

Thailand and the region of Southeast Asia: transitioning to liberal democracies?

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, the region of Southeast Asia has experienced dramatic change. Authoritarian and democratic governments dabbling in capitalism have now transitioned to nation-states with developing political institutions and stable economies. Some of these governments have actually taken the time to prevent rapid (sometimes misunderstood as radical) political reform by assisting their respective populations. Now, in order to continue this important conversation of liberal democracy and the democratization of Southeast Asia, one must understand what sort of change is necessary for the region. Should the polities of Southeast Asia accept the western notion of liberal democracy so that political development and stability will become ubiquitous or should it retain certain political and economic elements before transitioning to democracies?

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the region of Southeast Asia has experienced dramatic change. Authoritarian and democratic governments dabbling in capitalism have now transitioned to nation-states with developing political institutions and stable economies. Some of these governments have actually taken the time to prevent rapid (sometimes misunderstood as radical) political reform by assisting their respective populations. Now, in order to continue this important conversation of liberal democracy and the democratization of Southeast Asia, one must understand what sort of change is necessary for the region. Should the polities of Southeast Asia accept the western notion of liberal democracy so that political development and stability will become ubiquitous or should it retain certain political and economic elements before transitioning to democracies? The polities of Southeast Asia must keep the political framework they have simply because it has taken these polities thousands of years to reach this level of governance. It would be quite difficult for the countries within the region to adjust their system of governance to fit the ‘western standard.’

What the countries of the region should be focusing on is keeping their respective political frameworks and working towards a system of governance that is close to liberal democracy instead of the western notion of liberal democracy. It should be clarified that western nation-states have not progressed at a different level compared to Southeast Asian nation-states. Rather, western polities developed in a different manner. It is quite clear that the respective regions have both advanced over time; this is precisely what political science scholars should be focusing on: advancement. Adhering to the western standard prevents scholars from analyzing the advancement of certain regions such as

Southeast Asia. It is evident that numerous scholars have supported the diffusion theory because of this simple yet critical mistake. This essay will primarily be focusing on the region of Southeast Asia in the earlier pages. In the later pages, I will be analyzing the past and current state of the Thai polity because the Thai polity fits the analysis of democracy in Southeast Asia.

Since it is now clear that the polities of Southeast Asia should be progressing towards the establishment of true liberal democracies, we should begin to understand how this should be brought about and why western liberal democracy cannot be implemented in Southeast Asia. A few scholars perceive that in order to have a full picture of Southeast Asia one must understand the nation's traditions, history, and culture. More importantly, people should also compare the nations within the region to western democracies (Neher and Marlay, 199). The problem with including the latter in regional comparative analysis is that leaders of nations establish democracies with weak institutional foundations. The west immediately lauds leaders who implement democratic reform; however, nothing is said about weak institutions.

I assert that true liberal democracies can only arise with strong political and economic foundations, regardless of the previous system of governance. A semi-democratic nation-state spending time on political development will in effect be more stable than a government declaring itself a liberal democracy with no effective foundation to work with. The only possible way the nations of Southeast Asia would be able to call themselves western liberal democracies is if they tossed out political and cultural tradition. Both Mahathir and Lee, former prime ministers of Malaysia and Singapore respectively, perceive that the best possible way to bring about political development is

by keeping the best elements of traditional Southeast Asian nationalism, and blending them with modernity (Vatikiotis, 28). The claims made by Mahathir and Lee clearly shows that there are many positive aspects of Southeast Asian tradition. It would be a sad sight to see Southeast Asian polities incorporating the negative portions of western liberal democracy into their own institutional frameworks.

The primary reason why a few nations in Southeast Asia have resorted to authoritarian rule is because during the early days of the post-colonial era, leaders attempted to implement democracies when the gap between the elites and the lower classes was still wide (Vatikiotis, 36). It is quite easy to assert that the polities of Southeast Asia should push for solid political foundations before liberal democracy can be implemented.

