

REVIEW ARTICLES

POLITICAL CHANGE IN THAILAND, 1973 - 1976

Reflections on the Collapse of Democracy in Thailand

by Robert F. Zimmerman

Occasional Papers Series No. 50

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Thailand, Domino by Default? The 1976 Coup and Implications for U. S. Policy

by William Bradley, David Morell, David Szanton, Stephen Young

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Both these important monographs focus on events leading up to the military coup in October 1976, which ended three years of democratic rule in Thailand, and on the coup's significance for the country's immediate and long-term political future. Zimmerman prefaces his study of these events with lengthy analyses of the political system prior to the student-led rebellion which overthrew Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn's government in October 1973, and of its democratic successor. This account contains much useful detailed information and a challenging model of the political system during the democratic years. However, having identified the key forces in the Thai political process—members of the military and civilian bureaucratic elites, and sections of the Sino-Thai business community—the author all but ignores these in discussing the origins and aftermath of October 1976. Instead, attention is unconvincingly shifted to externally inspired communism, and a disparate variety of lesser factors. Zimmerman's case is not assisted by an often turgid prose style, and some inadequacies in documentation (e.g. the main source for events after October 1977 is the *Indonesian Observer*).

Bradley *et al.* (hereafter referred to as Bradley) begin by examining the immediate events leading up to October 1976. Their account, which stresses the crucial role of the pre-October 1973 political elite, is lucid, and is an admirably concise resumé of political developments in the democratic period. However, their future projections, depicting a virtually inevitable internal breakdown and communist triumph, appear to be overly deterministic. This is in effect conceded in a brief, surprisingly sanguine epilogue written by two of the authors. Curiously, pessimistic expectations of a communist victory expressed in the main body of the text do not prevent the authors advocating close future USA-Thai co-operation aimed at defeating the insurgency.

Nearly one third of the monograph looks at relations between the two countries but, in the opinion of this reviewer, misrepresents past interaction and advocates a highly dubious course for the future.

While both works are of uneven quality, they are nonetheless welcome additions to the expanding literature on Thai politics. They remain, to date, the only monograph-length accounts of political developments in the last few dramatic years, and their future implications. More importantly, they present a vigorous challenge to widely held assumptions about Thailand's underlying political stability and imperviousness to communist appeals, and are a valuable reminder that so far too little attention has been given to the dynamics of Thai political change.

Zimmerman's account of the pre- and post-October 1973 political systems

Zimmerman begins with a laboured, abstract account of the prerequisites for political development. This has little relevance to the subsequent analysis, beyond noting the truism that economic and social change impinge on political structures. Projecting this argument forward, it is stated that the October 1973 rebellion occurred because the government "could not cope with the rise in new economic and social pressures that its earlier development 'successes' created" (p. 6). However, analysis of the pre-1973 political system that follows, depicts a static 'bureaucratic polity' and ignores these socio-economic changes. After the overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932, Zimmerman argues, government was in the hands of a series of cliques, organized along patron-client lines, and dependent on the military and civilian bureaucracies. Even during brief periods of parliamentary rule this remained true as parliament lacked alternative constituencies. The only other important group was the Sino-Thai business community, whose financial support was often important in inter-clique rivalry. The 'bureaucratic polity' was sustained also by the apolitical tradition of rural Thailand and the strong Thai sense of individualism (partly a consequence of Buddhism).

Few would raise serious objections to this analysis. It accords with long-established conventional wisdom, and is found in the two standard texts on Thai politics, by D.A. Wilson (*Politics in Thailand*) and F.W. Riggs (*Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*). Bradley does not specifically look at the pre-1973 political system, but there are no indications that he would disagree with such an account. The only innovation lies in the importance attributed to members of the Sino-Thai business community. This is a valuable corrective to their common designation as 'pariah' entrepreneurs, though it is an exaggeration to claim that "coups in Thailand were very much a function of how many bankers a given clique could draw upon and control in a competition with other opposing clique leaders" (p. 17). However, the turbulence of political change in recent years indicates that this traditional framework does have shortcomings. These would no doubt have been revealed had Zimmerman, as promised, discussed the socio-economic changes that led to 6 October 1973 (e.g. the rapid commercialization of the rural economy, the 'boom town' effects of American bases, aid and investment, and the mushrooming of tertiary educational institutions); he merely documents the major preceding incidents.

