it. The largely ethnic orientations of the two communities have been described as 'closed systems'[34].

The era of the Second World War (1939-45) was marked by protests, riots and the Dusun Nyor(Dasunnayur) uprising[35]. Led by Haji Sulong, Chairman of Pattani Provincial Islamic Council the rebels made seven ethno-religious demands to the Central government, focusing on political freedom for the Malays and the preservation of their language. His only religious demand was the recognition and enforcement of Muslim Law. But his effort to sever the Malay region from the rest of the country was put down by the Central Thai authorities.

Organization and Mobilization of Ethnic Groups in the South:

The period of 1960s and 1970s marked a new phase of political tension in the region and Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat became a zone of dissidence and this situation has further deteriorated to the extent that the so-called Deep South is now in the throes of full-scale ethno- religious insurgency. In this period a variety of militant separatist movements occurred in the Southern Thai provinces. The common aim of these movements was to carve out an independent Muslim state with Pattani as the center. Violent action in pursuit of this objective typically fell into the classic pattern of

low-intensity conflict, generally involving ambushes, kidnappings, assassinations, extortion, sabotage and bomb attacks[36]. Their main aim was also to create a sense of insecurity among ethnic Thais living in the region and to mount more pressure on the central government to accept the political demands of Malay Muslim separatism. In that period some groups emerged which were in the forefront of this unrest. They are as follows---

Barisan Revelusi Nasional (BRN): BRN was formed in 1960 by Abdul Karim Hassan in a response to a government education program that forced the network of nominally independent religious boarding schools in Pattani to take as a secular curriculam in addition to their Islamic studies[37]. It rejected the Thai Constitution and wanted to bring about complete seccession of the South Muslim provinces to form an independent Pattani state. But the group never managed to attain the goal and to fight against the Thai Central authority because its leftwing platform did not go well with the basically conservative sentiments of the Malay- Muslim population in the South.

Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO): PULO was the most prominent and active rebel group among the other groups operating in Thailand. It was formed in 1960 by Tengku Bira Kotanila and followed a dual track policy of both non-violent and violent action. Its non-violent action was the improvement of education standards among the Southern Malay population. Through armed action, this group wanted to draw international attention to the plight of the indigenous Southern Thai population and also wanted to establish a separate wing known as the Pattani United Liberation Army. This organization made several attacks against the Thai authority. But within some days' members of this group fled abroad or took advantage of a government sponsored amnesty program and surrendered to the authorities.

New PULO: Furthermore, a split within PULO saw the creation of a group called New PULO in 1995 led by A-rong Muleng and Haji Abdul Rohman Bazo[38]. The goal of this faction appears to align with that of its parent.

Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Pattani (BNPP): Along with BRN, PULO,New PULO, there was another group operating in Southern Thailand called BNPP led by Tengku Abdul Jalal. Islam was part of its policy. Moreover, BNPP tried to shore up international

Muslim support when they prepared a document titled "The Muslim struggle for survival in South Thailand" at the 7th Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers Meeting at Istambul in 1976[39]. But these attempts to garner support from Islamic countries did not result in any tangible assistance and BNPP faded away.

Barisan Bersatu Kemerdekaan Pattani (Bersatu): Due to their different ideological outlooks BRN, PULO, BNPP and New PULO, never managed to attain their actual objective. Operating under the umbrella of Bersatu, they carried out a coordinated series of bombings and shooting attacks code named Falling Leaves that resulted in 9 deaths, several injuries and economic damage[40].

The activities of these organizations dropped markedly by the late 1980s because of the demise of the New PULO. In that period the government also defeated the separatist insurgency in the south through a combination of improved governance, economic development projects, blanket amnesties for the insurgents and stepped-up security cooperation with neighbouring Malaysia. Another attempt was made through the Southern Borders Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), established in 1981 under the Ministry of Interior(MoI) to formulate broad ranging policies for defusing tension.

In spite of these policies taken by the Thai government to normalize the situation in the southern provinces, violence re-erupted. After assuming power in 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra dismantled the SBPAC and imposed martial law in the Deep South. In protest separatist movements has resurfaced in southern Thailand.

The first signs of a re-emergence of violence showed at the end of 2001, when five- well coordinated attacks on police posts in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat left five officers and one village defense volunteer dead. The number of incidents increased from 75 in 2002 to 119 in 2003. But the two most significant incidents occurred in 2004. They are the Krue Se (April28, 2004) and Tak Bai (October25, 2004) incidents.

Kreu Se Jihad: In protest against martial law, on April 28, 2004, religious militants assaulted military forces and occupied the famous Krue Se Mosque in Pattani, a symbol of Malay Muslim resistance to Thai (Siamese) domination. In the ensuing battles,

roughly 107 militants and 5 security personnel died and 17 were arrested. 37 Muslim militants were killed in the blockade of the Krue Se Mosque.This incident led to a large public media debate about the methods employed in dealing with the situation.

Tak Bai Incident: There was another incident in Tak Bai district of Narathiwat. 86 muslims died who demonstrated against the jailing of a local muslim accused of inciting violence, due to the suffocation in trucks on which they were piled on for transportation to a military camp. This incident caused a serious controversy. Muslims militants charged the government officials with adopting harsh methods and human rights violations. They also demanded apology from Thai Prime Minister Thaksin. But PM refused to do that and set up an independent fact finding commission to investigate the whole situation[41].

These two incidents in 2004 marked another phase of insurgency. After these two incidents government realized that they should concentrate on promoting a secular curriculum rather than censoring religious education through the *pondok.*

Recent Trends:

Between January 2004 and the end of August 2007, the number of attacks increased day by day. In that period two groups were responsible for the majority of attacks. First is the Barisan Revolusi Nasional- koor dinasi (BRN-C) and its right wing Runda Kumpalan Kecil (RKK). The second is Gerekan Mujahideen Islami Pattani (GMIP). Their overriding goal would seem to be the creation of a separate Malay- Muslim state incorporating three provinces, Yala ,Narathiwat and Pattani within five years.

In order to achieve independent statehood, these groups (BRN-C and GMIP) have adopted some strategies. The first is to shatter the fabric of society in the south, polarize society, force Thai Buddhists to migrate and destroy Thailand's governmental structure in the Deep South. To date, the militants have achieved a high degree of success.

Another notable incident occurred in April 2005. Militants exploded bomb at Hat Yai International Airport, The French owned Carrefour Supermarket, and the Green Palace Hotel in Songkhla. In August 2006, 22 Commercial Banks were targeted for

bombings. In December 2006, the Bangkok Post reported that separatist groups were planning to form an alternative government for the Islamic Pattani state which included their own flag.

During 2006-2007 the situation was controlled by new Prime Minister General Surayud. He apologized for the mishandling of the crisis by the Thaksin government. He also revived SBPAC under its new name of Southern Border Provinces Development Center (SBPDC) which is playing a crucial role in resolving the Southern Conflict to create mutual acceptance and trust between Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims. PM General Surayud also took some measures such as delivering justice, recognized local language and culture, and letting locals manage their own affairs[42]. He tried to solve the problem in Southern Thailand but at last he failed to do so.

The situation was partly controlled by new premier Samak Sundaravej in 2008. He initiated some form of autonomy to solve the problem in the Southern provinces. Samak government proposed joint military and private business ventures to boost the local economy for ending insurgency in the South. The government also transferred the responsibility for running the southern provinces to the army. In spite of several steps taken by the Samak Government, the situation could not be totally controlled.

After the Samak Government, the Somchai Wangseat Government also unveiled a strategy to solve the problem. He wanted to improve the economic condition of Deep South. But the condition is still deteriorating.

Nowadays the instability in the South has been marked by an explicit religious, jihadist undertone. Separatists frequently attack drinking houses, gambling halls, Karaoke bars and other establishments associated with western decadence and secularism. They also distributed leaflets (printed in Malay language) warning the local people to wear traditional Muslim dress and fully respect the Friday holiday. The situation in Southern Thailand remains highly worrying and the government should adopt some measures to curb this problem as soon as possible.

The problems in the peripheral regions in Thailand are the result of decades of economic backwardness, the cultural hegemony of Thai Buddhism, lack of employment

opportunities, the non-recognition of religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity within the Thai polity and widespread feelings of deliberate neglect by Bangkok.

While the northeast is the poorest region, measured against core indicators of economic development, Pattani, Yala and Narahiwat are among the least developed provinces of the country[43]. Government policies towards the promotion of development in these areas failed to reduce regional economic disparities. But the situation in north, northeast, northwest Thailand is apparently well tackled by the Thai government. At the same time the volatile condition in the southern region could not be tackled by the Thai government.

State responses to the upsurge in separatist violence proved futile and also exacerbated the situation. During the Thaksin era (2001-2006), some measures had been taken to tackle the problem. In 2001, when the separatist sentiment was on the rise, Thaksin dismissed the violence as a turf war between rival criminal gangs. He did not want to know the actual reason behind the unrest. In 2002, he abolished the SBPAC and the Civil-Military Task Force 43(CMP-43) which were the key elements in the Thai government's successful counter insurgency campaign. He transferred the responsibility to keep peace in the south from the army to police. In 2004, when major violent incidents occurred, the Thaksin administration could no longer ignore the problem and declared martial law in the south.

In other words, state responses also helped to fuel the separatist sentiment. In February 2005, the government announced that the south would be divided into red, yellow, and green zones; red zones contained villages deemed to be supporting the insurgents and would be denied government funding[44]. This policy was widely condemned. After the bombings in Yala in July 2005, the government announced an Emergency Decree after revoking the martial law. These new measures gave the security services immunity from prosecution and the power to search and make arrest without warrants and to hold the suspects for seven days without charge[45]. The new measures give the license to the security forces to kill.

Not all the measures taken by the Thaksin government were harsh. In March 2005, in response to domestic as well as international pressure following the Tak Bai

incident, Thaksin appointed a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. Its recommendations included, inter alia, the need to right past injustices, encourage greater participation by Malay Muslims in decision-making bodies and allow the use of the local dialect as a working language by government officials. In order to achieve peace, the Thaksin government was ready to talk secretly to the exiled leaders of separatist organizations which had been active from the 1960s until the late 1980s, such as PULO, BRN and Bersatu. But no such kind of fruitful outcome was achieved by these secret talks.

The Thaksin government's heavy handed response to the violence not only embittered separatist movements but also strained the relations with neighboring countries such as Malaysia. So that it can be illustrated that the state responses under the Thaksin government were proved futile.

In order to improve the economic condition of the three provinces (Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani) plus Satun and Songkhla, Surayud designated these places as a special economic zone. He realized that economic backwardness was one of the main reasons for secessionist movement. To improve the educational standards in the south, Surayud announced some new scholarship programs for Malay-Muslims attending university. But the real problem lies in the provisions of primary and secondary education.

It was hoped that the Surayud government's adoption of new strategy would result in a drop in the level of violence in the south. But these hopes were belied. The number of bombings, assassinations and acts of arson increased dramatically. Instead of relying entirely on the traditional law and order approach, the government should undertake effective measures that will solve the whole problem. More autonomy should be given to the provinces. Local political organs such as village councils should be given more authority. Police forces should be localized. The government should undertake a 'mass education' program leading to more political consciousness and active participation of the public in civil affairs. Drastic reforms should immediately be undertaken before "the Land of Smiles" turns into "the Land of Blood and Tears"[46].

Conclusion:

Ethnic problems in Thailand mainly in the South has more recently become the focus of so much international attention. This ethnic violence in Thailand   may soon attract transnational actors who see this conflict as a skirmish in a greater global "War on Terror".

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The Debate between Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Way Out.

Introduction:

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia which never become colonized, and maintained its independence. But there is no stability in politics. Politics have taken the shape of a continuous alteration between democratic governments and authoritarian regimes. Thus, the process of democratic consolidation in Thailand is cyclical: authoritarian regimes alternate with democratic or semi-democratic ones. In this situation, neither authoritarian nor democratic structures are institutionalized.

