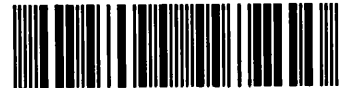


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*THE KING'S NATION: A STUDY OF THE EMERGENCE AND
DEVELOPMENT OF NATION AND NATIONALISM IN
THAILAND*

Andreas Sturm

Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the
University of London
(London School of Economics and Political Science)

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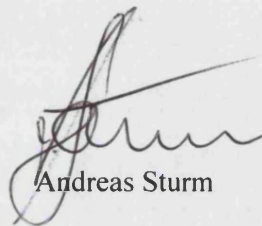


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Abstract

This thesis presents an overview over the history of the concepts of *nation* and *nationalism* in Thailand. Based on the ethno-symbolist approach to the study of nationalism, this thesis proposes to see the Thai nation as a result of a long process, reflecting the three-phases-model (*ethnie*, pre-modern and modern nation) for the potential development of a nation as outlined by Anthony Smith.

The four main points put forward by this thesis are as follows: First, the Thai nation is the result of a long process with roots within several cultural cores. When the modern nation came into being in the early Bangkok period, it was characterised by an indigenous interpretation different from the western understanding of a nation. Second, Thai nationalism as an ideology originated in the mid-nineteenth century. It was a consequence of an intra-elite struggle between the nobility and the monarchy. The kings actively used nationalism to strengthen their position and to bind the loyalty of the people to their institution. As a result, Thai nationalism at the very beginning was 'monarchical' with the monarch himself embedding the nation and lacking a popular component. Third, Thai nationalism in the twentieth century was characterised by alternate interpretations of the nations by different ruling elite groups. This resulted in three competing nationalisms, namely monarchical, statist, and royal nationalism. Fourth, the period since 1980 saw a revival of monarchical nationalism. The current ruler, King Bhumibol, adapted monarchical nationalism to a modern and democratic political system. He interprets the modern nation as a self-sufficient, trans-ethnic and moral community and disseminates the ideals with the help of the state via monuments, art, stamps, ceremonies, legends and festivals.

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Note

1. The romanisation of Thai words in this thesis follows the “General System of Phonetic Transcription” of the Royal Academy of Thailand.
2. Thai names are given with the names first. Names of royals, politicians, academics and writers are romanised following their personal styles of spelling or they are spelt in the way by which they are usually known. In other cases, the transcription of names follows the system of the Royal Academy.
3. For place names, I follow the spellings commonly found in newspapers or other books on Thailand. The term ‘Thailand’ is used throughout this thesis for a better understanding while her older name, Siam, appears only in quotations, titles or at relevant locations.
4. All translations from Thai language sources are my own. These translations were made to support my arguments and do not, as in the case of poems, claim any representation of the artistic value of the works. Translations found in English language sources are marked as such. My translations of book titles are mostly done directly from the Thai title. There are exceptions where the translation was given by the authors themselves and, in rare cases, deviate from the original title given in Thai.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Wenn mich ein Hochasiate früge, was Europa sei, so müsste ich ihm antworten: Es ist der Erdteil, der gänzlich von dem unerhörten und unglaublichen Wahn besessen ist, das die Geburt des Menschen sein absoluter Anfang und er aus dem Nichts hervorgegangen sei.”

Arthur Schoppenhauer, 1788-1860

Historians of South East Asia increasingly reject a nation-state based analysis. They argue that in order to gain a fuller picture of the region, it is necessary to think outside a centralised framework and to include the people as actors on the historical scene. David Wyatt, for example, pointed out that many outlying areas were not connected to a Thai central government until the 20th century. Therefore, scholars should not fall into a ‘national trap’ by focusing on political, administrative, economic, religious, educational or cultural institutions. Only the concentration on local histories and other alternatives to the national history could be the way forward.¹ Like Wyatt, Thongchai Winichakul pleaded to pay more attention to local histories and to include trans-border relationships between neighbouring regions in order to record ‘history at the interstices’.² Scott Barmé went even one step further when he criticised ‘traditional’ historians for using the ‘Great Men’ theory. He argued that by explaining Thai history with Thai kings at its centre, these historians would say ‘generally little about commoners being the harbinger of political and social change and renewal’. This one-sided focus on the royal elite would therefore be nothing else than a strong academic endorsement for official Thai nationalist discourse.³

Based in the field of nationalism studies, this thesis, however, in seeking to understand thoroughly the concepts of Thai nation and nationalism, deviates from this scholarly trend. As the Thai nation is built around the core culture of the Thais and their institutions, it is inevitable to centre the analysis on this dominant ethnic group. It is this group (especially its leaders and intelligentsia) which shape the nation and nationalism.