Zimmerman asserts that the October 1973 change ended forever Thailand's 'bureaucratic

polity'. Bradley does not examine the political system during the democratic years in detail, but asserts that the earlier power structure remained essentially intact. Zimmerman notes four key differences between the old and new polity, namely (a) more people—and in particular more technocrats—contributed to decision-making at the top; (b) a variety of new pressure groups were able "to bring facts, opinions, and recommendations to the attention of key decision-makers"; (c) the new constitution, which a wide cross-section of the people played some part in the drafting of, incorporated several important democratic guarantees; and (d) HM King Bhumiphol gained the potential to act as an important political force behind the scenes.

This checklist does seem to exaggerate the extent of change. It is doubtful that there was a significant increase in the number, or quality, of those contributing to decision-making at the top. The only evidence mentioned in this regard is the active political role of senior Bangkok Bank official Boonchu Rojanastien, described as 'a well-trained economist' (p. 39). (For the record, though Boonchu is a man of undoubted ability, his formal training in economics is limited to a diploma in accountancy.) Moreover, it has always been a feature of the Cabinet in Thai governments, at least since the days of Sarit, that most positions were held by highly qualified technocrats. With regard to the influence of HM the King, this was undoubtedly enhanced by his involvement in the 14 October incident, but it was already considerable before this. The new constitution differed markedly from its immediate predecessors, but had much in common with earlier constitutions in 1946 and 1949.

The most important post-1973 changes were clearly those related to the emergence of new pressure groups, here broadly defined to include political parties, organizations of students, academics, and labour, parliament etc. Unfortunately, the importance and 'newness' of these institutions is not adequately explained. What is one to deduce from the following statements? Students, though plagued by internal division, "retained a potential to press for action on political and social issues"; labour unions were "not as susceptible to manipulation by bureaucrats as once expected"; political parties were "a dominant feature", though most were "little more than clique groups . . . None of the parties had developed an organizational structure that reached down to the village level" (pp. 40-41). Several political parties are considered 'new', because they had no apparent base of support in the 'old system' (alliance, with Sino-Thai businessmen and/or influential bureaucratic patrons). This definition is not, however, adhered to, since it is conceded that the major 'new' parties, the Democrats (!), New Force and Social Action each had links with the 'establishment'. Since some members of the establishment were obviously enlightened, this definition does not seem a particularly helpful one. To this reviewer the novelty of post-1973 events, in addition to the emergence of important new pressure groups, lies simply in a newly found elite commitment to democracy and socio-economic improvement for the mass of underprivileged.

These arguments have certainly not sustained the case for 1973 representing the end of the bureaucratic polity. Further doubts are raised by Zimmerman's discussion of the means by which members of the Thanom-Prapass clique and their supporters were able to exercise influence. (Here again there is evidence of the author's less-than-rigorous approach to documentation. Key military officers, it is suggested, 'were able to retire early in order to run for Parliament', then expand their influence by backing or leading political parties. General Kris

Sivara is cited as a 'prime example', though he neither retired early nor ran for parliament.) The following section, a model of the 'Thai political process' during the democratic period, is perhaps the most important part of Zimmerman's work, and deserves consideration at some length. Not the least interesting aspect of the analysis is the fact that it effectively undermines the writer's hypothesis regarding the end of the bureaucratic polity.

There are two complementary components of Zimmerman's model. Firstly, there is a schema (diagram 4, pp. 47-48) identifying key figures in the political process, classified in terms of membership in political parties, pressure groups (narrowly defined), the Sino-Thai business elite, the military elite, and a group of advisors to HM the King. HM King Bhumipol, Kris Sivara, and a few others have independent classifications. Connecting lines between different interests depict a complex web of individual and group interrelationships. These, however, must be looked at in conjunction with the second component of the model, namely brief biographical details of leading political figures and leading members of the Sino-Thai elite. There is a great deal of interesting material here, and it is the most ambitious attempt to date to identify specific interlocking relationships between political and economic elites. Hopefully, it will provide an analysis that others will criticize and refine, and from this a more profound understanding of Thai elite politics will eventually emerge.

The model is not, of course, without its shortcomings, some of which are inherent in the schematic approach itself. (The author relies heavily on this methodology, also employing it to help define the pre-October 1973 and post-October 1976 political systems.) Lines drawn between individuals and groups indicate some interrelationship, but nothing about the quality of the relationship. The accompanying biographical notes do not go very far towards elucidating this critical factor. Also, a schema is inherently static, whereas clique politics in Thailand are in a constant state of flux.

