STUDIES OF THE THAI STATE:
THE STATE OF THAI STUDIES

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"What damn good is this country--you
can't compare it with anything!"

attributed to David Wilson[1]

The world of English-language writing about Thai politics
is a strange one. Consider only the following oddities: (1) No
country in Southeast Asia, except perhaps the Philippines, has
been more continuously open to Western scholars, yet there are
only half a dozen serious published monographs about modern Thai
political life--Coast (1953), Darling (1965), Riggs (1966),
Siffin (1966), Skinner (1958), and Wilson (1962a).

(2) All the major studies were done in the 1950s. We
have nothing satisfactory in English on the Sarit dictatorship,
except an unpublished dissertation by a Thai (Chaloemtiarana
1974); nothing on the Praphat-Thanom era; and nothing on the
"democracy" of 1973-76. (3) While the military and the monarchy
have quite clearly been the two most important political
institutions in 20th-century Thai politics, few in-depth studies
exist of either.[2] There are no substantial works on political
parties, on legislative behavior, on leftwing movements, or--aside
from Skinner's outstanding work on the Chinese--on the political
experience of the country's minorities.[3]

All works referred to in the text and footnotes of this
paper are cited in full in the bibliography at the end.

[1]In Phillips 1976, p. 452.

[2]With regard to the monarchy, two significant unpublished
studies exist: Greene 1971 and Batson 1977. (Vella 1978 reached
me too late for inclusion in the present discussion.) On the
military, Wilson 1962b, von der Mehden 1970, and Lissak 1976 are
skimpy and do not compare in depth of knowledge or sophistication
of analysis with the work on the Indonesian military by scholars
such as Crouch, Feith, Lev, McVey, and Sundhaussen.

[3]Skinner 1957, 1958. Coughlin 1960 is less satisfactory.
Poole 1970, on the Vietnamese in Thailand, is a counter-insurgency
tract whose weaknesses are clearly demonstrated in Flood 1977.

Indeed, the list of topic areas <u>not studied</u> could be expanded indefinitely. (4) I cannot think of a single political biography to put alongside the very useful books available to Southeast Asianists on, for example, Ho Chi Minh (Lacouture 1968), U Nu (Butwell 1963), Sukarno (Legge 1972), or Magsaysay (Starner 1961). (5) In Neher's helpful recent compilation *Modern Thai Politics*, published in 1976, half the texts were written over a decade ago and only a third were authored by political scientists.[4] (6) Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, with the exception of Phillips's "Some Premises of American Scholarship on Thailand," written in 1973, there is, to my knowledge, no self-conscious or self-critical literature about the larger problems of approach or method--not to say paradigm--in Western (or American) writing about modern Thai history and politics. One has no sense that Phillips's text, interesting as it is, aroused any significant response or discussion among Thai specialists; indeed, I think it is fair to say that the piece itself was a response less to theoretical problems within his own or parallel fields than to the general politico-moral crisis produced among Southeast Asianists by the Vietnam War.

Various explanations for this strange situation present themselves; I would like to offer some of them for consideration, in ascending order of their interest for the purposes of this essay (and also of their intrinsic complexity).

(1) The small number of Western Thai specialists, and their homogeneous cultural and class background, have certainly been important factors. Most of the relevant work has been done in America, and by middle-class white male Americans. Thai political studies have not benefited as, say, Indonesian political studies have done, from a world-wide proliferation of alternative study centers. In the field of Indonesian politics, for instance, American scholars must pay careful attention to work being done in Australia, England, France, Holland, and Japan. Indonesian studies in America have also been cross-fertilized by a sizable number of non-Americans (to name only some of the better known: Feith, Van der Kroef, Holt, Pauker, and Benda) who, however parochial their particular perspectives, nonetheless, coming from different "parishes," often forced Americans into self-awareness by posing non-American questions. It is instructive, for example, that the first shots in the continuing theoretical debate about approaches to understanding Indonesia were fired between a Jewish-Austrian-Australian political scientist and a Jewish-Czech-American historian (see Feith's 1962 book, Benda's 1964 review of

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[4]Contributing political scientists were: Thawatt Mokarapong, Donald Hindley (visiting Indonesianist), David Wilson, James Scott (visiting Malayanist), Clark Neher, William Siffin, Fred Riggs, and Vicharat Vichit-Vadakan.

it, and Feith's 1965 reply to Benda).

(2) If it is true--and it may not be entirely so--that the Thai were advantaged in not being directly colonized by a Western power, Western scholars have been seriously disadvantaged. It is difficult to imagine what modern scholarship on Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines would be like today, did it not rest on the magisterial work of colonial civil-servant scholars like Hall, Furnivall, Luce, Schrieke, Van Leur, Stutterheim, Pigeaud, Snouck Hurgronje, Gourou, Henry, Mus, Hayden, and many others.

But (and this suggests an ironical perspective on the relation between good Western scholars and the fate of the peoples they study) this scholarship was made possible only by the colonial dictatorship itself. Such scholars were not limited by twelve- or eighteen-month grants, fragmentary data, politically turbulent field conditions, and so forth. They lived for years in the countries they studied, usually acquired a deep knowledge of the languages and cultures, had excellent bureaucratic access, were able to use the colonial administration to gather data, and worked in the total (if soporific) calm of late colonial domination. Modern Thai studies had to start largely from scratch, not only in terms of data and analysis but even--as will be noted below--of fundamental perspectives.[5]

(3) An important corollary of this condition is that in London, Paris, Leiden, The Hague, and various places in the United States, voluminous archival materials on the inner workings of politics in the colonial territories lie accumulated--on the whole well-organized and well-catalogued, mostly written in Western languages, and increasingly open to the interested scholar. That the Thai escaped direct colonialization has meant that nothing comparable exists for students of early modern Thai history. Not only are most of the essential comparable materials written in Thai, but they have been jealously guarded by the Thai rulers and ruling class.

(4) Much of the more valuable post-World War II scholarship on the newly-independent states of Southeast Asia was informed or stimulated by anti-colonial sympathies. Needless to say, these sympathies did not in the least of themselves guarantee work of any interest or stature. But they did, in

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[5]I am, of course, referring to scholarly works, as opposed to travel reports, memoirs, and so forth. The most important pre-World War II scholarly works on Siam are, in order of their appearance: Wales 1931, Landon 1939, and Thompson 1941. Useful as these works are, they are not in the same class as the products of the colonial authors mentioned above.

combination with the actually existing political situation, force
modern scholars into a critical posture. This compulsion
operated on two distinct levels, though in differing degrees for
different territories. On the political level, insofar as the
U.S. government at various times and to varying degrees aided or
supported dying colonial regimes, many scholars had to distance
themselves from U.S. policy right from the start, and to get used
to the idea that policy and scholarship might have different
values and objectives.

On the intellectual level, something more interesting
happened. Since much of the best writing on the colonial countries
was done by colonial officials and much of the best data came from
colonial sources, liberal post-war scholars were automatically put
in a beneficial adversary relationship with the intellectual-
conceptual milieu in which they started working. They had to
think out their positions vis-à-vis the colonial giants, if they
were to challenge them successfully; they had to interrogate
colonial materials in an inquisitorial mood if they were to
penetrate to native reality through white documentation.

Precisely because the Thai were not directly colonized,
however, all these processes worked in contrary motion for the
Thai specialists. On the political level, if the Truman Adminis-
tration hurried to abandon Pridi for Phibun, the implications of
choosing between the two Thai leaders were far less serious than
those of choosing between Sukarno and Van Mook, or d'Argenlieu
and Ho Chi Minh. One might be critical of Truman's policy, as
many of the senior Thai specialists were; but one continued to
have cordial relations with the Phibun government in a way that
it was difficult to have them with Van Mook's or d'Argenlieu's.

Much more importantly, however, Thai specialists were not
confronted by a formidable body of colonial scholarship. Coming
of age at a time when all their Southeast Asianist colleagues
were imbued with pro-indigenous sympathies, they approached Thai,
Thai governments, and Thai history in the same tender spirit.
Rama VI and Phibunsongkhram were placed within the same conceptual
category as Ba Maw, Sukarno, Phan Boi Chau, or Rizal--rather than
that of Harrison, De Jonge, Craddock, or Sarraut. In the name of
nationalism the scholars were generally protective and, as a
result, were inhibited from critical confrontation with the objects
and materials of their study. It is only one of the ironies of
the Thai/West relationship that precisely thð same forces that
tended to create a critical scholarly atmosphere in the study of
the rest of Southeast Asia, reinforced a timid--not to say
conformist--outlook among the Thai specialists.

There is one further involution of this paradox that may
be worth emphasizing. Because Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, and the
Philippines were ex-colonies, they fitted easily into a general

conceptual category--that of "new states." They were seen as instances, or examples, of a general problem or situation. A great many superficial (and a few intelligent) works were written in the 1950s and 1960s from a global comparative perspective to show that however unique ex-colonial countries might imagine themselves to be, in fact for most serious purposes they were similar to one another and had similar relations with the industrial West. Southeast Asia specialists, confronted with the disciplinary prestige of this comparativism, had to struggle--for good intellectual (and often bad personal) reasons--to validate and explicate the uniqueness of their country of study. Much of the best work on ex-colonial Southeast Asia after World War II was done in this vein.[6]

Siam, however, not being ex-colonial, was taken as *ipso facto* "unique." And this "uniqueness" was typically celebrated, rather than studied or concretely demonstrated. Again, the general influence of Southeast Asianism was deleterious to Thai studies. Where everyone else was struggling to represent Burmese, Indonesian, or Vietnamese uniqueness, Thai specialists could--and did--proudly assume Thai uniqueness. Precisely in the case of Siam, a critical stance would have raised the comparative question and brought Barrington Moore, Eisenstadt, and Samir Amin into play, to allow a penetrating assessment of what was really unique in the Thai experience, and what was not. It would have rejected the alibi offered by the general stance of other Southeast Asianists, who were facing very different perspectival and methodological problems.

The end product of these four constraints was, I think, a placid consensus among scholars (with rare but important exceptions such as Jacobs and Flood) on a set of axioms about modern Siam, which I shall sketch out below. Only the events since October 6, 1976 have begun to shake the unconscious hold these axioms have maintained over the Thai specialists. One could, however, draw an analogy between Thai studies and the development of astronomy in the late 15th century. In that era, astronomers discovered growing discrepancies between what they observed and the axioms of Ptolemaic cosmology, and were led to increasingly strained and involved extrapolations from those axioms to "save the phenomena." But once the essential simplification and axial twist was made-- that the earth revolved around the sun--it turned out that many conventional astronomical questions no longer needed to be asked, while many fruitful new ones became imaginable. Similarly, in

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[6]In parallel vein, McVey's superb *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (1965) was intended to demonstrate the autonomy and idiosyncracy of early Indonesian communism against the "comparative" stereotype of Third World communist parties as faithful replicas and tools of the Kremlin.

Thai studies, I think, research done in the late 1960s and early 1970s was producing concrete data that could be explained, within the framework of the old axioms, only by elaborating qualifications and theoretical "subletting."

But before proceeding further, let me outline what I believe some of these axioms were--at the same time noting that they were actually constructed (so incapable are we of imaging the unique) on a set of implicit comparisons:

(1) Non-colonization was an unqualified blessing, which marked Siam as unique in 19th- and early 20th-century Southeast Asian history.

(2) Accordingly, Siam was in effect the first independent modern nation-state in Southeast Asia.

(3) The Jakri dynasty's historical role was "modernizing" and "national."

(4) Siam's success was due mainly to the basic "stability" of Thai society and to the famous "flexibility" of its patriotic leaders.

If these are the central axioms, let me suggest two types of largely implicit comparisons that make them plausible. One sort--which underlies Axioms 3 and 4--is that the Jakri dynasty's historical role is to be understood as analogous to that of the nationalist leaders in the rest of Southeast Asia, starting with the Filipinos of Rizal's generation. That is, the Jakri were, whether they understood it or not, nationalist patriots.[7] The second sort--which underlies Axioms 1 and 2--is that the history of modern Siam is to be seen as fundamentally comparable to Japan's; in both cases, as it were, astute monarchical regimes made the necessary flexible adaptations to Western expansionism to escape colonization and to modernize "traditional" society.[8]

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[7]This perception clearly underlies the best book so far on Chulalongkorn's reign, Wyatt's *The Politics of Reform in Thailand* (1969). It is explicit in the following sentence in the book's conclusion: "The king's task was, first, to seize power from his father's generation, and then so to use it as to bring the nation to) a poil.t at which it could accept his dreams and make them its own" (p. 378; emphasis added).

[8]Even the generally iconoclastic Jacobs accepted this analogy. In *Modernization without Development* (1971), he wrote:
    The Siamese or Thai case is of particular
    interest for a study of development because
    of the great similarity between Siam and

It hardly needs to be said that the facts that scholars are uncovering make both of these analogies more and more difficult to defend. Rather than finding further qualifications and elaborations to "save the phenomena," let us consider the following doubtlessly scandalous hypotheses:

(I)   In certain important respects Siam was unfortunate, not so much in being colonized, as in being indirectly colonized.

(II)   In certain important respects Siam was almost the last to become an independent <u>national</u> state in Southeast Asia.

(III) The role of the Jakri dynasty, if modernizing, was modernizing only in the special sense that the regimes of colonial governors were modernizing.

(IV)   Siam's "success/failure" is to be understood primarily as a result of the European imperialist pacification of Southeast Asia; Thai leaders have in fact been comparatively inflexible, and Thai political life has been (at least since the 1930s) an exemplary case of instability.