¹ Wyatt, David. “History is More than the Study of the Nation”, Paper Presented at the 8th International Conference on Thai Studies, Nakhon Phanom 2002, p. 2

² Thongchai Winichakul. “Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia”, Paper Presented at the 8th International Conference on Thai Studies, Nakhon Phanom 2002, p.1.

³ Barmé, Scott, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, Lanham 2002, p.3.

For the Thai case in particular, nation and nationalism cannot be understood without paying special attention to one institution: the monarchy. Love and loyalty to the king is a widespread phenomenon and very much connected to a sense of nationality. Taking the national flag on the lap of honour, for example, is a standard procedure for winners in sports. However, not many sportsmen show a picture of their king in the moment of their biggest triumph as Thai sportsmen do. Another example can be seen in the case of the best tennis player of Thailand, Paradorn Srichapan. When he won a tournament in New York in August 2003 for the second time in a row, Paradorn told the crowd that victory the year before gave him the chance to have an audience with the King and to present him his trophy. He explained that for Thais, the King meant everything and he would again present his new trophy to the monarch. A Thai newspaper reported that while the local crowd was listening quietly and applauded loudly at the end of the speech, Thai fans on the stand could not help shedding their tears because they shared the love Paradorn has for the King.⁴

Not only official representatives of the Thai nation show loyalty to the King so openly. Ethnic minorities such as hill tribe villagers in the North also display this attitude as can be seen in an interview by the BBC when asked about the importance of a visit of the King to their village:

“It has a great meaning and merit for the village... loyalty will rise in the village, our love for them [the royal family] will increase having seen them with our own eyes. We’ve heard his [the King’s] voice from his own lips and have spoken to him with ours. We have heard his voice over the radio, but now we have actually seen him. He is a real live person.”⁵

The in-flight magazine of Thai International Airlines, *Sawasdee*, printed a eulogy to the king in 2003 which attempted to explain this allegiance of the people to the monarchy:

“It’s an inexplicable feeling, greater than love, bordering on sanctity, and ingrained in the heart of every Thai citizen since the first day of his or her life. The Thai love of the monarchy is legendary, almost mythical, as it’s an invisible nucleus of the clockworks that keeps this country running.”⁶

⁴ Thai Rath, 27.08.2003, p.5.

⁵ BBC Written Archives, Soul of A Nation, LCA T854K, 7 January 1980, p.47.

⁶ Sawasdee, April 2003, p.19.

It appears that only in a few countries does the monarchy play such a central role in public consciousness. The question arises whether this loyalty to the monarchy lessens the loyalty to the nation? Is Anthony Smith's postulate of the 'world of nations in which no unit claiming political sovereignty can evade the dictates of nationalism'⁷ flawed in the case of Thailand? For a student of nationalism, it would be tempting to confirm a flaw but I propose that Thailand is no exemption from the rule. Nevertheless, with the monarch not simply being the symbol of the nation but its embodiment, nationalism in Thailand does follow a different pattern when compared to neighbouring countries.⁸ What makes the monarchy so crucial for the understanding of the Thai nation and nationalism? To answer this question, a study must look beyond politics to find the key to its appeal to the masses, as Guibernau pointed out: "any attempt to investigate nationalism needs not only to take into account its political dimension, but also to explore less 'rational' but not less important areas concerned with feelings and emotions."⁹

In the Thai case, all indicators show a close link between the king and the nation. However, the dominance of modernist approaches in existing studies resulted in a lack of explanation for this phenomenon. This thesis, therefore, proposes a new approach to the study of the Thai nation and nationalism. Apart from focussing on the role of the monarchy in the emergence and development of the Thai nation and nationalism, the thesis will include a fresh look at the origin of the nation, an analysis of indigenous elements and thoughts that formed the nation and nationalism and a novel classification of various visions of the nation. This chapter will start with a discussion on existing studies of the Thai nation and nationalism. In the second part, I will put forward my own approach of study and will define and explain its key elements.

1.1. Theoretical Views on the Thai Nation and Nationalism in Existing Studies

The earliest writings about Thai nationalism were published during the Second World War when Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram (1938-1944 and 1947-1957) brought Thailand into alliance with Japan. Their contents were mostly coloured by the

⁷ Smith, Anthony. "State-Making and Nation-Building", Oxford 1986, p.258.

⁸ The basic difference is that Thai nationalism is not based on anti-colonialism. See Chatterjee, Partha. "Whose Imagined Community?", London Reprint 1996, p.217.