Several more specific comments can be made. Firstly, the schema provides very little information on the most important of all groups, the military elite. Apart from relating about half with Kris Sivara, few other linkages are noted. In some cases, the links with Kris are dubious: for instance, General Chalard's well-known alliance with Kris's main opponent on the right, Major-General Pramarn Adireksan, makes him a questionable ally. Some generals—such as the present Defence Minister, General Prem Tinsulanond—are not mentioned at all. On the other hand the schema lists "General Yot Thephatsadin na Ayuthaya" and "Major-General Yose Dhevhuksin na Ayuthaya", apparently under the mistaken assumption that the two names represent different people. The Democrat Party also fares badly. Only three of its members are listed (compared with, for example, six for the rather less important Socialist Party of Thailand), and there is no indication of the different factions within the party—in spite of the importance of this factionalism to the events of October 1976. The '99 Group' gets no mention at all, though it was an important quasi-political party prior to elections in 1975. Several other questions could be raised about specific claimed linkages, or the inclusion/non-inclusion of various individuals, but documenting these would require greater length than seems warranted in a review of this nature.

In the discussion of biographical details, the political potential of each leader is assessed

in terms of his influence with the military, business community, and political cliques. These are, of course, the traditional indices of power within the bureaucratic polity, and constitute an implicit acknowledgement that this system continued after October 1973. (Also, Zimmerman later claims that the Thanin government, which came to power in October 1976, "approximated encapsulated authoritarianism", a system defined as "essentially the bureaucratic polity that Riggs and Wilson described" [p. 109].) Irrespective of the political system, however, it is an over-simplification to equate discernible potential with actual power. Other less tangible political skills or resources—such as those of politicking, achieving compromises, charisma—may ultimately prove more important. Thus Zimmerman is not correct when he observes of M.R. Kukrit Pramoj: "his 'political presence' was more overt than Kris Sivara's though, taken as a whole, still less influential" (p. 53). Kris may have been in a better position to manipulate players on Thailand's political chessboard, but he recorded no comparable achievements to Kukrit in domestic and foreign policy.

Zimmerman's brief reference to the Sino-Thai business community singles out two dominant groups, those attached to the Mahakhun Distillery and the Bank of Ayudhya. While both were no doubt important it seems unlikely that either rivalled the Bangkok Bank, notwithstanding a small decline in this group's influence due to its earlier close association with the pre-October 1973 military elite. The Bangkok Bank, the largest bank in Southeast Asia, is over five times as big as the Bank of Ayudhya (Thailand's fifth largest), and at least two of its leading personnel, Boonchu Rojanastien and Prasit Kanchanavat, were well to the fore during the democratic period.

Reasons for the 1976 coup

After devoting half the monograph to analyses of the pre- and post-October 1973 political systems, Zimmerman turns to examine the reasons for the failure of the democratic experiment. At this point his work becomes directly comparable with the account of Bradley. Zimmerman has a shopping list of eight different factors said to have contributed to the downfall of democracy, but places primary emphasis on the role of communist-influenced students. Bradley explains this development as a consequence of the traditional elite's continued hold on power after October 1973.

Zimmerman dismisses arguments that events leading up to October 1976, including the returns of Prapass and Thanom, were orchestrated by the 'right'. Instead he argues that there is 'considerable evidence' that the 6 October incident was "the successful culmination of communist influence (among Thammasat students)—both from the Soviet and the Vietnamese on the one hand and the 'Maoist' CPT on the other" (p. 66). Later on this is asserted as a fact (p. 82). Elsewhere, implicitly conceding that there is an element of doubt, it is argued that "*whatever the inspiration for the coup, the rightists' success remained a direct function of the failure of the noncommunist-influenced university activists to cope with factionalism, disillusionment, ideological polarization, violence and the tendency to take on too many issues*" (p. 67; my italics).

The 'evidence' for communist manipulation of the student movement is, contrary to Zimmerman's claim, tenuous in the extreme. Attempts to dredge it out reveal a tendency among

American academic observers, frequent in past decades but now somewhat unfashionable, to combine liberalism with an almost obsessive anti-communism. This takes the form of assuming that attempts by communists to influence events must *ipso facto* be successful, and that evidence of communist inroads is essentially explicable in terms of 'external' manipulation. No doubt the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), the Soviet Union and Viet Nam attempted to obtain the maximum advantage from post-1973 events, but there is little evidence to suggest they made significant inroads. Interest in left-wing and communist publications *per se* is not evidence of anything sinister, particularly since these had been forbidden fruit for such a long period of time. The interest in Marxist and left-wing thought that did emerge at this time probably owed little to the CPT, USSR or Viet Nam. Thai academics returning from radical Western universities, the resurrection of writings by Jit Phumisak (an idiosyncratic Thai Marxist scholar), exceedingly grim job prospects faced by graduates from the early 1970s, and ideological polarization brought about by right-wing initiated political violence after 1974, all made vital contributions to the radicalization of the Thai student movement.