We must return to Lee and Mahathir's theory to truly understand how the nations of Southeast Asia can bring about positive and effective political reform. The broad policy of all political leaders in the region should be one that strives to combine the most effective traditional and modern tools for success. With this broad framework, the polities of Southeast Asia will inevitably succeed. However, prolonged economic growth and political stability can only arise with a solid foundation. During the political development process, it is wise to keep a semi-democracy semi-democratic because there will not always be initial political and economic success. Indeed, within the organization ASEAN, Singapore is the most economically developed nation in the region even though political liberalization has not taken place. Nations such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, which are undergoing political liberalization, will have the most profound long-term changes (Beeson). If the polities of Southeast Asia are willing to commit the time for political

development, the results will inevitably be stellar for the region. The economic crisis of 1997 showed that solid foundations are imperative (Neher, 280). Temporary high growth rates should not allow nations to bask in the Asian miracle. In short, long-term growth should be the goal of all nations in the region.

More important, Southeast Asian nation-states should be focusing on effective leadership, the role of individualism, and relative autonomy before making a transition to true liberal democracy. In the realm of governance, Southeast Asian polities have relied on strong and charismatic leaders (Neher, 17). When this sort of leader steps down, the entire political system changes. These leaders realized that in order to truly transition to effective governance, governments need to limit individualism in Southeast Asia or the transition would be impossible to make. For the nations of Southeast Asia social unity is of the utmost importance because social divisiveness prevents successful political reform and economic growth (Vatikiotis, 120). Furthermore, in order to prevent such social discord after making a transition to successful governance, the nations of Southeast Asia should allow rural villagers to keep their relative autonomy. Encroaching on their land and not allowing them to move around the country creates problems for rural villagers (Scott, 60). Rural villagers make up a huge portion of certain nations in Southeast Asia. Preventing them from living independently and forcing them to partake in the political process is a policy that should never be implemented. The nations in the region can still progress politically without assimilating the rural populace. Hence, it is clear that the polities of Southeast Asia should be striving for true liberal democracy. Western liberal democracy simply creates problems. It will not be an easy process; however, the region

of Southeast Asia has the potential to surpass western liberal democracies if leaders are not distracted with short-term political development and economic growth.

Thailand: a case study

Numerous scholars have studied Thai political history extensively in the past mainly because the Thai nation-state was never colonized during the colonial era in Southeast Asia. One would assume that the lack of external political pressure would lead the Thai state to progress on its own. However, this assumption cannot be made without examining the pre-colonial history, past, and modern political developments within the Thai polity. There have been a myriad of developments throughout Thailand's political history that support both the diffusion theory and the independent modernization argument.

This section of the paper examines the rise of the Thai Rak Thai party and its emphasis on political liberalism within the context of the modernization of the pre-colonial Thai political state, Thai political developments since 1991, and the inclusion of the Thai populace in the realm of governance. The primary question raised in this paper is whether or not the TRT can successfully lead Thailand to a stable monarchic democracy. It is evident that Thailand does provide the institutional framework for a monarchic democracy, but it will be quite difficult for the TRT to lead Thailand to a stable and effective one.

Moreover, it would be problematic for the TRT to support any other system of democratic governance because the Thai monarchy has recently been involved in Thai politics with the overthrow of Thaksin Shinawatra who was formerly the prime minister of Thailand and party leader of the TRT. Thailand's political turbulence has made it an

interesting case study. It is difficult to predict which faction will govern Thailand in the future. Will it be democratic parties like the TRT, the military junta, or the monarchy? Also, can one of the two entities (monarchy or the TRT, military is a non-factor in this case) involved in politics successfully engage the modern-day Thai populace? The complexity of a constantly developing issue in Thailand must begin with the analysis of the Thai Rak Thai's political history.

Brief history of the Thai Rak Thai

The TRT party rose to power in 2001. The constitutional changes in the mid-1990s were effective in keeping political parties in line. However, the TRT simply played power politics and centralized political power around the Prime Minister (Thaksin Shinawatra.) The TRT's platform is what assured success for the party in the long run. The TRT wanted to win elections on the platform by keeping the Thai economy afloat and assisting the rural populace. Thaksin and the TRT were able to win critical elections in 2001 and in subsequent years because of his personal wealth.