⁹ Guibernau, Montserrat, *Nationalisms*, Cambridge 1996, p.65.

political opinion of the writers.¹⁰ The period of the Vietnam War, which was the heyday of South East Asian Studies, saw many works on Thailand but these books did not feature nationalism as their main theme.¹¹ It was not until 1978 when the first in-depth study of Thai nationalism in western languages appeared. In *Chaiyo- King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Walter Vella examined nationalism in connection with persons and events and considered King Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925) as the ‘founding father of Thai nationalism’.¹² After Vella’s path-breaking work, western scholars paid more attention to the creation of Thai identity. Scott Barmé, for example, analysed the work of Luang Wichit Wathakan, the ideologist behind Phibun’s policies.¹³

As for Thai academics, the initial study of nationalism appeared in 1970 with the work of Chulla Ngonrot. Chulla set the frame for a top-down approach to nationalism, always closely connected to the political leaders and identified the reign of King Vajiravudh and the Phibun era as core periods of Thai nationalism, stressing that Phibun was the one who created a popular Thai nationalism.¹⁴ Since then, many studies conducted by Thai academics followed this concept.¹⁵ Although most of these works written by Thai scholars are valuable in terms of historical studies, they are lacking a theoretical analysis of nationalism. The term nationalism is somewhat ill defined and

¹⁰ One good example was a comment by the Japanese Foreign Ministry which praised the ‘awakening of the Thai people to the importance of their position as an East Asiatic nation’ in 1940. On the opposite side, Virginia Thompson called the Thai elite ‘imperialists’. In another article, she accused the Thai government of ‘unprecedented chauvinism’ and ‘super-nationalism’. See Tokyo Gazette. “Japan and Thailand”, 1940, p.54; Thompson, Virginia, *Thailand- The New Siam*, New York Reprint 1967, p.9 and Thompson, V. “Thailand: Nationalism and Prosperity”, *Current History*, 1952, p.98.

¹¹ See for example Skinner, William, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, Ithaca 1962 and Wilson, David, *Politics in Thailand*, Ithaca 1966.

¹² Vella, Walter, *Chaiyo- King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Honolulu 1978, p.xiii.

¹³ Barmé, Scott, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity*, Singapore 1993. Other important studies are Reynolds, Craig (ed), *National Identity and Its Defenders- Thailand, 1939-1989*, Clayton 1991 and Smalley, William, *Linguistic Diversity and National Unity*, Chicago 1994.

¹⁴ Chulla Ngonrot, *Kamnoet lae khwampenma khong latthi chatniyom nai prathet thai* [The Origin and Development of Nationalism in Thailand], Bangkok 1970.

¹⁵ The main reason was that these scholars connected their understanding of nationalism with obvious or direct campaigns by King Vajiravudh and Prime Minister Phibun. See for example, Atcharapon Kamutpitsamai, *Udomkan chatniyom khong phunam thai* [Nationalist Ideology of the Thai Leaders], Bangkok 1982. The main study of King Vajiravudh’s nationalism is Kanpirom Suwunnanonada, *Phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua kap kansangchat thai* [King Vajiravudh and His Nation-building Programmes], Bangkok 1981. Many other works focus on Phibun’s nationalism such as Thamsook Numnonda, “Phibulsongkram’s Thai Nation-Building Programme During the Japanese Military Presence, 1941-1945”, *JSEAS*, 1978; Charvit Kasetsiri, Thamrongsak Petchlert-anan and Vigal Phongpanitanon (eds), *Chompon Po Phibunsongkhram kap kamueang thai samai mai* [Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram and Modern Thai Politics], Bangkok 2001.

the current face of nationalism is rarely explained, assuming a unitary development since its origins.¹⁶

However, the last twenty years saw the development of the 'revisionist' school of Thai historiography which has been successful in explaining the origins and development of the Thai nation and nationalism in a more theoretical and convincing way. This school is firmly in place because its proponents follow the same approach and use quite the same set of data. Important proponents of this school include both Thai scholars such as Thongchai Winichakul, Nidhi Aeusrivongse, Chai-anan Samudavanija, Kasian Tejapira, Thirayuth Boonmee, Kullada Kesboonchoo and foreign scholars such as Michael Connors, Matthew Copeland and Mauricio Peleggi. The central figure, however, is Benedict Anderson whose modernist concept of the nation¹⁷, greatly influences the modern debate about Thai nation and nationalism.¹⁸