Zimmerman returns to this factor when he argues that the communist victory in Indochina in 1975 gravely alarmed Thai conservative elements, particularly the military, allowed north-eastern insurgents much greater access to facilities provided by Pathet Lao and Vietnamese allies, and led to increasingly intense communist guerrilla attacks in Thailand. Undoubtedly it is correct that events in Indochina, perhaps particularly the forced abdication of the Lao monarch, alarmed Thai conservatives. But by all accounts—including those of the US government—Viet Nam provided virtually no material aid to Thai insurgents after winning its war in 1975. Also, communists did not consistently step up their attacks during the democratic period: Thai government casualties numbered 522 in 1974, 420 in 1975, and 460 in 1976.

Zimmerman's criticism of students, as an earlier quotation has indicated, is not confined to their alleged propensity to manipulation by communists. They are criticized both for their failure to utilize the opportunities for supporting democracy, and for other activities (resorting to violence, adopting radical slogans) which led more directly to the downfall of democracy, primarily the former. It is arguable, however, that the students' failure to live up to the high responsibility vested in them by the writer is hardly a realistic basis for such a critical evaluation. Students have often contributed to bringing down governments, but have seldom played a major role upholding a democratic government; nor, however, are they customarily expected to play such a supportive role.

The failure of the academic community to restrain irresponsible political activism is also listed as a 'major cause' of October 1976. Some lecturers, it is argued, due to long foreign residence, "were in a sense not really Thai"; others "had already entered at least a loose alliance with the CPT through united front organizations or were heavily influenced by the funding activities of the Soviet Embassy in Bangkok" (pp. 70-71). Prudhisana Chumpol is the only one known to Zimmerman who attempted to bring reason and rationality to bear on students.

Bradley diverges explicitly on this issue, observing that Dr. Boonsanong Punyodyana, the liberal, Cornell-trained Secretary-General of the Socialist Party of Thailand (assassinated early in 1976), "had been extremely popular with the students and had been influential in

moderating their demands for immediate and unrealistic political change" (p. 14). This reviewer knows personally of several others who acted in a similar manner. Few of them were communist-influenced, as is indicated by the handful that went underground or pursued radical politics abroad after October 1976. As in the case of students, however, it has not generally been held that academic faculty play a 'major role' in upholding democratic government.

Zimmerman does not deny that the right wing contributed to the 6 October situation. 'Status quo-oriented conservatives', as they are euphemistically called, included several military officers, some close colleagues of Thanom and Prapass, who utilized such organizations as the Red Gaurs and Nawapol. These groups, it is noted, "were far more prone to initiate violence than were the 'leftists'" (p. 74). And failure to bring any of the perpetrators to justice was a key factor in driving students to the radical left. Such arguments call into question the author's earlier criticisms of students and communists, but there is no attempt to evaluate critically the respective importance of all factors.

The proliferation of political parties and the absence of leadership are also listed as contributing to the downfall of democracy. Most of the parties, it is claimed, "were merely individual-oriented clique groups, all of which saw in the new democratic situation an opportunity to try to cut themselves in for a share of power and its perquisites (not the responsibilities)" (p. 76). Leadership was 'conspicuous by its absence'. Kukrit never had time, with all the effort required to hold together a multi-party coalition. Seni simply lacked leadership qualities. Kris Sivara had the potential, but died at a critical moment (two days after he was appointed Defence Minister, following the April 1976 election). These comments seem generally fair, but it is also necessary to question whether these were primarily causes or effects of the underlying political malaise. To the reviewer they reflect a situation in which traditional institutions of the bureaucratic polity continued to function as a barrier to political development.

Finally, the USA is criticized for failing to foresee the consequences of its actions for democratic growth. Washington "somehow never ceased operating on the assumption that a few key Thai military leaders behind the scenes were in control" (p. 82). Eventually this become a self-fulfilling prophecy. No empathy was ever shown for the democratic experiment, and no effort made to tailor assistance to its needs. This assessment is doubtlessly correct, but again it would have helped Zimmerman's analysis if an attempt had been made to compare the significance of this point with other factors. If the USA had mobilized its resources to support democracy, would the end result have been different? Probably not.

