1980

Roles of the military in Thai politics.

Krongkan Kanchanabhogin

The University of Montana

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ROLES OF THE MILITARY IN THAI POLITICS

By

Krongkan Kanchanabhogin

Bachelor of Commerce, Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand, 1977

B.S., University of Montana, 1978

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Public Administration

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1980

Approved by:

[Signature]
Chairman, Board of Examiners

[Signature]
Dean, Graduate School

9-19-80

Date
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INTRODUCTION

The Thai political system was changed from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy in 1932. Since then, both civilian and military leaders took turns controlling the country. The failure of the early civilian leaders to solve the domestic problems encouraged the military to seize control of Thai politics.

Since 1932 Thailand has been ruled by military government for thirty-nine years. The stability of the military regime was developed not only from the long-term military rule but also from the support of the Thai people. One reason the military governments receive full support from the Thai people is that the military preserve their belief in the importance of the monarchy. It is a Thai political tradition that although the administrative power of the King declined after 1932, the role and influence of the King as a father figure of the country has never changed. Another reason is because the military governments have successfully served the functions of social order, political stability and modernization of Thai politics, and the public administration system.

The purpose of this paper is to review the military influence in Thai politics and its effects on public administration. The paper examines the role of the military in Thai
social and political system, the causes of military intervention in politics, and offers a broad conceptualization of different military regimes in Thailand.

**Methodology**

Most of the facts on the historical background of the Thai socio-political system are taken from Thai government publications. The organization of the multi-party system, the causes of military intervention, and the pattern of military participation in politics are drawn from the study of Sameul P. Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies*. The data on the assessment of the performance of the civilian and military governments comes from Thai government publications, Thai and American news media, and academic sources published from 1960 to March, 1980.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into three parts. Part one introduces the importance of the monarchy in Thai politics and the basic pattern of the Thai political system.

Part two examines the military influence in Thai politics. It describes structure of the Thai military institution which is one of the strongest and the most well developed organizations in Thai society. The reasons for the military intervention in politics and the typology of military roles in Thai politics are also presented.
Part three presents the reformation of Thai public administration which has been initiated by different military regimes. The political, social, economic development programs and civil service reform promoted extensively by different military governments during 1946 and 1973 are presented in this part.
I

THE THAI POLITICAL SYSTEM

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that has a long history of independence and has never been controlled by any western country during the period of colonialism.

The kingdom of Thailand was formed in 1238 with its present name derived from the capital city. Since 1238 there have been four major kingdoms which are the kingdom of Sukothai (1238-1378), the kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767), the kingdom of Thonburi (1767-1782), and the kingdom of Siam or Thailand, which was established in the capital of Bangkok in 1782.¹

A long tradition of independence helped created a social system that has developed in its own way. The traditions and political institutions in Thailand were never abruptly overturned by colonial rulers who imposed new social institutions on their colonies. There was no particular external power which could serve as a government model for the Thais such as the American and British government models imitated by the Philippines and Malaysia. In addition, Thai society

has never been affected by a severe social revolution as happened in China in the late nineteenth century.²

The Role of the Monarchy in Thai Politics

The monarchy is the most continuous legitimate institution in Thai politics. The tradition of kingship has originated and accumulated in the past and adapted itself to the changing circumstances.

The concept of kingship was constituted as a pattern of administration from 1238 until 1932. On June 24, 1932, a group of civilian-military officials organized a bloodless coup d'etat to overthrow the absolute monarchy and established a parliamentary democratic government. Since 1932 the legitimate power of the King has been altered. The King's administrative power declined; but his prestige and influence as a symbol of national unity and the supreme patron reigning has remained. In addition, the King was still recognized as the head of the nation, head of the armed forces, upholder of religion and he was held to be sacred and inviolable.³

In the constitutional period, the King is recognized as the source of the sovereign power. The Thai constitution acknowledges that the King exercises the legislative power


³Thailand Official Year Book, 1964, p. 34.
through the parliament, the executive power through the cabinet, and the judicial power through the courts. All laws and royal commands regarding the constitution are to be signed by the King. The state laws and regulations are formed under the title of the King's orders.

The monarchy institution receives full support from all the Thais and their political leaders. Few political leaders feel that it is safe to eliminate the monarchy. In addition, most of them provide full support to the King in order to increase the legitimacy of the regime in power. As David Wilson points out:

The King or the monarchy is a symbol of the nation as a unified entity and of political conservatism. The Thai ruling class takes pride in its bloodless revolution which preserved king and national unity. Its members take satisfaction from the fact that the government form was brought up-to-date without affecting or disturbing the long venerable monarchy institution.

The royal family has been given full publicity and freedom of movement. Since the coronation in 1950, King Phumipol Adulyadej and his wife, Queen Sirikit, have travelled extensively throughout the country to promote social and agricultural development programs. These programs are conducted as a small project to develop social welfare, agricultural technology, agricultural products, and medical and health services. The programs are administered by different

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4 Wilson, Politics in Thailand, p. 81.
foundations which are supported by the royal funds, public donations and government contributions. The royal funds are made up from the personal fortune of the King and an annual appropriation provided by the government.