No less than their antecedents, these hypotheses rest on a comparative basis. But the relevant comparisons now are not with Sukarno and Ho Chi Minh or with the Meiji reformers but rather, in different ways, with the indirectly-ruled principalities of Southeast Asia (e.g., Brunei, the Javanese Vorstenlanden, and the unfederated Malay states) and with the "modernizing" regimes

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Japan during the mid-nineteenth century at the time that the challenge of modern development first presented itself to both societies. Both societies were independent, both were largely homogeneous in culture, both had a strong sense of national identity, both had creative and often brilliant elites· who were strategically located in decision-making positions from which they could innovate constructively, both had bureaucratic staffs able and willing to implement elite decisions, both were realistic about foreigners' (particularly Europeans') intentions and power and sensed the need for social innovation rather than verbalization to meet the threat, and both had the key, cash crops, to use as the means by which to implement productive change--to mention only some of the key factors often discussed as crucial to successfully achieving modern development. <u>Yet, Japan developed but Siam did not</u>.... (pp. 3f.; emphasis added).

of colonial Southeast Asia.[9] (Simply from the point of view of world-historical time, these comparisons seem rather more plausible: Chulalongkorn's reforms correspond temporally with the "new" colonial policies of the Netherlands Indies and British Burma rather than with the Meiji reforms.[10] All of them precede by a generation the nationalist movements of Indonesia, Burma, and Vietnam.)

It will immediately be apparent that these hypotheses call into question the accepted view of the modern Thai monarchy and, still more important, the relationship between that monarchy and the modern Siamese nation. Rather than assuming a harmonious lineal descent from one to the other, they suggest contradictions between them. In fact, it is tempting to argue that it has been the identification of the two that has, on the scholarly level, systematically distorted understanding of 20th-century Thai politics and, on the political level, retarded the development of the Siamese nation--leaving it, in some important respects, "behind" its directly-colonized neighbors. The remainder of this essay will be devoted to an elaboration of this argument. For I believe that it may help supply a sort of "axial twist" that will both simplify and clarify some of the "problems" of the contemporary political historiography of Siam.

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Nothing illuminates the role of the Thai monarchy in the 19th century and early 20th century better than a consideration

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[9]Batson (1977), generally admiring of the Jakri, makes the latter analogy with great lucidity. "The late nineteenth century Thai government, with its goals of technological development, rationalization of the administration, and expansion of central government control to areas remote from the center, was in many respects similar to colonial regimes in neighboring countries, and the Thai official sent from Bangkok to supervise the administration in Chiengmai or Ubon was only somewhat less foreign than the British district officer in Malaya or the French *résident* in Indochina " (p. 18; emphasis added)

[10]Battye (1974) shows that the purpose of the young Chulalongkorn's visits to colonial Singapore and Batavia in 1870 and British India in 1872 was, in Chulalongkorn's own words, "selecting what may be safe models" (p. 118). As Battye wryly notes, "There was both enticement and instruction in these colonies which throve on order maintained by small but efficient military establishments" (p. 120; emphasis added). It is instructive that the young sovereign never made a comparable trip to Japan. Later on, in a pattern followed by many of the more advanced Southeast Asian "protected" rulers, he sent his heir to be educated in the metropole (in this case, England).

of the "modernization" of the Thai armed forces. (In addition, one can not, I think, comprehend the modern political role of the Thai military without clearly understanding its historical origins.) Nothing shows more clearly the non-parallelism of the Chulalongkorn regime with that of the Meiji oligarchs and the parallelism with the indirectly-ruled states of 19th-century Southeast Asia.

The Meiji oligarchs came to power in 1868 by coup d'état. Taking advantage of Western-style military organization, tactics, and munitions, they defeated the obsolete levies of the Bakufu and proceeded immediately to establish what was essentially a military dictatorship in the name of the restored monarch. Residual feudal military forces were liquidated--not only on the basis of borrowed technical instrumentalities but by nationally conceived and administered conscription (1873). Already in 1872, a program of mass education had been initiated in order to provide the popular basis for a large standing army and a national polity. The army (and navy) were basically intended for external use, and within a generation they had proved their capacities in successful wars with China and Imperial Russia.

By contrast, while Chulalongkorn came to the throne in the year of the Meiji oligarchs' coup, a Thai Ministry of War was not set up till 1894, the year prior to the Sino-Japanese war. Conscription was not introduced until 1905, a whole generation later than in Japan (see Battye 1974:429). Furthermore, no attempt was made to tie educational development to military requirements; indeed, modern primary education was not even made formally compulsory till the reign of Rama VI.[11]

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[11]By the beginning of this century, virtually all Japanese children were in primary school, and a national pyramid of secondary and tertiary educational institutions run by Japanese was in good working order. By contrast, the Thai government was happy to announce in 1957 that in 14 of 71 provinces more than half the population had completed primary education (Smith et al. 1968:161). As late as 1974, the average number of years spent in school by Thai nationals was 5.56, only slightly more than a lower primary education stretch (see Mabry 1977:11). The first full-fledged university (Chulalongkorn University) was set up in 1917, four decades after the Imperial University in Tokyo. And as Wilson observes, "Until World War II, the best secondary schools were administered by Europeans, and university deans were often Europeans" (1962a:62).
　　　If this discrepancy between Siamese and Japanese progress escaped the eye of the Thai monarchs, it was evidently obvious to some of their subjects. Greene notes that the ringleaders of the 1912 attempted coup against Rama VI cited Japan as their model in demanding changes in the state educational system, cuts in government expenditures in certain fields, and democratization. Otherwise, they felt, Siam would "continue to fall behind the rest of the world and continue to receive the disrespect of all the advanced nations" (1971:133; emphasis added).

The key fact--which provides the framework for understanding the entire evolution of the Thai monarchy and the Thai military--is that between roughly 1840 and 1940 the state ceased not only to engage in warfare but even to seriously contemplate doing so.[12] Long before the French and British annexations (which occurred between 1885 and 1909), the real external security of the Thai monarchical state had been guaranteed by the European imperial powers. All of the Thai rulers' traditional rivals--Burmese, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese--were demilitarized by being subjected to European colonialism.[13] (In precisely the same way, all the

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[12]As Battye notes, "Mongkut [Rama IV] was the first Chakri king who never led an army into battle and [Sisuryawong] the Great Minister had campaigned only once, and then unsuccessfully" (1974:66). Skinner (1957:30) observes: "Rama III's successors were able to avoid 'shooting' wars altogether."

It should perhaps be added that the term "Thai military" is essentially anachronistic. Battye (1974:20-21) shows that the armed units serving the Jakri rulers in the 19th century were anything but Thai (just as the 18th-century Prussian army was anything but Prussian). Most of these units were manned by Vietnamese, Khmer, Mon and Lao--either descendants of war captives, or immigrant adventurers who offered their services to the king. "Under Rama III and IV non-Siamese--who had long since manned the Second and Third Foot Guards--bore the brunt of calls for new military formations." Under Rama III, Vietnamese were recruited for training as "sepoy" artillery, Mon for "sepoy" infantry. In 1852, Khmer and Bangkok Lao were formed into new units of King's Guards. Non-Siamese were especially overrepresented in "the more technical and up-to-date" units. The crews of the "Thai" navy were predominantly Cham and Malay.

[13]The Thai rulers were fully conscious of the advantages they derived in this respect from European imperialism. As late as 1930, the year of the Nghe An and Ha Tinh peasant insurrections and the Yen Bay military uprising in Vietnam, Rama VII observed:

> As long as French rule continues in Vietnam it is a 'safeguard' for Siam. No matter how much we sympathize with the Vietnamese, when one thinks of the danger that might arise, one has to hope that the Vietnamese will not easily escape from the power of the French. Aside from the necessity of maintaining good relations with the French, I believe it is the direct interest of Siam not to give protection to Vietnamese rebels or in any way to aid the Vietnamese in freeing themselves from French rule. (See Batson 1977:183.)

Needless to say, it is hard to imagine such thoughts occurring to Ho Chi Minh, Sukarno, or Aung San at that time.

surviving monarchs of Southeast Asia had their external relations "pacified" by one or another of the colonial powers.

As a result, the "modern Thai" army (and navy) had no serious external defense function, and indeed virtually never fought except against "domestic" forces (compare Japan!). The Thai military was mainly a means for internal royalist consolidation;[14] it was, in addition, an emblem of modernity

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[14]Though he himself largely overlooks it, this point is thoroughly demonstrated by Battye's (1974) data. (All references in this footnote are from that work.) He notes that at the beginning of Mongkut's reign the royal armies had been outgunned by the Lord of Keng Tung. But this situation soon changed as "Bangkok began to gather new strength, for new weapons could be speedily dispatched by Western sail and steam" (p. 76; emphasis added). When the young Chulalongkorn came of political age, one of the first "reforms" he undertook was the formation of a special royal bodyguard, which "formed a most important base of support for the king's 'party' or faction in the lively politics of his first regnal year" (p. 133). But the young king's ambitions soon expanded. "The king had not forgotten the link between the armies of the [British] Raj and the [Dutch] Kumpeni and effective government and prosperity....He wanted an adequate force 'to put down unlawful persons within the country...'" (p. 132). He wrote to the Governor-General of India in March 1874 that "we must make an effort to constrain the provinces"; and he duly sent a royal commissioner to Chiengmai accompanied by a military garrison (p. 146). Battye adds "There is no reason to disbelieve the report of the British Consul that the ["modern"] army, a novelty on the Siamese scene, was created for 'internal political rather than external military purposes'" (p. 226).
　　　　After a military success in Isan in 1885, made possible by imported land-mines (whose novelty terrified the local opposition), Chulalongkorn for the first time, in his Birthday Speech of 1886, began to speak of his Lao "provinces" (p. 251f.). In the late 1880s and early 1890s, "before he turned to major reform of his government, King Chulalongkorn carried out a series of military reforms which bear all the marks of internal political safeguards" (p. 268). Finally, Battye shows that military conscription, decreed in 1905, was prompted by the so-called Holy Man and Shan rebellions of 1902, which in turn were "reactions to the extension and intensification of Siamese government into former tributary states....Confidence in internal security [sic] was shaken....The argument for a national conscript army as an essential instrument of internal governance...unexpectedly gathered strength." (pp. 429-30; emphasis added)

for the outside world.[15] In this light we may better understand
the status panic of the Thai military at Rama VI's creation of a
second, rival toy soldiery in the Wild Tigers.[16] Had the Thai
military had a credible external role to play, this panic would
certainly never have arisen.

Wholly ineffective as far as defense was concerned, the
Thai military nonetheless (or rather, precisely because it had
no external function) eventually came to dominate the domestic

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[15]"Most foreigners saw Siam's armed forces as too large
for purposes of maintaining internal order and yet far too small
in the event of a conflict with a major European power, which in
any case now [1920s] seemed an extremely remote possibility. As
Siam's only territorial neighbors were British or French colonial
possessions, it was not clear what enemy the Thai military was
designed to fight....Many Thai, however, felt that a substantial
military establishment was necessary for national prestige..."
(Batson 1977:51). Sir Edward Cook, Financial Adviser to the
royal government, noted in 1925 that 23.3% of the budget was
spent on "defense," a proportion higher than in the budgets of
Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, etc. (Batson 1977:29). An
instructive early example of dangerous overspending on "prestige."

[16]For useful material on the Wild Tigers, see Greene
1971:103-13 in particular. He suggests that, in forming this
corps, Rama VI was doing exactly what his father Rama V had done
in 1873/74: creating a loyal military force to consolidate a
shaky political position and to challenge an entrenched political
"old guard." That the Wild Tigers were basically "toy soldiers"
is, I think, widely accepted; but the term may seem inappropriate
when applied to the Thai armed forces.
   Once again, material in Battye (1974) is illuminating.
With regard to the Franco-Siamese crisis of 1893, he comments
that the Thai fleet "was more familiar with picknicking and the
logistics of royal vacations than with combat maneuvers" (p. 325).
He also cites (p. 326) these words of Henry Norman in the
Contemporary Review (1893): "A couple of hostile British and
French gunboats, and a thousand soldiers on shore, and the
whole structure of Siam would fall like a house of cards...."
Such views cannot be written off as colonial-minded prejudice.
Rama V's Finance Minister, Prince Mahit, wrote acidly in 1906
that Siam should "stop playing soldiers" (Battye 1974:463). And
an expert French military observer noted calmly in 1908 that
"cette force navale est, pour ainsi dire, nulle" (Battye 1974:533).

political process, turning on the rulers who created it,[17] in a pattern that has been more recently replicated in Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Cambodia. (It is instructive in this light to reflect on the parallels between Rama VII and Idrus, Farouk, Haile Selassie, Faisal, and Sihanouk.)

Yet in many basic respects the coup of 1932 did nothing to change the basic role, outlook, and habits of the Thai military (see Jacobs 1971, esp. 43ff.). Indeed, these habits, rigidly maintained (Thai "flexibility" notwithstanding), help to explain the less-than-glorious role of the military since the century of European imperialist pacification came to an end and the Thai found themselves once again up against Khmer, Vietnamese, Burmese, and the rest. In the 1950-76 era, Siam's defense continued to be guaranteed by foreigners (in this case, American and Chinese troops), present in numbers never before seen on Thai soil.[18] The Thai military's external role in Korea, South Vietnam, and Laos was little more than economic. Burdened with its ancestry, it remains today--like its half-forgotten cousin, the Wild Tigers--a cluster of self-absorbed, status-conscious, privileged bureaucratic factions. (We need only compare the intra-Southeast Asian prowess of the "Thai" armies of pre-1840 with those of post-1940.)