Bradley, as mentioned earlier, sees the root cause of 6 October in the continuance, essentially intact, of the pre-October 1973 power structure. Since both the right and left perceived this to be the case, they doubted the powers of the new parliament, and took politics to the streets. The 'radical' style and tactics of the reformers alarmed many Thais, and led conservatives to counter by establishing extreme right-wing organizations such as the Red Gaurs, Nawapol, and Village Scouts. Endemic political violence was the result. Fear then developed a dynamic of its own, with the public blaming the left for instigating violence rather than the right for carrying it out. It is easy to see why people came to fear the left. As both left and right resorted to street politics, "Bangkok was in chaos by the standards of the previous forty years"

(p. 17). Halting but sincere efforts to change economic and social policies, and a foreign policy that forced the US military withdrawal and sought rapprochement with communist regimes in Indochina and China, were too slow for the left but too threatening for everyone else. The victory of Indochinese communist movements in 1975, stories brought by thousands of Indochina refugees flooding into Thailand, and the Lao government's abolition of the monarchy, all gravely alarmed conservative Thais.

The murder of Boonsanong, presumably by right-wing assassins, on 28 February 1976 is seen as a turning point. Following this many left-wing activists either departed for the jungle or opted out of politics. The election on 4 April "confirmed the growing strength of the right". Additionally, it brought to power Seni Pramoj, a less able politician than his brother Kukrit. The death of Kris Sivara in the same month hastened the crisis as he had "both unified the Army and played a moderating role in civilian affairs" (p. 19). These specific incidents were, however secondary to the underlying process being worked out, namely the increasing polarization between left and right. As this developed, "difference of degree became a difference in kind to be resolved only by the subjugation of one side or the other, through force and violence if need be ..." (p. 22).

Bradley's argument is clearly and succinctly developed. This reviewer would quibble only on three minor details. Firstly, in discussing foreign policy it is suggested that Thai leaders considered an alliance of the 'mainland-state' members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)—i.e. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore—with Indochina, to offset the island states of Indonesia and the Philippines. No evidence is cited for this, and there are several reasons why it seems improbable. Malaysia, for instance, could hardly be expected to unite against Indonesia when the leaders of these countries share so many cultural similarities. An alliance between anti-communist Singapore and Indochina also looks inherently improbable. And since Thailand was already then aligning itself with China to limit Vietnamese influence, it would have required prodigious feats of diplomatic juggling to have used Viet Nam for a similar policy *vis-à-vis* Indonesia and the Philippines. Secondly, the massive vote for the Democrats in the April 1976 election cannot be classified as a victory for the right. It was a victory for a party which over decades had established itself as a dependable, liberal-conservative grouping, far removed from the extremes of both left and right (though by this time the party had factions from both groups). Thirdly, the forced abdication of the Lao monarch in late 1975 was probably a greater factor in focusing public awareness on the ills of communist rule than the later complete abolition of the monarchy.

The post-coup government

The October 1976 coup group, according to Zimmerman, acted mainly to prevent coups from one or possibly two other sources. They were not equipped with a long-range plan, and their initial reactions reflected confusion above all else. Also, their development was inhibited by having the group internally divided into at least three factions. For these reasons they initially appointed as Prime Minister Thanin Kraivixien, "a civilian but viewed as a trusted hardline anti-communist who was also honest. The Military Advisory Council decided to let him tackle many of the development and administration problems on his own, but finally grew

weary of Thanin's excessive conservatism and obsessive anti-communism that resulted in neglect of other fundamental development programmes" (p. 89). Zimmerman also criticizes the 'depressing', harshly applied restrictions on nearly all forms of political activity.

Bradley makes no reference to the coup being preventive in nature. He appears to accept that the coup group lacked a long-range plan, but attributes this to the backward ideology adhered to by the military and used to justify the coup, namely support for the three traditional Thai institutions of monarchy, nation and the Buddhist religion. The appointment of Thanin is not linked to a lack of military preparedness but, implicitly, is seen as part of the traditional post-coup legitimization process. The 'new military regime', it is argued, was "quickly formalized in a civilian-led cabinet and an appointed national assembly legitimized by royal support and a modified version of the 1968 Constitution" (p. 25). Thus, the Thanin Cabinet is not considered to have had any independent powers. The stability and political longevity of the regime is, however, questioned because of conflicts within the ruling military elite and the doubtful ability of the government to devise and implement changes necessary to sustain public support and lead the country towards modernity.

These two accounts reveal widely differing interpretations of events surrounding the October 1976 coup. What conclusions should be drawn? Several other analyses refer to the preemptive nature of the coup, and the evidence for this seems strong. It is inconceivable, however, that the coup leaders would not have had a contingency plan ready for an emergency. There is, moreover, considerable evidence that they were also working to bring down the Seni government, when events forced them into immediate action.