One of the principle duties of the Thai King is being the leader of Buddhist religion. Theravadi Buddhism (Hinayana) is the religion of a majority of the Thais and about 93.4% of the population is Buddhists. 5 Buddhist concepts have influenced Thai art, culture, education, society and every day life. Thai government has fully recognized Buddhism as the state religion. The administration and coordination of Buddhist affairs rest with the Buddhist Order Council (Sangha Supreme Council). This council is given full authority from the government to regulate and supervise Buddhist affairs. The members of this council are appointed by the King. The coordination of all religion affairs is under the responsibility of the Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Education. Besides going religious services, most of the monasteries have operated elementary schools in their districts. These schools are supported by both monastery funds and government funds.

The influence of religion and the role of the monarchy are the main basis of the belief system of Thai unity. This concept of national unity has been promoted by the Thai govern-

ment since the end of the World War II. One of the established
traditions is that all Thai students and the public pay respect
to the national flag and song each day at 8 A.M. and 6 P.M.

Thai people view their nation as a single unit of a
large family, regarding the King as a father figure, and view
themselves as family members. By law, all people born in
Thailand are legal Thai citizens. As Wendell Blanchard points
out:

The basic aim of Thai government policy toward all per­
manent residents is to bring about complete assimilation,
to stimulate participation of all residents in national
life, and to create a common national outlook by all
citizens regardless of racial or cultural origins.

Thai Political System

The Thai political system has gone through many
changes since 1932. These changes began with an absolute
monarchy which became a parliamentary democracy with the
leaders changing back and forth from military to civilian
depending on the pressure of Thai society. These political
changes effect the organization of the Thai political system.7

The Thai parliamentary system lacks a well-developed
structure because it came to Thailand without precedent and
without preparation. It was introduced by a small group of

6Wendell Blanchard, Thailand: Its People, Its Society,

7Wilson, Politics in Thailand, p. 16.
young and western educated civilian and military officials who led the coup to overthrow the absolute monarchy in June, 1932. Both members of the early assemblies and the electorate did not understand their roles and duties. Most of them were familiar with the tradition monarchy system which was overthrown by the sudden coup.

Since 1932 the country has been ruled by both civilian and military leaders. Between 1932 and 1980 there have been sixteen Prime Ministers ruling the country. Nine of these Prime Ministers were civilian leaders who were in power for a total of nine years. The remaining seven were military leaders who controlled the country for over thirty-nine years.

There are two major differences in the civilian and military designed constitutions. The 1975 constitution was the last civilian-based constitution. It stated that the House of Parliament is a bicameral legislature which consists of appointed members of the Upper House and the elected members of the Lower House. The members of the Upper House could only act as an advisory group which did not have power to vote on any legislative issues. Members of the Lower House were the only legitimate group who could vote. The Prime Minister was required to be a member of the House of Representatives, but cabinet members did not have to be house members. This 1975 constitution had a short and stormy life. It was disbanded by the military coup in October, 1976, and was replaced by a
military constitution in December, 1978.\(^8\)

The modern military-based constitution was promulgated in December, 1978, and is still used today. According to this constitution, the Upper House is composed of 225 members (three-fourths of the members of the Lower House), who are appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Prime Minister of the government in power. Three hundred and one members of the Lower House are elected by the general election. The power of the Senate (Upper House) exceeds the power of the Lower House in the sense that the Senate can sit in with the House to vote on the bills relating to national security, the throne, as well as budget and confidential issues.\(^9\)

The military-based constitution states that neither the Prime Minister nor the cabinet members need to be elected. The King appoints the Prime Minister through the major vote of the House and the ministers to the cabinet on the advice of the Prime Minister.

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\(^9\) Article 74, Section 6, Part 1, 1979 Constitution.
II

MILITARY INFLUENCE IN THAI POLITICS

The Thai military is the best organized institution in Thai society and political system. In Thai society, the military is recognized as a high unified organization compared to political parties. Every military official has been trained to pay loyalty to the leaders, military rule and discipline. The structure of a political party is considered weak as it is based on the loyalty and satisfaction of its members toward the party leader and party policy. In addition, since the Thai party system is a multi-party system, there are so many parties participating in politics that none of them have broad-based support from their constituency.

The weakness of the political parties not only affects the stability of the civilian government but also encourages the military to step in to control Thai politics. Relating to the national guardian's functions, the military's major interest concerns the problems of social order and stability. The study of the causes of military intervention in Thai politics shows that when the military see the value of order threatened, they act as a power group who step in to control the political situation.
The following section describes the function of the military involvement in Thai social and political system. The four reasons why the military has intervened in politics, including the reason concerning the weakness of the Thai political party, are presented. A typology of military roles in Thai politics is offered to provide an understanding of the military roles in Thai society.