At the same time, the coup of 1932 assumes, within this perspective, a meaning that shows precisely the superficiality

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[17]Two vignettes illustrative of the Thai military and its domestic political role are offered by Battye and Batson. Battye (1974:263f.) remarks that in the mid-1880s, young reformers with European education--while dismissing any hope of external defense against the West--still strongly supported modernizing the military in order to push through domestic reforms against conservative opposition and the provinces. Batson (1977:202) brings to our attention a memorandum written in 1928 by Prince Bǫwǫradet to Rama VII. In this memorandum, the Prince, then Minister of War, criticized Thai officers for their "slackness and general apathy," "intriguing mentality," and "money-making bent," adding that "Actually, the spirit of the officers is deplorable, and if left may even become a source of danger, for it must be recollected that we live in times in which subversive propaganda is likely to become prevalent." In reply, Rama VII slid that the military cadet school was in such bad shape that at one time he believed the only thing to do was to close it down and "let the bad examples be forgotten and start afresh."

[18]In 1968, there were at least 46,000 American troops alone on Thai soil--almost three times the number of colonial troops in the Netherlands Indies in the 1930s. (For the 1968 figure, see *New York Times*, 14 April 1968.)

of any comparison between Meiji Japan and Jakri Siam. For a
"1932" never occurred in Japan, and the Japanese military in
modern times never turned against the Japanese monarchy. The
reason is simple but instructive. While the able, lower samurai
"oligarchs" claimed to be restoring the centrality of the monarchy
against Bakufu usurpation, in fact they never permitted the
monarch to play an active political role. Drawing popular
legitimacy from the monarch and exploiting his sacral prestige,
the oligarchs abolished the samurai as a politico-military caste
and engaged in fierce political competition among themselves as,
in some sense, "citizens."

To an important extent, real power in Meiji Japan lay in
"commoner" hands and flowed in "meritocratic" channels. The ruler
remained the "object," not the "subject," of politics. In Siam,
the Jakri dynasty--like other 19th-century Southeast Asian
royalties--continued till very late in the day to play "subject"
rather than "object."[19] The pool of available political and
military talent remained arbitrarily narrow for precisely this
reason. "Merit" versus "blood" accordingly became a political
issue in a way that was inconceivable in Japan.[20]

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[19]It is almost with a sense of time-warp that one reads
in Wyatt (1969:61) that Rama V, like his father before him, bought
"property abroad for use in the event that abdication and exile
became necessary." Is it possible that these men were the first
Southeast Asian political figures to take out this kind of
political life insurance? It is difficult to imagine the Emperor
Meiji doing the same thing. How aware the Siamese royalty were
of the difference between their own role and that of the Japanese
emperors is revealed by Rama VI's remark, to his cabinet in 1925,
that he had no intention of being pushed aside "like the Mikado
in Japan" (see Batson 1977:30).

[20]It is sometimes thought that this became a real problem
only in the reign of Rama VII. However, Battye's work (1974,
from which comes all the material in this note) shows conclusively
how Chulalongkorn's military policies ran flatly against profess-
ional, meritocratic standards. For example, when conscription was
finally enacted, civil servants who were conscripted were given
military ranks equivalent to those they had previously held in
the civil service, regardless of their military talents and
qualifications (pp. 454-56). In 1906, the rules for entry into
the Military Academy were changed: henceforth, candidates had to
be children of "reputable" parents and to be sponsored and
guaranteed by a commissioned government official (p. 494).
    In 1909, entrance to the three preparatory grades of the
Military Academy was limited exclusively to scions of the royal
family, the maternal family of Bang Chang, and sons of military
officers. In addition, a special class was created for sons of

We may note one further fact of decisive comparative significance. Royal succession in Japan was able to continue calmly in the old vein, in spite of the combination of inbreeding and the modern etiquette of monogamy, because the monarchy served only symbolic functions. If some of the Japanese royal children happened to be feeble-minded or homosexual, it was not a matter of political importance.[21] In Siam, however, as in other parts of indirectly-ruled Southeast Asia, the controlling presence of the Europeans and the prestige of European ideas about monarchical succession and functions [22] had a signally deleterious impact just *because* the monarchy remained a political "subject." The ending of royal polygyny began to drastically reduce the pool of capable

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royalty with the rank of Serene Highness and above, and sons of military officers with commissioned or warrant rank: no examinations were required for this class (p. 495). In 1910, the year of Chulalongkorn's death, only members of the royal family held the ranks of General and Lieutenant-General; 6 out of 13 Major-Generals were also of royal birth. The upper echelons of the War Ministry were more heavily royal than those of any other department; 5 of the 9 Divisional Commanders, including the commanders of the First Division (Bangkok) and the Second (Nakhǫn Chaisi), were also royalty--most of them very young indeed. "Twenty-year old generals were common." (p. 519).

Whatever the gifts of Chulalongkorn's brothers, sons, and nephews in other fields of government, there is no convincing evidence that any were *militarily* competent, precisely because the Thai military did no serious fighting in which such talent could manifest itself. Hence the packing of the War Ministry with royal adolescents must have seemed particularly egregious and unprofessional favoritism.

[21]In fact, the Taishō Emperor (father of Hirohito) was insane for prolonged periods; but this made absolutely no difference to the conduct of Japanese government. Such a situation is unimaginable in modern Siam.

[22]This trend started very early. Riggs (1966) notes that Rama IV already created "secular" royal ceremonies on the English model, such as for the King's Birthday and his Coronation Anniversary (p. 105). In 1887, Rama V made his nine-year-old son the *legal* heir to the throne, rather than Upparat ("Second King" or *Ruler* of the Front Palace); indeed, the traditional office of Upparat was abolished. By this "the king brought Siam into line with the 'civilized' monarchies of Europe" (Battye 1974:270f.). By the time Rama VI ascended the throne, things had become "civilized" to the point that Western and other foreign royalty-- including princes or dukes from Britain, Russia, Greece, Sweden, Denmark and Japan--attended the public coronation ceremonies (Greene 1971:92).

royalty in the younger generation and to increase the likelihood of dangerous inbreeding within the royal circle.[23]

Succession determined in European-style legal-genealogical terms permitted the accession of monarchs like Rama VI and VII, who--whatever their personal merits--would surely have been barred from succession a century earlier on grounds of political incapacity or sexual orientation.[24] (Such "ossification" of traditional leaderships as a result of European pacification, European etiquette of succession, and European prejudices against polygyny is characteristic of most colonial zones.) The 1932 coup was thus the product of a failure either to maintain the pool of royal talent or to remove royalty from active politics.

Yet even the coup did not achieve a real resolution of this contradiction. For a short time, the coup leaders came close to abolishing the monarchy; but in the end they lost their nerve.[25]

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[23]Royal monogamy rather spectacularly reduced the total production of royal children in any one generation. In addition, since only one royal consort was now permitted, her social rank had to be of "unblemished" quality. As principalities with which Thai rulers had earlier had marital links declined or disappeared, royal marriages necessarily became more and more endogamous. A culmination of this process can be seen in the recent marriage of Crown Prince Vajralongkorn to his own first cousin (on his mother's side).

[24]The policies, style, mistakes, and problems of Rama VI's reign cannot be understood without acknowledging the ruler's homosexuality. (Yet it is striking that Greene's dissertation on Rama VI's reign, completed as recently as 1971, tiptoes silently around this fact. Needless to say, in this discretion he follows virtually all published work on modern Siamese history and politics). When rulers spent time and money on female sexual partners, these women--however powerful they might become behind the scenes--were nonetheless barred from holding public office and thus offered no political competition to the usual princely and noble candidates. Male sexual partners, on the other hand, were eligible for public office; and Rama VI aroused great enmity within the Bangkok establishment by making such appointments. One is reminded that the English rulers Richard II and Edward II both were overthrown and murdered in part because of the political consequences of their homosexual inclinations.

[25]"The revolution of 1932 might well have led to the establishment of a republic, as it seemed determined to do in the first flush of victory" (Riggs, 1966:94). Batson (1977:283) describes how the coup leaders told Rama VII that if he did not accept a constitution, he would be replaced by a relative or a republic would be established.

Unlike the monarchies of Libya and Ethiopia, the Thai monarchy has survived; but it has never made the full modern transition to the Japanese or European 20th-century monarchical style. "Royalism," in the sense of an active quest for real power in the political system by the royal family--i.e., the role of political "subject"--persists in a curiously antique form in contemporary Siam.[26]

If the external pacification of Siam's borders and the "Europeanization" of Thai monarchical etiquette strongly indicate that some of the relevant comparisons are not with Meiji Japan but with the indirectly-ruled principalities of Southeast Asia, such comparisons seem all the more pertinent when we turn to the economic and juridical spheres. The Bowring "treaty" of 1855 essentially deprived the Thai sovereigns of a key element of their sovereignty (i.e., control over foreign trade) as well as of the traditional royal commercial monopolies. As Bowring himself observed (1857, II:227): "It was clear that my success involved a total revolution in all the financial machinery of the government [,]...that it took a large proportion of the existing sources of revenue." Siffin (1966:48) comments that "The Thai role in this economic relationship [with the imperial West] somewhat resembled that of a colony, but there was a significant political difference--the nation was not brought completely within the sphere of interest of any single Western nation" (emphasis added).[27] Whether or not a multiplicity of Western "interests" really made that much of a difference is, it seems to me, a moot point--if we remember that seventy-five years later, on the eve of the 1932 coup, 95% of the Thai export economy remained in the hands of foreigners and Chinese (Darling 1965:29).

Nothing in all this reminds us of Japan; everything recalls Johor or Kelantan. On the juridical level, it should suffice to note that extraterritoriality is in essence simply another term for the privileged supra-legal status that white colonials enjoyed elsewhere in indirectly-ruled Asia under different nomenclature. Without perceiving this connection, Wilson (1962a:18) nonetheless correctly notes that it was not until 1938 that "Thailand's long

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[26]This is all the odder since the present ruler's accession to the throne was a product purely of formal lineage and accident and should therefore have made him an ideal political "object." As neither Rama VI nor Rama VII had male heirs, as Rama VII abdicated while in self-imposed exile, and as Rama VIII--the present king's elder brother--died of a mysterious gunshot wound while still a minor, the element of accident is apparent; Rama IX ascended the throne as a politically untutored adolescent simply because of his close blood tie to his predecessor.

[27]Note that, for Siffin, the Siam of 1855 is a "nation."

struggle for <u>complete autonomy</u> [sic] was finally achieved," and "Thailand [gained] control over all legal and fiscal aspects of its administration" (emphasis added).[28]

The material presented thus far plainly points to a semi-colonial, indirectly-ruled condition wholly incompatible with the "national"--not to say "nationalist"--terminology typically applied in most Western scholarship on Siam. What then has made such terminology plausible?

I would suggest that the answer is a myopic interpretation of the rationalization and centralization policies of Rama IV, Rama V, and Rama VI, which reads the internal consolidation of the dynastic state as identical with the development of the nation. Yet the most elementary comparisons reveal the dubiousness of such a reading. For example, the rationalization and centralization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the later Habsburgs was precisely <u>discontinuous</u> and <u>non-identical</u> with the formation of the modern nations of Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and so forth--all of which are republics, and most of which were born in resistance to the Habsburgs, not in succession to them.

It is important to remember that while the later Jakri were carrying out their reforms (under strong foreign guidance), analogous centralizations of state bureaucracies were being carried out both in neighboring indirectly-ruled territories by "native rulers" and in directly-ruled zones by white administrators.[29] Everywhere, centralization was accelerating as a result of the demands made by, and the opportunities derived from, the expanding global capitalist system.[30] The role of Dutch colonial bureaucratic centralization in creating the embryo of the modern Indonesian <u>state</u> is quite clear--this state is surely unimaginable in its present form without it--but who would identify the colonial bureaucratic state with the modern Indonesian <u>nation</u>?

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[28]Note that, for Wilson, the "subject" of this long struggle is an eternal Thailand.

[29]Compare Kelantan in the 1838-86 reign of Sultan Muhammad ("Mulut Merah") II (see Kessler 1978:41-44) and Johor in the 1862-95 reign of Abubkar (see Trocki 1978: chaps. 5-6).

[30]The idea of "opportunities" is important. It helps to explain why, in the words of Siffin (1966:48), the provisions of the Bowring treaty obtained "willing enforcement over the years by King Mongkut and his successor." Siffin is less successful in explaining why a national patriot should have <u>willingly</u> enforced the provisions.

If Rama V should be understood as performing much the same historical role as Muhammad II of Kelantan and the European pro-consuls of late 19th-century colonial administrations, this role does not obviously identify him with the development of the modern Siamese <u>nation</u>. Indeed, the argument runs in a diametrically contrary direction. It is rather that because the construction of the centralizing "colonial"-style late 19th-century state was effected by the monarchy, the growth of an authentic popular Siamese nationalism was stunted; and this, in turn, has been the central reason for the failure to achieve modern national political integration of "minorities" and to create a stable, legitimate political order. Furthermore, the conceptual identification of monarchy and nation has no less seriously stunted Western scholarly investigation of these problems.

Minorities and National Integration. Although Siam comprises considerable numbers of non-Thai peoples--Malays, Karens, "Hill Tribes," Vietnamese, Khmer, Chinese, and so forth--little in-depth work has been done on their political history and experience (with the exception of Skinner's rewarding texts on the Chinese). Nothing illustrates this neglect more strikingly than the fact that the indices to Wilson's *Politics in Thailand* (1962), Siffin's *The Thai Bureaucracy* (1966), and Neher's *Modern Thai Politics* (1976) contain no single entry for "minorities" in general, or for any particular minority beyond the Chinese; Riggs's *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (1966) has a single reference (to two pages) for "minorities." This relative lack of concern compares sharply with scholarly interest in, say, Burmese, Indonesian, or Filipino "minorities." My suspicion is that this comparative neglect reflects an axiomatic view of Siam as "Thai-land," in direct succession to the Old Thai kingdoms. This perspective itself mirrors the outlook of the Bangkok elite, an outlook that does much to account for their historic failures in dealing with the "minorities" (especially "indigenous minorities"), indeed in ever really comprehending the problems posed by these groups.