Up until the coup d'état in 2006, Thaksin and his party had been one of the more successful political entities in Thai political history. The downfall of the TRT can be linked to Thaksin's increase in political power and the subsequent threat to the king's position in Thai politics. This will be explained in greater detail when I discuss Thailand's cyclical politics. In order to fully understand the TRT's place in contemporary Thai society and whether or not it or other factions can lead Thailand to a stable and progressive monarchic democracy, we must examine the history of the Thai polity to get a better grasp of Thailand's political foundation.

Thailand's non-colonial past

Within the nation-state of Thailand, the Thai populace was able to consolidate power and establish political legitimacy without the assistance of Western polities. The combination of cosmological thought and family ties to politics set the foundation for a stable and non-traditional polity. According to Riggs, it is almost impossible to show a western scholar that the historical polity of Thailand was organized governmentally because the western notion of governance has been so pervasive, A conception of governmental organization based on cosmological and topographical considerations contrasts strikingly with modern ideas about the place of function, clientele, and territorial jurisdiction as criteria for organizational design. So pervasive have these themes become in contemporary thought that they seem to provide the only framework in which any system of government can be imagined (Riggs, 69.)

The pre-colonial states of Southeast Asia were able to combine new and old political ideas so that the state remained progressive (Riggs, 77.) Also, the combination of ideas meant that the pre-colonial polities of Southeast Asia valued cultural exchange. The theory that the pre-colonial state of Thailand and various other polities were influenced by external states to the extent of dependency on political modernization is simply a fallacy. The innovativeness and cosmological order in Thailand and other nation-states in the region during pre-colonial times proves that the diffusion theory is irrelevant (Riggs, 77.)

The rapid change in political patterns within the region of Southeast Asia further accentuates the claim of Thailand's independent political modernization. The shift from pattern A (charter administration) to pattern B (decentralized Indic administration) shows how the nation-states in Southeast Asia reformed their old policies regarding political legitimacy (Lieberman, 34.) In pattern B, lay people and local officials gained even more

political clout. Religious officials no longer accumulated the wealth and local politics actually solidified during this time period (ibid, 34.) Instead of trying to control entire regions, leaders of various empires decided to decentralize rule in the post-charter era. Pattern B was ubiquitous in pre-modern Southeast Asia.

To the modern mind, these acts (cosmological practices) are irrelevant to politics. However, when one examines the cosmological order closely, one will realize that Thai governance is based upon the cosmological order of the bureaucrats. Each wing or court of the palace had its corresponding officials (Riggs, 71.) For the cosmological order of the bureaucrats to represent both cosmological thought and political governance shows how interconnected cosmology and governance were within the Thai polity. Furthermore, the Thai state was not centralized to the extent of having no political leaders on the local scale involved. In fact, the very same cosmological order within the capital was emulated on a smaller scale in local provinces and cities. The involvement of local politicians in state crafting clearly shows the emphasis on local politics.

The cosmological influence on Thailand's political history is even relevant to the 1932 coup against King Prajadhipok. The aftermath of the coup shifted Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. The two leaders that successfully emerged from the coup were Pridi and Phibun. Both Pridi and Phibun had numerous political differences. Pridi attracted support from businessmen, labor leaders, and upcountry politicians while Phibun garnered support from the military (Baker, 122.) These differences meant that Phibun and Pridi would have different political goals in Thailand. Pridi's main focus was to form a liberal state in Thailand while Phibun and his coterie of military officials supported the idea of molding the individual and saw the state

as an expression of popular will (ibid, 122.) Although Pridi and Phibun's political motives were essentially conflicting, they both worked well together mainly because they feared a royalist counter-revolution (ibid, 122.) The lack of a royalist counter-revolution broke ties between Pridi and Phibun. More importantly- Phibun's military clout began to increase as the US began to separately fund the army and the Thai police.