This revisionist school of Thai historiography called into question existing views on the Thai nation and the role of the monarchy.¹⁹ Anderson commented: "ambiguous rubrics like 'uniquely Thai values', anachronisms such as [19th century] 'Thai nationalism', and questionable axioms such as 'the monarchy is essential to the Thai national identity', encourage us to base our thinking on a wholly imaginary eternal Thai essence."²⁰ What were the new 'axioms' of the revisionist school? Without exception, the proponents accepted Anderson's main argument that the nation is an imagined community.²¹ They, therefore, shared the 'standard total view' that the Thai nation was newly imagined and a construct of the ruling elites in the late nineteenth and early

¹⁶ A good example of ill-defined terms and a classic perception of Thai nationalism as a unitary block can be seen in Pornpen Hantrakool. "Thai Studies in Thailand: A Review", *Asian Research Trends*, 1991, pp.2 and 6.

¹⁷ The modernist and post-modernist theories of nationalism seem to be popular approaches to the studies of nationalism in the so-called developing world. Modernists, like Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, argued that the nation is something novel and the product of modernisation. Hobsbawm, Eric, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge 1990, p.10; Gellner, Ernest, "Do Nations Have Navels?", *Warwick Debate* 1995, p. 3 and Breuilly, John, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester 1993, Introduction. The first one applying the modernist approach to Asia was Kedourie, Elie. "Introduction", New York 1970, p.23. For an overview of these approaches see Smith, Anthony, *Nationalism and Modernism*, London 1998, pp.223-224.

¹⁸ This is obvious not only in historical and political studies but also in fields such as literature and theatre. See, for example, Manas Chitakasem. "Nation Building and Thai Literary Discourse: The Legacy of Phibun and Luang Wichit", Bangkok 1995, pp.29-55 and Jiraporn Witayasakpan, *Nationalism and Transformation of Aesthetic Concepts: Theatre in Thailand During the Phibun Period*, Cornell 1992.

¹⁹ See for example National Identity Board (ed), "Thai Culture in Brief", Bangkok 1981, p.6. An older example is Prince Wan Waithayakon, *A Diplomatic History of Thailand*, Bangkok Reprint 1991b, p.7. For a recent example, see Somchai Wudhiprecha. "Cultural Preservation is National Preservation", Bangkok 1989, p.141.

²⁰ Anderson, Benedict. "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies", Athens 1978, p.226.

²¹ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1991, p.6.

twentieth century.²² The view of the Thai nation as being newly constructed seemed to ‘have led a whole generation of historians and political scientists away from the acceptance of the importance of cultural traditions as sources for nationalism in the non-European world’.²³ The revisionist school, therefore, paid less attention to the study of Thailand before the late nineteenth century in terms of the pre-modern ethnic bases for Thai nationalism. Indeed, categorizing Thai nationalism and its promoted identity as a ‘modern enterprise’²⁴ made such pre-modern identities irrelevant.

The revisionist school argued that this ‘newly imagined’ nation began to evolve in 1855 when a far-reaching treaty between the United Kingdom and Thailand was signed. The Bowring treaty gave the Europeans not only full access to the Thai economy but also was the beginning of modernisation of the Thai state and society under King Mongkut. It resulted in a transformation of the royal realm from a loosely structured tributary state system into a centralised, absolutist state under King Chulalongkorn. The royal elite, especially Interior Minister Prince Damrong, organised, for example, frequent ‘administrative pilgrimages’ of local bureaucrats to Bangkok and the increased use of Central Thai as standard vernacular contributed to the creation of a picture of a unified political, economic and linguistic entity. Together with modern technology, such as print media, this picture helped to imagine the Thai nation in a way which was previously not possible. Anderson, therefore, concluded that the “construction of the centralizing ‘colonial’ style late 19th-century state was effected by the monarchy”.²⁵

Considering the Thai nation as an imagined community, the revisionist school also gave more importance on the external factor, the contribution of the West to the development of Thai nation and nationalism, both institutionally and ideologically. In their writings, the effects of European imperialism in South East Asia were identified as key factors for the creation of the modern nation. First, the colonisation of the Thai neighbours resulted in the elimination of the military threat to Thailand. Traditionally, constant warfare with countries such as Burma and Vietnam bound many resources

²² See for example Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped- A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, Honolulu 1994, p.142; Kullada Kesboonchoo, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, London 2000, p.12; Rosenberg, Klaus, *Nation und Fortschritt- Der Publizist Thien Wan und die Modernisierung Thailands unter König Chulalongkorn (r.1868-1910)*, Hamburg 1980, p.84; Likhit Dhiravegin. “Nationalism and the State in Thailand”, 1988, p.93 and Murashima, Eiji. “The Origin of Modern Official State Ideology in Thailand”, *JSEAS*, 1988, p.81.