Like Burma, and unlike Indonesia and the Philippines, the modern Siamese state in some sense does territorially correspond to a "pre-colonial" kingdom based on a wet-rice agricultural core area dominated by a single ethnic group. The historical movement from the kingdom of Burma to the nation of Burma might perhaps have followed a Siamese path had not the monarchy been liquidated by the British who interposed, for about sixty years, something called British Burma or Colonial Burma. A state emerged--named Burma, <u>but by no means ruled by Burmans</u>. Precisely this development necessitated a clear politico-cultural distinction between nation and ethnocultural group, signaled in the British period and afterwards by the semantic distinction (and, to be sure, at times also confusion) between "Burmese" and "Burmans," terms that in different times and different places denoted ethnic group and national community.

In this sense, the ethnic Burmans were forced to confront their own "minority-ness" within the Burmese nation. Modern Burmese nationalism has been deeply conscious of and concerned by the whole complex question of "national identity" and "national integration." At independence, elaborate constitutional mechanisms were worked out to handle the problem.[31] Even today, the Rangoon military leaders talk and think about national identity and national integration with an energy and anxiety wholly missing from the preoccupations of their opposite numbers in Bangkok.

In spite of the potential advantage to the Thai of having as the name of the Old Monarchy's realm (Siam) an appellation quite distinct from the name of any ethnic group, a Burma-style evolution of political consciousness, clearly differentiating ethnic group from modern nation, has still, in my view, not been fully achieved. There is no word for the Thai that prevents them from semantically monopolizing the nation. "Thailand," the term for the contemporary state ruled from Bangkok--product of the opportunist chauvinism of the Phibunsongkhram-Luang Wichit ideological duumvirate of the late 1930s--is symptomatic. Western scholars have tended (mistakenly, I believe) to regard this formulation as expressing Thai nationalism.[32]

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[31]The 1948 Constitution established a two-chamber parliament, one chamber of which was called the Chamber of Nationalities. The new state was formally entitled the Union of Burma, a federal republic composed of a number of ethnically-defined (sub-)states, for some of which the option of secession was constitutionally guaranteed. See Silverstein 1977: esp. 54-59.

[32]It is perhaps symptomatic that Wilson (1962a) refers to Phibunsongkhram's repression of the Chinese minority in the late 1930s and early 1940s as an "intensely nationalist policy" (p. 120). Given this view, it is not surprising that he characterizes the "first Phibun era from 1938 to 1943" as one of "extreme nationalism" (p. 19). There are good reasons for thinking that Jacobs (1971) is nearer the mark when he observes that "True to patrimonial principles..., anti-Chinese political actions were not regularized but appear to be immediate responses to the arbitrary and capricious personal predilections of whoever was in power" (p. 75).

In other words, the anti-Chinese repression was a matter more of extortion than of nationalism. Coughlin points out (1960:24-25) that no administrative controls were placed on Chinese immigration until May 1947, when the liberal and nationalist Pridi regime was in power. In other words, for all the "extreme nationalism" of the first Phibun era, nothing was done to limit the influx of golden-egg-laying geese. [fn. continues on p. 213.]

It is striking that the progressive and genuinely nationalist regime of Pridi Phanomyong (1945-47) restored the old name Siam--not out of nostalgia for a monarchical past, but because the name symbolically marked the possibility for a new nation that would <u>not</u> be the monopoly of the ethnic Thai. In subsequent generations, it has been the Thai left which has worked hardest at this redefinition of the state. We may note, for example, that the thrust of the late Jit Phumisak's last work (1976) was precisely to combat ethnic Thai chauvinism by showing the heterogeneous ethnic origins of the "Thai" themselves and their close interaction with non-"Thai" groups (also see Flood 1977).

But we must be clear about the basic historical reason for the prevailing "minorities" crisis: the conceptual conflation of monarchy and nation. In Old Siam, as indeed in all traditional kingdoms, the state was defined by its center, not by its boundaries --not by its populations, but by its ruler. For this reason, it was relatively easy for Mon, Lao, Persians, Chinese, or Malays to be loyal to the monarch; they were, after all, in common his <u>subjects</u>. Their ethnic identity in no way determined the degree of their access to him. Traditional monarchs, including "Thai" monarchs, usually worked hard at integrating their kingdoms--and indeed expanding them--by multi-ethnic polygyny.[33]

In a paradoxical formation--which may remind us that there has not been an ethnically English king of England since the

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Skinner is sufficiently a victim of conventional thinking that he can write (1957:360), in reference to the post-1948 era: "In one of the most intriguing paradoxes of Thai history, militant economic nationalism has resulted not in the defeat of the [Chinese] enemy, but in cooperation between the antagonists." In fact, the pattern is clearly reminiscent of, say, Czarist policies towards the Jews, in which racist propaganda and periodic pogroms combined with close economic ties built on extortion and corruption-- policies few would claim to be in any sense "nationalist." We should perhaps not be surprised that in July 1938, Luang Wichit (then Director of the Fine Arts Department) "gave an address in which he compared the Jewish problem in Germany to the Chinese problem in Thailand and implied that the Nazi solution might be applicable" (Skinner 1957:261). This episode is ignored in Wilson's text.

[33]"Some measure of control was exercised over the vassal states and over the distant provinces with hereditary governor- ships, however, through a system of marriage alliances. It was the policy of the Thai kings to acquire the daughters of heads of dependencies to fill the royal harem. These women formed a permanent bond between the Bangkok government and the leaders of vassal states and provinces." (Vella 1955:327)

eleventh century--traditional rulers were the least "ethnic-national" people in their realms. Study of the physiognomies of the Thai ruling family (as of royalty elsewhere in Southeast Asia) shows clear atypicality produced by complex inter-ethnic mixes.[34] All these rulers are mixed-bloods, for mixed blood was once a political advantage. However, though a Malay chieftain could be loyal to a ruler in Ayutthaya or even in early Bangkok, there is no reason to suppose that this loyalty could or would be sustained towards rulers who, in modern times, were gradually transformed ideologically into Thai monarchs, symbols of the ethnic Thai monopoly of a new would-be nation-state.[35]

In just the same way, the Hungarians of one generation could be loyal to the Habsburgs as Habsburgs, while the next

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[34]We can illustrate this point with one important component of the Jakri ethnic mix: Chinese ancestry. Skinner's genealogical analysis (1957:19 & 26) is illuminating. He begins by reminding us that "We have King Mongkut's word for it that the bride of his great-grandfather was a beautiful daughter of one of the richest Chinese families in Ayutthaya;" in other words, Rama I was half Chinese. Assuming that the mothers of Rama II and III were "pure Thai," these rulers would have been, respectively, one-quarter and one-eighth Chinese. Since his mother was the daughter of Rama I's sister and a rich Chinese, Rama IV would have been half Chinese. Rama V's mother was a granddaughter of Rama II (and thus at least one-sixteenth Chinese), so Chulalongkorn was more than one-quarter Chinese. Queen Saowapha, mother of Rama VI and VII, was the daughter of a "pure Chinese" concubine of Mongkut; thus, these two sovereigns were over half Chinese in ancestry. It is curious, but not altogether surprising, that the strongly anti-Chinese Wachirawut should have had more Chinese than Thai "blood."

[35]Keyes (1967) makes instructive reading in this respect. On the whole, he is clear that the people of Isan are a Lao minority; he gives an excellent description of long-standing attempts by Bangkok rulers to incorporate them into a Bangkok-controlled state; he is sympathetic to the difficulties these Lao have thereby suffered. But the thrust of his argument is that Lao loyalty to the Jakri is proving to be the mediating mechanism for the development of loyalty to the modern nation-state; if they dislike the government, at least they love the monarch. As will be clear from my own argument to this point, this "love" has very little to do with the nation-state and is in fact retrogressive, preventing a modern incorporation into an authentic national polity. This weakness is unconsciously stressed by Riggs' formulation (1966:106): "For the perpetuation of this [Thai] sense of nationhood the survival of the monarchy would appear to be necessary." One can agree with Riggs, provided one understands "this sense of nationhood" to mean something stunted and archaic.

generation rejected them because they had come to be seen as
Germans or Austrians. Precisely because much of the Bangkok
("Thai") elite--and many Western scholars--have never really
thought about this transformation[36] and have assumed a continuity
that in fact does not exist ("Thai" rulers as Ur-Thai, rather than
as mixed-breeds), they have been unable to comprehend the real
crisis of the minorities and the need for a radical redefinition
of the modern state. Policies have thus varied among indifference,
condescension, and repression--not so much because of the malice
of governments as because of their politico-cultural backwardness.
Moreover, this backwardness originates in and depends on a
fundamental mystification about the nature and origins of the
modern Thai state and the role and meaning of the monarchy within
it.

    Stability and Instability.   If neglect of the problem of
minorities and nationalism is one tell-tale sign of this mystifi-
cation, the intellectual confusion over the much-discussed issues
of "stability" and "instability" is another. Let me offer two
well-known instances for consideration. The later Jakri monarchs
are regularly described in the literature as farsighted, patriotic,
dynamic, and modernizing rulers.[37] (Writers in this vein tend to
overlook the fact that competitive examinations for government
posts were instituted only four years before the overthrow of the
"absolute monarchy,"[38] long after the neighboring colonial regimes
had instituted such systems for their populations.) Yet here is
the conservative Wilson's judgment (1976:333; emphases in original)
of the Siam he studied in the 1950s: "The society of Thailand
today is, as it was a century ago, predominantly preindustrial--
almost pre-commercial--economically; more or less neolithic
technologically; and residually feudal socially. I would like to
quote here from Ingram's *Economic Change in Thailand* (1955) in
reference to the past century of world history:

        The Thai population has largely remained in agriculture,
        and has neither improved techniques nor increased the
        proportion of capital to labor. Moreover, most changes
        in the economy as a whole have been in volume rather
        than kind. New methods have not been used, new products
        have not been developed. No product of any importance

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    [36]A splendid example is Tambiah (1970), who manages to
spend 375 pages on the people of Isan without once referring to
them as Lao. His fieldwork site is blissfully entitled "our
remote and humble Thai village" (p. 372).

    [37]This is a commonplace in the literature. See, e.g.,
Wilson 1962a:97-112; or Siffin 1966:51-63.

    [38]On the Civil Service Act of 1928, see Siffin 1966:
211-13.

(besides rubber) is exported today which was not exported in 1850.

This quotation illustrates the truly striking fact that between 1850 and 1950, a century of revolutionary upheaval in the world, Thailand in very substantial ways remained very much the same."

One naturally asks where all that modernizing dynamism went. Why was it that, after a century of modernizing rulers, a "uniquely independent" Southeast Asian state remained so backward? Why did its export economy look like a retrograde version of the neighboring colonial economies (indeed, closely resemble the economies especially of indirectly-ruled colonial territories)?

Our second instance is the image of Thai politics made popular by the work of Riggs--i.e., the "bureaucratic polity," a polity described as immensely stable, impervious to appeals or pressures from outside or below.[39] Yet, if we compare the years 1782-1932 (in which seven monarchs and one regent held power-- roughly 18.8 years per power-holder) with the years 1932-73 (heyday of the "bureaucratic polity"--with twelve different men in the Prime Ministership, an average of 3.3 years per person, and no less than eight successful and many more unsuccessful coups carried out), a picture of great instability emerges.[40] By contrast, Indonesia in the post-independence period has had only two presidents in 33 years, though no one, till very recently, would have called Indonesia a bureaucratic polity. (See Jackson 1978.)

I draw attention to both longitudinal and latitudinal comparisons precisely to focus attention on the peculiarity of modern Thai political instability and to explore the reasons for its scholarly devaluation. Here, it seems to me, the original-- for their time--speculations of Hanks may have played an important

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[39]"...cabinet politicians have shown themselves more responsive to the interests and demands of their bureaucratic subordinates than to the concerns of interest groups, political parties, or legislative bodies outside the state apparatus" (p. 312).

[40]Riggs recognized this obliquely. Of the 1930s he wrote: "Both the People's Party and the parliamentary system proved unable to control the dynamism of intrabureaucratic conflict which broke out as the monarchical control system was dislodged" (1966:178). "The resultant system of government, which I have termed a 'bureaucratic polity,' is in a sense a nameless system. It is nameless because no one dares to ascribe to it a basis of political legitimacy which corresponds to the facts of effective control." (p. 323)

role. (See his seminal 1962 text, elaborated in his 1975 article.)
His discussion of the dialectic of "merit and power" and his
model of the "entourage" have been especially attractive because
they incorporated instability within stability: a ceaseless
"karmic" quest for patrons and followers, which never crystallized
into stable institutions but at the same time never turned into
anything new or different.[41]

It was easy to take the model for a timeless reality, and
hypostasize it as "uniquely Thai."[42] With history abandoned, it
was tempting to perceive the bureaucratic polity as both "natural"
in its instability (i.e., culturally rooted) and as national
(after all, it was "uniquely Thai").[43] Instability was thus
frequently read, comfortingly, to mean "Thai-style stability"--
rather than as an indicator of the crisis of the Thai state.

It should be clear, I think, that the instability was
(and is) real, important, and historically rooted. The roots lie,
I would argue, in a stunted and incomplete transition from kingdom
to modern nation-state--a transition whose problematic nature is
glossed over by the axiom that "Thailand" started "modernizing"
in the 1850s under Mongkut and has continued to do so ever since.[44]

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[41]"I emphasize persons moving in their fixed setting,
like players with their rules and tactics on a football field"
(Hanks 1962:107; emphasis added).