Shortly after Sarit took Phibun out of power the US began to supply Thailand with weaponry. The US wanted to make sure that Thailand did not conform to communist ideology. According to Baker, the US supplied Thailand with an extensive amount of weaponry and even created tension between the army and the police, Beginning in January 1951, the US sent twenty-eight arms shipments with enough equipment for nine army battalions. By 1953, US military aid was equivalent to two-and-a-half times the Thai military budget. With command of this patronage, Sarit Thanarat was able to strengthen his grip on the army. He brought all the troops in Bangkok under his old unit, the First Division of the First Army, staffed with his loyal subordinates. In 1954 he became army chief. Simultaneously, the CIA began to arm the police (Baker, 146.)

The heads of both the army and the police (Sarit and Phao) vied to take control of the businesses developed by Pridi and his cohorts. It is evident that in order for the Thai economy to grow during the interim periods of various coups, businesses needed to continue to trade and remain free in the sense that politicians and military generals could only guide them. However, one misinterpretation of this critical time period in Thai history is that in other instances, US supplied aid to Thailand through economic development in order to promote private capitalism so Thailand would remain in the "free-world" camp (Baker, 140.) The fact is that private capitalism may have helped the Thai economy somewhat, but the Pridi group established the economic foundation of

Thailand. Even during times of political turbulence before the US helped the Thai economy, the monopolies in Thailand remained lucrative. It suffices to say that the free-market principles embraced by the Pridi group assured economic prosperity for the Thai polity. As the army and police heads embraced corruption via aid packages, the king remained a symbol of tradition and purity to the Thai populace (Baker, 169.) This notion of purity within the Thai monarchy resonates to this day in Thailand.

The Thai populace and glocalization

Unlike the pre-modern system of governance where local politics played a role in the state, local leaders lost political clout during the post 1932 coup era. The military began to delocalize politics by pushing the government further into the countryside in provincial areas, (Baker, 172.) This policy of delocalizing politics meant that the government would be focused on economic growth in urban centers instead of helping the rural populace. Indeed, Thailand had a dual economy, relying on the industrial and services sector as well as the agricultural output of the rural Thai. The rural Thai could not benefit from the industrial and services sector. The resulting economic surplus from the economic policies of the 1950s went to urban investment instead of rural investment, (Baker, 151.) It appears that over the past half century the rural Thai populace has been in need of economic assistance even though the rural Thai rely on subsistence farming. The real question is has Thailand's economic policies changed since the 1950s?

As Thailand continued to democratize in the 1980s, business interests still dominated politics, (Wah and Ojendal, 262.) Thailand was in need of populist politicians who would aid the rural populace. The rural populace makes up the bulk of the Thai population and they simply need to be involved in the decision-making. The urban

middle class and urban elite have been influencing politicians since the early economic policies of the 1950s. Before the arrival of Thaksin and the TRT, the rural Thai saw the monarch as the true Thai leader because the monarchy did not reform when Thailand began to modernize, (ibid, 169.)

In this era of globalization, rural Thai want to be recognized and want to partake in the market economy according to Wah and Ojendal, The central demand of localism, in practice, is for the role of agriculture and local business in the economy to be recognized and nurtured rather than letting market forces raze them to the ground (Wah and Ojendal, 263.)

One would assume that there would be leadership on the local scale with a glocalized population in the rural areas of Thailand. However, there is a diverse range of thinkers on the local scale from moderates to anarchists in Thailand, (Wah and Ojendal, 264.) Moreover, the TRT has been able to provide the leadership the local populace has desired even though the TRT represents the general Thai population. Thaksin and the TRT have begun to foster local entrepreneurs and they even have a social policy agenda for the rural Thai, (Wah and Ojendal, 279.) To much dismay, Thaksin's social policy agenda has primarily been economic because he has wanted to revive the capitalist economy by advancing the interests of local capital while trying to keep his economic fortunes, (Wah and Ojendal, 280.) It seems that Thaksin has garnered political support from the rural Thai for the wrong reasons. However, since the majority of the Thai populace resides in rural areas, Thaksin and the TRT have political power nonetheless.

The monarchy on the other hand, has had the support of the rural Thai without a social agenda besides the king's rural projects. The rural Thai see the monarch as a truthful leader who is there to keep the peace and to watch the politicians closely. Thus,

the monarch is the supreme political authority in the eyes of the Thai. Once Thaksin began to get more support from the Thais with his economic policies, the monarch and the royal family thought he crossed a serious political boundary. The recent coup in 2006 has changed the political dynamics of Thailand and this will be explained in greater detail in the next section.