Defining Authoritarianism:

Before explaining the debate between democracy and authoritarianism, we should know the meaning of democracy and authoritarianism. We have already discussed the meaning of democracy in the previous chapter. Now we discuss the actual meaning of authoritarianism.

Authoritarianism is a form of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms as opposed to democratic individual freedom of thought and action. In authoritarian regimes, the ruler is an absolute dictator and is not restricted by a constitution or laws or opposition etc.

Authoritarianism is also characterized by highly concentrated and centralized power maintained by political repression and the exclusion of potential challengers. It uses political parties and mass organizations to mobilize people around the goals of the regime [1].

As a form of government, authoritarianism concentrates power in the hands of a leader or in a small elite not constitutionally accountable to the people. It is also a reaction to democratic failure, social polarization, economic stagnation and international instability. Adam Przeworski has theorized that "authoritarian equilibrium rests mainly on lies, fear and economic prosperity" [2].

Authoritarianism also tends to embrace the informal and unregulated exercise of political power and depend on a leadership that is "self-appointed and even if

elected cannot be displaced by citizen's free choice among competitors."
Authoritarianism also implies the arbitrary deprivation of civil liberties, and little
tolerance for meaningful opposition"[3]. In authoritarian regimes, the obedience of the
public is created through a mixture of threats, violence, fear and propaganda.

Juan Linz defined authoritarian power as a system in which political pluralism is
constrained, a state of emergency is evoked to gain legitimacy, political participation is
controlled, and the government's rights are ill-defined[4]. Authoritarianism is a belief in,
or practice of, government 'from above', in which authority is exercised regardless of
popular consent[5].

Thus most authoritarian states inflict a degree of oppression upon their citizens,
use violence and torture to achieve their goals, and enforce public conformity by
suppressing intellectual and social freedoms.

The debate between democracy and authoritarianism has become a regular
occurrence in Thailand since 1932, when a group of people overthrew Thailand's 700-
year-old absolute monarchy and established a constitutional monarchy.

From 1932 to 1973, Thai politics was mostly dominated by the authoritarian
regimes, first under Phibun, then under Sarit Thanarat, Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas
Charusathian. But several attempts were made to consolidate democracy in Thailand
between these authoritarian regimes.

The first attempt was the promulgation of the "permanent" constitution for the
kingdom of Thailand in December 1932. This constitution outlined several rights and
duties of the citizens of Thailand, as for example, equality before law, freedom of
religion and belief; freedom of movement, residence, property, speech, education,
assembly and freedom to form associations; respect of the law, protection of country
and paying of taxes etc. The committee which was given the responsibility to draft the
constitution also consisted of civilian people.

The second attempt was the establishment of a unicameral legislature and
appointment of Phraya Mano Pakorn as the first prime minister of Thailand who was
also a civilian.

Several attempts were made by Phahon, when he was prime minister of Thailand from 1933 to 1938, although under him, the ban on communism was reaffirmed, the Press Act (1934) legalized censorship and the formation of political parties was disallowed[6]. His government's main achievement was the extension of primary education to the vast majority of Thai communities. In four years, the expenditure on education quadrupled.

Phahon assumed that his government was responsible to an elected parliament (or sNational Assembly) and appointed upper house, and although the parliaments elected during the period were hardly representative of the country as a whole, they did include many representatives from provincial areas who were thus able to voice their views at the highest levels of Thai government for the first time in the country's history[7].

A few attempts were made by Pridi, a promoter of the 1932 revolution, then prime minister for a very short time. In 1933, he proposed an "economic plan" in reaction to combat the effects of the great slump of the early 1930s, although the plan was not published. The plan considered nationalization of all farm land, with farmers working for the government as paid employees and receiving pensions. But the plan was condemned by then prime minister Mano.

After the second world war Pridi and Seni Pramoj introduced a new, more liberal constitution in 1946, providing for a bicameral legislature with a fully elected lower house, whose members would elect the Senate. Elections were held accordingly in 1946 which appeared to presage in a new era of parliamentary democracy.

Following the election of 1946 Pridi assumed the premiership for a very short period. His government abolished the anti-communist law. For the first time parties began to play their role in Thai politics. The Press censorship was also eased. As a result, several journalists wrote many articles independently.

Labour activists also formed their first labour federation during Pridi's time. Labour unions also organized strikes to raise wages in line with rice prices. All this shows that Pridi and his allies tried to run the country along a democratic path. But the

1947 coup led by military leaders ended these attempts to promote democracy in Thailand.

Then Thailand entered an era of authoritarian rule during Phibun's prime ministership from 1938 to 1944 and also from 1948 to 1957. Phibun succeeded Phahon as Prime minister in 1938. For the next 6 years with the support of the military he assumed an increasingly authoritarian role- one that was facilitated by the outbreak of the second world war and Phibun's alliance with Japan. He favoured the idea that the country needed a leader(Phunam), who could not be like the kings of old but would be articulate, authoritative and able to embody the aspiration of the nation. Phibun saw himself as such a leader, one who could unite all Thais[8].

In Phibun's era the yearly average of the percentage of military expenditure to total national spending increased to 33% compared with 26% during the 1932 to 1937 period, and three quarters of all cabinet posts were held by military men. In August 1942 he reshuffled the cabinet for the first time since 1932 without prior discussion. He supported government intervention in the economy on the ground that it would lead to both prosperity and self-reliance. He also ordered that his picture should be displayed in every home.

Phibuin also passed several authoritarian laws including a press act and an emergency decree which permitted almost unlimited arrest. Beginning in June 1939 Phibun issued a series of decrees and 'cultural mandates' or state conventions to redefine Thailand as a modern state. First of all, he changed the official name for the country from Siam to Thailand. He urged the people to contribute to the strength of the nation by working hard, buying Thai goods and respecting the national flag and anthem. Others codes of social behaviour included adopting some western standards of dress, and discouraging local habits such as chewing betel. His intention to modernize the country was commendable, but the main motive behind this was to strengthen his authoritarian rule.

Phibun also brought education under strict control. All schools had to adopt the curricula, text books and examination rigidly prescribed by the ministry of education, and all teachers had to be registered[9].

Phibun also undermined the remnants royalism and the old order. In 1941 he abolished the use of royalist titles. The movement to equate Buddhism with patriotism was fostered, and there were many conversions from Christianity[10]. Without special permission no official could marry an alien. So it can be seen that the Phibun's authoritarian character affected all aspects of Thai life.

During his second term in office as prime minister, Phibun slightly deviated from his path of authoritarianism, and adapted certain liberal policies for the betterment of the common people. In 1949, a new constitution was promulgated, providing a bicameral parliament, the lower house of which was elected through universal adult suffrage, and the upper appointed by the king. The new constitution barred officials from being members of the national assembly, thus separating the once powerful military and civilian bureaucrats from active involvement in politics[11]. The military opposed this constitution and staged a silent coup in November, 1951. This coup was led by general Phao sriyanon, the head of police and general Sarit Thanarat, head of the army.

The 1951 coup d'état ended Phibu's efforts and also pushed the country into a period of authoritarian rule. The coup group sacked the civilian cabinet, abrogated the constitution, dissolved the parliament, banned political parties and outlawed political meetings. They restored the 1932 constitution, which provided for a unicameral parliament in which half of the seats were filled by executive appointment. 91(or 74%) of the total 123 appointed in the 1951 parliament were military members, of whom 62 were army officers, 143 were navy and 15 were air force officer[12].

In Feb 1952 an emergency law was passed providing the government with wide powers of arrest and press censorship was approved. In the same year, the government also re-enacted the anti-communist law and by Nov 1952, over 100 writers, editors, labour organisers, Intellectuals, young military officers and other dissidents (including Pridi's wife and sons) ware arrested on grounds of alleged communism.

Again in 1955 to 1957, Phibun pushed through parliament new democratic reforms to enable a wider sector of the populace to participate in the political life of the country[13]. Such as public meetings ware permitted (in the "The Thai Hyde Park"),

political parties were allowed to function and election promised. There was to be decentralization of power from the centre to the local authority. Although Phibun's purpose was commendable, his democratic experiment failed.

The September 1957 coup attempt by field marshal Sarit Thanarat ended the above Phibun's initiative to run the country with democratic ideas and also alter the face of modern politics. The Coup group ousted Phibun and appointed Pot Sarasin, the former Thai ambassador to the United states as the interim prime minister. Elections were held in December 1957 in which no party gained a clear majority. Then in January 1958, Thanom Kittikachorn, a leading member of the coup group formed a government with Praphat Charusathien as his vice premier and minister of the interior[14]. Thanom's efforts to combine the effective authority of the military with the legitimate power of a democratically elected parliament created problems from the very beginning.

In Octobet 1958, Sarirt staged his second coup to oust Thanom and became the prime minister. From the time of this coup- or as Sarit himself termed it, the "revolution" (Patiwat)-of Oct 1958 until the student led revolution of Oct 1973, Thailand was under the rule of an authoritarian regime[15].

The underlying rationale for Sarit's coup was, however provided by Thanat Khoman, foreign minister for the next decade in these words: "If we look back at our national history, we can see that this country works better and prospers under an authority around which all elements of the nation can rally. On the contrary, the dark pages of our history show that whenever such an authority is lacking and dispersal elements had their play, the nation was plunged into one disaster after another"[16].

During his rule (from 1958 to 1963), Sarit abolished the constitution; dissolved the parliament; banned political parties; arrested several politicians, journalist, writers and labour leaders; declared martial law and imposed restrictions on the mass media and newspapers. Educational and cultural organizations could organize under strict control. Sarit claimed that "Evils and corrupt practices had multiplied [during the more liberal 'interlude']. Subversion of the government was the order of the day…. The national assembly, the press and certain labour circles had also succumbed [to subversion]"[17].

Not only did Sarit take action against several senior monks who resisted government efforts to constrain their activities, but in 1962, he promulgated a law that brought the entire sangha under much closer control by the government[18].

Besides being the prime minister, Sarit himself assumed the posts of supreme commander, commander chief of the army, director of the police and later also minister for development. An interim constitution which gave extra-ordinary powers to the prime minister was proclaimed in 1959. It provided an all appointed constituent assembly whose main function was to draft a new permanent constitution. From 1958 to 1963, Sarit used the power given by article 17 of that constitution to execute without trial eleven persons, five for arson, one for producing heroin and four on charges on communism[19].

Apart from this, Sarit also cut corners in building up a vast empire of personal wealth: "Sarirt dominated the Thai economy for five years. His character was a combination of the ruthless gangster, the traditional lavish oriental despot and the shrewd judge of expertise. He built up immense private interests for himself in banking, real estate, construction contracting and other sectors. He placed his trusted friends in key positions to make money for him and held people's loyalty by both gratitude and fear"[20].

So we can state that Sarit was a very strong leader who exemplified in his person what in Thailand is known as a *nakleng*. A nakleng, according to Thak Chaloemtiarana is "a person who was not afraid to take risks, a person who 'lived dangerously', [Who was] kind to his friends but cruel to his enemies, a compassionate person, a gambler, a heavy drinker, a lady killer. In short, the kind of person who represented one central model of Thai masculinity"[21].

Effectively, Sarit's coup abolished the constitutional regime, replacing it with an authoritarian regime. But it did more: The regime moulded a state which incorporated capitalist developmentalism and authoritarianism with a technocratic logic to the organization and operation of the state apparatus. The significance of this cannot be underestimated[22].

Sarit died in Dec 1963. After his death, his deputies, general Thanom Kittikachorn and general Prapas Charusathian, extended Sarit's authoritarian rule for another decade. Thanom become prime minister, Supreme commander and minister of defence; Prapas became deputy prime minister, army commander in Chief and remained (since 1957) minister of the interior.

In 1968, a constitution was promulgated creating a bicameral parliament with the lower house comprising elected officials and the upper house containing officials appointed by the king. A senate was appointed with a membership of 105 militaries (including 80 from the army), 12 police and 47 civilians, nearly all of whom were senior members of the bureaucracy[23]. This constitution did not last long and did not satisfy the people's demands. "Although it was democratic on the surface, in its details the constitution essentially legitimized Thanom's military- dominated government "[24].