Roles of the Military in Thai Society

The Thai military forces have been established for more than 600 years to deal with national defense. The Defense Ministry was first formed in 1802 and the entire organization of the three Armed Forces was developed in 1937. Since the 1960's, the Thai military system has improved with supplies, training, and funds from the U.S. government. \(^{10}\)

The Thai military organization is very centralized in hierarchical pattern. Military regulation are strictly enforced to ensure the obedience of the officers to the subordinate and superordinate system. In addition, the military recruits and trains its own personnel. The pre-military school (equal to two years of high school) and military academies are under control of the Defense Ministry.

The military is recognized by the Thai as the national guardian which is responsible for national defense,

national integrity, and sovereignty of the country. The following statements made by his majesty the King on Army Day in 1955, provide clear support of the Thai view toward military officers.

The highest duty of a soldier is to shield and defend the nation from the threats of its enemies so that the people can live happily and at peace. Soldiers receive the highest honor and trust from the nation.

There are two things of which the Thai military are justifiably proud: the first aspect which was already mentioned concerns the ability of the military to maintain the independence of the kingdom; the second thing is the fact that the military can protect the legitimacy of the monarchy institution. In the recent history of Thailand, the military steps on various occasions to overthrow the civilian government, suppress dissident elements, and beaten back countercoups. There is no indication that any military leader has a desire to revolutionize the monarchy institution. It is because military leaders are willing to maintain the monarchy institution as a symbol of national unity. In addition, all the military officers pay full respect to the King who holds the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Armed Forces. It is strongly emphasized in the military discipline that all military officers are to pay respect and loyalty to the quality of leadership and to protect the institution of the nation, religion, and the monarchy.

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Causes of Military Intervention in Politics

There are four reasons to explain why military leaders have a high interest in politics and try to control the Thai political system. These explanations also contribute to the reasons why military leaders decided to lead a coup d'etat to overthrow the civilian government.

The First Reason Concerns the Attempt of the Military to Protect the Monarchy Institution, National Order and Social Institutions.

This reason was the major reason why the military leader stepped in to control government power for the first time in 1946.

After the civilian-military group led the coup in 1932 to overthrow the absolute monarchy, different civilian and military leaders took turns controlling the government. Each leader supported the concept of participatory democracy and tried to develop a different pattern of the constitution. The democratic system of the civilian government failed when King Rama the Eighth was assassinated without reason on June 9, 1946, and the Prime Minister in power, Dr. Pridi Phanomyong, left the country that night with no explanation. 12 The military leader, Field Marshall Phibul Songkarm, stepped in to take control of the government. The Phibul regime exercised military rule and martial law for more than nine years.

This reason for military intervention in politics repeated itself shortly before the coup in October, 1976. One major factor that caused a military coup in October, 1976, came from the inability of the civilian government to cope with a great number of public disorders and to protect the monarchy institution. The coup of 1976 happened because the public and the military felt that the leftist students demonstrated a gross disrespect to the royal family. This feeling arose from the rapid distribution of newspaper pictures of the student demonstration at Thammasart University in Bangkok. One picture showed an effigy which bore a close resemblance to the Crown Prince, who had returned to the country just a few days before completing his education in Australia. The next day a large number of village scouts, riot police, and right-wing students clashed with a group of 7,000 demonstrators. This violent scene provided a chance for the military to step in to control the situation, declared a state of emergency, and end the civilian government at the same time. 

The Second Reason That Encouraged the Military to Take Control in Thai Politics Came from the Military's Dissatisfaction with the Civilian Government's Policy

The top military leaders have actively participated in Thai administration since the National Security Council was established in 1959. This council provides a consulta-

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tion to the cabinet on matters concerning economics, foreign affairs, national security and defense policy. This situation provides a good opportunity for the military leaders to control the civilian national policy's formulation and implementation. Whenever those top military leaders see that the civilian government is not handling its national policies properly, they step in to control the situation.

The cause of the coup in October, 1977 came from the military dissatisfaction with Prime Minister, Thanin Krivichien's foreign policy and national security policies. Since 1975 two civilian governments led by Kukrit Pramoj and Seni Pramoj initiated a diplomatic relations with the socialist bloc countries in Southeast Asia. In April, 1975, a diplomatic and trade relationship with the People's Republic of China was created by Kukrit Pramoj. In September, 1976, Seni Pramoj formulated a peace and cooperative agreement regarding trade and diplomatic relations with Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Since October, 1976, the government was led by Thanin Krivichien, a civilian leader who came to power by appointment of the military group who led the coup in October, 1976.

After a year of power, Thanin's government announced its intention to take hardline action against domestic communist insurgency by planning to discontinue trade and diplomatic relations between Thailand and Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Thanin's government blamed those countries for supporting communist insurgency around Thai borders. Relating to this
announcement, military leaders became wary of Thanin's hard-line anticommunist policies and were puzzled by the government's lack of knowledge and understanding of modern foreign and national security policies. The government action, as a conservative regime, caused the military group who had supported Thanin to decide to lead another coup to overthrow his government in October, 1977.\footnote{Kamol Somvichien, "The Oyster and the Shell", Asian Survey, (August 1978): 829-837.}

The Third Reason Concerns the Weakness of the Civilian Government as a Result of the Instability of the Thai Political Parties.