The real question in this section is whether or not it is important for the rural populace to be assisted. It is quite obvious that the rural populace needs to be assisted because of economic disparities. However, are there any reasons besides that? The answer according to Connors is that the rural populace should be assisted to urbanize them. Urbanizing the rural populace in the sense of raising their socio-economic status would help them differentiate between good and bad governments (Connors, 200.) Currently, the rural Thai only care if their infrastructure is being updated and if rural projects help them economically. In numerous instances, the urban Thai cannot be relied on to prevent corruption within the Thai government because they only represent 22% of the population (Earthtrends, 1) With an aware rural Thai, corruption at the top will inevitably decline.

The Thai urban populace is the main support of the political factions in Thailand. Without its support, the Thai factions would not be able to win elections. What is currently stagnating political development in Thailand today is the control of the votes (Ockley, 680.) The Thai factions simply do not develop their own electoral networks to spur political competition for the votes. The only way political development will occur in Thailand is if the urban populace develops its own democratic consciousness (Connors, 198.) Preventing politicians from taking advantage of elections is only the first step in

political development. The subsequent steps include educating the middle class about the functioning of political factions and teaching the middle class the importance of assisting the rural populace. As previously stated, the rural populace forms a bulk of the Thai populace and without their compliance, a stable democracy will not arise (ibid, 200) The urban populace would begin to think on its own and would guide their politicians in the right direction once reform starts at the top.

It will be quite difficult for reform to start at the bottom since the urban elite has been used to the politicians guiding it in the right direction in terms of national ideology (Connors, 148.) Political development is of the utmost importance in modern Thai governance because political liberalism will not grow and spread without it. More importantly, the establishment of political liberalism in Thailand would mean the birth of a liberal democracy. The importance of a Thai-style liberal democracy will be discussed later on in the paper.

Thailand's cyclical politics

To understand Thailand's cyclical politics from the incorporation of democratic parties in 1992, to the downfall of Thaksin in 2006, one must examine the involvement of all three factions during these critical events and the importance of the constitution. The conflict among the three factions is one of two root causes of Thailand's cyclical politics. The other has not been emphasized in the discussion of Thai politics. The Thai constitution has been reformed on many occasions since the 1932 coup. The main reason why the constitution has always been changing is because the TRT, the military, and the monarchy have not followed the constitution at any point in Thailand's political history.

The rise of the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) signaled a shift in Thai politics. The military began to lose its political clout. At the close of 1991, the CPD protested against the military for trying to reform the constitution (Baker, 244.) The military wanted to extend its rule because it perceived it had the support of the country. Phibun's emphasis on popular will and the molding of the Thai citizen carried on to modern Thai politics. The problem with the military's perception of molding the Thai citizen is that the press and the Thai populace became more informed of the inner-workings of the Thai polity. The emergence of Thai democratic parties led to an obvious transition to a true monarchic democracy. Baker expands on this argument by stating that the retreat of the military allowed the Thai populace to have a voice in Thai politics, Although parliament had become a business club, politics nok rabop (outside the system) emerged to occupy the new political space created by the retreat of the military. The events of 1998-92 heightened the role of the press, academics, and public intellectuals as the voice of largely urban middle-class opinion (Baker, 249.)

After Chavalit's cabinet failed during the 1997 economic crisis, the urban elite called for military intervention (Baker, 255.) The minor reshuffling of the Democratic Party did not tip the balance of power in favor of the royal army and the monarchy. However, a weakened democratic party did not stand a chance against Thaksin's TRT party in the 2001 election. Indeed, Thaksin's landslide victory signaled a change in Thai politics once again. Furthermore, since 2001 and right before the military coup in 2006, Thaksin centralized power and brought about the first single-party majority in parliament (Chambers, 496.) This begins our discussion of the TRT, the royal army, and the monarchy and their unique roles in current Thai politics.