Elections were held in 1969. But this election was characterized by accusations of rigging that tarnished the government's reputation. Also widespread corruption, military dominance in the government, oppressive police power in the provinces, emerging trade difficulties and economic hardship as well as the rise of an insurgency in the country side fuelled calls for military action.

Realising that his control was beginning to slip and the political situation was on the brink of chaos, Thanom then staged a coup against his own government only two years later in Nov 1971. Thanom said "the current world situation and the increasing threat to the nation's security required prompt action, which is not possible through due process of law under the present constitution"[25]. "The 1971 coup abolished the constitution, parliament, and political parties, while the armed forces divided into several competing factions"[26].

The above attempts made by Thanom and Prapas to run the country under strict authoritarian rule proved futile, as much of the increased political activism was outside Parliament and increasingly involved students and academics, who led the campaign against the government and its regime. Increased repression failed and in October 1973 a student-led rebellion brought hundreds of thousands onto Bangkok's streets; the regime Sarit had established was doomed[27].

Thailand entered into an era of democracy in 1973 and lasted only three years till 1976. During this period student played a heroic role in ousting the authoritarian regime and reinstating a more democratic government.

During this democratic period (1973-1976), the government was shifting away from its authoritarian traditions. People were becoming more involved in the political process- an essential component of democracy. People began to question about the government's ability to rule the country.

Student protests began to take place with regular basis. Their demands for genuine constitutional rule and promulgation of more democratic constitution embraced all strata of urban society, from the king to the professionals, teachers, shopkeepers and workers. Students formed a new nationwide network (National Student Centre of Thailand) which was an inspirational and organizing force. Although they did not bring an end to the military's role in politics, there was at least "a new consciousness of the necessity of sharing political power"[28].

In the aftermath of the 1973 revolution, some important changes took place which showed that the country entered into a period of democracy. First was the creation of a new civilian government under Prime Minister, Dr. Sanya Dharmaskati and the promulgation of a more democratic constitution in Thai history in October 1974.

The 1974 constitution called for a bicameral legislature with an appointed Senate and an elected House of Representatives. Elections were also scheduled for 1975.

There was an increase in the number of new and more outspoken political organizations and associations formed not just by students, but by peasants, farmers and workers. The ban on labour unions was lifted. From the beginning of 1973 to October 14, 134 strikes broke out, and between the revolution of October 14 and the end of the year there were 367. Labour agitation remained high throughout the next three years [29].

During the first week of June 1974, three Thai student groups- the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), the People for Democracy Group (PDG), and the

Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST)-began assisting textile workers in their slowdown protest against mill owners [30]. Some 20,000 textile workers from about 600 factories located in or near Bangkok went on strike. The strike ended a week later when the Sanya government agreed to help the workers in their negotiations with their companies and to raise the minimum wage to 20 baht (less than $1) per day [31].

The protesting workers had also some other demands such as reinstatement of laid- off workers, revision of labour law, and promoting temporary workers to permanent status. The crowning achievement was the proclamation of the 1975 Labour Relations Act which established a complex set of laws, structures and procedures which granted worker's basic rights and permitted them to have a legitimate voice in the formulation of labour policy.

The Sanya government proved sympathetic to the protestor's request for higher rice prices and earmarked some 300 million baht to meet farmer's demands. This positive response encouraged other villagers to organize their own petitions to the government for help with tenancy problems or for redress of other grievances [32].

In early June, the government created an extraordinary committee "empowered to reallocate land and investigate grievances of landless farmers. This new committee was given unprecedented authority to arrest and detain uncooperative land owners" [33]. In the same year, the Sanya government gave the universities bureau 15 million baht to send students out into the villages to educate peasants on their rights and duties in a democratic system [34].

Restrictions on political parties and media were lifted. As a result, a number of political parties began to function and also a large number of liberal newspapers and magazines were able to develop. The 1973-1976 democratic period also provided press with a fresh, vibrant environment. In July 1974, for example, 400 new publishing licences were registered including those of leftist publications[35]. During this democratic period, a 'proper' role of the press as the peoples' political voice became more viable.

Following the 1975 elections, a coalition government was formed under Kukrit Pramoj, a leader of the Social Action Party. In his period as prime minister from March

15 to April 1976, Kukrit announced to the Assembly that his government would get US troops out of the country within twelve months, abolish the anti-communist law, raise the minimum wage, build public housing, provide free bussing for poor, and create a special fund for village development. Never before had a government announced such a radical programme.

Kukrit's government established a price support scheme for rice growers and also pushed through the National Assembly an act transferring 2500 million baht of revenue from the central government to *tambon* councils, that is subdistrict or commune councils, to be spent on public works and projects such as roads, reservoirs, public buildings and electricity supply. This act was the first significant move in the direction of decentralization made since the reform of Chulalongkorn in the 1890s [36].

Another election were held in April 1976 and Seni Pramoj (brother of Kukrit), leader of the Democrat Party became the prime minister of Thailand for a very brief period from April to October 1976. He formed a shaky coalition government and was unable to initiate any democratic reforms.

Thus, the instability and inefficiency of the new coalition governments under Kukrit Pramoj and Seni Pramoj just two years after the revolution led many to begin to doubt the democratic reforms and others to withdraw their support. Also after the 1973 revolution, the student movements began to become radicalized and fragmented and much more aggressive in the the pursuit of their goals. "Before a week had passed, student groups were factionalized, fragmented and out of control due to personal rivalries, petty jealousies and lack of agreement on what to do with their new found power."[37].

In addition, many student leaders breaking off from the main movement sending their own teams to "the most remote, poverty-stricken rural part of the country, while other students, in their group concentrated their efforts on slum dwellers in the capital"[38]. Also a variety of new rightists' organizations emerged, such as Red Gaurs, Nawaphon and Village Scouts led to a sharp polarization in society which created instability and fear.

"By 1976, political assassinations… were commonplace. Police harassed the electioneering of leftist parties, and even active moderates were afraid for their safety. Violence, vituperation and incivility were now part of public life as they never had been before in Thailand"[39]. Thus, in order to restore stability in Thailand, a military junta calling itself the "National Administrative Reform Council" organized a coup and seized power. This coup proved to be a setback for democracy and a path for authoritarianism.

Martial law was instituted, parliament was abolished and the constitution, which had taken so long to write was set aside. It appeared that there was to be a return to some type of military dictatorship like that which had existed prior to 1973 [40].

The rationale for the 1976 coup was that it would reinstate peace and order. The military, supported by the monarchy and other rightist groups, felt that "the public at large, dissatisfied with the result of an open political system since October 1973, might be willing to forgive and quickly forget- if domestic stability appeared a likely reward for the sacrifice of representation, and if a coup could restore stability without violence"[41].

After the 1976 coup, Thailand's three years' democratic period ended and the country again came under the purview of authoritarian rule under Thanin Kraivichien, who was appointed as prime minister by the coup group. Many observers regard the government of Thanin as the most repressive in Thai history, surpassing in its authoritarian control of the populace even the governments of the various military dictators [42].

The ultra-rightist policies of the Thanin government- especially its stipulated twelve-year plan for political development, its obsession with communism and unnecessary aggressiveness toward the communist regimes in neighbouring countries- resulted in increasing polarization of Thai society [43].

Government also issued an order that allowed authorities to detain "elements dangerous to society" for six months without trial and then to try them before a military tribunal. Over 3000 were arrested. Books were banned and burned, journals closed, libraries raided, publishers harassed, political meetings outlawed and union

activity suppressed. University teachers and bureaucrats were forced to attend courses on the evils of communism. Some 8000 people were arrested on the charge of being a 'threat to society' [44].

The October 6 coup and the subsequent harsh reactionary policies implemented by the Thanin government convinced thousands that a radical revolution was the only alternative to a right-wing authoritarian regime. Many people left their homes to join the Communist Party of Thailand in order to work for a revolutionary change in the Thai political system[45].

Thanin did not have the full support of the military leaders. They convinced that Thanin was leading the country to disaster, that his extremist policies were having a divisive effect. Ultimately in October 20, 1977 the Thanin government was overthrown by the same coup group which had brought Thanin to power one year earlier.

General Kriangsak, supreme commander of the armed forces, the mastermind of the October 1976 coup became the prime minister of Thailand. His government made possible a return to a more open political system by easing press censorship, establishing better relations with labour unions and by giving amnesty to the student leaders arrested in October 1976. Kriangsak also extended his patronage to moderate leaders of labour unions, especially in the state enterprises, which had been under threat of deregistration under Thanin[46].

The Kriangsak government on the other hand reinstated a constitution closer to the 1932 constitution than to the 1974 one which signalled his authoritarian character. Under this constitution that is the 1978 constitution, there is an appointed upper house of 225 members, and an elected lower house of 301. (Of those actually appointed, all but 31 are from the armed services, particularly the army, whether serving officers or retired. In the 1975 Senate, by contrast, no active service officers were represented.) The upper house votes with the lower in joint session on matters of national security, the throne, national economy, budget, and no-confidence votes. The prime minister and 44 cabinet members do not need to be elected[47].

Elections were held in April 1979, but they were viewed with considerable

scepticism by large sections of the populace. Only 24 percent of the eligible electorate voted, as compared with 47 percent in April 1976[48]. Because under the election bill (January 1979) Thais with alien fathers (i.e., mostly Chinese) were not allowed to vote: this effectively excluded nearly one-quarter of the previously eligible voters in Bangkok[49].

In addition, during the Kriangsak regime, diverse military interests were well served. The defense budget has shown a remarkable 25 percent increase each year since 1976. (The army gets the lion's share, more than the navy and air force combined). Altogether, defense and internal security, which is largely the responsibility of the police, amounted to more than one quarter of the 1978 budget[50]. Thus, in reality Kriangsak government from 1977-1980 is a combination of democratic ideals and authoritarian character.

Thailand entered a new era of semi-democracy under General Prem Tinsulanonda who replaced General Kriangsak and remained prime minister of Thailand from 1980 to1988. Prem had acquired a reputation as a professional soldier who gained support both from palace and military and also from civilian people. He appointed senior generals and bureaucrats to the key ministries of Defense, Finance and Interior. Also metropolitan and provincial businessmen dominated the Assembly and rotated through the remaining ministries[51].

During Prem's era, a number of political parties were allowed to function and contest elections which were held in 1983 and in 1986 respectively. Although several coups were staged by military to oust Prem from his power, he has been able to remain in power for an unexpectedly long time.

Also the economy grew in "an unprecedented manner, reaching double digit growth rate at the end of the 1980s. Also unprecedented was its integration into global trade, investment communication and information systems"[52]. The level of education rose at an unprecedented rate and the number of people with higher education in the 1980s was up to 15 percent from 2 percent in the 1960s[53]. In this semi-democratic period under Prem's leadership, we could see a more stable political system emerge.

Following the parliamentary elections of July 24, 1988, Chatichai Choonhavan, the leader of Chart Thai Party (Thai Nation Party) became prime minister. His tenure from 1988 to 1991 can be termed as democratic because Chatichai was the country's first elected member of parliament to become prime minister since 1976. He had assumed power without any military support.

During his tenure in 1989 parliament took the bold step of cutting the military budget, and on a range of issues there was an increasing divide between civilian politicians and the generals[54]. Also a group of politicians had begun to attack the military budget allocation and they sought to enlarge the proportion of government funds available for other development activities. In 1990, the Budget Scrutiny Committee passed a token cut in the military allocation. The cabinet rejected a plan for the military to build a new intelligence centre[55].

Labour organizations and peasant protest emerged for the first time since the repression in 1976[56]. Trade Unions in the state enterprises started a campaign against plans for privatization, and workers in the port disrupted shipping. In the countryside, villagers protested against eucalyptus plantation, against dam-building, and against loggers.

Chatichai's premiership also promised a better deal for workers. He demonstrated an intention to accord greater priority to engaging workers in a dialogue, allowing them to express concerns on wages and conditions, social security, privatization, temporary work contracts and child labour.