Relating to the multi-party system, so many parties participated in an election that none of them received enough support to form a government. Although some parties are larger than others, the creation of a government requires a coalition of several parties.\footnote{Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 420.} Frequently when the coalition government depends on the loyalty and satisfaction of a member of divergent parties, the downfall of the government is inevitable. The failure of the civilian government to maintain their power can encourage the military to return to control the government functions.

After their roles in politics have increased, the Thai military acts as a powerful political group. This group can lead a coup to seize the power from the civilian govern-
ment, when there is a high degree of political disorder.

The judgement of the military leader to overthrow the civilian government in 1976 came from the failure of three civilian governments in an eighteen month period. Admiral Sagad Chaloryoo, the leader of the 1976 coup said:

According to the military analysis, it was clear that the country was in deep confusion the cause of which came form all directions. . . One factor is that the government was composed of so many factions. It was so difficult to agree on any important issues and it made the government neglect the national problems which had to be solved quickly. We (the military) could not see how these confusions could be solved. We had to step in to correct the situation.  

The Fourth Reason Concerns the Fact that Thai Military Always Has a Share in Politics.

Not only has all civilian government allowed top military leaders to participate in making national security policies, these civilian leaders also allow the military to control the Defense Ministry. Whenever the country is ruled by a civilian government, the military will provide full support to that government under the condition that the civilian leader will leave the power to administer defense matter to military leaders.

Since 1932 no political officials have been appointed to control defense functions. The ministry itself is staffed entirely by military officers. All ministerial functions are assigned to the military officers as routine and permanent

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positions. In addition, if a civilian government desires to take power from the military leaders or try to control military affairs by appointing a civilian to a defense ministry post, it will cause dissatisfaction between the military and the existing government. This situation can lead to a military coup to overthrow that government.

This circumstance happened at the end of Seni Pramoj's government in 1976. Seni announced the reorganization of his cabinet by appointing civilians to the defense ministry post. The military viewed the reorganization as a threat to their power and as a means of controlling the military's role in society. In October 6, 1976, this factor was one of the reason that the military decided to lead the coup to overthrow Seni's government, proclaimed martial law, and disbanded the constitution.\(^\text{17}\)

**Military's Role in Politics**

The military leaders have played a dominant role in Thai politics for a long time. The military government can maintain the continuity of program administration, which does not occur under the civilian government. Between 1932 and 1980 military leaders have controlled the country for more than thirty-nine years while the civilian leaders were in power for a total of nine years.

\(^{17}\)Clark Neher, *Modern Thai Politics*, p. 25.
The pattern of military participation in Thai politics can be summarized into three types: the authoritarian, the conservative and the moderate view. Example of the various military regimes are seen in the following governments: Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat from 1958-1963, Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn from 1963-1973, General Kriengsak Chamanan from October, 1977 to February, 1980; and that of General Prem Tinsulanon which took control in March, 1980.

**Military Authoritarian**

In a military authoritarian society, the military leader rules the country by martial law, all political institutions are disbanded, and politicians are relatively limited with all the power resting in the national leader, the Prime Minister.

During 1944 and 1958 the Thai political system underwent many changes. Ten civilian and military governments took turns to control the country. These leaders introduced different forms of government in order to develop a political system of the country. The changes in political leaders and their policies affected the continuity of the social and economic development programs. The coup in 1958 resulted from Sarit's realization that economic and social

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development were more important than political development issues. When Sarit came into power, the constitution was abolished, the Assembly was dissolved, all political parties were banned, and martial law was declared. In January, 1959, Sarit promulgated an interim constitution which gave him total power until his death in 1963. This constitution remained in force until 1969.

Under the military authoritarian system, all decision making rested with the military leader. The military regime played a major role as a reformer to promote social and economic development regardless of the political factors. During the Sarit regime, Sarit held the position of Prime Minister and headed the National Security Council, the National Research Council, and the National Education Council. He was the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the Director-General of the National Police Department.

Sarit's absolute power enabled him to cut through bureaucratic incompetence and push through policies he favored in initiating a comprehensive development plan. Sarit promoted highway construction which improved mass transportation throughout the country, and supported economic, urban, and rural development programs, and many state enterprises projects. Besides the ordinary government functions, Thai government controlled the operation of irrigation systems, electric power, whiskey distilling, tobacco products, etc. Many private investments in business and financial corporations were also supported by
the government leader.\textsuperscript{19}

Sarit was in power until he died in 1963. After his death it was revealed that by the misuse of public funds and participation on corporation boards, he had collected a huge personal fortune.\textsuperscript{20}

Although Sarit exercised totalitarian power and personal corruption, his government received full support from most of the Thais. It was because Sarit's government improved the well-being of the people, the education program, and paid high respect to the monarchy institution.