²³ Dahm, Bernhard. “Cultural Traditions and the Struggle for Nationhood in Asia”, Kota Kinabalu 2001, p.3.

²⁴ Connors, Michael, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand*, London 2003, p.5

²⁵ Anderson, 1978, p.211.

from the central government. With such military campaigns a thing of the past, these resources could now be used to expand the power and influence of Bangkok over lesser kingdoms and chiefdoms.²⁶ The Thai nation itself came into being in 1893 during the so called *Paknam* crisis of 1893. The Thai ruling elite realised the importance of maps when the French underlined their claim to territory with the help of maps (and gun boats). The map gave birth to the 'geo-body' of the Thai nation, a new entity represented by the image of Thailand on it. This firstly-depicted image clearly demarcated borders and included formerly independent political units. The geo-body was therefore not a gradual evolution from the indigenous political space to a modern one but was a sudden replacement of the former. Consequently, the rulers needed a new, national identity.²⁷ They substituted earlier local identities with a 'Thai' identity with the help of a constructed bureaucratic culture.²⁸

Another key factor crucial for the development of Thai nation, according to the revisionist school, was economy. The Bowring treaty of 1855 deprived the Thai sovereigns of an important element of their sovereignty, namely the control over foreign trade.²⁹ However, this change also offered the ruling elites the chance to participate in the trading boom by transforming the Thai economy from a subsistence-orientated into an export-orientated economy. To increase the production of export goods, Thai society had to be reformed (for example with the abolition of slavery) and the state centralised (under strong foreign guidance). Kullada argued that although the country frequently interacted with various capitalist world-economies in the past, it remained a pre-modern state. However, this changed when Thailand's economy was linked with the European world-economy.³⁰

The revisionist school also shared the idea that the establishment of European colonies on the borders of Thailand, provided the ruling elites with a new threat scenario which enabled them to create the image of a monarchy as saviours of the nation. This claim to national leadership was reinforced by refashioning the monarchy as modern and civilised: 'by contemplating themselves in their new clothes, new domestic settings, new urban spaces, the Siamese court ended up convincing themselves

²⁶ Anderson, 1978, pp.202-203.

²⁷ Thongchai, 1994, p.165.

²⁸ Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Wattthanatham khue thun* [Culture is Capital], Bangkok 1997, p.12.

²⁹ Anderson, 1978, p.209.

³⁰ Kullada, 2000, p.178.

of being modern'.³¹ The position of the monarchy, however, was increasingly questioned by the non-royal bureaucracy. Case studies, such as Copeland's thesis on critical cartoons and newspaper articles directed against the monarchy in the reign of Rama VI, seemed to confirm that the answer of the king to this pressure was an intensified promotion of nationalism in order to safeguard his rule.³² A coup d'état by military and civil bureaucrats ended the monarchical rule in 1932.³³

Another focus of the revisionist school was the role of the monarchy after Field Marshall Sarit came to power in 1957. This period saw a revival of the monarchy which was moved into the centre of the Thai official nationalism (see below). King Bhumibol was positioned with the help of ceremonies and other public appearances to symbolise the Thais. Connors argued that for this reason "the king may not be transgressed, for that would be a transgression against all Thais. The hegemonic message was 'we are all one', all tied to the destiny of the geo-body of Thailand."³⁴ This image of the king was 'carefully built [by the palace and the state]'³⁵ and Anderson saw the new interpretation of traditional roles of the king as the decisive factor for its success. While the military dictators took on the role of the secular ruler (punisher of crimes, collector of taxes etc), King Bhumibol played the role of the Buddhist ruler (consecrator of authority etc) and this resulted in the resacralisation of the king's person.³⁶ The state, led by military dictators, instrumentalised the monarchy to provide legitimation and moral lustre for their rule, the rapid modernisation and development of Thai society as well as the fight against communism. The aim, so the argument, was to ensure security and prosperity for the bourgeois strata. The king's sacredness was safeguarded with the help of a strict enforcement of *lèse majesté* and made sure that 'the compulsory respect was shown to the institution'.³⁷ The current incumbent, King Bhumibol, was willingly cooperating with the efforts of the state which are still ongoing.³⁸

Another focus of the revisionist school was the role of the monarchy after 1957. This period saw a revival of the monarchy. The 'standard' argument was that the military dictators instrumentalised the monarchy to provide legitimation and moral

³¹ Peleggi, Maurizio, *Lord of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Modern Image*, 2003a, p.3.