But the existing Chatichai government was not universally applauded and was seen to be highly corrupt. The rising middle class believed that his political party, Chart Thai, had "bought" its way into power through rampant vote buying[57]. With the blessing of the King, a coup was carried out by a military junta- called the National Peacekeeping Council-led by General Suchinda[58]. The author David Van Praagh describes in his book, "Struggle for Democracy" how the NPC "dissolved the legitimate government and the parliament and imposed martial law...the high command abolished the 1978 constitution as amended in 1983 to limit military influence."[59].

This coup was regarded as a major setback for the consolidation of democracy and pushed the country into another era of authoritarianism under General Suchinda for only a few months (from February 1991 to May 1992). The 1991 takeover inaugurated a period of military-authoritarian rule that boasted the usual features of technocratic caretaker government, a military appointed legislative assembly, a new charter and a scheduled return to elections.

Although progress toward democracy had been temporarily halted, the military understood that the Thai society, especially the middle class had developed to the point that it would no longer be acceptable to have prolonged military control of the government. Suchinda appointed a civilian Anand Panyarachun to the position of prime minister of the interim government. His interim government was filled with "technocrats and businessmen" and was mostly non-corrupt and fairly progressive in trying to implement social and economic reforms[60].

Anand also paved the way for elections, which led to a coalition of parties sympathetic to the military. Promising not to assume the prime ministership, Suchinda sought the position following the March 1992 elections. After the coup, the Junta began to strengthen their power in a number of ways. As Van Praagh reports, they "sacked the interim legislative assembly to draft a new constitution and pass laws, with 148 military officers making up a majority of 292 members."[61]. They imposed a ban on labour unions to get rid of labour unrest.

The junta announced that the inquiry into corruption in high places and of current officials in the previous government would not extend to well-to-do military officers. The junta also promoted changes in the new constitution that would further consolidate their hold on the government, by supporting "an appointed senate equal or greater in power to an elected lower house."[62].

The above events were the last straw for the Thai people. The public was alarmed to see the manipulation of the constitution, the consolidation of the junta's power an increase in Suchinda's power as prime minister. They feared that the military's intention was not to remove a corrupt government but to institutionalize their rule for several years to come. As a result, demonstrations started in April 1992,

almost 20 years after the 1973 revolution.

Numbering around 100000 people, this protest was called the "largest pro-democracy protest since October 1973 student-led march"[63]. Another peaceful protest began in May 1992 led by Chamlong, who claimed that he would not eat until Suchinda resigned. More than 80,000 Thais joined him in peaceful protests.

The composition of the protesters was much different than that of the student-led protests of 1973: "Whereas the anti-military movement of the early 1970's was led by and consisted of students and more radical elements of Thai society, the anti-Suchinda movement was very broad based both in leadership and rank-in-file participation. Prominent among the leaders were elected politicians, former bureaucrats and military officers, NGO leaders and 1970's-vintage student activists, many of whom were now involved in successful careers in the private sector"[64].

Ultimately, with the support of the King Phumipol and modern technology (copiers, fax machines, e-mail, and cellular phones), which kept the protesters aware of their progress in spite of the government's censorship of the press, Suchinda resigned his office of Prime Minister. In his place, Anand was again appointed as an interim prime minister, and with the aid of technocratic government, he "successfully restored political tranquillity and behavioural decency." to Thailand's government[65].

In addition, he removed the supreme commander, head of the army, and two other military figures implicated in the violence. He started the process of extricating military figures from the fiefdoms in the state enterprises, particularly by removing the air force head from the chair of the national airline. He organized a relatively clean and orderly general election.

So, we could say that the May uprising of 1992 marked the decline of authoritarian rule under Suchinda and cleared the path for further restoration of democracy in Thailand. Then Thailand entered into the longest era of democracy yet seen in Thai history under several rulers. In the aftermath of the 1992 Uprising, the armed forces' image was tarnished, soldiers were barracked, and Thailand gained 14 years of uninterrupted elected civilian governments[66].

The new elections in September 1992 brought about a coalition of parties opposed to the military and supportive of civilian rule. The election featured 2417 contenders from sixteen parties contesting 360 parliamentary seats. Chuan Leekpai, leader of the Democratic Party, mobilized a coalition of parties to become prime minister, and set forth the goal of democratizing the political system[67]. He became the longest serving civilian prime minister in Thai history who was reappointed to the position of prime minister for the second term from 1997-2001.

For strengthening the democratic procedures, Chuan Leekpai gave more decision making power to the local level, especially the tambon (commune) councils. He initiated several projects designed to make bureaucracy more efficient and responsive to the needs of Thai citizens. For providing greater educational opportunities, he also got through the legislature a bill increasing the number of years of compulsory schooling from six to nine.

Chuan also scheduled the next elections for 1995. His call for elections was a further sign of the institutionalization of democracy because for the first time in many years, a free election was carried out by a civilian prime minister, who would either be kept in office, or replaced by another civilian prime minister.

The 1995 election, which Chuan Leekpai lost and brought Banharn Silapa Archa to the position of prime minister (from July 1995 to November 1996) of Thailand can be characterized as a further evolutionary step towards democratic government. The election itself, the second since the revolt of May 1992 was fairly free[68]. The number of people who voted in this election were many, nearly two million people as young as 18, after the voting age was reduced from 20 to 18.

The transfer of power to the successor government, headed by Banharn Silpa-Archa, was peaceful, orderly and in accordance with the constitution. The new government appointed a new Senate, first to be so nominated by a democratically elected prime minister. Its composition for the first time showed a drastic relaxation of the grip the military had held over Thai politics for such a long time. Of the 260 members of the new Senate, only 39- as against 139 in the outgoing Senate- were active military officers[69].

Chavalit Youngchaiyudh replaced Banharn as prime minister following the November 1996 elections. The onset of the Asian Financial Crisis caused a loss of confidence in the Chavalit government. The baht fell from around 25 to the dollar, a level it had retained for decades, to 56 to the dollar by the following year. The ensuing political chaos finally concluded with new elections that resulted in Chavalit's replacement by the durable Chuan Leekpai as prime minister in November 1997[70].

During the democratic period from 1992 to 2006, a constitution was promulgated in 1997. It was the first constitution to be written directly "by the people" and so it can be called the "People's Constitution". It encouraged horizontal accountability, with independent state agencies now checking government activities. Most notably, the judiciary was strengthened through the introduction of a constitutional court possessing the power of judicial review as well as an administration court to oversee bureaucratic affairs[71].

The 1997 constitution also established several quasi-judicial agencies such as National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC), the Election Commission (EC), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), an Ombudsman and the National Auditor General (AG).

The welcome document of the 1997 constitution brought in a new openness of government, and increased environmental protection and enhanced social welfare. The bicameral legislature now centered on an elected house of representatives of five hundred members, most of whom represented single-seat constituencies, while the remainder were elected at large. The two-hundred-member senate, also elected, was to play a secondary role[72]. Suffrage was extended universally, but all candidates required to possess university degrees.

The constitution also required that the prime minister be an elected MP, whereas earlier constitutions permitted any Thai citizen to be an appointed premier. Further, in contesting the Senate elections, candidates would be barred from holding bureaucratic positions or even party memberships, thereby weakening pernicious old links between politics and business.

The constitution also ranged widely across the social terrain, directing the state to provide national health care, welfare and 12 years of public schooling. Other clauses called for consumer rights, gender equality, protection from domestic violence, and consultations with relevant NGOs over projects having environmental impact. In consequence, the charter's sweeping reforms promised to do much in raising the quality of Thailand's democracy[73].

Thus, the 1997 constitution was the first real attempt to establish meaningful constitutional authority and initiate reforms that could lead to a more accountable and democratic government.

Thaksin Shinawatra, a populist business tycoon was elected prime minister in 2001. He remained in office until the coup in 2006. He and his party (Thai Rak Thai) were able to achieve a landslide victory in the 2001 elections. His party, their rise to power and his tenure in office marked an important era in Thai politics.

The 2001 election can be seen as a further evolutionary step toward democratic government. This election held under the provisions of the 1997 constitution. In the 2001 elections, TRT played up the problems which existed as the result of the economic crises-they promoted the rights of the business elite. But they also promised to "pour government money into rural areas", in the form of social programs such as "universal health care, soft loans for every community, a three-year debt moratorium for farmers, and a peoples' bank"[74]. No one had ever appealed to the rural masses in such a way before.

With the support of the rural masses as well as business elite, Thaksin scored a sweeping victory in the 2001 elections, capturing 12 million votes, or around 40 percent of the total vote. "The 6 January 2001 elections completely reshaped the political landscape in Thailand: on 9 February 2001, 339 of the 500 MP's in the new lower house voted for Thaksin to become prime minister. This was an unprecedented parliamentary majority"[75].

Thaksin's principal mission was to rescue Thai businessmen from the 1997 financial crisis and restore economic growth. Then he broadened his political mission to

include reforms that would modernize Thailand, especially the bureaucracy and the political system, and hence prevent the recurrence of financial crisis in the future. The slogan for his party- "Think new, act new for every Thai"-reflected the image he projected as a modernist and reformer[76]. As a result, "the economy recovered and domestic capital was strengthened"[77].

Thaksin and his party enjoyed another landslide victory in the 2005 elections. In this election, his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party gained 19 million votes (more than 60% of the votes cast), substantially improving on the result achieved in 2001[78].

Although the election law forbade any instant handouts in this period, but Thaksin announced a much more elaborate programme of election promises than in 2001, including an extension of the village funds, land deeds for every landholder, a government pond dug for anyone prepared to pay a small fuel cost, four new cheap loan schemes, free distribution of cows, training schemes for the poor, cheaper school fees, special payments for children forced to drop out of school because of poverty, an educational gift bag for every new mother, care centres for elderly, more sports facilities in urban areas, cheaper phone calls, an end to eviction from slums, more cheap housing, lower taxes, more investment in the universal health scheme, a nationwide scheme of irrigation, and a deadline for an end to poverty- "Four years ahead, there will be no poor people. Won't that be neat?"[79]. For this election, the populist slogan was "The heart of TRT is people."

Thaksin's arrival as prime minister in 2001 signalled a new era of democratic success in Thai history. In addition, he achieved a number of firsts that seemed to augur well for democratic stability and effective (or at least coherent) governance. He became the first prime minister to complete a full four-year term in office, the first to be re-elected and the first to preside over a government composed entirely of ministers from one party[80].

Despite the enormous popularity of Thaksin, especially in rural areas, opposition politicians, academics, journalists and middle-class Bangkonians had become concerned that the Thaksin regime had eroded the mechanism and principles of democracy[81]. Thaksin devalued the importance of parliament, neutralized the check-and-balance

bodies of the 1997 constitution, micro- managed the electronic media and said in public that law, rule-of-law, democracy and human rights were not important because they often got in the way of "working for the people"[82] He had also shown an unwillingness to tolerate criticism, stifling both public and parliamentary debate.

Also Thaksin used his position to reallocate positions of power within the government by promoting friends and families that were loyal to him and his party, while displacing those that were not.

It could also be added that although he was a democratically elected prime minister, his government took on an increasingly authoritarian character. On several occasions, he encouraged people to draw parallels between himself and authoritarian military leaders of the past, especially Sarit Thanarat, whose memory had become associated with direct and decisive action[83].

Ultimately, Thaksin's regime was overthrown by a military coup led by General Sonthi on 19th September 2006 with the consent of the king. The military junta named itself the "Administrative Reform Group under the Democratic system with the King as the Head of State"[84]. The military declared martial law; revoked the 1997 constitution; controlled the media; arrested a handful of politicians; threatened opponents, particularly in poor rural areas and the city's slums; and announced an investigation into "unusual wealth"[85]. The army banned political parties and authorized censorship.

In addition, the coup group facilitated the promulgation of a new constitution that, unlike its predecessor, weakened the power of elected civilian governments by facilitating enhanced intra-party factionalism; implementing an electoral system that hindered the development of strong, centralized parties; and making the Senate into a half-appointed body[86].