In addition, Sarit's national development programs were considered successful. Sarit favored full support to the education system. During his regime, the education budgets were roughly equal to the military budgets. The King and his royal family were encouraged by the government leader to travel both throughout Thailand and the world. Sarit viewed this projection of the royal image as an asset, a unifying force within the country, as well as a useful international symbol.\textsuperscript{21}

Conservative Military

In the conservative military regime, the National

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{20} Clark Neher, \textit{Modern Thai Politics}, p. 14, 338.
\item\textsuperscript{21} Daniel Wit, \textit{Thailand: Another Vietnam} (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968) p. 111.
\end{itemize}
Assembly, the general election, and the political parties were permitted under the pattern of a military-based constitution. The military leader controlled the administration and implementation of national policies and appointed a military group to be members of the Upper House (Senate). These Senators have the power to vote on any important issues with the elected members of the Lower House.

Under military leaders Field Marshall Thanom and General Kriengsak the military controlled the executive branch and the Upper House and civilians controlled the Lower House. The Prime Minister had power to appoint and dismiss all cabinet members. As a result of this pattern the active group who participated in politics was not the civilian but the military officers.

During 1971 and 1973, Field Marshall Thanom was a Supreme Commander, a Prime Minister, a Defense Minister and a Foreign Affairs Minister at the same time. Field Marshall Prapas Charusatien, the number two man in Thanom's government held the positions of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army.22

In the General Kriengsak regime, cabinet positions had increased from eighteen to forty-four. The General controlled the Prime Minister position and the Agricultural and Finance Ministries. Top military leaders were not only assigned to

22 *Nations*, 10 February 1974, p. 28.
hold the defense ministry posts, but also became the Minister of Interior, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister to the Prime Minister's office. There were only eight civilians who were members of the Lower House allowed to be cabinet members. These civilian members were assigned to control minor ministerial functions; there was only one of them, Prasit Narongdej, who was given full ministerial rank as Minister of Industry.23

Although the military-based parliamentary system seemed to provide strong support to the military leader who controlled the executive branch, it did not in fact ensure the security of the military government in power.

During the 1960's the Thai people and the students developed an understanding of the pattern of the democratic system and the role of government leaders. This understanding led different groups to become aware of the capabilities of cabinet members, government policies and the collective participation of military elites in Thai politics.

There were two major incidents that showed that the failure of the government to maintain the support from major interest groups could lead to the downfall of the government in power. These incidents happened in the Thanom and Kriengsak regimes.

During the last two years of the Thanom regime, the country faced severe economic problems. These problems resulted

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from a combination of factors, including the increased balance of payment deficit stemming from gradual reduction of American troops throughout the country and the unbalanced foreign trade agreement, principally with Japan. A steep rise in inflation made the Thai farmers and the middle-class workers worse off economically than in the previous decade. As a result, in late 1973, a group of university students coordinated a series of minor demonstrations against the government economic policy. The course of the conflict between the government and the students came after the government arrested thirteen demonstrators who were university lecturers, students and former politicians in October, 1973. Following that event a major demonstration was held by 200,000 students in the center of Bangkok. This demonstration turned into a riot on October 14, 1973 when the police officers began firing indiscriminately on the thousands of student demonstrators. The King and other top military officers were so deeply unhappy about the situation that they asked Thanom and his deputy Prime Minister Field Marshall Prapas to resign and leave the country that night. 24

Since 1973 the groups of career bureaucrats, businessmen, academic professors, and politicians became more active participants in politics. The most active group consisted of members of the Lower House. This group resented the govern-

ment actions that limit participation of civilian persons in the cabinet. In General Kriengsak regime, the cabinet was criticized for being unrepresentative of elected legislators and lack of needed expertise in crucial ministries. General Kriengsak held the position of Minister of Agriculture in addition to the Prime Minister position. After ten months of power, it was proven that the General had so much responsibility in the Prime Minister's affairs that he neglected the agricultural affairs. There were many tensions between the Lower House and the cabinet in the legislative sessions. Members of the Lower House were satisfied with government actions in dealing with energy problems, inflation, and the high defense budget for 1980 which was about 24% of the total budget. After ten months of the second regime, General Kriengsak acknowledged that his government could not compromise the conflict between the Lower House and the cabinet. In order to maintain the legislative body, General Kriengsak resigned in February, 1980.

The Moderate Military

By 1980, there were changes in the pattern of military government from conservative to moderate. Modern military were more willing to compromise with the needs of different groups and to be responsible for the consequences of former military actions. This moderate military leader realized that the conservative military leaders failed to compromise with
the demand of the interest groups and gave up the responsibility of solving the problems of governance when the problems became too much for them.