There was, thus, some confusion after the coup, though not to the extent that this necessitated the appointment of an outsider. Bradley is probably correct in seeing Thanin's appointment as reflecting a traditional pattern. Civilians were also appointed as Prime Minister to legitimize military coups in 1932, 1947 and 1957.

Both Zimmerman and Bradley oversimplify the nature of relations between the coup leaders and Thanin's Cabinet: the Cabinet was neither permitted to tackle many of the development and administration problems on its own, nor was it merely a tool for the military. The Cabinet sought to demonstrate its independence shortly after it was formed when the Interior Minister, Samak Sundaravej, dismissed the chief of police—a member of the coup group—and appointed his own candidate. This immediately created tension between the two groups, which grew as Thanin steadfastly rejected attempts to impinge on the Cabinet's independence. Gradually, this problem was compounded by the emergence of a policy difference between the two groups. Military leaders soon learned that the hard-line anti-communism pursued by Thanin made their task of combatting insurgency and guarding border regions more difficult. For several months before the coup it was clear that the military favoured a distinctly more conciliatory approach, domestically and internationally, than that pursued by the government.

Both writers correctly note that divisions within the military had negative implications for stability. However, discussion of this is highly speculative, and provides no reliable indicators to the nature or extent of the phenomenon. The capacity of the military to hold together

also appears to have been underrated. In the long period the military has dominated Thai politics there have only been two occasions—in 1957 and 1973—when internal divisions became so pronounced that they contributed to the overthrow of a government.

In both works the logic of the Thanin government is seen, apocalyptically, as leading to a communist triumph. Both draw analogies with the former regime in South Viet Nam. According to Zimmerman:

The country and Bangkok remain particularly ripe for communist-inspired terrorism. Since the October 1976 coup the CPT has had no nongovernmental competition—ideological, political or organizational—precisely the situation the Viet Cong and the Hanoi Politburo faced in South Viet Nam (p. 93).

Bradley argues that the backward-looking Bangkok leaders are “likely to come to a similar end as did those in Saigon, Vientiane and Phnom Penh for they confront a comparable set of hostile circumstances and have shown no sign of having devised any new or alternative policies for coping with these challenges” (p. 27). The scenario is one of a steadily growing insurgency. Gains to the CPT from the influx of intellectuals after October 1976 would lead to more government repression, but this would be counter-productive. Failure to solve the problem this way would make the government appear inept, and cause it to face a crisis of authority. This in turn would lead to greater opportunism, corruption etc., and hence more insurgency. Political instability would also cause money to be sent abroad or channelled into areas of quick return, and the resulting economic problems would cause greater political instability. In two to four years another coup further from the right would be a distinct possibility, hastening the ultimate collapse. Within as short a time period as five years the right might have completely lost its capacity to govern, following which “insurgent leaders will come in from the hills to reeducate the populace along Marxist lines” (p. 37).

These accounts represent, in effect, a refurbished ‘domino theory’. It is ironic that this, once the preserve of the right wing, is now being resurrected by its former bitter opponents: liberals and socialists. The new theory, though it focuses more on internal dynamics than external conquest, is scarcely more convincing than the old. Post-democratic conditions in Thailand differ vastly from those in Indochina prior to the success of communism there. Compared, for instance, with South Viet Nam at any stage from the 1950s, in Thailand (a) the insurgency is pitifully small, its support is still based largely on appeals to regionalism and ethnicity, and it lacks a distinctly national identity; (b) there is no equivalent of the split between a ruling Catholic minority and the mass of Buddhist believers; (c) landlessness remains well below the previous level in South Viet Nam and has not, in any case, been a significant factor in CPT growth (the central region has the greatest land-tenancy problem, and is also the least penetrated by the CPT).

Zimmerman’s claim, that after October 1976 the absence of nongovernmental competition to the CPT makes the situation analogous to South Viet Nam, overlooks important organizations such as Boy Scouts and Village Scouts which continued to actively proclaim an alternative to communism, and it implicitly underestimates the substantial difference in governmental capacity between the two countries. Bradley overstates the ‘backwardness’ of Thai leaders. Even members of the Thanin government recognized the need for socio-economic change.

And in recent years anti-insurgency policy has been directed by military leaders (such as the generals Saiyud Kerdphol and Prem Tinsulanond) well aware of the importance of social reform and the limits of outright repression. The realization of reform has been hampered far more by intractable practical problems than by lack of awareness.

Is it, moreover, reasonable to assume that while the government moves from one disaster to the next, the CPT will go from strength to strength? The CPT has not had a particularly impressive record to date, and recent international events have not been favourable. Developments in Indochina since 1975 have provoked widespread public horror, and have obviously made the task of winning popular support more difficult. CPT support for China in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict has clearly complicated its relations with communist movements in Indochina, and may well cause dissension within the party. It is also difficult to see what rewards its fidelity to China might bring, in view of the close ties now being forged between Peking and Bangkok.