A new constitution was issued, called 'junta-support constitution' in 2007. It was drafted under military sponsorship, bears anti-democratic traits, including the return to a partially appointed upper legislative chamber, a fragmentation of the party system and elected politicians[87]. Thus, this coup was a serious setback for democracy and blessing for authoritarianism. After the 2006 coup, Thailand reverted for a period to

military authoritarianism.

Given the above scenario, we can say that the present political system is neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian. So we can call it a mixture of both, democracy and authoritarianism.

The Way Out:

A viable and responsible government that would emerge in Thailand may not exactly like the British Parliamentary model that has been followed in since 1932. It may be a mixed system in which the military bureaucratic elites and the elected politicians share power and each side competes for support from the masses in their respective spheres of influence. The peculiarity of the Thai polity is that, apart from the institution of the monarchy, no other political institution can claim legitimacy of its own accord.

Democracy in Thailand is not fully institutionalized. Several coups staged by the military were major setbacks for democracy and froze the proper functioning of democracy. Also no democratically elected government has run a full term except for the first Thaksin government (2001-2005); more often than not they fell because of corruption scandals. The Chatighai government (1988-1991) was dubbed the "buffet cabinet" for the alleged "all you can eat" behaviour among the cabinet ministers[88].

Authoritarian governments on the other hand come and go, but they never succeed in institutionalizing their political control over society. Authoritarian governments have been influential but have not produced a true ruler. In fact, most authoritarian regimes have been rather fragile when faced with mass movements, as evidenced in the fall of Thanom- Praphas clique after October 1973 student revolution and the fall of General Suchinda after the May 1992 mass uprising.

The only way out of the above unstable situation is to establish such a government which will be accepted by both pro- democratic and pro- authoritarian regimes. This type of government was in power during the Prem era, that is, the semi-democratic period from 1980 to1988. That government was much more stable as it was accepted by both military and the civilian people.

In the semi-democratic government, the bureaucratic elite have made certain

concessions to the non-bureaucratic forces to allow participation in the political process. The semi-democratic government in Thailand is dominated by the military, top-level bureaucrats, members of the parliament and the monarchy. The prime minister is elected by a coalition of parties and major ministries are given to retired military figures, famous politicians, or high-level bureaucrats.

In a dispensation of this kind, there is an increasing number of pressure groups including business organizations, that influence policy making. The semi-democratic political system is accepted as legitimate by the rulers and ruled because it involves the participation of most groups within the society. In this political system, the Thais do not feel that they are being oppressed by their government leaders and civil liberties are protected.

Thus we may conclude that the way out of this dichotomy between democracy and authoritarianism lies in the adoption of the semi-democratic system.

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Thai Democracy: Functions and Limitations

Introduction:

Over long years democracy and the process of democratization has become a central interest for everyone, extending from ordinary citizens to politicians, as well as political scientists, policy makers and scholars. The countries in Southeast Asia are also engaged in the process of moulding themselves in accordance with democratic ideals. Following the rapid spread of democratization around the world, Thailand also quickly entered into the orbit of this democratization process. As a result, Thailand has become one of Asia's strongest democracies in a relatively short period of time.

Functions:

For the past 700 years, Thailand was a monarchical country where the King was the absolute monarch. The 1932 revolution transferred power from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. From then on Thai democracy has been functioning slowly or rapidly as the prevailing political circumstances warranted. But before the 1932 revolution, the credit was given to the absolute monarch for preparing the country for democracy.

During Mongut's rule, several reforms helping to lay the foundation of democratization were effected. For example, he put a special emphasis on western education. He invited western tutors to his home for teaching his children. Trading agreements were made not only with England but also with other countries such as United States and France.

During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the term democracy first came into vogue. Although he promoted modern education for a new generation of Chakris and then for other officials not associated with royal service, a group of princes and officials for the first time began to question the King's ability to effectively function and control a rapidly changing and growing government and nation.

"In a strongly worded sixty- page petition addressed to the King early in 1885, eleven young men strongly urged that the King quickly move toward a system of parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy"[1]. The King took prompt

action by sending Prince Devawongee "to study and report on the organization of European governments"[2]. The prince recommended the formation of a cabinet of 12 equal ministries including the heads of the seven old ministries and five new ones, the responsibilities of each to be newly defined on functional lines… new ministries were to be created for public works, public instruction, justice, army and privy seal"[3]. As a result, systematic changes were effected as the bureaucracy was created with a view to bringing about a transformation similar to western standards.

Thus it can be said that the first visible stirrings for democracy began under Chulalongkorn and continued until the revolution in 1932. It is generally agreed that Thai democratization is a progressive story spanning the period from King Chulaongkorn (1867-1910) through the 1932 revolution to the October 1973 and May 1992 uprisings.

Prior to 1932, that is, during the monarchical regime, several attempts were made to democratize the country. In 1910, an unsuccessful coup was attempted by a group of loser army officials to replace the absolute monarchy with a republican government. In 1917, prince Chakrabongse submitted a memorandum to the King suggesting that it was time to grant some kind of constitution to the people[4].

From the late 1920s to May 1932- a month before the end of the absolute monarchy- the question of whether a democratic form of government was suitable for Siam was one of the major concerns of the regime.

In 1932, a group of "middle-level officials" consisting of the new bourgeois elite, well-educated -civil servants and army officers, staged a coup that ended the system of absolute monarchy. However, democracy has not achieved its goals in Thailand like the other democratic nations in the world, because Thailand has alternated between military regimes, 'Thai-Style democracy' and civilian government.

Thus, it is no wonder that we have seen several attempts during this period by the governments of the day to create a functional Thai democracy which were as follows:

The coup leaders (Colonel Phahon, the highest ranking military official, Pridi Phanomyong, a brilliant French-educated student lawyer and intellectual, and the

Major Phibun Songkram) prepared a constitution based on a three-stage approach to democracy: 1. The coup group (known as the 'people's party) in control of government;

2. The people's Assembly, part elected, part-appointed;

3.Direct election to the Assembly whenever more than half the population has completed four years of primary education- but in any case not later than ten years' time[5].

A parliament and a government acceptable to both the King and the People's Party were formed. People's Party at the time of its seizure of power had issued a manifesto with a six-point program[6]:

i.   freedom and equality of the people in politics, law, courts and business;
ii. internal peace and order;
iii. economic well-being and work for all by means of economic planning;
iv. equality of privileges;
v.   freedom and liberty not conflicting with the foregoing;
vi. education for all.

The coup group that is the People's Party issued a crucial text, the *Announcement* of the People's Party. The *Announcement* criticized the monarchical state as dishonest, corrupt and indifferent to the people's sufferings[7].

The *Announcement further* attacked the wicked arbitrariness and nepotism of the monarchical state. It also marked a forceful reconceptualization of the relations between the state and the people: People! Let it be known that our country belongs to the people and not to the King as was deceived. Our forefathers had rescued the freedom of the country from the hands of the enemy. The royalty only took advantage and gathered millions for themselves[8].

Pridi, one of the coup leaders promised 'equality of opportunity', and government employment for all through his economic reform plan in 1933. But the plan was condemned both by the royalist prime minister (Phya Manopakorn) and by conservatives in the coup group as "communistic"[9].

Thailand's first "permanent" constitution was promulgated in December 1932. It consisted of certain articles which deal with the rights and duties of Thai citizens:

i.   Titles of birth no longer inherited privilege and laid down the basic rights of people;

ii. Equality before the law, freedom of religion and belief, 'when it is not antagonistic to the duties of a citizen or when it does not contravene the peace and order or the good morals of the people' (Article-13);

iii. People were also given the right, within the bounds to be defined by law, of free movement, residence, property, speech, education, assembly and the right to establish associations (Article-14);

iv. As for duties, these were relatively straight forward: respect the law, protect the country, and assist the government by paying taxes and by other means (Article-15)[10].

The constitution also outlined the structure of the government which was of the classic parliamentary type with a single legislative house and a royal cabinet responsible to it. The King's independent position was reduced. In addition, the constitution included one unique and crucial provision. It declared that since the country needed a period of tutelage before entering full democracy, half of the Parliament would be appointed by the government. This condition was to continue until half the eligible voters had completed four years of school or to continue for ten years, whichever came first[11].

During the reign of the country's first and second prime minister that is, under Phya Manopakorn and Phibun, two *Manuals for Citizens* were issued by the Department of the Interior in 1936 and in 1948 respectively regarding the ideas of democracy.

In the first manual, Siam is said to be no longer an absolute monarchy, but a system of democracy, which is described as a 'government of the citizens and by the citizens [Phonlameung]'[12]. In a revised edition published a year later, a rationale for the manual is given: In every country that has government in accordance with

constitutional democracy, the people have a duty to study and know their rights and duties… so as to be able to act as good citizens[13].

In addition to the duties outlined in the 1936 manual (patriotism and defending the country, payment of taxes, voting, respecting the law, and obtaining education and working), citizens were now expected to report deaths, births, and marriages, report building activities and perform the various duties of the citizen to the state.

In both the manuals, rights are defined as having access to political and legal equality and freedom. However, rights are limited so as not to infringe another's rights. Freedom is to be constrained by law, for freedom means being 'able to do anything without infringing the law of the land. Rights include freedoms of movement and expression, freedom to take up any occupation or legal residence, or to set up an association. These are all part and parcel of a generalized liberal presentation of democracy as a system safeguarding individuals[14].

Thus the manuals significantly set forth the popular representation of democracy by the state to the people- a formal presentation of quite liberal forms of democracy.

A new version of the constitution was introduced in May, 1946 when Pridi became prime minister. This constitution provided for a national assembly made up of two houses. The lower house was fully elective. The upper house (senate) was elected by the popularly elected lower house. For the first time parties began to play a role.

Thus during Pridi's tenure emerged party politics, a fully elected Assembly, the restitution of seized territories and a liberal foreign policy (support for anti-colonial independence movements). Also elections were held in May 24, 1946.

Phibun Songkhram promoted the image of authoritarianism on the one hand during his first term as prime minister from 1938 to 1944, on the other hand he made several democratic reforms to enable a wider sector of the populace to participate in the political life of the country in his second term from 1948 to 1957.

Phibun visited Europe and America in 1955 and returned enthusiastic about the possibilities of democratization. He legalized political parties and lifted press censorship in preparation for general elections early in 1957[15]. Public meetings were permitted (in the "Thai Hyde Park")[16].

As a result of passing an act for the registration of political parties, a first of its kind in Thai history, more than twenty-five political parties were registered, which can be divided into four groups. The first and pivotal group was actually only one party, the massive official government party, Seri Manangkhasila, with the government's parliamentary supporters as its core. The second group included a number of parties which supported individuals in the government but not the government as such. The most interesting of these were the Thammathipat, which supported Phibun, and the National Democratic Party, which supported Sarit. The next group was also one party, the Democrats, with Khuang Ahaiwong as its head. This group of conservatives made up the only party with any continuity of tradition. The final group comprised a number of leftist parties. The two most important of these, the Free Democrat and the Economist, were built around members of parliament from northeast Thailand[17].

During the reign of authoritarian rule from 1957 to 1973, first under Sarit, and then under his predecessors, Thanom and Prapas, few attempts were made to consolidate democracy in Thailand which attested the democratic aspirations of the people.

During his time, Sarit (1957 to 1963) adopted a national economic development plan and a national educational development plan which indicated his willingness to develop a new Thai-Style democracy as he did not believe in the western model of democracy. In 1961, Sarit declared to the constitutional assembly that he saw the education system and economy as the foundation for democracy[18]. Two departments were also established to promote local democracy- Local Administration Department (LAD) and Community Development Department (CDD).

LAD's broadly defined responsibilities included promoting the well-being of local areas and the efficiency of their administrative units, social development, registration

of populations, preserving law and order, public safety, aid relief and occupational development[19].