[42]Hanks (1962:107) warned his readers that "This paper
treats the scene ahistorically, though it refers to the period
from the beginning of the 19th century to the present." Yet he
has on occasion ignored his own warnings. I suspect, in addition,
that there are irremediable intellectual problems with all
ahistorical models that "refer to" specific historical periods.

[43]It is interesting that Riggs initially tried to
disassociate his "bureaucratic polity" model from any "Thai cultural"
explanation. He attacked Phillips's and Wilson's 1964 Memorandum
for trying to account for the bureaucratic polity by "alleged
traits of the Siamese 'race'" (Riggs 1966:320ff.). But in the
end, he reverted to a "cultural" explanation of the Thai
population's acceptance of the bureaucratic polity, even to the
point of uncritically accepting (on p. 324) Phillips's and Wilson's
conclusion that "villagers actually enjoy making known to those in
power their willingness to be ruled. Indeed, this is to them one
of the major pleasures of being a citizen." Riggs evidently saw
no inconsistency between acceptance of this gem and his own
description of the bureaucratic polity as a "nameless"
political system without legitimacy. See fn. 40.

[44]Here lies the central weakness of Jacob's stimulating
work (1971). He is so determined to undermine the conventional
myths about the "development" of Siam that he finds it difficult

This conceptual framework is strikingly evidenced in Akin Rabibhadana's 1969 work, arguably the most brilliant English-language text on modern Siam by a Thai. Akin proposes the following general model of the dynamics of dynastic rule in Old Siam: A dynasty typically begins after some major calamity--energetic, reintegrative leadership being provided by a parvenu statesman-general. Precisely because this figure emerges at a time of crisis, when existing structures are in disintegration, he is able to summon the most able men in the kingdom to his side. The first reign is thus classically a period of unusual social mobility, in which exceptional *homines novi* can make their mark. Taking advantage of his savior role, the new sovereign is able to subject most of society directly to his command. Above all, the numbers of *phrai luang* (commoners liable to state corvée) are at their height.

The hero's successors, however, who come to power by descent rather than by coup or conquest, find themselves increasingly entangled in complex rivalries with and dependencies on fellow-members of the established royal family, prominent nobles, and so forth, whom they have to "take care of" by assigning them *phrai som* ("private" corvée laborers). The services required by princes and nobles are so much less onerous than those demanded by the state that there is a steady leakage from *phrai luang* to *phrai som*--slowly draining the sovereign's manpower resources until the dynasty is too weak to survive a major challenge. A new dynasty then arises, and the cycle begins all over. This very rough sketch of Akin's model does not do justice to the subtlety and learning with which it is elaborated, but it perhaps suffices for raising some interesting questions of perspective.

First of all, if we ignore for the moment "Thai uniqueness," it is clear that Akin's model closely approximates the general Weberian model of patrimonialism, in which the central tension is between the monarch's natural drive to centralization and the localizing, fissiparous tendencies represented by provincial notables, noblemen, and royal princelings. In other words--and this is important--centralizing, "absolutizing" tendencies have nothing intrinsically to do with <u>modernization</u> and everything to do with the inherent dynamics of a certain type of state system. We should thus already be warned to be cautious about interpreting

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to admit that any substantial changes have taken place at all in modern Thai history. Mongkut's Siam and Sarit's Thailand--everything is a timeless "patrimonialism." In fact, as I shall argue below, the "patrimonial model" can be very useful for the study of Thai political history, but it can not be used to explain everything; and it is a <u>model</u> for analyzing historical reality, not that reality itself.

Jakri centralization in modernizing terms, rather than in terms of the patrimonial model.

Secondly, Akin appears to face an uncomfortable paradox. He posits as the "great men" of Thai History those dynasts who are most capable of cornering the manpower market--implicitly belittling those latterday sovereigns who seem incapable of organizing the peasantry for state corvée. In his view, "Thailand" is great only when these state corvées are working optimally. On the other hand, the silent migration of the population from *phrai luang* to *phrai som* status shows clearly that the Thai people much preferred service under anyone but the sovereign. In a sense, then, it is the Thai people who undermine their own chances for national glory. This paradox is tenable only if one sees the sovereign--as Akin tends to do--not so much as a dynastic power-politician following patrimonial imperatives but as Ur-Thai national hero; then the suffering and sacrifices imposed on Thai commoners can be glossed as analogous to tax-paying, military conscription, and all the other obligations that citizens of national republics properly owe their state. Avoiding royal corvée then appears as heinous as dodging the draft!

If we accept Akin's argument that there were basic instabilities built into the Thai patrimonial state, but emphasize that they involved conflicts of interest (not only between sovereign and nobility, but also between ruler and subject), we can proceed to the next step in analyzing modern Thai political instability: theoretical reconsideration of Jakri policy towards the Chinese. Two small but important points should be made before turning to the basic questions raised by this policy. First, the policy of encouraging in-migration of Chinese (especially Chinese as mobile, single, male manual laborers) precisely parallels the policies of the British and Dutch colonial regimes, and of petty Malay sultanates like Johor and Perak--in terms both of the policy itself, and of the world-historical epoch in which it was enacted.[45]

Second, it was a policy that absolutely cannot be made to fit with the Thai-monarchs-as-national-heroes trope. For one thing,

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[45]Skinner (1957) writes: "It may seem strange that the Chinese outnumbered the Thai in the Thai capital city, but most nineteenth century observers attest the fact" (p. 82). "More and more towns in the interior of Thailand, too, took on a Chinese cast during the latter half of the nineteenth century" (p. 88; emphasis added). Exactly the same phenomenon of alien immigrants demographically dominating urban areas occurred in British Burma--and for exactly the same reasons (see Furnivall 1956:44, 53, 116-23). Comparable tendencies are observable in the Netherlands Indies and in British Malaya in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

it is inconceivable that a nationalist leadership would pursue such a policy. For another, it is anti-Chinese sentiment that Western scholars see as one of the first signs of "Thai nationalism."[46] (So serious is this sentiment, by the way, that--in a remarkable manifestation of "uniquely Thai" flexibility--Thai rulers from 1911 right through to 1946 consistently refused to entertain official relations with any Chinese national leadership.[47]) It is thus clear that the Chinese immigration policy has to be understood in terms of dynastic, rather than national, needs. For if it helped in the short run to "stabilize" dynastic power (as it clearly did), it generated long-term instabilities and contradictions in Thai society--just as the immigration policies of the British and Dutch and of the Sultans of Perak and Johor did for contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia.

Systematic importation of Chinese labor first became a major element of state policy under Rama III.[48] But it was "the expansion

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[46]"Rama VI...was in effect the founder of intellectual nationalism among the educated Thai. He wrote a number of articles in the press under various pen names which expounded the subject of love of nation and also attacked the developing separateness of the Chinese community in the country" (Wilson 1962a:9-10). Wilson's readers are not informed that this "vivacious" founder of Thai intellectual nationalism was the pseudonymous author of a celebrated near-racist pamphlet attacking the Chinese, entitled *The Jews of the East* (see Purcell 1951:155).
    There is, in fact, good reason to argue that the anti-Sinicism of Rama VI (himself more Chinese than Thai by ancestry) had little to do with any putative nationalism. Skinner (1957), for example, stresses that Wachirawut's anti-Chinese sentiments were largely derivative of the prevailing racist prejudices of the British whom he so deeply admired (see p. 160; also pp. 248-49). In addition, after the overthrow of the Manchus in 1911, Thai rulers feared that Chinese immigrants could bring with them republican ideas that might infect the Thai (Batson 1977: 89). Greene (1971:125) comments that Wachirawut decided that many of the leaders of the abortive 1912 coup were of "mixed Thai-Chinese stock" and believed this to be "highly relevant in the light of the recent political unrest in China."

[47]Purcell (1951:192-94) describes the Siamese-Chinese Amity Agreement of 1946, negotiated in the brief interregnum of civilian rule between the two Phibunsongkhram dictatorships. After Mao's victory in 1949, successive Thai military regimes provided a further splendid example of "uniquely Thai" realism and flexibility by maintaining diplomatic relations with Taipei for the next quarter of a century. It took the civilian Kukrit Pramote government to open relations with Peking in 1976.

[48]But, as Skinner (1957:24f.) observes, "The first two Jakkri kings developed state trading and royal monopolies to an unprecedented degree. In order to increase the production of Siam's exports and provide crews for their royal ships, they encouraged Chinese immigration."

of the Thai economy after 1855 [the Bowring 'Treaty,' that] greatly
increased the demand for manual workers and eventually led to the
recruitment of Chinese peasants for 'coolie labor' in Siam and to
the mass migration which began in the 1880s" (Skinner 1957:109).
What were the reasons for this policy, and what was the structural
relationship between the immigrant labor force and Jakri
absolutism?

The answer is two-fold: (1) Manifesting themselves as
laborers looking for work (rather than as Thai peasants seeking to
evade work), the Chinese immigrants presented the Thai rulers with
a directly exploitable labor force outside the Siamese political
system--i.e., not subject to the classical slippage from *phrai
luang* to *phrai som*. (2) The Thai rulers quickly discovered, as
did the British colonial authorities in Malaya (and, to a lesser
degree, the Dutch in the Netherlands Indies), that this labor
force could be managed in such a way as to pay not only for its
own exploitation but for the general expansion of the state itself.

Let us look briefly at each part of the answer in turn.
The enormous advantage of the Chinese immigrants, in relation to
the rulers' manpower needs, was that they were vulnerable, ignorant,
youthful, single, and mobile. Provided funds could be found to pay
them wages, they could be used for a far greater variety of tasks
than could the Thai peasantry. Furthermore, "wage labor came to
be recognized as more efficient than conscripted labor" (Skinner
1957:114). Chinese coolie labor was thus "used extensively in
canal and railroad building, tin-mining, stevedoring and other port
work, rice-milling, saw-milling, and on Chinese commercial planta-
tions" (Mabry 1977:43). Skinner (1957:114) indeed suggests that
the construction of Siam's railroad system, which began in 1892 and
was essential to the maturation of Rama V's centralization policies,
"would, from all accounts, have been impossible without Chinese
labor." And Chinese deaths: "It is no exaggeration to say that
thousands of Chinese lost their lives prior to 1910 on railway
construction in Siam" (1957:115).

Nonetheless, Skinner is also correct in pointing out that,
since the Chinese were so essential to royal plans, "they had to
be given freedom unthinkable for the Thai masses of the time"
(1957:97; emphasis added).[49] "Instead of corvée...[they] were
charged a head tax large enough to be a sizable source of revenue,

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[49]In exactly comparable vein, British and Dutch colonial
regimes in other parts of Southeast Asia gave immigrant Chinese
(or Indians) "freedom unthinkable for the [local indigenous]
masses."

but not so large as to discourage immigration" (1957:97).[50]
Furthermore, "In the 1860's, Werner attempted an exhaustive list
of the commercial crafts in which any Thai were to be found....
He concluded that practically the entire industry of Siam had [by
then] passed into Chinese hands" (1957:117; emphasis added). Is
it superfluous to reiterate that such policies are absolutely
irreconcilable with the conventional "far-sighted patriot" images
of the 19th- and early 20th-century monarchs?

With regard to the financing not only of this system of
state-paid wage-labor but also of the absolutizing state itself,
Skinner demonstrates that the Jakri rulers (with the assistance
of a few extremely wealthy Chinese leaders, on whom they showered
honors[51]) astutely established the following highly utilitarian
structure: (a) head taxes were kept very low to encourage
Chinese immigrants to stay in Siam;[52] (b) opium addiction, gambling,
prostitution and alcoholism were encouraged within the immigrant
community,[53] to ensure that the Chinese laborers stayed put and
spent their wages locally rather than remitting them to their
families in China.[54]

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[50]This head tax amounted to 4.5 baht paid once every three
years. It did not change from 1828 to 1909. When compulsory male
corvée labor was finally abolished for the Thai in 1899, it was
replaced by a head tax amounting to 4-6 baht every year. Skinner
was rather puzzled by this "inequity," but viewed it as part of
"the favoritism [sic] shown the Chinese by the Thai government
in the nineteenth century." Needless to say, the simple explana-
tion for the discrepancy is that the tax on Chinese had to be
kept fairly low not to discourage them from immigrating; as for
the Thai, why not impose a stiff tax, since they had nowhere to
escape to? (On all this, see Skinner 1957:162, 123, 97.)

[51]"It was also government policy to give titles to most
of the Chinese holding revenue monopolies. In the third reign,
both the lottery and gambling farmers were automatically given
the title Khun; by the fifth reign the rank had been raised to
Luang. The opium farmer was also given noble rank..." (Skinner
1957:153; emphasis added)

[52]Skinner (1957:125) explicitly makes this case.

[53]This may seem harsh, but Thompson (1941:609) reports a
League of Nations survey in the 1920s which found that in Siam
"the average Chinese coolie spent fifty percent of his earnings
on opium, but not one out of fifty among them was an opium
smoker" before arrival in Siam.

[54]The policy was extremely successful. Skinner (1957:
227) concludes that "in all probability, by far the greater part
of the money income of the Chinese remained in Thailand."

The facts speak for themselves: "It is significant that four of the most lucrative [revenue] farms--together providing between 40 percent and 50 percent of the total state revenues during most of the second half of the nineteenth century--were based on Chinese consumption. These were the opium, gambling, lottery, and spirit farms." (Skinner 1957:120; emphasis added) In 1905/06, revenue from the opium farm netted Rama V over 10,000,000 baht, about 15-20% of government revenue.[55] In 1903/04, the gambling farm produced 5,700,000 baht, the lottery 2,100,000 baht, and alcohol 4,200,000 baht. (By contrast, the head tax never produced even 1,000,000 baht a year at any time; see Skinner 1957:123.)