Zimmerman, however, while not ignoring domestic factors, sees the main communist danger in the form of external pressures and manipulation. He does not believe that Viet Nam and the Pathet Lao will pass up the opportunity for 'political war', and claims that the attitude and intentions of China are 'unknown'. This is probably a reasonable assumption of Vietnamese and Laotian intentions, but it must still be asked what dangers this poses to Thailand? Assistance to the CPT so far appears to have been limited to the provision of sanctuaries in Laos and Kampuchea (both now in doubt), plus political and moral support. As earlier mentioned, even American government sources concede that Viet Nam has provided virtually no material aid to Thai insurgents since 1975. The author's claim that a *Nhan Dan* commentary in August 1977 (i.e. during the ideologically anti-communist Thanin regime) was "a rationale for active Vietnamese support for the communist cause in Thailand" is unsubstantiated; it was more likely a substitute for such support. Chinese attitudes and intentions may still be the subject of some debate, but can hardly be considered unknown. China has, for instance, long indicated that it draws a distinction between government-to-government and party-to-party relations, but seems nonetheless to have reassured most Thai leaders, since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975, that the type of party-to-party relations envisaged does not constitute a threat to Thailand. Border conflicts with Kampuchea are discussed at length (and those with Laos noted), and in each case communist perfidy is assumed. Since, however, Thai military leaders attributed several of the disputes to conflicting claims over boundary alignment, it is doubtful that these could be considered evidence of a dire external threat to Thailand's security.

The October 1977 coup

In spite of on-going communist dangers, Zimmerman is euphoric about the October 1977 coup. Thanin was removed because he opposed the military's policy of a freer political process and more capable men in Cabinet posts. The Thanin government approximated 'encapsulated authoritarianism' (similar to a bureaucratic polity), though it espoused 'developmental authoritarianism' (political stability, reliance on experts, and bureaucratic effectiveness). The succeeding government of General Kriangsak Chomanan, on the other hand, is accelerating the move towards a democratic political process, and can definitely be considered a 'development authori-

tarian' government" (p. 109). Young and Bradley add a brief epilogue to their manuscript expressing a similar, though more moderately expressed, viewpoint. Thanin's removal is seen as

a victory of traditional Thai pragmatism over an ideological approach to politics, for the intention of the coup leaders seems to be to pull back from harsh confrontation and adopt a posture of balance and accommodation... It seems also that an innate Thai preference for fluid adjustment, so aptly displayed in international affairs for centuries, is at work within the body politic as well. If this is so, the prognosis for Thailand could be favourable over a long period of time (p. 58).

Events since these accounts were written have obviously raised doubts about some aspects of these analyses, but were they plausible assessments at the time? Had Bradley followed through the implications of arguing that Thanin's appointment reflected a traditional pattern of legitimizing changes of government, the 1977 coup would have been viewed as one of consolidation. There were at least elements of a simple power contest—the military against Cabinet members such as Samak Sundaravej and Dusit Siriwan—which indicate that consolidation was a factor. In the initial months of his government, Prime Minister Kriangsak did have considerable success in heading a government of reconciliation, and improving relations with neighbouring communist countries (though this was already underway, as Kriangsak's retention of Thanin's Foreign Minister emphasized). Achievements in other areas were by no means as apparent. Zimmerman, however, accepts declaratory policy at its face value, ignoring the fact that promises to give immediate, high priority to rural policies and social development all had their Thanin counterparts. Indeed there is a general uncritical willingness to assume that all developments under the new regime are for the best. It is even suggested that proposed constitutional changes to limit the number of parties (not in fact adopted) "would remove one of the major causes of instability" (p. 110), though the democratic period surely provides ample evidence that deep fissures in Thailand's political culture cannot be abolished by legal *fiat*. Similarly, the experience of these years should have cautioned against assuming that 'democracy' will aid political stability, before there is evidence that the form of democracy contemplated actually is useful. Thanin emerges from this analysis blacker than black; Kriangsak (along with Kukrit, Boonchu and one or two others) whiter than white. Thai politics would more accurately be represented by a canvas featuring various shades of grey.

Thailand's relations with Southeast Asia and the USA

While these monographs dwell on domestic Thai politics, there is an awareness throughout that the internal political situation is vitally affected by external events. References relating to the domestic significance of 1975 communist successes in Indochina, and Thai-US relations, have already been noted. The concluding sections of both works focus more specifically on aspects of Thai foreign relations.