In Thailand, there have been on average sixteen parties running in any given election and six parties in parliament from 1979 to 2001 (Chambers, 497.) The decentralization of the Thai government can be traced to the fragmentation of Thailand's parties. Thaksin centralized power by taking advantage of the parties in various ways. In the Thai parliament, the vast majority of current MPs are former MPs even though 141 members had to be new MPs after the most recent change in the Thai constitution (Ockley, 668.) This fact tells us two things. First, former MPs lost power to Thaksin because they succumbed to joining his political faction in order to win elections. Second, the lack of new MPs meant that the majority of MPs would not counter status quo policies. If more MPs joined parliament, they could have pushed other MPs and the prime minister to be more progressive instead of trying to remain in power for personal interests. In short, new MPs would have succeeded former MPs and would have ended parliament's gerontocracy.

Also, the growth of larger parties would not have been possible without the departure of the military from the cabinet in 1988 (Ockley, 670.) Politicians such as Thaksin had no counterforce in the cabinet. He was able to form larger political blocs with greater flexibility. These larger political blocs meant that the TRT could either form a minimum winning coalition or a grand coalition. Surprisingly, Thaksin and other TRT leaders chose the latter. Minimum winning coalitions guarantee more power for a particular party while grand coalitions create more stability in the event that a party diminishes or simply leaves parliament (Ockley, 674.) The establishment of a grand coalition benefited Thailand's other political parties after the 2006 coup since the fall of Thaksin and the TRT did not affect other factions.

Shortly after the military left cabinet in 1988, it lost a significant amount of political power. Not only was the military's political wing significantly weakened, but the military divided into separate conflicting factions after its extensive involvement in politics (Pathmanand.) However, ten years later, the military had a new role in politics. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai appointed General Surayudh Juranondh as army chief and Thai troops began to deploy in East Timor as part of the ASEAN task force (Pathmanand.) The resurgence of the military right before the TRT took power is one of the reasons why the coup against Thaksin in 2006 was successful. Although the rural populace supported the monarch's implicit decision to issue a coup, the military would not have been able to carry it out without a unified force. Moreover, what needs to be clarified is the lack of distinction between the royal army and the monarchy. The royal army is loyal to the monarch and is there to make sure that the political factions in cabinet and parliament remain loyal to the king.

Finally, what has not been discussed yet in this paper thus far is the place of the monarchy in modern-day Thai politics. In order to comprehend the military coup of 2006, one must understand the balance of power within the Thai polity. King Bhumibol is the symbol of traditionalism and nationalism in Thai politics and he determines which system of governance Thailand should follow (Handley, 385.) Bhumibol has remained the driving force in Thai politics mainly because he has had the support of the rural Thai populace. As previously stated, the rural Thai are the majority in terms of demographics. The rural Thai rely on subsistence farming and only need help from outside actors such as the king when crops fail, or when political factions take advantage of them. The king has sponsored rural projects to assist the rural Thai and has repeatedly scolded corrupt

politicians and military officials when the rural Thai speak out against reform. In short, as long as the king has the support of his constituents, he will determine the balance of power. In the eyes of the king, the ideal balance of power is quite different than what political factions would want. The royal army would remain loyal and political factions would not vie for more political support.

In particular, garnering more support from the rural Thai would be a mistake. Bhumibol's main political base is the rural populace and he had to attempt to garner support from the urban populace because of a loss of general support in the mid 1990s (Handley, 377.) Thaksin made the mistake of pursuing his personal interests when he sold Shin Corp to Singapore; he also gained more political clout with his own projects in rural areas. When Thaksin sold Shin Corp to Singapore, he openly showed that his personal interests were above the national interest. The ultimate irony is that King Bhumibol also has personal interests in Thai politics; however, he does not openly disclose them. Even though he does not care about his personal wealth as much as Thaksin does, he most certainly cares about political ambition. Bhumibol wants to remain the monarch of Thailand. Indeed, in the 1990s the monarchy spent millions of dollars celebrating the Chakri monarchy so urban Thai would begin to support the monarchy (ibid, 377.) If Bhumibol put national interest ahead of personal interests, he would not have minded a loss of political power. Bhumibol wants to remain the traditional symbol of Thailand and does not want any faction or leader to get more support so that they become the symbol of traditionalism. In Thailand specifically, traditionalism equates to nationalism.