It is revelatory of "late Ptolemaic" thinking that Skinner should have observed (1957:125) that "for a period of at least fifty years, during which Siam achieved a modern government, a thriving economy, and entered the world economy and family of nations, almost half of the government's revenues was derived directly or indirectly from the comparatively small Chinese minority," and yet have found this conclusion "anomalous." In fact, it is common sense, provided one abandons conventional mythologies.

In effect, under conditions of externally imposed peace,[56] the sovereign could essentially forget about defending the state militarily against external enemies and could devote himself full-time to internal aggrandizement ("centralization"), for which a free-floating, politically impotent alien population was decidedly advantageous. It is in this light that one is to understand the abolition of slavery in 1874[57]--an act that today is often glossed as an enlightened, liberating move but that should really be understood as a logical extension of the policies outlined above.

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[55]Skinner 1957:121. The opium-farm system was abolished in 1908/09 but then became a state-controlled monopoly. Skinner (1957:226) tells us that in the period 1910-38, government revenue from opium varied from 8 to 23 million baht a year, averaging 14,900,000. In precisely the same way, the British colonial government in Malaya avoided taxing British enterprises by growing fat on drug-peddling to the immigrant Chinese community. To a lesser extent, the same is true of the Dutch colonial government in the Indies.

[56]Battye (1974:22) says that Chinese were exempted from military conscription--a rather insubstantial privilege after the 1840s.

[57]In fact, the measure did not emancipate those already burdened with the status of slave; it merely forbade the creation of new slaves. Final, formal abolition of all slavery had to wait a generation, until 1905. (Mabry 1977:42)

The important thing to remember is that slaves were traditionally exempt from state corvée and were thus outside the reach of the sovereign's grasp. "It became apparent to the reforming kings that, by freeing the slaves, the supply of peasant farmers would be increased, and the tax base of the government would simultaneously be enlarged" (Riggs 1966:58).

We can now proceed to reconsider, in this light, the general thrust of Jakri policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—policies that have been studied in different ways by scholars such as Wyatt, Keyes, Siffin, Wilson, and others. It is well known that these policies involved (a) the sizeable employment of foreign advisers;[58] (b) the extension of Bangkok administration over Isan, Chiengmai, and the South[59]—considerably aided, towards the end, by the expansion of imported rails,

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[58]On this, Siffin 1966 is, as usual, illuminating as to the facts, Ptolemaic as to interpretation. He notes (p. 97) that in 1909, the last year of Rama V's reign, more than 300 foreigners were employed by the government. They included a dozen "general advisers," 13 director-generals of departments or equivalent, 23 assistant-director-generals or equivalent, and 69 "foreigners engaged in administrative work at the level immediately below departmental management." (We are a long way from late Meiji Japan, and very close to late Abubakar Johor.) On the next page, however, he says both that these advisers "were not to have final control over major policies of the nation" and that "foreign advisers did not formally control major policy, but their influence sometimes verged on control." (!) Elsewhere (p. 96) we learn that these advisers' "contribution to the central values of the new bureaucracy defies description." Greene's description (1971:261; emphasis added) of the situation under Rama VI is less schizophrenic: "...England had a tremendous amount of influence within the Thai government in the form of her many foreign advisors. Out of a total number of approximately 208 foreign advisors, 133 of them were English. Moreover, the English, more than any other nationality, were spread throughout the bureaucracy. They were represented in every department which in some way exploited the natural resources of the nation in addition to being in every financial department."

[59]E.g., Keyes 1967: chap. 3; and Siffin 1966: chap. 4. Siffin (pp. 94 and 80) suggests that the total number of salaried bureaucrats in 1892, just prior to the "radical reforms" of Rama V, was about 12,000. By 1899, this number had doubled; by 1905, it had doubled again. By 1910, the number in the Ministry of the Interior alone (15,000) exceeded the total salaried bureaucracy of pre-1892.

telegraphs, telephones, and, ultimately, motorized transportation;[60] and (c) attempted direct subordination of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the state, and its manipulation for state purposes (i.e., the post-Mongkut role of the Dhammayut sect under strong royal patronage--notably the appointment of Chulalongkorn's brother Prince Wachirayan as Supreme Patriarch and his function in harnessing the Sangha to the sovereign's overall administrative and educational policies[61]).

In important respects, many of these policies follow--on a small scale--the patterns of European absolutism symbolized by the immortal words of Louis XIV, "L' état c'est moi." Indeed, they are/were, on the whole, in the short run, "rational" from the perspective of the *moi*-state. Yet there is a difference. The European *moi*-states were profoundly unstable and destabilizing precisely because they were so strong. Bourbon, Romanov, and Stuart absolutism all collapsed before massive popular revolutions generated in reaction to the transforming policies of entrenched absolutism itself. In the Thai case, however, the depth and duration of absolutism were insufficient to precipitate such a social upheaval; what emerged instead was the partial, mystified revolt, signaled by the coup of 1932, of absolutism's own engine, the functionalized bureaucracy. The real political problem in Siam was--and is--precisely this: that there was no decisive popular break with "absolutism," fueled by social radicalism and indeed mass nationalism.[62]

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[60]By 1907, Siam had more than 7,000 miles of telegraph lines linking 67 administrative and commercial centers. About 550 miles of railway were in operation. (Siffin 1966:122)

[61]See Wyatt 1969: chaps. 7-9; also Reynolds 1972: esp. chaps. 3-5 and 7. Actually, this process may go back to Mongkut himself, if Jacobs is to be believed. He writes (1971:260): "Rama IV, in a frank moment, admitted that one of the motives he had in introducing the dharma reform movement was to compete with and thwart millenium movements which might arise during the dislocation accompanying his forthcoming modernization program." (Somehow, this does not sound quite like Mongkut talking.)

[62]Batson puts it gently thus (1977:18; emphasis added): "...elsewhere in the region the period ,[of early 20th century] was characterized by the growth of disparate nationalist movements whose one common aim was the aⁱhievement of political independence. In Siam, this focal point was absent...." That the seeds for such popular nationalism in fact existed is suggested by the "Ai Kan" uprising in Saraburi in 1925; its leader, attacking foreign oppression, said he would take care of it himself if the king did not do something about it in seven days (1977:174).
It is likely in any case that the stunted form of 20th-century Thai nationalism is not wholly unique in Southeast Asia.

The bureaucratic engine of absolutism was incapable by itself of breaking with the perspectives and traditions of absolutism; yet, by its heterogeneity and functional specialization, it was also incapable of generating the temporal legitimacy that monarchical absolutism had previously had. Riggs's "bureaucratic polity" was, in fact, the absolutist *moi*-state manqué. Suspended between royalist absolutism and popular nationalism, the modern "bureaucratic polity" was both deeply conservative and highly unstable--not because it was "uniquely Thai," but because it contained within itself no real foundation of or criteria for internal or external legitimation.[63]

The suspension began to come to an end only in the early 1960s--and then largely by inadvertence, when American military power and giant corporate capitalism imposed themselves on a stagnant political order. (Sarit's "absolutism," like that of the Jakri, was made possible only by external pacification and external support.) This massive penetration generated extremely rapid social changes (planned and unplanned) in Thai society, which the bureaucracy itself was incapable of imagining--let alone generating--for all its "modernizing" protocol. Out of these changes, in turn, developed the popular Thai nationalism that is, I believe, the most significant feature of the contemporary scene.[64]

Culture and Politics.   It will be apparent that much of the criticism of existing studies of Thai politics sketched out thus far is, at bottom, criticism of a certain reification of Thai culture. Ambiguous rubrics like "uniquely Thai values," anachronisms such as [19th-century] "Thai nationalism," and questionable axioms such as "The monarchy is essential to the Thai national identity" encourage us to base our thinking on a wholly imaginary eternal Thai essence. Moore (1966:483-87) has warned students of politics against "culturalist" explanations precisely because, in his view, they are intrinsically conservative, ahistorical, and uncritical. I think that his argument is, in

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A comparable case is Malaya, where till very recently there has also been only a stunted and mystified nationalism, manifested in anti-Chinese racism and slavish admiration for the imperial British. Large numbers of "nationalist" Malays, clinging with pride to their sultans, totally ignore the fact that these very sultans (or their immediate ancestors) were, along with the British, primarily responsible for bringing the hated Chinese into Malaya in the first place.

[63]Riggs himself recognized this: see note 40 above.

[64]See my 1977 article, esp. pp. 21ff.

general, exaggerated--indeed, often unfair. But in the case of
Thai studies, there is a good deal to be said for it.

The irony is that for all the importance attached, in
analyses of Thai politics, to the idea of "uniquely Thai culture,"
this culture has very rarely been studied in a critical and
dispassionate spirit. Nor is its dynamic relation to Thai social
and political life concretely explored. Let me suggest two sorts
of reasons for this undesirable situation. First, there has been
a tendency among political scientists who pride themselves on
being area-specialists to defend that title by indiscriminate
raids on the work of anthropologists (especially those influenced
by the "culture and personality" school), in search of a
"uniquely Thai" cultural matrix. The anthropologists' experimental
models and hypotheses have too easily been reified by non-
anthropologists as the axiomatic, fundamental reality of Thai
society.[65]

Second, since most of the political scientists have
unconsciously been committed to the modernizing-monarchs=
patriotic-national-heroes axiom, it has been easy to assume
(especially for those not much interested in culture in any case)
that late Jakri "high culture" represented Thai national culture.[66]

Once again, it is comparison--longitudinal and latitudinal--
that is required. We can start by comparisons with an earlier
Siam. Nothing strikes one more vividly than the lack of visual
distinction in the plastic arts of the Jakri period. The Buddha
images are lifeless imitations of the strikingly individual

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[65]This tendency may have been encouraged by the predominance
of anthropologists among the first generation of post-World War II
Thai-ologists and their general "culture and personality"
orientation. It is significant that the "loosely structured
society" model continued to be used by political scientists long
after most anthropologists had abandoned it, in whole or in part.
(Note that the whole "loosely structured society" debate--aside
from a certain basic triviality--concerned a supposed "inherent,"
"given" essence of Thai society, wholly divorced from history.)

[66]Hence a mythologizing of late Jakri upper-class life as
"Old Siam." The cynic might offer more personal reasons for this
nostalgic identification. For in talk and texts, "Old Siam"
manifests itself as a typical blend of comfort and exoticism.
Steam-powered river transport, modern tropical medicine, a stable
currency, and easy communications with the Western world combine
with colorful ceremonies, picturesque sights and sounds, piquant
cooking, cheap antiques, plentiful servants, and a "relaxed"
attitude on sexual matters. Needless to say, this "Old Siam"
does not date further back than about 1900.

imagery of Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya. Similarly, much of the religious and secular architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries has an exhausted, fussy air about it. This is not just my personal view. Here is the judgment of the *Area Handbook for Thailand* (Smith et al. 1968:182-83):

> The establishment of Bangkok in 1782 marked the beginning of the fifth school of traditional Thai art, the Ratanakosin [Jakri]. It was a period of little accomplishment, in which the decadence of the late Ayutthaya era continued....By 1868 traditional Thai sculpture, architecture, painting, music, ornamentation and handicrafts were stagnant .... Traditional Thai sculpture had almost disappeared.

It is perhaps of more than symbolic significance that the *Handbook's* dating of this stagnation is the year that Chulalongkorn ascended the throne. The Fifth and Sixth reigns show the final disintegration of any real idea of Thai architecture.[67] The royal complex at Bang Pe In expresses this melancholy process perfectly. An incoherent jumble of miniature replicas of "typically Thai" palaces and garish "overseas Chinese"-style dwellings, it prefigures nothing so much as the suburban villas of post-independence elites in other parts of Southeast Asia.[68]

It is my strong impression that the lively arts have suffered much the same fate. An almost unbroken succession of conservative regimes, ostensibly committed to Thai culture and values, parallels a steady decline in "classical" music, dance, and drama to the point of near-extinction.[69] Old teachers die

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[67]May part of the reason be that these monuments and buildings were more and more constructed by immigrant Chinese rather than by native Thai craftsmen, thanks to the policies of the Jakri rulers? Skinner (1957:113-14) records that Chinese built the structures for the cremation of Rama II in 1824 and that they had long been accustomed to erecting Thai-style temples. We may also recall Werner's description (mentioned above; as cited in Skinner 1957:117) of the 19th-century collapse of Thai craft industries at the hands of Jakri-imported Chinese.

[68]For a comparative discussion of the political meaning of such miniaturization and replication, with reference to Indonesia and Cambodia, see my 1978 article.

[69]On occasion, one hears the view expressed that the decline in court arts is to be blamed on the leaders of the 1932 coup. While this view is intrinsically implausible, it is pleasant to find Wachirawut starting a *khọn* (dance drama) school around 1908 because he was worried that "this most highly developed of all Thai art forms was withering away due to lack of support" (Greene 1971:30).

without successors. The classics are occasionally revived, but in
an academic context, and they breed no children. All these arts
tend to become museum pieces, more for the entertainment of foreign
tourists who have never seen them before than for living Thai
society itself.

Similarly in literature: it seems of more than symbolic
significance that the fall from favor of the last classical Thai
poet of consequence, Sunthǫn Phu, coincided with the accession to
the throne of the Chinese-importing Rama III. What figures of
comparable stature grace the reigns of the later Jakri? What
vigorous literary styles were created? Is there not simply a
kind of Victorianization?[70] A narrow, cramped ideal of gentility
everywhere smothering vitality? A museumized culture which found
its institutionalization in the Siam Society of former times?
Not until the 1960s--and then removed from court and Siam Society
--did Thai literary culture regain a creative élan.