The CDD was carved out of a bureau in the Interior Ministry in 1962. It aimed at facilitating rural development on the basis of 'aided self-help'. Among the CDD's stated objectives were the fostering of meaningful local government, sanitation and an increase in family income[20]. In order to achieve such goals, a new bureaucratic regime was established with professional community workers- the agents of development.

Thanom Kittikachorn, prime minister and Praphas Charusathien, deputy prime minister made several attempts to promote democracy at the local level.

Praphas proposed a two-stage development of democracy, focusing first on developing self-government at the local level, with the democratically inclined bureaucracy acting as guardians, educating the people in democratic ways. This stage was named 'preliminary democracy'[21]. In the second stage, if preliminary democracy succeeded, the 'guardians' should withdraw and let the people be independent, and a parliamentary system in which the people's representatives control the administration would come into being[22].

Praphas also argued for the integration of traditional national ideology with the new ideology of the civilized world- 'democracy'.

In 1965, like CDD, the Project to Develop Democratic Citizens (PDDC) was launched. The democratic features of the project were essentially the delegation of minor administrative and public works duties, training in efficient meeting practices, and training of village heads to promote the democratic system among villagers[23].

In addition, three manuals were issued in support of the Project for the Development of Democratic Citizens. In these manuals, a more extensive definition of democracy was elaborated.

The first manual, that is, the Project for Democratic Citizens Book is a discussion of the PDDC programme and its success upto 1967[24]. It begins with a perceptive understanding of democracy. The dictionary, the reader is told, defines democracy as

system of government in which the people are sovereign, which is then explained as meaning that the highest political power comes from the people and that the people are the owners of political power[25].

The next two documents were The Sub-District Committee Manual (hereafter Manual 1) and the Subdistrict Committee Manual According to the Project to Develop Democratic Citizens (Manual 2). They expanded the notion of democracy, relating it more firmly to national ideology and to the problem of 'Thainess' (khwampebthai)[26].

Manual 1 stresses that people need to be given the opportunity to practise democracy at a local level, which would be scrutinized by the central bureaucracy[27].

Manual 2 argues that in England, the 'model of democracy', local government, was the basis on which democracy was established. Drawing from the authoritative experience of England it is stated: Developing the citizens of Thailand to have a knowledge and understanding, and to realize the value of government in a democracy, it is necessary for the people to have the opportunity to practise and have a familiarity of government at the local level first[28].

In 1968, Prime Minister Thanom proposed a new constitution very similar in many respect to previous constitutions, especially the 1949 constitution. This document provides for the separation of powers and a bicameral legislature with an elected lower house and an appointed senate. It includes numerous provisions protecting "rights and liberties" of the people, including the freedoms of religion, speech, assembly and association. It likewise protects private property and sanctions free political parties. Also a list of "Directive Principles of State Policy" is included to guide future legislation and administration toward world peace, national security, free primary education, the promotion of arts and science, private enterprise, social welfare, public health and local government[29].

Thus after the adoption of the 1968 constitution, the Thai people had tasted the atmosphere of freedom and politicians had demonstrated an unusual boldness in criticizing the government for a very brief period. Also with the promulgation of the constitution in 1968 and the establishment of legislature in 1969, an economist was led

to observe with a sense of optimism (or perhaps scepticism) when he wrote: "After a decade of central government control, 1969 was a year of open elections and the establishment of a parliament where economic and social issues could be discussed freely from the perspective of different regions and social classes"[30].

The actual democratic period began in October 1973, when a student-led uprising led to a new era of liberating the country from military rule. Since then we have seen such periodic improvements in the functioning of Thai democracy.

In the aftermath of the 1973 revolution, new interest groups and politicians who were more accountable to the people took over the highest positions of government. The period from 1973 to 1976 marked an unprecedented proliferation of protest groups. Farmers, workers and students had for the first time an organizational base and a political environment of mobilization and protest which lasted longer than any such previous period in Thai history[31].

During the 1973-1976 Democratic Period, the expectations of peasants rose, only to be belied again with the military's return to power. Nevertheless, the Democratic Period resulted in the temporary mobilization of rural people, who attempted to organize and make demands on government authorities. Thus, the "passive peasants" for a moment in time- became activists[32].

The passing of a labour relations law and the establishment of a labour relations committee were landmarks in Thai labour history. Also with the support of some student organizations, Farmer's Federation of Thailand (FFT) was established in December 1974. Unions were legalized, the seriously understaffed Labour Department valiantly sought to mediate in employer-employee disputes and a minimum wage was fixed. This minimum wage doubled over the period 1973 to 1975 to 25 baht ($ 1.25) a day in and around Bangkok, but increased less in the future provinces[33].

The 1973 uprising had brought the students into politics in a significant way. The university students, led by three most important groups- the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) founded in 1965, the People for Democracy Group (PDG) and the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST), demanded a new constitution, a

new civilian government and the well-being of the common people. More than 200,000 students spearheaded the revolution.

In addition, the barriers to political education and experimentation were lifted. As student demonstrations confronted a wide range of social and political issues, intellectuals translated and published works that had been banned, including the Marxist texts[34]. A number of students fanned out in the countryside to spread democratic ideals throughout the hinterland.

A number of liberal newspapers and magazines were able to develop and proved instrumental in the 14th October 1973 popular revolt against the military[35]. The media received more freedom to criticize politicians and governments. The press helped to disseminate news from the protesting students to the public at large.

After legislation permitting the registration of political parties was passed in 1974, a veritable explosion of political parties took place. The most important of these were the Thai Nation (Chat Thai) Party and the Social Justice (Thamma Songkhom) Party. The two smaller parties were the Social Nationalist (Songkhom Chatniyom) Party and the Social Agrarian (Kaset Songkhom) Party. The other two leftist parties were associated with the student movement namely the Socialist Party of Thailand (Songkhom Niyomheang Prathet Thai) and New Force (Phlang Mai)[36].

In 1974, one non-LAD project, named 'Back to The Countryside Project' was set in motion to promote democracy among the rural population. This project was organized by the University Bureau. The project involved sending student teams not only to propagate democracy, but also to make assessments of the areas assigned to them and provide feedback to the government on communist penetration and popular discontent and provide recommendations for action.

Professor Sanya Thammasak, former chief justice of the Supreme Court and Rector of Thammasat University, was appointed by the King as prime minister, since he was acceptable to the students as well as to the armed forces. Sanya formed a civilian cabinet, consisting of individuals from the legal profession and civilian members of the previous cabinet, with a minimal military participation.

To draft a new constitution, Prime Minister Sanya appointed an eighteen-member constitution drafting committee. It consisted not only of the upper echelons of the bureaucracy and business elites but also of several political leaders and a number of University Professors. Ultimately in October 10, 1974, a new constitution was promulgated that still regards as the most democratic constitution in Thai history.

The constitution provided for a bicameral legislature with an appointed Senate and an Elected House of Representatives. The Prime Minister is to be an elected member of the house. Although the constitution is not clear about how the Prime Minister is to be chosen, in practice he (or she) must be able to form a government and win a majority vote of confidence in the elected House. It excluded serving civil or military officials from sitting in either house[37]. It required that at least half of the cabinet be chosen from among the MPs[38].

Two general elections were held in 1975 and in 1976 respectively. In the 1975 election, several political parties contested for the 279 National Assembly seats. The Social Action Party under the leadership of Kukrit Pramoj, with only eighteen seats in the House, together with three other major parties and ten minor parties, formed a new coalition government[39]. Elections in January 1975 returned an Assembly with 35 percent businessmen, 30 percent professionals and only 12 percent ex-bureaucrats and soldiers[40].

In the April 1976 elections, four major parties- the Democrat, Thai Nation, Social Justice, and Social Action contested. The Democrat Party's leader, Seni Pramoj (brother of Kukrit) took over premiership on 20th April, 1976. Together these four parties controlled 206 of the 279 seats in the House of Representatives[41].

Although the democratic period (1973-1976) lasted only three years, the seeds of democracy germinated in the minds of the people of Thailand. Politicians, technocrats and business leaders all became more active in the political realm.

After 1976, several developments marked the continual functioning of Thai democracy. Kriangsak's government (1977-1980) lifted ban on freedom of speech and assembly with the removal of press censorship. Some degree of participation in politics

had been allowed. The government also has permitted labour, student and farmer groups to organize, albeit on a restricted basis.

In 1978, Kriangsak proposed a constitution which re-introduced democratic institutions under carefully circumscribed conditions. This constitution featured representative rule, albeit with an appointed Senate in the bicameral legislature, universal suffrage, free and open campaigning for office, and the right of political parties to mobilize votes for their candidates[42].

General elections were held in 1979. It was at this point that businessmen regained their confidence in the Parliament and emerged as a central force in the political life of the nation; a new phase in the political development of Thailand had begun[43]. In this 1979 elections, pro-business political parties emerged as the dominant force and elections became highly competitive. Thus the 1979 election began a new phase of electoral politics in Thailand.

After the end of the democratic period in 1976, two manuals- the Manual on Elections and the Manual on Democracy Propagation to the Sub-district Councils were published for the propagation of liberal democracy. This also marked the smooth functioning of Thai democracy.

The Manual on Election, aimed at officials conducting democratic education and electoral mobilization, was an educational tool for developing a liberal democratic regime[44]. It explains that the special characteristic of democracy lies in having great faith in the ability of the human intellect, regardless of class, sex or social status. People can use their own reason without others making decisions for them[45].

The liberal tenor of the second manual is evident in the extensive citation of rights which are, nevertheless, qualified by an extensive list of citizen duties, adding up to civic involvement in society.

During Prem's regime (1980-1988), several attempts were made to re-articulate Thai democracy. There was an increasing number of pressure groups, business organizations, that influenced policy making. A party system composed of competing

networks of capitalists, military backers, bureaucrats and political entrepreneurs emerged[46].

In the early 1980s, several Thai NGOs were formed to improve the conditions of village people. For example, the Research and Development Institute founded by Akin Rabibhadana; Centre for Culture and Development established by Apichart Thongyu in 1985 and Seri Phongphit's Village Institute and Rural Development Documentation Centre and Thai Institute for Rural Development (THIRD).

During the 1980s, a new dynamic interaction emerged between the ruling bureaucratic and technocratic elites and the capitalist class, with the latter increasingly using Parliament to encroach on bureaucratic prerogatives. There were two general elections held in 1983 and again in 1986.

The formation of National Identity Board (NIB) with the prime minister's office to re-articulate Thai democracy was also an indication of a functioning democracy in Thailand. In 1984 two major publications appeared designed to strengthen and consolidate the meaning of 'democracy with the king as the head of state'. The first was directly attributed to the NIB. The NIB publication offers an extended discussion on democracy aimed at the people in general.

The second text issued by the PM's office reproduced transcripts from the nationally aired programme Let's Think Together… Whose duty is Building Democracy? In radio broadcasts aired between February and June 1984, a series of discussions on democratic responsibility, discipline and citizen virtues was presented by the secretariat of the PM's office[47].

During Prem's rule in the the semi- democratic period, Thais did not find themselves oppressed by their governments leaders and (with rare exception) civil liberties were protected. In 1987, Thailand's continuing capacity to cope with changing demands and to assert its own identity, free from menacing internal and external forces, remained intact.

The assumption of prime ministership of Thailand by Chatichai Choonhavan was the clearest sign of the continual functioning of Thai democracy. He was the first

elected member of parliament who became prime minister after 1976. He had assumed power without relying support of the army.

The smooth functioning of Thai democracy continued after the establishment of Anand Panyachun's government. Although appointed prime minister by the military, Anand was able to win the support not only of the general population but also of the international community. He included some of the best known civil servants and businessmen in his cabinet.

Anand was very much fond of democracy and this was reflected in his statement that- "As for Thailand we do not need to copy anybody's democracy, we only need to uphold the principle of democracy which is that the government must come from the people, it must be of the people, and it must be for the people"[48]. For him, elections are only one point in the democratic process and he argues that the people, need to struggle to take part in policy determination.

Anand also argued that "Democracy is a reflection of the level of the people who vote… if they vote for bad persons, democracy will deteriorate"[49]. He also paved the way for election.