³² Copeland, Matthew, *Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, 1993.

³³ See chapter 7 for details.

³⁴ Connors, 2003, p.147.

³⁵ Peleggi, 2003a, p.166.

³⁶ Anderson, Benedict, *The Spectre of Comparisons- Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, London 1998, p.165 and Peleggi, 2003a, p.166.

³⁷ Connors, 2003, p.133.

³⁸ Kasian Tejapira in Pravit Rojanaphruk. "A Nation Still in the Making", 1994.

lustre for their rule, the rapid modernisation and development of Thai society as well as the fight against communism. The aim, so the argument, was to ensure security and prosperity for the bourgeois strata. This was achieved by a reinvention of the monarchy as a sacred institution and by positioning the king as an advocate of Thailand's underprivileged rural population. This happened under the leadership of the state which also safeguarded the king's sacredness with the help of strict enforcement of *lèse majesté* and made sure that 'the compulsory respect is shown to the institution'.³⁹ The current incumbent, King Bhumibol, was willingly cooperating with the efforts of the state which are still ongoing.⁴⁰

An important aspect in the discussion about Thai nationalism in the 'standard view' is the assumption that it is an instrument of the ruling elites. Therefore, the categories *official* and *royal* nationalism were introduced. The term official nationalism found its way into Thai studies through Anderson, who defined it in relation to King Vajiravudh's reign as 'an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups who are threatened with marginalisation or exclusion from an emerging nationally imagined community'.⁴¹ Anderson emphasised that this kind of nationalism appears *after* and *in reaction* to a popular nationalist movement. Thongchai later introduced the term royal nationalism. The Thai elite, stated Thongchai, used Thai historiography as an instrument and created a 'royal-national history' which emphasised the role of the monarchs as saviour of the sovereignty of the nation. The royal nationalism was a tool to spread the power of Bangkok into all directions. Even after the revolution in 1932, this approach has been maintained in general terms until today. A slight change occurred in 1973 when the 'bourgeois' leaders adapted the royal nationalism to propagate democracy and to create the image of a monarchy which serves the people. Thongchai termed this new interpretation *neo-royal nationalism*.⁴²

The analysis of studies of the revisionist school showed that we have to give credit to the (post-) modernist arguments regarding their explanation of some elements

³⁹ Connors, 2003, p.133.

⁴⁰ Kasian Tejapira in Pravit Rojanaphruk. "A Nation Still in the Making", 1994.

⁴¹ Anderson, 1991, p.101. Anderson adopted this view from the earlier definition of Seton-Watson, who defined 'official nationalism' as "a doctrine which *replaced the principle of dynastic loyalty* as the basis of legitimacy of government. The leaders see it as their task and moral duty to impose their nationality on all their subjects- of whatever religion, language or culture." Seton-Watson's definition fits with the situation after the revolution in 1932. The new rulers, a clique of civil and military bureaucrats, really had to *replace the principle of dynastic loyalty* as the basis of legitimacy of government with the intention of justifying their own power. Seton-Watson, H., *Nations and States*, Boulder 1977, p.148. Emphasis added.

⁴² Thongchai Winichakul. "Prawattisat thai baeb racha chatniyom [Royal-National Thai History]", *Sinlapawathanatham*, 2001, pp.56-65.

of nation and nationalism in Thailand (for example the construction of history and the influence of the West).⁴³ However, the uniform approach (based on the same data) applied by the proponents of this school limited the possibilities of new explanations and ideas about Thai nationalism, particularly the role the monarchy play in it.⁴⁴

Although celebrated by the revisionist school, Anderson's approach drew criticism from a number of scholars, particularly some specialists in South East Asian nationalism. Dahm disagreed with Anderson's connotation of Asian nationalism as something alien in origin. He saw, on the contrary, the existence of a kind of non-European nationalism. In Dahm's opinion, Anderson may have described correctly the attitudes of leaders but failed to explain the acceptance of this imagination by the masses.⁴⁵ Tønneson/Antlöv also rejected the modernist approach to the study of Asian nationalism. For them, Anderson has disregarded the impact of pre-national conditions and traditions in various parts of Asia on each existing national form. His emphasis on modern imagining 'led him to downplay the limits as to what could be imagined by a significant number of people in each specific case'.⁴⁶ A theorist of nationalism, Anthony Smith, also doubted Anderson's central argument on print capitalism as the decisive force in the creation of a national consciousness. For Smith, literary analysis of nationalism cannot substitute for causal explanations of the rise, content, form, timing intensity and scope of a given nation and nationalism. He doubted that anybody is willing to sacrifice his life because 'print capitalism' has forged everybody into solidarity.⁴⁷ Anderson's argument, stated Smith, failed to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch, thereby excluding any understanding of the popular roots and widespread appeal of nationalism.⁴⁸ Despite this strong criticism, Anderson's theory had a great influence on the studies of Thai scholars. The idea of the 'imagined communities' and the Thai