Surely this widely acknowledged cultural decline,
considered in juxtaposition to the modernization of the realm,
raises serious questions about the character of modern Thai history
and politics. The solution to the paradox cannot be found in the
nature of absolutism itself; the royal absolutists of Europe--Louis
XIV par excellence--presided over brilliant efflorescences in
literature and the arts. But part of the answer may be found if
we remember that Jakri absolutism was a dependent absolutism, at
bottom a byproduct of European pacification and penetration.[71]

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[70]Phillips (1975:332) reports an informant telling him
that the classical erotic literature written at the court during
the 17th-19th (early 19th?) centuries was "Thailand's only original
contribution to the great literature of the world." Such literature
re-emerged from the underground only in the last fifteen years or
so.

[71]This point brings to mind one of the most obvious gaps
in the study of the modern history of Siam: a synoptic analysis of
Anglo-Thai relations. Here are a few items for consideration:
    (i) Battye (1974) reminds us that England strongly
supported Rama V's attempt to develop an army. In 1884, the
English Minister Resident wrote to London that he was "convinced
that in strengthening the king and the throne lies the only hope
for the future of Siam and for its possible utility to ourselves"
(p. 269; emphasis added).
    (ii) "England exercised a virtual stranglehold on the
Thai economy. Not only could England close her two entrepot ports
of Singapore and Hong Kong, which handled the bulk of Thailand's
export trade, but she could also blockade the nation's primary
port." (Greene 1971:261)
    (iii) In reference to the reign of Rama VI: "On most
international questions, the Prince [Devavong] usually adhered to

In this sense, it was parallel to the absolutism of neighboring colonial regimes and the would-be absolutism of semi-independent, indirectly-ruled principalities in the vicinity, few of which produced anything significant in the realm of art.

Latitudinal comparisons are no less illuminating. Coming from the study of neighboring Southeast Asian countries, one cannot but be struck with the relative narrowness of 20th-century Siamese (in comparison with modern Vietnamese, Indonesian, or Filipino) literature. The "springtime" of this literature also manifested itself at least one, and probably two, whole generations after its regional companions. These comparisons are made not with the intention of disparaging Thai achievements but to remind ourselves of the inescapable interrelation between cultural and political life. It is clear that the growth of a creative modern literature in the other countries mentioned, starting with the extraordinary novels of José Rizal, is intimately connected with the nationalist movement. The crampedness of Thai literature is, I would suggest, symptomatic precisely of the incomplete transition from absolutist kingdom to nation-state.[72]

Finally, we turn briefly to the largest and most complex cultural institution of all: the Sangha. It is certainly likely that from early times Thai rulers "used" Buddhism to cement their legitimacy and increase their manpower resource base. One function of traditional Buddhist monument construction was certainly to "attract" followers. Buddhist missionary activities were certainly encouraged, in part, for *raisons d'état*. Nonetheless, one must remember--as when studying the politics of the Middle Ages in Europe--that only one cosmology was then available, and even the most cynical, Macchiavellian rulers could not stand outside it. Such traditional Thai rulers were subject to Buddhism no less than,

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the policy line established by Great Britain. Sir Herbert Dering, England's diplomatic representative in Bangkok, was on exceptionally friendly terms with Devavong. In fact, he conferred with Devavong so often that in many Thai's eyes he was, in effect, the Ministry's Foreign Advisor, usurping the power of the American hired for that post." (Greene 1971:264)
        (iv) As late as the mid-1920s, six times as many Thai students were studying in England as in any other country (Batson 1977:72).

[72]Greene's (1971:420) analysis of Rama VI's stance is very apt: "Whenever opposition arose he sought to surmount it by intensifying his call for loyalty to the king and nation. By so closely identifying the monarchy with nationalism and by maintaining a virtual monopoly on the leadership of the movement, Wachirawut impaired its effectiveness. His concept of nationalism was suspect because it was the King, himself, who so ardently preached loyalty to the monarchy."

though in different ways from, their subjects. What seems to have
happened in the late 19th century was the onset of a slow
secularization of the Thai ruling class. Fewer and fewer boys
from these milieus entered the monkhood at all (let alone for good);
and increasingly, when they did, the act was perfunctory.[73]

Thus, to the extent that it was possible to stand outside
it, it became possible to "use" Buddhism for political purposes
in a more drastic and cold-blooded way.[74] (There are clear
analogies here with the manipulation, by certain power-groups, of
Islam in contemporary Malaysia and Indonesia, and of Buddhism in
Burma. In all cases, the policies are reflections of cosmological
separations between ruler and ruled.) Under conditions where
rulers no longer really believe in the ideology/religion they
propagate to the ruled, such "faiths" rapidly petrify in their
official institutional manifestations. Does this help to explain
the contemporary paradox of a Sangha hierarchy in obvious decay
(despite official affirmations to the contrary), and the wide
lateral spread--to left and right, as it were--of lay Buddhist
activism?

Conclusion

I have tried to indicate what seem to me the weaknesses
of English-language writing about modern Thai political life, and
to suggest some of the material, political, and conceptual reasons
for those weaknesses. Rather than repeating or even recapitulating
what has been said so far, let me try here to offer a brief
synthesis.

Reflecting on the corpus of available writing on modern
Thai society, one is struck by the many apparently contradictory.
motifs: loose structure/rigid bureaucratic hierarchy, Buddhist
activism/decline of the Sangha, dynamic rule/unchanging society,
stability/instability, conservatism/decay. Each of the elements
of these pairs (and many others) has been the subject of useful
study--by anthropologists, students of religion, political
scientists, historians, economists, and others.

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[73]Batson (1977:79) records that the magazine of the Thai
students in England in the 1930s contained numerous articles on
the growing indifference to religion among the younger generation
of Thai.

[74]This process reached an apogee of sorts in the brutal
manipulations of the Sangha by the late dictator Sarit Thanarat.
See my article, 1977:22, 29-30.

Yet awareness of these apparent contradictions has not, on the whole, encouraged scholars to go beyond either (a) insisting that one element in the pair is the real, the important, or the preponderant one; or (b) insisting, with a certain complaisance, that such "dualities" are simply "natural givens" of a complex and uniquely Thai society. What is badly needed is a perspective that seriously studies the interrelations, not only within each dualism but also of the general configuration that contains them all. In other words, we need to dare to think carefully about Thai society, history, and culture as a totality.

In this regard, it is very important to assess dispassionately the situation of the "Thai specialists" in the American (Western) academic marketplace. All are both area-specialists and members of formal disciplines. The prestige and plausibility of area studies--perhaps never very high, and nationally significant only in the context of American expansion into the Third World after World War II--has been on the decline for a decade. Many area-specialists feel vulnerable to the charge of being methodologically backward and theoretically unsophisticated in terms of their disciplines. (On the whole, these disciplines have only a modest appreciation of the concrete, as well as the theoretical and methodological, difficulties facing their members working in places like Siam: language difficulties, data difficulties, access difficulties, cultural difficulties, political difficulties, etc.)

Nonetheless, it strikes me that the responses of the area-specialists often reflect a kind of failure of nerve. Two polar types of response seem only too frequent. One consists of mindlessly trying to "catch up" with the discipline's latest methodological or theoretical fads--applying them randomly and without reflection to the data, in the hope of making respectable showings at the discipline's annual conventions. The other consists in defiantly crawling deeper into an "area-ist" shell, insisting--in a defensive, ideological way--on the uniqueness and incomparability of the area of specialization, and engaging in the study of ever more narrowly defined and esoteric topics. ("Humanistic studies" can often be a useful shield for this maneuver.) Yet how often the defiant country-specialist in fact submits him/herself to the fancied boundaries of the discipline. How easy it can be to snuggle down within the limits of both discipline and country.

It seems to me that being an area-specialist is actually nothing to be ashamed of, but we must have the energy and self-confidence to undertake the task implicit in that to-be-honored title: in other words, propose as our task the study of that area or country as an area or, as I put it earlier, as a totality. This means not only reading the work of fellow area-specialists in disciplines other than our own but allowing these works to interrogate ours. It means precisely not raiding these works for

evidence to support existing conceptions or hypotheses, or citing them simply to add a cross-disciplinary, "humanistic" patina to our writings.

With all its obvious shortcomings and probable errors, this survey is meant to contribute to what I conceive to be the real purpose of this conference--to give some genuine meaning to the idea of "Thai Studies."

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Comment

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Suksit Siam Bookstore. Bangkok

I have two shortcomings: (1) I have no formal training as a political scientist (I don't know if that's a blessing or not); and (2) because of problems with the Canadian postal service, I did not have Anderson's paper until this morning [conference day].

I must say that I always find Ben Anderson's papers of great interest; every piece of his that I have ever read has been stimulating and challenging. For example, his 1977 article on the social and cultural aspects of the October 6th coup fascinated me. Yet I could not bring myself to agree with him, especially with his class analysis of the Thai society. His paper here under discussion puts me in a similar predicament. To contradict him, one would need to do a lot of homework. But at the same time, I feel I cannot simply let him get away unchallenged.

My reaction is deep-rooted. Perhaps this is because he took a position from a rather Marxian standpoint, whereas I-- having come from a bourgeois Bangkok background; royalist, traditionalist at heart--see things differently. But I think that fundamental questions of East/West, Thai/non-Thai may come into it. You see, in the West you take politics to be amoral. But from my upbringing, I regard politics as something moral. So the role of the monarchy must be a moral role. Of course, there are some shortcomings; I shall return to the monarchy later on.

Concerning what Anderson said about Thai uniqueness: My grandfather having come from China and having been an assimilated Thai, I'd like to point to that as Thai uniqueness. I agree with Anderson that one ought not accept unchallenged the idea of Thai uniqueness, but rather understand and go beyond it. However, I believe that several things ought to be said about the Thai uniqueness; we must not merely bypass it.

I agree with most of what Anderson said, but I feel he went a little too far. And some of his statements need more factual substantiation than merely to make them fit his theoretical framework or his analysis. I do agree with most of his opening

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Full citation of works not listed in the Supplementary Bibliography at the end of this Comment are to be found in Anderson's Bibliography.

remarks and his conclusion, though. Since he was writing about the work of Westerners, Anderson did not mention *The State of Social Sciences in Thailand*, a survey commissioned by and published by the Social Sciences Association of Thailand (1974); however, that monograph would on the whole confirm his statement on the weak and sad state of serious writing on the political science of Thailand.

I would like to add in parentheses here that one point on which Anderson and I agree is a preference for the name <u>Siam</u> over <u>Thailand</u>. (Pridi and the princes also agree on the name Siam, although their motives may be different.) Nevertheless, I find that Anderson tends to look too positively toward what he regards as the progressive element, and perhaps too negatively toward the traditionalist and the royalist. Pridi, for example, is much more complex a man than to be branded merely a "progressive Thai statesman." Jit Phumisak, too, is a much more complicated character than his worshipers (and he has been canonized, particularly by those who claim to represent the masses) or his admirers make him out to be.

I certainly like Anderson's four axioms and counter-axioms; they are all thought-provoking. But, as I said earlier, to do him justice one would need more time to argue against his points. What I can do here is merely point out--briefly and superficially-- major disagreements I have with some of the ideas in his paper, and raise some questions.

For instance, I find his treatment of the Thai military as "mainly a means for <u>internal</u> royalist consolidation...[and] in addition, an emblem of modernity" a bit too neat a formulation. I think applying it to the reigns of Rama V and Rama VI stretches it back just a little too far. Admittedly, from the reign of Rama V to 1932, the Thai Army did not have to fight foreign aggressors (except the Ho, who attacked Luang Prabang, which was then part of the Thai kingdom). But to the ruler, the fear of foreign aggression was still real. The thought of using the army to suppress the <u>people</u> is quite late in the Thai mental attitude. I agree that colonial-period Siam should not be compared with Japan; I never wanted to compare Siam with Japan anyhow. But to merely compare Siam with a kind of sultanate in Malaya--I feel the case is being stretched a bit too far there also.

) It is fashionable among some progressive Thai writers nowadays to claim that Chulalongkorn's abolition of slavery was merely a matter of self-interest (his own and that of his class) rather than an act of magnanimity for the good of the kingdom and its citizens; Anderson seems to also be of that opinion. Unfortunately, Chulalongkorn has been too much praised; but it is too extreme to not give him the credit due him. The monarchy may be a hindrance, from the Western nationalist point of view. After

all, nationalism is a product of the West; indeed, the War of
Nationalism was instigated by Wachirawut, who got the idea from
England. (He also got his anti-Chinese ideas from England.
This is brought out very clearly in a paper written by a Cornell
student, Karen Silverstein; she traces how he got his ideas
regarding the Chinese as the Jews of the East and so on.) Not
until recently did the Thai ever regard the monarchy as a
hindrance to their national progress. By "Thai" here I mean all
writers, including some who have been put in jail by the monarch--
for example, Tianwan, who, while expressing himself very clearly
on Thai nationalism and Thai progress and such, never ceased to
be loyal to the throne.

I would like to know the basis for Anderson's statement
that "the coup leaders came close to abolishing the monarchy; but
in the end they lost their nerve." In my own reading of the coup
of 1932, and in my conversations with many of the coup leaders,
there is no idea of abolishing the monarchy. In fact, most of
the leaders, including Pridi Panomyong, had strong respect for
the monarchy. Contemporary feelings against the monarchy must not
be extended too far back into history; anti-monarchy sentiment
tends to be present only after 1936--even the Communist Party of
Thailand never said anything against the monarchy before then.