Also it is evident that King Bhumibol has personal interest because of precedent. King Chulalongkorn, regarded as one of the greatest kings of Thailand, acquired power for his own sake (Chachavalpongpun, 37.) This notion of political ambition has not changed at all within the Chakri dynasty. King Bhumibol wants centralized rule and would like political factions to stay within their boundaries as previously stated. What is extremely perplexing is that Bhumibol's cohorts would not agree with a loss of political legitimacy within the monarchy even if the king decided to lessen the power of the monarchy in general. We can clearly see that the officials within institutions like the Privy Council and Bhumibol's family members have more of a say in the monarchy than one would like to think.

Conclusion

The heart of this paper has been the discussion of major political factions such as the TRT and the monarchy. The pre-modern foundation of Thailand gave us a glimpse of how important the king is in modern-day Thai politics. The involvement of the rural populace has sparked a rivalry between political factions and the monarchy as a whole. The only way the rivalry and cyclical politics will come to an end is if the monarchy resorts to absolutism, if the monarchy serves a symbolic role in politics, or if the political factions and the monarchy cooperate and abolish political boundaries. Cooperation between the two entities would be the best option for the current Thai polity; however, the Thai monarch should serve a symbolic role until the socio-economic status of the rural Thai rises. Political factions and the monarchy cannot commence political cooperation until they cannot gain support from different constituents. With united constituents, it would be pointless to play power politics for both entities.

Moreover, one would assume that there would be stability if each faction remained in its respective boundary. However, it is simply wishful thinking to assume that factions will remain in their political boundaries. The Thai factions have been experimenting with their democracy since the 1932 coup and need to come to the realization that the monarchic democracy must transition to a full-scale liberal democracy. The only reason why political factions have been corrupt is because they want to remain in power for the longest period of time and gain the most popular support. Through this process, the political factions inadvertently limit the power of the monarchy for a short period of time. When the Thai populace is generally united in terms of socio-economic status, cooperation between King Bhumibol and the political factions will inevitably commence.

If the monarchy somehow decides to lessen its political clout for a short period of time, parties will find it pointless to play power politics. The purpose of political parties is to gain popular support through meaningful reform. If Bhumibol limits his political clout, the political factions within parliament and the cabinet can finally reform Thailand's political institutions. To augment on the reformation of political institutions, the Thai factions should reform the electoral system so that individual parties hold less clout.

In addition, a different interim constitution should be implemented in order for the monarchic aspect of Thailand's democracy to diminish. It is the duty of the urban elite to remain informed on various issues in order to support the rural Thai until the socio-economic status of the rural Thai rises. The urban populace should put national interest over personal interest. Once the political factions and the urban populace reform their

way of approaching the Thai polity, the Thai state will finally progress without future political or economic stagnation. What is evident through logic and evidence provided by Connors and Handley is that the king will serve a smaller role in Thai politics with an informed rural Thai. The king relies on the rural Thai for political support because he is the symbol of traditionalism and he assists the rural Thai through numerous projects. An informed rural Thai would care about effective governance as previously stated and would need help from political factions and not the king. King Bhumibol provides no assurance of economic progression and cannot help the Thai populace politically. These are a few policies that the rural Thai will care about with higher socio-economic status. The process of urbanization should not be forced upon the urban Thai. Rather, it should be a gradual process. The rural Thai will not rise to the extent of abandoning communitarianism. Indeed, full-blown capitalism would simply overwhelm the individual communities (Connors, 241.) Their socio-economic status will rise to the point where they will be able to differentiate between good and bad governments. Also, the rural Thai are not a backwards people. The primary reason why the rural Thai cannot differentiate between good and bad governments is because they rely on subsistence farming. The rural Thai simply do not care about governmental policies that do not affect them.

Furthermore, the party that should lead Thailand's democracy is the TRT.