Zimmerman looks at Thailand and Southeast Asia in a chapter of only six pages. It begins by noting that if ASEAN is strengthened the position of Thailand will be enhanced. Proceeding in a circular manner it then reiterates arguments about the dire regional threats posed by Viet Nam and China, and asserts that consequently Thailand (presumably because it is the first in line, and the least politically stable) is the key to the future development of ASEAN. As Prime Minister Kriangsak is considered to be following policies appropriate to the country's needs, the account ends on an optimistic note.

Bradley has an important section on Thai-US relations. This begins with an historical background in which it is argued that from the time of the 'Cold War' the two countries had developed a unique patron-client relationship, qualitatively different from the normal ties between the USA and its less powerful allies. Cited as an illustration is the US response to communist gains in Laos in 1962, taken under the Rusk-Thanat agreement of that year, of stationing 10,000 combat troops in Thailand. The argument continues:

Here was a classical example of the patron-client relationship, raised from the domestic to the international level, entailing reciprocal but asymmetrical obligations unfamiliar to the United States but standard practice in Thailand's conduct of foreign policy... With the Rusk-Thanat Agreement of 1962 [by which the US pledged to defend Thailand unilaterally, if necessary, under the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)] the United States assumed an obligation that affected the vital interests of Thailand but not those of United States. The sending of American combat troops to Thailand that same year meant that the Thai Government, from its perspective, could feel genuinely secure in its alliance" (p. 41).

The example is unfortunately chosen since it was actually the USA that had requested permission to send the troops, not Thailand. Yet, even if this had not been the case, there is nothing in the example to indicate that Thai-US relations were unique. Being the world's premier power, the USA could in all its alliances, with the possible exception of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), impose asymmetrical obligations. No American would have believed that the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) protected American vital interests in the same way as it protected those of Australia and New Zealand. But Americans, in 1962, did believe that they had a vital interest in preventing communist encroachments in all countries. Thailand's strategic position *vis-à-vis* the troubled Indochina region made its support crucial. It is simply not the case that the Rusk-Thanat Agreement, in the eyes of the administration at the time, did not bear on American vital interests.

Bradley sees Thai-US relations as entering a somewhat indeterminate state after the 1969 Guam doctrine warned of a declining US commitment to the region. Elected Thai governments during 1975 and 1976 showed signs of moving towards a genuine partnership with the US in joint regional concerns, until "an indifferent response from Washington to the Thai concern for readjustment in the degree of overt Thai dependency on America's military initiatives precipitated an eviction of the American military save for a handful of advisors" (p. 44). A number of options for future US policy are canvassed, and a decision finally made in favour of assuming the initiative "in devising a coherent strategy for Thai development that relates American assistance to the Thai government's policies toward its own citizens" (p. 47). This is justified with much idealistic rhetoric about the need for an American foreign policy "dedicated to the economic, social, and ultimately political enfranchisement of the world's peoples" (p. 51). Such a policy, it is claimed, "would call for a joint effort with the Thais to identify a feasible evolution of Thai society, to assist the Thai in designing programs that might alleviate the causes of insurgency..." (p. 54). It is not a return to a patron-client relationship since the partnership would be more an equal one, although American participation would require Thai adherence to certain 'minimum' democratic criteria — political decentralization, institutional means for popular political participation, and freedom of expression. Conveniently, idealism in this context does not conflict with professional interest:

Should such a culturally sensitive approach become a general basis for American foreign policy, it would necessitate increased initiatives and support for locally focussed international studies in order to expand the cadre of Americans, both within the government and without, required to make the requisite analyses and recommendations (p. 54, fn. 21).

It is, however, difficult to imagine such a policy ever being implemented. If literally interpreted, few countries in the world would meet the minimum democratic criteria demanded. Moreover, there is an implicit assumption that social scientists are well-equipped to analyse the causes of insurgency and prescribe the necessary social changes to overcome these. Belief in the efficacy of applied social science, a distinctly American phenomenon, has not, however, been borne out by events. Indeed, in the 1960s America channelled massive investment into applied research on Thailand, with few notable successes. The complexities of social engineering still elude the social science disciplines. Finally, it is questionable whether many Thais would welcome a future relationship in which American officials defined essential national objectives, then exercised a major role in guiding their implementation.

Thailand's position within a broader regional and international context is, indeed, the area least adequately covered in these monographs. In view of the aforementioned nexus between foreign and domestic events, and the greatly increased complexity of intraregional relations since the 1975 communist victories in Indochina, this shortcoming is not insignificant.

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