⁴³ See Nidhi Aeusrivongse, *Chat thai mueang thai baep rian lae anusawari wa duai watthanatham rat lae rupkan chitsammuek* [Thai Nation, Thailand, Textbooks and Monuments: Towards Culture, State, and Conscience], Bangkok Reprint 1995, p.70.

⁴⁴ This could have been the reason why David Wyatt saw the earlier mentioned need for a new approach.

⁴⁵ Dahm, 2001, pp.3-6. For more criticism on Anderson's approach to non-European nationalism see Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, London 1993, pp.19-22.

⁴⁶ Tønneson, S./ Antlöv, H. "Asia in Theories of Nationalism and National Identity", Richmond 1996, pp.8-9.

⁴⁷ Smith, Anthony. "The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed?", *MJIS*, 1991, pp.360-362.

⁴⁸ Smith, Anthony, *Myth and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford 1999, p.9. For more theoretical criticism on Anderson see Smith, A., *The Nation in History*, Oxford 2000, pp.55-60, Hastings, Adrian, *The Construction of Nationhood*, Cambridge 1997, pp.2-4, Breuilly, John. "Approaches to Nationalism", London 1996, p.159 and Motyl, Alexander. "Inventing Invention: The Limits of National Identity Formation", *Ann Arbor* 1999, pp.58-71.

nation as a construct has been so deeply engraved on the minds of Thai academics that it has become common academic practice to start an article with a reference to Anderson's concept.

The leading Thai authority on Thai nationalism is without doubt Thongchai Winichakul. His study *Siam Mapped-A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* received wide interest from Thai and western academics. Thongchai's work is an outstanding contribution to the debate about nationalism in general and the Thai nation and nationalism in particular. As I consider Thongchai as a good representative of the revisionist school, I will mainly use his work as basis for criticism on this approach.

Firstly, Anthony Smith criticised Thongchai's line of argument because he 'failed to enter the world of national sentiments and ideas or to explain how and why non-elite Thais became attached to the modern Siamese nation'.⁴⁹ Indeed, Thongchai did not explain why the vast majority of the people in Thailand would identify with the country and the monarchy when the Thai nation is just an invention of the elite. It seems that the use of the modernist approach creates problems when trying to understand non-western cultures. Chatterjee portrayed this situation as dilemma for any academic when beliefs held by other peoples turn out to be manifestly irrational and false in terms of western criteria of rationality or truth. The question arises of 'how is one to interpret the fact that large numbers of people collectively hold beliefs that are false?'⁵⁰ Aware of this problem, Geertz demanded that academics should use less time to decry nationalism, which would be a little like cursing the wind, and focus more on figuring out why it takes the forms it does.⁵¹ The main question to ask, therefore, is why Thai nationalism is popular with the people? If Thai nationalism and identity would be felt as something artificial or invented, Thai society would never have been relatively stable in the twentieth century (compared to its neighbours).⁵² How would it be possible for 'the' elite to manipulate the people in the same way over generations? How could such a 'project' go on for more than a century without succeeding to create a uniform identity? The vivid local identities of the Muslims in the South or the Khmer in the southern *Isan* [North East] are the best counter-arguments. This thesis will pay attention to popular elements such as beliefs, values and traditions in Thai national identity and nationalism.

⁴⁹ Smith, Anthony, *Chosen People*, Oxford 2003, p.133.

⁵⁰ Chatterjee, 1993, p.11.

⁵¹ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York 2000, p.253.

⁵² For a theoretical discussion of the connection between the 'feeling of invention' and 'stability', see Featherstone, Mike. "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity", London 1996, p.62.