In late 1991, a constitution was promulgated and elections were held in March 1992 under the new constitution. To make sure that the March election was clean and fair, Anand set up Poll Watch in January 1992. Thirty-three leaders who formed poll watch came from non-governmental organizations and public organizations such as trade unions, academia, and professional associations. Poll Watch had two tasks: curbing vote-buying and encouraging democratic consciousness[50]. Poll Watch mobilized 60,000 volunteers to supervise the run up to the polls, and used the press to publicize wrong doing[51].

After the general election of March 1992, General Suchinda assumed premiership of Thailand. Against him a mass demonstration started in April 1992 and became violent in May 1992. This demonstration was the largest pro-democracy protest since the October 1973 student-led uprising.

The protest was the largest ever, attracting 500,000 people, largely middle class and professionals. It was also a popular uprising which spread far beyond the middle class and Bangkok to encompass a wide range of people who demonstrated all over Thailand[52]. Pro-democracy non-governmental organizations led by the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) and the Students' Federation of Thailand (SFT) were also active in organising rallies and spreading information through their networks. The networking was crucial in providing alternative sources of information since the official electronic media were heavily biased in favour of the Suchinda government. "This socio- political infrastructure also embodies modern information technology and telecommunication devices such as electronic mail, fax machines, mobile phones and databases"[53]. The broader non-governmental organization movement thus provided various groups of people with information, so they could make their own decisions.

Four major rural movements with a combined total of more than 100,000 people have been formed since the 1992 pro-democracy uprising, said a veteran consultant to rural movements, Bantorn Ondam[54]. Two of these, based in the North and Northeast, are the first independent farmer groups since the democratic interlude of 1973 to 1976. Bantorn said the new movements "are a force, the government cannot ignore the rural people as before."[55]

Said Sulak Srivaraksa, a leading social critic, "For the first time the poor have been empowering themselves. They were taught that they were poor, they were no good, they were stupid. Now they know they are not stupid. They are as good as anyone else. If this country is going to be democratic, this is the basis of democracy"[56].

During the May 1992 incident, most papers resisted military attempts to censor coverage. In the aftermath of the 1991-1992 crisis, the role of the press further expanded. Newspapers hosted debates on political reform; publicised the abuses of power which had previously seemed part of parliamentary privilege; corralled politicians with hopelessly murky pasts; investigated scandals which ministers attempted to bury[57]. At last with the King's intervention, the violence ended and Suchinda finally resigned.

Anand was again appointed to the position of prime minister until the elections could be held. The new elections took place on 13th September 1992. Chuan Leekpai, the leader of the Democrat Party became the prime minister. He was the first prime minister who could truly claim a humble origin, provincial background and no experience in the military or bureaucracy[58]. He became the longest serving elected civilian prime minister in Thai history.

On May 19, after losing the support of a coalition partner, Chuan called for a 44-day period of campaigning for the new Parliament. About 40 million people voted, 50 percent of the voting population. Included in that number were nearly two million people as young as 18. They voted for the first time because of a constitutional change that lowered the voting age from 20, after the public backlash against the military's shooting of democracy demonstrators in 1992[59].

Chuan's call for free and fair election in 1995 was a further evidence of the successful functioning of Thai democracy. The 1995 election brought the seven party (Chart Thai, NAP, SAP, PD, Prachakorn Thai and Muang Chon) coalition government under Banharm Silpa-Archa to power. This election saw the publication of more detailed party policy statements than had previously been the case. Both the electronic and print media sought to emphasize policy issues, analysing the differences in policy between the different political parties[60].

Banharm's government was remarkable for the politicization of many institutions, especially the Bank of Thailand, which for so long had successfully managed Thailand's economy.

In the aftermath of the 1992 uprising, several democracy-oriented groups emerged. These groups demanded a large-scale 'political reform' (karn patiroup karnmuang). Also several officially endorsed committees began to investigate potential reforms of the parliamentary system.

In 1993, a parliamentary committee on constitutional amendments proposed far-reaching changes that would lead to greater transparency in government and open

up greater avenues for political participation[61]. In June 1994, Democracy Development Committee (DDC), was set up to consider proposals for democratic reforms.

The DDC proposed a series of measures- including allowing an outsider to be appointed prime minister; limiting the right to call for votes of no-confidence[62]; and the provision of various measures to improve state accountability such as appointment of an ombudsman, establishing an administrative court, and strengthening the house committee system[63].

In 1994, Committee on Developing Democracy (CDD) was established under the first Chuan Leekpai's first government. Under the leadership of Banharn Silpa-archa, Political Reform Committee (PRC) was set up.

The above committees were superseded by the formation of the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) in 1996. It issued a major document entitled Preliminary Framework for Drafting the constitution. The document listed measures to extend rights and to make them enforceable. These included community rights over resource management, the right to resist an overthrow of democracy with the King as head of state, freedom of information and press, academic freedom and importantly any limitation of rights, it was suggested, must find its justification in the constitution[64].

Finally, in mid-August 1996, the CDA passed the draft on to the parliament. In this draft, a series of reform measures was adopted. Such measures included: elected senate, establishing an independent electoral commission, an administrative and constitutional court; reform of the electoral system; allowing citizens initiatives in legislation and impeachment; having MPs lose their status once they enter cabinets and an NGO-inspired proposal for the establishment of a human- rights commission.

As a result of the measures taken by CDA, now both houses of parliament were fully elected and required to uphold high moral and educational standards. Prime Ministers were required to be elected members of the lower house.

The greatest achievement of the functioning of Thai democracy was the promulgation of the 1997 constitution during Chuan Leekpai's second government. This constitution marked a significant moment in Thai history. As scholar James Klein states

in his article, "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997," during the "first 60 years of Thailand's constitutional history, there were no serious attempts to reform the political process and its associated problems of inefficiency and corruption[65]." The 1997 constitution was thus the real attempt to establish meaningful constitutional authority.

It was the first constitution to be written "by the people" with a "99-member Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) was composed of two indirectly elected groups: 76 members representing each province, and 23 recognized political, administrative and legal experts"[66]. "For the first time in Thai history, it establishes a judicial review process independent of executive branch control, thereby enhancing both government accountability and the protection of civil liberties"[67].

In Duncan McCargo' book, "Reforming Thai Politics",Sombat Chantorvong summarizes, many of the changes that were included in the 1997 constitution. Among these were the changes in election of the house to single-member constituency, the creation of a party list system, a new directly elected senate with increased powers as well as new restrictions, the creation of an Electoral Commission and other independent agencies such as the National Counter Commission, a Constitutional Court, and a National Human Rights Commission and new limitations making it more difficult for candidates to change parties[68].

These reform measures were intended to establish a stronger and more professional senate, ensure free and fair elections and to give more power and control to citizens over the government and bureaucracy. But the most important aspect is that this constitution "marked a great advance in the thinking of the people in Thailand on constitutional issues and the management of their society."

The new People's Constitution of 1997 has brought about a significant degree of democratization. True, the present king Bhumibol Adulyadej, who ascended the throne in 1946, remains a revered, god-like figure, above politics, with his position constitutionally protected; no criticism of the Royal Family is tolerated. But there is now a fully elected legislature, comprising a Senate and a House of Representatives, based on universal and compulsory suffrage for both sexes at 18 years of age.

As a result of the successful functioning of Thai democracy, general elections were held in January 2001 which brought Thaksin Shinawatra and his party Thai Rak Thai (TRT) into power. The 2001 election was the first to be conducted on the basis of the new constitution. Thaksin, his party, their rise to power and his tenure in office as prime minister also symbolised a significant era in Thai politics.

Thaksin Shinawatra came to power after the 2001 general elections under the slogan 'Think New, Act New', which meant in other words, honest politics and a better deal for the underprivileged. His party, the TRT, having absorbed the small Seritham Party, won some 263 of the 500 seats in the House of Representatives-an outright majority- but it chose to share power with Chart Thai, the New Aspiration Party, Chart Pattana and one or two smaller entities which together held over a hundred seats[69]. Thaksin became a new pillar in the Thai political structure and equilibrium below the palace and above the military.

The conduct of Thailand's election in 2001 demonstrates that significant gains were made in terms of raising democratic quality. The ban on campaign entertainment injected a new note of seriousness into many campaign rallies[70].

The 1997 constitution also made voting a duty for all Thai citizens; the expectation was that the expanded electoral participation would make vote buying too expensive. Beyond the usual restrictions that disqualify convicts, the insane, the corrupt and the bankrupt, candidates for office now had to possess at least a bachelor's degree and they were required to be free from any kind of drug addiction. Electoral reforms such as the bachelor's degree requirement were meant to "encourage better- known and more respectable personalities to enter politics"[71].

The constitution also created an independent organization, the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT). The remit of the ECT as an independent non-partisan organization was to run "clean and fair" elections by "sever [ing] the crucial ties that exist between politicians and the civil servants responsible for administering elections[72]."

From the perspective of the reformers, representing the dominant discourse of political reform, the new electoral system was a success. For the first time in a generation, vote buying was down in the January 2001 general election. From the 1980s, the people had believed that vote buying was rampant at every level of election.

Thaksin and his party TRT won the 2005 general election by a landslide. The main reasons behind his victory in this two general elections were his electoral proposals for the development of the Thai political system and the proper improvement of the condition of Thai common people. The proposals were as follows:

1. Grants of one million baht to each of Thailand's 70,000 administrative "villages" to promote economic diversification,
2. 30 baht visits to clinics and hospitals,
3. A three- year moratorium on farm debt, and
4. The creation of a national asset management company to relieve Thailand's commercial banks of their non-performing loans (NPLS)[73]

Thaksin's government inherited a National Education Act mandating reform of the sector by August 2002. Major features of the reform include 12 years of compulsory schooling and the decentralization of curricular and budgetary authority[74]. He also put Thailand on the map of the world's emerging markets with impressive rates of economic growth, bold leadership, clear policy directions and democratic consolidation that seemed to promise a future in which Thailand would be politically stable, effectively governed and highly attractive to investors.

Another outcome of the successful functioning of Thai democracy was the promulgation of 2007 constitution. Though it was written by a military-appointed group of drafters, it was approved by a public referendum.

This survey of the democratization process at work in the country with its varied process, proposals, reform measures and improvements effected that Thai democracy functioned very well. In spite of this, it has several limitations as follows:

Limitations:

Democratic functioning grew slowly and then rapidly after 1932, when Thailand's absolute monarchy was overthrown by a coup group and constitutional rule was inaugurated. But the coup group (the military and its civilian allies) was primarily concerned with state-building rather than promoting democracy and democratic practices.

After the 1932 revolution the new powerful elite established a parliament and enfranchised the masses, but the right of free association, especially political association, continued to be denied until 1950. Since then, political association in the form of political parties has not been free from controls set by the Ministry of the Interior through its control of the political parties act 1955. The Associations Act, 1912, also prohibited registered associations from having any political objective or to engage in any political activity[75].

Without any popular base of support, the coup leaders staged the 1932 revolution. Although a parliament was created after the revolution, the people who stood for election in the 1930s were affiliated, not with parties, but with whatever faction in the ruling elite with which they had established patron-client relations[76]. Also, the building of democratic political institutions was at most, a peripheral goal of some of the civilian leaders of the coup[77].

Constitutional principles first adopted in 1932, have been adapted and adjusted to follow the old rules, based on centralism, personalism, unity and solidarity and patron-clientelism[78].

The limitations of the successful functioning of Thai democracy can be attributed to the low level of political institutionalization in Thailand, which is the consequence of three important factors: the frequency of coup d'état, the discontinuity of elected parliaments and the weaknesses of political parties. In addition, the frequent occurrence of elections and censorship on media also gave fresh lenses of life to the limitations of the Thai democratic functioning.

As military coups have become more frequent, the commitment of the military to consolidating democracy has declined. In Thailand, from 1932 to 2007, there have been altogether eighteen military interventions, eleven of which were successful. These military interventions usually resulted in the abolishment of the constitutions and parliaments; banning of political assemblies and political parties and authorization of censorship.