In the moderate military government the role of the military in the cabinet is limited to control only national security functions. The military wants to control the Prime Minister position because the leading problem of the government is the national security problem. Since 1977 the country faced an external threat from Cambodia. There were the sequences of Cambodian troops attacking Thai border villages. It was necessary for the Thai military to move troops along the Thai-Cambodian border. Although the Thai government tried to maintain peace by diplomatic negotiations rather than a military approach to this conflict, Cambodian military attacks along the Thai border continued. The Thai government faced not only the Cambodian conflict, but also the problem of rural insurgencies in the North, Northeast, and the Southern parts of the country.

It is generally accepted that the military wants to control the Prime Minister position because national security issues are related to the foreign, financial, and political policies which are under control of the Prime Minister. The military feel that top military leaders understand national security problems much better than civilians and that the military Prime Minister can make better and quicker decisions.
The moderate military government pattern was exercised by the government of General Prem Tinsulanon in March, 1980. After General Kriengsak resigned, his cabinet collapsed, but the House of Parliament and the constitution remained in power. General Prem came to power from the support of both houses with 399-96 votes on the issue to select the Prime Minister.

General Prem's government is a coalition with three major political parties participating in the cabinet. The degree of participation varies with the share of seats that each party has in the House. The distribution of shares is not evenly proportioned. The Social Action party which has 83 seats, receives eight shares in the cabinet; the Thai Nation party has 38 seats, receiving five shares; the Democrat party has 32 seats, receiving only three shares.

The organization of General Prem's cabinet shows the proper use of experts from different fields of experience more than of any government in the past. General Prem's cabinet is composed of politicians, military officers, and the experts who have been highly trained in various fields such as agriculture, medical science, energy science, and industrial science, etc. The leaders of three political


parties became Deputy Prime Ministers. Military officers were appointed to be the Defense Minister and one as a Deputy Prime Minister in charge of the national security function. Records on the educational background of twenty-six civilian cabinet members show that twenty-one of them have an outstanding education compared to the educational background of the thirty-eight cabinet members in General Kriengsak's government.  

Information of General Prem's government is only available for this study through March, 1980. If there are no major interruptions such as the death of the General, a future vote of no confidence, or another coup, this government will be in power until the term of the General Assembly ends in January, 1983.

III

THE MILITARY AND THAI PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The contents of this part are divided into two sections. The first section summarizes the influence of the military on Thai political development, based on the content of the second part to this paper. This section shows the analysis of the military aims and intention to support Thai political development. The second section presents the effects of the military roles on Thai public administration.

Military and Political Development

The Thai military organization is very well-developed compared to the Thai political parties. As already explained one reason why the military wants to control Thai politics is because of the political instability of civilian government, regarding the weaknesses of the political parties.

Thai political parties have never been a strong political institution because they have had short and discontinuous lives with no opportunity to develop a fundamental structure. Political parties were first created in 1932 and were disbanded during the military regime from 1933 to 1944. They emerged briefly in 1944 and were banned by the return of the military rule in 1947. After that time they were

Thailand has a multi-party system with so many parties that none are broad-based or institutionalized on a national scale. Most parties emerge from factions of political leaders. Consequently, parties rise and fall with political pressure. The coalition of the party depends on the loyalty and satisfaction with the leader and party policy.

When the military controlled a government, the pattern of the constitution was changed to a military-based constitution. The military argued that the only way to strengthen the legislative branch was to create a strong united party by appointing a military group to participate in the Parliament. This group had the same power as the elected legislators and consisted of three-fourths of the members of the Lower House. The only difference was that the members of the Lower House could not hold any occupation while they were on duty, but the appointed members could. This exception provided a legitimate allowance for the military officers to participate in politics while they were continuing their official careers.

The military has played a dominant role in Thai politics since 1932. This role has never gone unchallenged. In every government top military leaders are always appointed to be members of the National Security Council, which is an
advisory group to the Prime Minister on matters concerning foreign affairs, national security, and defense policies. These top military leaders understand their roles so well that whenever the civilian leaders' actions create a large scale public disorder and affect the stability of the laws and order of the kingdom, the military leaders feel that they have the right to intervene in politics.

The military governments receive support from most of the Thais because they rely upon the legitimacy of the monarchy; they contribute more consistent policies, and more continuous program administration than past civilian regimes.

Since 1932 the royal power declined from the abdication of King Rama VII in 1935, and the assassination of young King Rama VIII in 1946. Until 1950 the prestige and influence of the monarch has increased with the support of two military leaders, Field Marshall Sarit and Field Marshall Thanom. Dr. Clark Neher points out that:

Prime Minister Sarit and Thanom have encourage the King's endeavors to closer to his subjects as both means to increase the legitimacy of the regime in power and to decrease the potential for insurrection by providing the people with a symbol of Thai Unity.