I also have some major disagreements with Anderson on
minority and national integration, on stability/instability.
Unfortunately, I do not have time to go into these subjects in
detail now. However, I would like to point out that I do not see
any model state nowadays--including the United States--that is
stable. Another matter I wish I had more time to go into here is
my idea of "backwardness"; those of you who have read my writings
will be aware of it. I do not accept the Western concepts of
"progress," "development," "modernization," and so forth. What
I find weakest in Anderson's paper are his treatments of culture
and politics and the Sangha. He does not do the Sangha justice.

Anderson's quoting from the *Area Handbook* (Smith et al.
1968), merely because it supports his argument, does not convince
me. In the *Kalama Sutra*, the Buddha taught that one must not
quote another's words simply because they happen to agree with
one's own ideas, even if the words be those of the Buddha himself.
Indeed, there has been much artistic and cultural deterioration
since the reign of King Chulalongkorn, even at the beginning of
the Bangkok Period. Some would argue that it took place even
earlier. Yet the Chakri kings and princes and people did a great
deal for conservation and restoration, including new creativity
in the Bangkok Period. The artistic stagnation took place only in
the last two to three decades. Anderson makes much of Sunthon
Phu's fall from favor coinciding with the accession of Rama III;
in fact, most people realize that Sunthon Phu was very well looked
after by the second king of the reign, Rama IV.

Despite my disagreements with him, I have been much enriched
by my reading of Anderson's paper. His recommendations ought to
be taken seriously. My own modest proposal would include the
following points: (1) Western scholars, especially political
scientists, ought to know more Thai language and consult more Thai
writings. I have been very much encouraged about historians and
anthropologists; their knowledge of Thai has become much better.
But I don't see that much knowledge of Thai among political
scientists. Although Anderson is a newcomer to Thai studies (after
his mastery of Indonesian studies, including Bahasa Indonesia), he
has a significant command of Thai; I wish I could say that of other
foreign political scientists. If Western scholars would consult
more Thai sources, Akin Rabibhadana's M.A. thesis (in English,
published in 1969 as a Cornell Data Paper)--useful as it is--may
cease to be a classic to the foreign scholar. In the field of
political science, Thai writing is not all that outstanding; yet
there is much information that could be gleaned from various books,
pamphlets, and so on. Admittedly, during the 1973-76 period there
were many propaganda tracts coming out; but some good works were
also published, by people like Saneh Jamarik, Chai-anant
Samutwanich, Kosol Srisung, Kramol Thongtammachart, and Likit
Tirivekin--to name but a few.

(2) Having mastered the Thai language, Western scholars
ought not to rely only on written records, which seem to be safest
by Western standards. A political scientist ought to consult, take
into account, and rely on oral tradition too. Also, the traditional
viewpoint ought to be taken more seriously than heretofore. This
point is made very clearly in Richard O'Conner's recent thesis on
Thai urbanism (though it is written from an anthropological, rather
than a political science, perspective); he has shown great respect
for the Thai viewpoint. In his argument on the monarchy, religion,
and the nation--which, unfortunately, is being badly misused by
the right-wing element nowadays--O'Conner traces back and reminds
us that we ought to take seriously these national institutions.
I happen to agree with him.

(3) A political scientist, or any social scientist, should
not study Thai politics or anything Thai merely to enhance a
theory or to prove one point against another. One may eventually
get to that, but a Ph.D. dissertation should not be just another
step in building up a theoretical ladder, one way or another, at
the expense of Siam or any other area studied. My last plea,
therefore, is that scholars--particularly foreigners--ought to be
more modest, more willing to listen to different and conflicting
views with more tolerance and with cooler hearts.

SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Other works referred to in the above Comment are cited in Anderson's Bibliography.)

O'Conner, Richard A.
    1978   "Urbanism and Religion: Community, Hierarchy and
                Sanctity in Urban Thai Buddhist Temples." Ph.D.
                thesis, Cornell.

Silverstein, Karen
    1977   "Chinese-Thai Relations and the Beginnings of
                Anti-Sinicism in Thailand: 1824-1919." Cornell
                Asian Studies Graduate Seminar paper.

The State of Social Sciences in Thailand.
    1974   Paitoon Sayswang (ed.). Bangkok: Social Science
                Association of Thailand.

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Comment

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We are indebted to Benedict Anderson for bringing together
historical, cultural, and political insights into a coherent
critique of the study of Thai politics. His most significant
contribution is to raise questions about the conventional wisdom
accepted by Western scholars of Thai politics. His paper is an
invigorating, masterfully written critique. He has accomplished
his aim of giving genuine meaning to the idea of Thai studies.
My intention is to raise some questions about his interpretations,
and to offer alternative views.

Anderson is correct in saying that colonialist scholars
such as Hall, Furnivall, Luce, Schrieke, Van Leur, and others have
contributed magisterial works that are difficult to match in quality
and in depth. But Anderson is wrong when he states that this
scholarship was made possible only by colonial dictatorships.
Consider the grand works of George Bacon, Sir John Bowring, Cecil
Carter, Mary Cort, John Crawfurd, W.A.R. Wood, H. Quaritch Wales,
Kenneth P. Landon, N.A. McDonald, E.W. Hutchinson, and the Burney
Papers. These scholar/authors (missionaries, foreign embassy
staff, or officials hired by the Siamese government) have
presented a remarkable amount of data. Modern Thai studies need
not, as Anderson suggests, start from scratch in terms of data,
analysis, or fundamental perspectives. The above list names only
Westerners; there are also Siamese scholars. And the royal
chronicles are every bit as rich in historical background as the
indigenous literature of the colonized states in Southeast Asia.

Anderson suggests that the lack of a colonial heritage
affected the amount of Western scholarly work on Thailand, particu-
larly effecting a paucity of stimulating anti-colonial literature.
He notes that modern-day scholars of Thailand do not have to think
out their positions vis-à-vis the colonial giants. He states that
the modern scholars had little on which to sharpen their critical
teeth--resulting in a conformist and timid outlook, and a placid
consensus on a set of axioms about modern Siam.

It is quite true that there has evolved a general liberal-
consensual view of Thai politics; but I am not convinced that
Anderson's explanation is valid. He attributes motivations, both
to modern scholars of Thailand and to the colonized states of
Southeast Asia, that may or may not be true. I am not convinced
that "since much of the best writing on the colonial countries was
done by colonial officials and much of the best data came from
colonial sources, liberal post-war scholars were automatically put

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in a beneficial adversary relationship with the intellectual-conceptual milieu in which they started working." First, Anderson does not substantiate the set of values he posits for both the colonial writers and the post-war scholars. Second, he has not made clear why "choosing" between Pridi and Phibun is any less difficult than choosing between Ho Chi Minh and d'Argenlieu. Anderson may be reflecting his own values; but, for many, the differences between Phibun and Pridi were every bit as significant for the future of Thailand as those between Ho Chi Minh and the colonial administrator were for Vietnam. Third, Anderson has not dealt with the difficulties political historians and political scientists have in gaining access to indigenous records, especially those regarding such sensitive institutions as the monarchy and the military.

Moreover, there is implicit ethnocentrism in Anderson's discussion of the role of the Chakri Kings. He argues that the 19th-century monarchy stunted the growth of an authentic popular Siamese nationalism. This view reflects a Western view of nationalism--that is, ethnic uniformity within state boundaries. He has ignored the Thai view (which continues to the present day) of the symbolic nature of the monarchy, its virtual identity with the nation-state. When viewed from the Thai perspective, the role of the Chakri kings vis-à-vis nationalism is more constructive than the negative view given by Anderson.

Anderson correctly notes that the Chakri kings encouraged in-migration of Chinese and that this policy paralleled the British and Dutch colonial regimes. He then states that it was a policy that absolutely cannot be made to fit with the Thai-monarchs-as-national-heroes trope, arguing that the policy to import Chinese was decidedly un-nationalist. But only in a narrow sense is his thesis persuasive. The policy was a modernizing one, not at all contradictory to an anti-Chinese nationalist sentiment. Modernization is a theme of 19th-century nationalists. In their policy of importation of Chinese to keep up with the rest of the world against which they measured their kingdom, the Chakri monarchs expressed a commitment to modernity. Later, the Chinese were useful as a target for nationalist sentiments--especially after 1910, when Vachiravudh became King.

Anderson states that the Chinese immigration policy should be understood in the more conspiratorial terms of dynastic rather than national, needs; In certain respects, he is correct. In certain other respects, he is wrong. And here is the core of the problem of his paper. He has chosen as evidence those elements of Thai history that agree with his thesis; he has ignored evidence that is contrary to his hypothesis. Anderson, like the rest of us, manipulates his own Ptolemaic cosmology in order to "save the phenomena."

In his discussion of stability and instability in Thailand, he notes that between the years 1782 and 1932, rulers held power for roughly 18.8 years, whereas since 1932 the average Prime Minister served only 3.3 years per person. He sees this short period of tenure in the contemporary period as evidence of instability. Certainly, that is one way of measuring stability and instability. However, a more effective measure, in my view, is to determine the degree of policy continuity since 1932, and to analyze the role of major institutions like the military and the bureaucracy. The result of such an analysis provides a picture different from Anderson's. The interesting finding is the essential sameness in the regimes of Phibun, Sarit, Phot, Thanom, Thanin, and perhaps even Kriangsak. Contrary to Anderson's view, there has been social and political stability at all levels of Thai society. The names of the Prime Ministers have changed, but not the fundamental nature of elite, authoritarian politics-- characterized by various high-level groups vying for power, with an almost total absence of peasant involvement in central Thai politics.

Anderson seems uncomfortable with the contradictions found in Western studies of Thailand. But is it not presumptuous to deny that such contradictions exist in reality? It is more than a mere cliché to state that Thailand is a complex society--with evidence of loose and tight structure, Buddhist activism and concurrently the decline of the Sangha, dynamic reform as well as stagnation from the Chakri Kings, and both stability and instability. Anderson despairs of such a complacent view of these dualities; he suggests we need a perspective that seriously studies not only the interrelations within each dualism, but also the general configuration that contains them all. In other words, he says, we need to dare to think carefully about Thai society, history, and culture as a totality. In invoking the idea of totality, he appears to mean adapting the methods of the area-specialist interacting with specialists of all disciplines.

I do not disagree that such interaction is important. Anderson himself is an example of a superb scholar who has combined the best of several disciplines in his work on Indonesia. But he has ignored, in his paper, the excellent case studies that have been published by social scientists in journal and monograph form. He is correct to point out that the books published on Thai politics are few in number. However, he has overlooked scores of excellent analyses, by Western and Thai scholars, dealing with national and rural-level politics. When considered together, these add up to quite a comprehensive body of writing. Anderson does an injustice to the state of Thai studies by ignoring the work of Frank Darling, Ronald Krannich, J.L.S. Girling, David

Morrell, Ross Prizzia, Ansil Ramsay, Jeffrey Race, Ladd Thomas,
Herbert Rubin, Anderson himself (e.g., his provocative account of
the October 1976 coup, in the 1977 *Bulletin of Concerned Asian
Scholars*, IX, 3), and dozens of social scientists in related
fields.*

When he discusses minorities and national integration,
Anderson notes that little in-depth work has been done on them.
Yet the Peter Kunstadter (ed.) volumes (*Southeast Asian Tribes,
Minorities and Nations*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967),
and the extensive work* of Charles Keyes, G. William Skinner,
Ladd Thomas, E. Thadeus Flood, David Wyatt, Michael Moerman,
Frank Lebar, Addison Truxton, and Gordon Young--among others--
clearly belie his assertion of a striking neglect, by scholars,
of minorities.

I missed, in Anderson's account, a critique of the basic
approaches used by contemporary political scientists studying
Thailand: patron-client ties, the impact of Buddhism, the
functional-structural approach, and the bureaucratic policy
approach. I looked for, but did not find in his essay, an
explanation for the almost total failure of Thai or Western political
scientists to foresee the phenomenal events of October 1973 and the
accompanying rise in importance of group structures. Nor did I find
an elaboration of an alternative approach that would see these
events in context rather than as anomalous acts.

Anderson's plea for pride in the area-study approach does
move us away from our consensual view of the stable Thai political
system, but his paper does not adequately spell out why that will
occur. Indeed, I am concerned that an area approach will
exacerbate the "Thai is unique" thrust of the consensual literature.
Solid comparative cross-national analysis, using the best methods
of our particular disciplines, is as essential as the inter-
disciplinary study Anderson calls for.

I have elsewhere (*Journal of Asian Thought and Society*,
forthcoming) argued that it would be useful to study Thai politics
from assumptions that are different from those of conventional
approaches. In particular, I believe that thus far we have not
adequately analyzed how Thai society changes. Our approaches have
been static, rather than dynamic. Indeed, we have not even
accepted the view that conflict and change are natural elements
of all political systems, including the Thai.

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*I do not cite specific publications here because I am
referring to the totality of the work of these scholars.

In analyzing the parties to conflict, the competition for resources, and the environment in which conflict takes place, one can better see the patterns of social order. At present there are few studies of sex, age-group, ethnic, familial, and class conflicts in Thailand. Little work has been done on corruption, revenge, discrimination, and violence--even though these acts abound in the Thai political system. We have ignored differences in norms, ideology, role perceptions, and modernization forces among Thais. A change-and-conflict orientation suggests new areas in which political scientists can apply their energies (e.g., conflict over property relationships, class interests, land tenancy, urbanization, corruption, imperialist penetration, and repression).

There is a tendency to quote slavishly from the classics, so that a self-perpetuating recycling of explanation continues. Ben Anderson has broken from that. Instead, he has presented a fresh, stimulating, and controversial overview of the study of the Thai State. His challenge bears close scrutiny.