Thus it freezed the whole gamut participant political activities. Every democratic attempts was thwarted by successful military coups. The high frequency of military interventions in Thailand has had diverse negative effects upon democratic political institutions and has bred more instability in the political system as a whole.

Unlike Malaysia and Singapore, where the term of parliaments continue without any interruption, only few in Thailand completed their terms; the rest were disrupted by several coup attempts by the military. When parliaments could not complete, several bills proposed by the members had to be re-submitted, thus delaying the process of socio-economic reform in response to the rapidly changing condition of society during these interim periods[79]. The discontinuity and disruption of Thai parliaments also symbolised the weakening power of the legislative branch vis-à-vis that of the executive and prevented the legislature from becoming a potent force in the Thai political system.

Political parties were not allowed to function in the first fifteen years of constitutional rule. When political parties began to function, they suffered from lack of discipline among their members, who pursued factional and individual interests rather than abiding by party policies. Before the mid-1970s, most of the political parties were short-lived. Although several political parties were formed after legislation permitting the registration of political parties was approved in 1974, very few of them survived.

Usually political parties in Thailand are groupings of individuals or networks of patrons and clients who are forced to be together by a political party law requiring candidates to contest elections under party banners. After elections almost all of the parties have no significant programs that would link them with the masses. From 1975

to 1976, parliamentary seats were shared by from eight to twenty-two parties, resulting in highly unstable coalition governments[80].

Chai Anan Samudavanija, Thailand's most renowned political scientist, wrote that Thai political parties have not gone far in performing even the minimum functions of mobilizing support from people at the grass roots. He criticized parties for reflecting elite self-interests rather than those of the people they are supposed to represent[81].

As Kramol Tongdharmachart (1982,37) observes, "the bureaucratic elites often perceived political parties as the cause of national disunity and political instability and also as the political entity that could threaten their power positions"[82].

In a more stable parliamentary system, general elections are a regular occurrence as part of a normal cycle of political change. But in case of Thailand, regular occurrence of elections inevitably intertwined with brief or prolonged spells of military and authoritarian rule disrupted and set back the functioning of Thai democracy. This symbolized the discontinuity of parliament, and also the dissatisfaction of the Thai people with their governments.

During the period from 1958 to the late 1970s, election often formed a part of what Chai Anan (1982: 1-5) has termed a political 'vicious cycle' in which a political crisis gives rise to a military coup, followed by the promulgation of a new or revised constitution, an election and then a return to parliamentary politics which eventually ends in another political crisis[83].

In the 1975 election, "forty-two political parties had been formed, espousing unclear and overlapping platforms"[84]. This "confusion and complexity was far more than the voters could comprehend"[85].

From the 1980s, high-cost campaigning, candidate buying and vote buying became a common feature of every election. Although the 2001 general election marked the smooth functioning of democracy, vote buying continued. Vote buying has been around since elections began in the 1930s and became rampant after a 1983 by-election in the province of Roi-Et[86].

From the time of the first elections in the 1930s, bureaucrats had the power to prescribe electoral regulations and define the electoral discourse. Paradoxically, the Ministry of the Interior-regarded as a conservative, even anti-democratic, and most intractable bureaucratic institutions has been entrusted with overseeing popular elections. For the Ministry of Interior officials, holding elections is simply an extension of the bureaucratic functions of the Ministry rather than building democracy[87].

The independent performance of the media is an integral part of the smooth functioning of democracy. But in case of Thailand, most of the time censorship was imposed on the media by several governments- military or civilian. For example, Thaksin has been fairly successful in nobbling television and radio, both on the issue of licences contents.

Most of the mass communication media, particularly radio and television stations, are under the control of the military-which has undoubtedly increased its political potency. Out of the 269 radio stations-all of which are government owned-the military stations account for some 57 percent, while 33 percent are operated by the Public Relations Department and the rest by other ministries and educational institutions[88].

Feudalism did not end in Thailand until 1932, when a coup d'état replaced the country from absolute monarchy with constitutional monarchy. Bureaucrats and the military have shared control ever since.

Although seventeen constitutions were promulgated from 1932 to 2007, only two of these can be classified as 'democratic' (the 1974 and 1997 constitution). In Thailand a constitution does not normally provide for the general and neutral rules of the game to regulate participation and competition between political groups[89].

On the contrary, it has been used as a major tool in maintaining the power of the group that created it. The most important aspect of a Thai constitution is not the provision and protection of civil and political liberties, but the extent to which it allows the elected House of Representatives to participate in the political process[90].

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Conclusion:

From the observation made and the data presented in the foregoing chapters, I draw the broad conclusion that Thailand is in a state of rapid transition towards democracy. These chapters not only illustrated Thailand's turbulent journey on the road to democracy but also examined several government attempts to restore and expand the democratic system.

Since the political change of 1932, that is, the transformation of absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, the democratic ideal was promoted as if it were a holy object in a shrine. Some democratic gains were certainly achieved over the years. They are as follows:

In December 1932, Thailand's first "permanent" constitution was promulgated which outlined several rights and duties of the Thai citizens. In 1946, a new, more liberal constitution was introduced by then prime minister Pridi and elections were held which ushered in a new era of parliamentary democracy. In addition, political parties began to function for the first time in Thai history.

During Phibun's second term as prime minister, public meetings were permitted, political parties were allowed to function and elections promised. Also in 1949, a constitution was also adopted. It featured a bi-cameral assembly of which lower house was to be elected through universal adult franchise. This constitution barred officials from being members of the assembly, thus insulating the once powerful military and civilian bureaucrats from active involvement in politics.

Another constitution was introduced in Thanom's era who was an authoritarian ruler. This constitution created a bicameral parliament with the lower house comprising elected officials and the upper house containing officials appointed by the King. Elections were held in 1969.

In 1973 a student uprising took place which catapulted the Thailand into the age of democracy. The student revolution which overthrew Thanom's military regime, opened the Thai political system and allowed the participation of previously locked-out groups, such as workers, peasants, labourers etc. At the universities, Thai intellectuals,

instructors and students began organizing panels, seminars and study groups to debate various political issues. A civilian government was created under Dr. Sanya Dharmaskati and a more democratic constitution was promulgated in October 1974.

Following the general elections of 1975 and 1976, coalition governments were formed under Kukrit Pramoj and Seni Pramoj respectively.

During the reign of General Kriangsak, a new constitution was unveiled in 1978. It provided representative rule. It featured universal suffrage, free and open campaigning for office and the right of political parties to mobilize votes for their candidates. Elections were held in 1979.

In the 1980s, the democratic movement became stronger. Prem's government protected the democratic system and ruled the country for eight years. A number of political parties began to play their role and two general elections were held in 1983 and 1986. Prem also defeated the coup attempts by the military thrice.

Chatichai's premiership marked another era of democracy when labour organizations and peasant protest began. Trade unions in the state enterprises started a campaign against plans for privatization.

In 1992, Thailand saw the democratic unfolding of a major democratization effort. The military regime under Suchinda was forced out of power by the May 1992 uprising. More than 10,0000 people were involved in this protest and this was called the "the largest pro-democracy protest".

Elections were held in September 1992 and Chuan Leekpai became the prime minister. In order to strengthen the democratic system, Chuan gave more decision making power to the local level. Chuan also scheduled the next elections for 1995.

After the 1995 elections brought Banharn Silapa Archa headed the new government as prime minister. This election can be regarded as an important step toward routinizing democratic process because it made possible Thailand's first transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another in twenty years.

In 1997, country's most democratic constitution was promulgated. It was the first constitution to be written directly "by the people" and so it can be called "the people's constitution".

Two general elections were held in 2001 and in 2005 which marked an important democratic era in Thai politics. After achieving a sweeping victory in the 2001 elections, Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister and he was re-elected in 2005 elections.

A new constitution was promulgated in 2007 and although a junta-support constitution, this also took the proem of democratization forward in Thai history.

If people's participation in politics is the essence of democracy, this is what Thailand is moving forward, 1973 and 1992 are milestones in this direction. Also public opinion was forcing legislators to consider a draft constitution which went far beyond any previous constitution in institutionalizing democratic practices and values. As a result, the 1997 constitution was adopted which has been discussed above.

The above discussion must be viewed against the backdrop of Thailand's status as a developing country and its incremental transition to democracy. Thus, I agree that Thailand has all the legal trappings of a democracy: a freely elected and representative National Assembly, a popular constitution, an executive accountable to the people, competition for office, elections and multi-party system.

But the country has not achieved full democracy, because several attempts to consolidate democracy failed. Moreover, in Thailand, elected governments did not complete their full term due to several coups staged by military. Thaksin's government was the only exception to this rules.

According to several lawyers and political scientists, a coup uses of the law of the jungle to destroy the existing social order. Also military rule froze the several nascent democratic institutions. For example, after every coup, political parties were banned, parliaments and constitution were abolished, censorship was imposed and public meetings were restricted. In addition, coups by the military brought to power not the same people but their protégés and former associates.

All constitutions that were promulgated after the coups, including the country's first constitution (the 1932 constitution) were unlawful and un-democratic except the 1974 and 1997 constitutions. Also these constitutions did not last long because of the frequent occurrence of coups that resulted in frequent promulgation of constitutions. New constitutions have often repeated old ones, word for word.

Several elections were held in Thailand. But only few were fairly free. Most of the elections were characterized by vote buying and candidate buying. Since the 1980s, high-cost campaigning, candidate buying and vote buying have become a common occurrence in every election, although the 1997 constitution effected several reforms which would make vote-buying increasingly expensive. For example, in Chatichai's Government, most of its members used money as their stepping stone to success. Most politicians got elected through vote buying and MPs were appointed ministers because of their deep pockets.

The military seized power from the government by deploying heavily armed soldiers and tanks. The advocates of democracy could not accept it because under democracy, one succeeds by advancing reason and winning the battle of minds not by the use of force.

Moreover, the removal of the absolute monarchy from politics in 1932 did not continually end the traditional attitudes towards authority. Because the ruling group has its origins in the traditional bureaucracy, it relies on these attitudes, bolstered by the manipulation of loyalty with rewards and punishment to control the government. The King's position did not fade away either from Thai politics after 1932. Several monarchical interventions were made mainly in October 1973, April 1981 and May 1992.

Discontinuity of elected governments has had adverse effects on political parties. Party organizations could not be developed. Several political parties were formed but they suffered from lack of discipline among their members, who chose to pursue factional and individual interests rather than abide by party politics.

Besides, no single party has ever dominated Thai politics. When government parties won a majority of seats in parliament, internal factionalism usually led to political crisis and administrative breakdown, culminating in military coups.

Recently, Thailand faced ethnic problems mainly in the South. Although the ethnic movements signified the success of Thai democracy, they also created hurdles, disrupting in the process of democratic consolidation in Thailand, because, lately widespread disaffection in the South has acquired an explicit religious, jihadist undertone.

During the reigns of several authoritarian rulers such as Phibun, Sarit Thanarat, Thanom, Prapass, Thanin, Suchinda, many democratic institutions became inactive. After assuming power, each ruler abolished the constitution, dissolved the parliament, banned political parties, declared martial law and imposed restrictions on the mass media and newspapers. The constitutions which were promulgated during these authoritarian regimes, legitimized their authoritarian character. In 1968, Thanom proposed a constitution. Although, it provided a bicameral parliament with the lower house comprising elected officials, the senate was to be run by many military representatives, nearly all of whom were senior members of the bureaucracy.

In 2007, a new constitution was adopted. It was drafted under military sponsorship, bears anti-democratic traits including the return to partially appointed upper legislative chambers, fragmentation of the party system and so on.

Thus, it can be said that although many civilian governments were voted to power after elections, authoritarian enclaves remain entrenched in Thai politics.

After the 1932 abolition of the absolute monarchy, the political narrative in Thailand was characterized by frequent changes of government, civilian or authoritarian regimes alternating; frequent occurrence of military coups and bloodshed. Thus, the present political system is neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian, it is a melange of both, democracy and authoritarianism.

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