In Thai political history, the military governments provided consistent national policies more than civilian governments. Whenever there were changes in civilian leaders the national policies were also changed. These changes could

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be seen during 1975 and 1977. In 1975, Prime Minister Kukrit's government exercised the policy of the Social Action party. In 1976, the Seni government used the Democrat party's policy; and in 1977, the Thanin government initiated its own policy. An abrupt change in national policy never occurred when there was a change from one military leader to the other. The new military leader always followed the predecessor's major policies. The change among military leaders came in the form of transferring power from the first leader to the second leader of a military group. On the contrary, the change of the civilian leader was seen in the form of switching power from one political leader to another who possessed different political opinions and policies.

The change in civilian leaders also disturbed the continuity of the national development plan. The civilian leader always turned down the former government's program and created its own plan to gain popularity for its party. This situation did not happen to the military government. When a new military leader came in power the viable social and economic development programs which were in progress were carried out until they were terminated. As an example the Six-Year Economic Development Plan created by Sarit in 1961 was carried out by Thanom until the termination of the program in 1966.29

Military and the Development of Thai Public Administration

The following section summarizes the development programs which have been introduced by Thai military governments. These programs concern economic development, foreign assistance, and civil service reform.

There are two reasons why the military governments are able to provide more successful national development program than the civilian governments. The first reason is because the early civilian leaders did not stay in power long enough to support their projects, and those projects were replaced by the new government programs. Between 1932 and 1980 the military controlled the country for more than 39 years while the civilian were in power for a total of 9 years. The other reason is because the military governments in the 1960's received extensively foreign assistance. Further explanation of this reason will be presented in the section of foreign assistance.

Economic Development

In Thailand, the national economic development program was initiated extensively in the 1950's during the regime of Field Marshall Phibul Songkarm and Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat.

The National Economic Development Board was set up in 1959 and was assigned to draft a long term National Economic Development Plan.
The first Six-Year Plan, 1961-1966, was announced on January 1, 1961. The major objective of this plan was to develop public constructions and public utilities such as power plants, transportation, and tele-communication programs. Another main objective was to raise rural income, agricultural products, and an industrial development program. This plan provided satisfactory results, with the Gross National Product (GNP) increasing at an annual rate of 7.2% and the industrial contribution to national income amounted to 12% compare to almost 40% from the agricultural sector. 30

The Second Five-Year Plan, 1967-1971, was fairly successful. In 1971, the GNP had grown at the rate of 8% which was one of the highest sustained growth rates in Asia. 31 After the Third Four-Year Plan, 1972-1976 ended, the program was discontinued by the civilian regime at that time.

During 1977 the GNP growth rate dropped down to 5.8% and the level of foreign investments also decreased a great extent. 32 Severe national economic problems are one of the main factors that encourage the military to seize control in


Thai government.

When General Kriengsak came to power from the coup in October 1977, his government tried very hard to promote economic development. This was the first time that the government decided to sell bonds in the international money market in order to fund the Fourth National Economic Development Plan.\(^{33}\) This plan has been reorganized since it ended in 1976. In 1978, the GNP growth rate increased to 7%. The number of investment increased by 22% over 1977.\(^{34}\)

Foreign Assistance

Foreign assistance was sent to Thailand after the end of the Second World War and after the country became a member of the United Nations in December, 1946. Besides the United Nations, Thailand received aid from different countries and international institutions. Those countries are the United States, Britain, Germany, Australia and Japan. The international organizations which have helped Thailand are the Asian Development Bank, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), etc.\(^{35}\)


The military governments during 1946 and 1973 managed their foreign loans effectively to support a large scale national development program.

During 1947 and 1963, Field Marshall Phibul and Field Marshall Sarit created more than 140 public enterprises. These public enterprises were created to promote industrial development and provide direct income to the government. As a result of the promotion of public enterprises, the Thai government monopolized the tobacco industry, cement, sugar and pharmaceutical factories, and the operation of a mass transportation system. The government operated a number of small plants making batteries, timber products, glass, paper and gunny sacks, etc. Thai government also owns a share in the Rural and Metropolitan Electric Organization, various banks, and financial organizations.\(^{36}\)

During the 1960's Sarit and Thanom's government received a large amount of help from the United States government through the Military Assistance Program (MAP). This program aimed to strengthen the Thai military capabilities, through both training activities and construction of logistical facilities. Major highways and military bases were constructed throughout the country.\(^{37}\)

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The government efforts in rural development, while moved by security objectives, contribute to economic growth. The advanced transportation system improved marketing of agricultural products by bringing them out to reach the market. The Ministry of National Development was created in 1963 to be responsible for the rural development program. This program presented a number of activities such as promotion of education, construction of small irrigation systems for domestic needs, giving advice to improve agricultural products and expansion of public service activities. 38

Most of the foreign assistance programs were reduced when the Vietnam War ended. The major fund for the Ministry of National Development was terminated; the ministry's functions were discontinued in 1975. The major function of this ministry, the rural development program was transferred to the Interior Ministry; the irrigation development and the land development programs were transferred to the Agricultural and Cooperatives Ministry. Since then the government has not sponsored many major public construction. The Ministries of Interior and Agricultural and Cooperatives were left with the responsibility for maintenance of all public construction and public utilities.