Thaksin should be allowed to return to power in the future. Thaksin made the mistake of expanding upon his personal wealth and strengthening his party by limiting the power of other political factions. With a symbolic monarchy, the TRT will have no need to gain as much political clout as possible because no domestic force will be able to counter it. In

short, if the monarchy becomes symbolic, politicians within parties such as the TRT will pursue reform for the betterment of the Thai nation-state and not for the progression of the party. Also, in Thai politics the political factions dictate the national ideology to the populace (ibid, 148.) This is not necessarily a bad policy. As long as the political factions do not take advantage of the Thai populace, a united urban elite could potentially prevent discord within the Thai populace and Thai political factions. However, a united and *informed* Thai populace could be the model for governments throughout the international community.

Once the rural Thai's socio-economic status has risen, the constitution can reach its final stage of development. The inclusion of both the Thai monarch and the political factions in Thai politics will bring about true political liberalism. One might say that political liberalism is not possible with a monarch involved in politics. However, since the Thai polity has been accustomed to the monarch being involved in politics since the Siamese empire, a symbolic role would not suit the Thai monarch. A close relationship was formed between Sarit and Bhumibol when Sarit faced a legitimacy crisis and when Bhumibol was relatively new to the Thai polity (Suwannathat-Pian, 188.) Currently, the Thai political factions and the monarch need to cooperate because they face the opposite problems. The TRT is still a new political faction and political parties do not last long in Thai politics. The monarch on the other hand is facing a legitimacy crisis with the loss of political clout. Without cooperation, the monarch and the political factions will once again return to power politics which puts the Thai polity back into cyclical politics. Political development will never be able to take place in the Thai nation-state without an end to cyclical politics.

Now, what needs to be accentuated in this paper is the definition of political liberalism and political development. According to the indirect assumptions of western scholars, political liberalism and political development can only take place with an urbanized rural Thai and a symbolic monarchy. However, it is possible to have a liberal democracy and political development with a non-urbanized rural Thai and a monarch involved in politics. It would be quite difficult to change the entire political and economic framework of a nation-state which has progressed significantly. In essence, Thai-style democracy can progress if the political factions and King Bhumibol cooperate to prevent political stagnation. More important, political development will take place in Thailand if the urbanites and the bureaucrats do not force capitalism upon the rural Thai.

Also, as Ockley explains in his timely article discussing change and continuity in the Thai political system, political factions should find young MPs to succeed them simply because the gerontocrats will not be around forever. Likewise, King Bhumibol must find an intelligent successor because if the next monarch is not as intelligent or skillful, the palace could potentially take advantage of a young king (Suwannathat-Pian, 209.) A finalized constitution must include a clause similar to the 1997 constitution which allows great flexibility within the monarchy. The monarch can decide to cooperate as much or as little as he wants. Bhumibol's successor will most likely start as a political novice and the flexibility within the constitution will allow him to slowly increase the amount of political cooperation with factions such as the TRT. It is evident that finding a successor who has the capacity to become a skillful monarch is of the utmost importance.

One key piece missing from this puzzle is the monarch's coterie. None of the above can be accomplished unless the Privy Council and the monarch's family are

indifferent with the short-term abandonment of Thailand's monarchic democracy. In the past, the Privy Council has made decisions such as issuing coups without the compliance of King Bhumibol until the coup actually took place (Suwannathat-Pian, 154.) What should be examined in a future paper is the extent of the Privy Council and family's influence on King Bhumibol and if they would be fine with the loss of political power. It suffices to say that a liberal democracy, with an emphasis on effective political institutions and the incorporation of the monarch in Thai politics will lead Thailand to unlock its full political and economic potential.

The Thailand case study is a prime example of what the nations in Southeast Asia are experiencing. The Thai polity needs to strengthen its political foundation in order to prevent cyclical politics, corruption, and the passiveness of the urbanites. In the beginning of the paper, my main claim emphasized true political liberalism. The Thai polity will inevitably progress towards the above if the political framework of the nation is strengthened. Now, it is evident that the other polities within Southeast Asia have differing political problems. However, all the nations of Southeast Asia must work towards true political liberalism no matter how small or large the political puzzle.

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