38 Thailand Official Year Book, 1964, p. 54.
Civil Service Reform

The administration of the Thai civil service system is guided by the Civil Service Act of 1954. This Act was amended in 1971 on the issue of the duties of the Civil Service Commission. This Civil Service Commission is responsible to draft the civil service rules and to control the personnel practices to insure the conformity of those rules. Since 1971 the functions of this commission have expanded. The agency is responsible for conducting competitive examinations for recruitment to the civil service, the classification and qualification of all civil service positions, and the government scholarship examination to study abroad.

The major content of the Civil Service Act of 1954 are summarized in the following categories.39

1. Penalty: The Civil Service Commission is responsible for controlling the uniform system of civil service order. This agency has the authority to investigate violations of the Civil Service Rules in all ministries and arrange recommendations for the penalties to the minister of the superior of each violator. The degree of penalty varies with the most severe penalty prescribed for the various forms of corruption. This penalty requires dismissal with an investigating committee of at least three members to conduct a hearing for further legal punishment. An official who is

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39 Ibid., pp. 60-70.
dismissed or discharged from the service loses his right to pension benefits and to readmission into the service.

2. Recruitment and Promotion: Recruitment to the civil service is done by competitive exams. This system is believed to be the best way to provide equal opportunity for the candidate and for the government to hire competent officials. The exams are conducted under the responsibility of the Civil Service Commission in both oral and written examinations. The admission to service of the candidate is done strictly in order of examination grade. Promotion of the civil servant from one grade to another is usually made on the basis of a written exam.

3. Political Official and Career Official: The Civil Service Act of 1954 indicated the distinction between career bureaucrats and political officials. The act outlined the duties and responsibilities of those officials. Since political officials attain their positions from the appointment of political leaders, those officials are dismissed when the tenure of those leaders ends. The political officials are responsible for the formulation of the government policies while the career officials are responsible for the implementation of such policies. Special civil servants and political officials who are appointed to specific positions cannot be transferred to any other civil service categories.

4. Fringe Benefit: Another outcome of the civil service reform in 1954 was the fringe benefit program to civil
servants. These programs include subsidy in payment of income taxes, subsidy of at least one-half of the tuition fees for their children, a reduction of at least half of the cost of medical treatment in public hospitals, and the pension benefits. Retirement takes place when a civil servant reaches the age of sixty. Upon retirement, a civil servant can receive either a lump sum or an annuity retirement benefit. This benefit is calculated by multiplying the last monthly salary by the number of years in service, which the pensioner can receive at one time or this amount can be divided by 50 and be paid to the pensioner monthly until he dies. When the pensioner dies, an amount equal to one month's pension multiplied by 30 is given the heir.

The 1954 Civil Service Act has been enforced until the present without any major changes. An advantage of the Thai civil service system is that it has a uniform pattern and is considered well-organized. Most of the Thai bureaucrats enjoy becoming public servants and are satisfied with their fringe benefit programs. It is the desire of the government to systematize the civil service administration, to select competent personnel, and to maintain a uniform guideline for the bureaucrats to understand the ways and means of public service.

Thai public administration has been developed to a great extent under the military regimes from 1947 to 1973. The continuing national economic development program promotes
the modernization of production and technology used in the agricultural system. Different military governments successfully promote industrial development through foreign investments and industries for defense. The modernization of defense facilities and related infrastructure help develop the national transportation system. The modern transportation system encourages the government to conduct rural development programs throughout the country. Besides the national development programs, the Civil Service Reform Act of 1954 emphasized the fundamental structure of the Thai bureaucratic system. This Reform Act has been enacted to reduce corruption, to protect security of bureaucrats, and to give uniformity of the Thai public administration system.
CONCLUSIONS

In Thai politics, the monarchy and the military are the two important institutions. These two institutions rely upon the legitimacy of each other. The King recognizes the legitimacy of the military government as a group of citizens who are willing to administer the country. The military respects the monarch as a symbol of the national leader and national unity.

At the present time, Thai politics still lacks a well-developed pattern compared to the western democratic form of government. Thai political system has changed on a trial and error basis. These changes are guided by the political history, political culture, and social influences of the country.

Thai public administration has advanced more in the past decade than at any previous time. Modern military government conducts a workable system which shows a rational administrative process with proper use of experts, expansion of civilian roles in politics, and a good understanding of internal and external influences. These external forces are the attitudes of the neighbors of Thailand and the relationships of the major power such as the United States, the USSR, and the PRC (People Republic of China). This administration system is supported by the propaganda of the military regime.
which tries to make people accept the fact that the military is a group of citizens who are willing to develop the Thai public administration and political system.

The future role of military in Thai politics depends upon the military's attitude toward a national security problem. The military will maintain a military-based constitution and government if the national security issue continues to be a major problem to the government. The military may change the constitution to a civilian-based pattern if they feel that the national security problem is under control.
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