A second criticism is Thongchai's argument that the concept of the 'geo-body' suddenly displaced former ideas of indigenous political space after the crisis of 1893. Thongchai said that this situation was responsible for the development of nationalism and as a result of the Thai nation. In the light of Shils' statement that 'a nation is never an affair of a single generation...a nation is by its nature a trans-generational entity'⁵³, it seems strange that the Thai nation came into being as a consequence of one specific event. One must doubt that the level of emotion reflected in newspapers in Bangkok during the *Paknam* crisis in April 1893 ('we will form our ranks and give our blood for our country, our king, our religion, and our race'⁵⁴) were just the product of a newly invented imagination. The reason why the modernist approach fails to explain this is connected to the fact that the majority of existing studies understand the nature of Thai nationalism as 'official nationalism'. This term found its way into Thai studies through Anderson, who defined it in relation to King Vajiravudh's reign as 'an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups who are threatened with marginalisation or exclusion from an emerging nationally imagined community'.⁵⁵ This implies that a ruler, who developed nationalism only as a response to popular nationalism from below, is a passive figure that reacts rather than leads a nationalist movement from the beginning. Nationalism is reduced to be a pure instrument to control the masses and thus the possibility that nationalism is perceived positively within the population because of its emotional dimension is excluded. It means further that nationalism can only arise when the masses develop an awareness of being a nation in times of modernisation and industrialisation. As this thesis will show, official nationalism was neither the first nor the only kind of nationalism in the case of Thailand.

A third criticism is that Thongchai's concept is problematic when applied to recent periods of study. He concluded that "the definition and domain of nationhood are not given. They are constructed, carved, inscribed, fabricated."⁵⁶ Thongchai implied that

⁵³ Shils, Edward. "Nation, Nationality, Nationalism, and Civil Society", *Nations and Nationalism*, 1995, p.100.

⁵⁴ Cited in Landon, Kenneth. "Thailand's Quarrel With France in Perspective", *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 1941, p.34.

⁵⁵ Anderson, 1991, p.101. Anderson adopted this view from the earlier definition of Seton-Watson, who defined 'official nationalism' as "a doctrine which *replaced the principle of dynastic loyalty* as the basis of legitimacy of government. The leaders see it as their task and moral duty to impose their nationality on all their subjects- of whatever religion, language or culture." Seton-Watson's definition fits with the situation after the revolution in 1932. The new rulers, a clique of civil and military bureaucrats, really had to *replace the principle of dynastic loyalty* as the basis of legitimacy of government with the intention of justifying their own power. Seton-Watson, H., *Nations and States*, Boulder 1977, p.148. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Thongchai, 1994, p.173.

Thainess and Thai nationalism in its basic form was static since its supposed beginning in the late nineteenth century (with a slight exception in the period between the 1930s and 1950s).⁵⁷ This static view towards the Thai elite and society as whole is debatable. Already Max Weber and Otto Bauer stressed the changeability of the 'national character'.⁵⁸ This character can alter in decades. Did Thai society remain unchanged over a long period of time? Elites are not a unified block, neither are the masses. A change in society would automatically reflect in Thai nationalism and nation. The argument of an 'unchanged nation and nationalism' becomes already weak on the surface when we compare Thai society in the 1960s and the vibrant Thai civil society a few decades later: "Below the decision makers and administrators lies the bulk of Thailand's 31 million population with few, if any truly autonomous associations to press or represent their interests. The nascent post-war trade union movement was easily tamed; political parties, never of wide membership or organization, were banned in 1958; peasant organizations are unknown; student organizations are strictly non-political; the press, radio and television keep criticism of the government muted to the point of inaudibility; the Buddhist clergy remains apolitical; and leading members of trade associations have intimate business relations with the officer corps."⁵⁹ The fact is that the current Thai society is different from that description and as a logical consequence, the interpretation of the Thai nation and nationalism must be different as well. It can be assumed that the difference to Thai societies in history would even be bigger. This thesis will show that a uniform and static view of the Thai nation and nationalism is invalid.

A fourth criticism is that Thongchai seemed to equate the 'geo-body' with the Thai nation-state instead of the Thai nation. The similarities are at least in Giddens' definition of the nation-state obvious: "The nation-state, which exists in a complex of other nation-states, is a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence."⁶⁰ There is no doubt that the centralization of state power and the development of a modern bureaucracy under King Chulalongkorn represented a Thai nation-state but

⁵⁷ Thongchai W. "A Short History of the Long Memory of the Thai Nation", Victoria 2003, pp.6-7.

⁵⁸ Weber, Max, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen Reprint 1956, p.560 and Bauer, Otto. "The Nation", London Reprint 1996, p.41.

⁵⁹ Hindley, David. "Thailand: The Politics of Passivity", *Pacific Affairs*, 1968, p.358.

⁶⁰ Giddens, Anthony, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Cambridge 2002, p.121.

does not eliminate the possibility of an earlier Thai nation. Therefore, this thesis will have a look into history in order to find earlier elements of the Thai nation.

Lastly, there is still the lack of explanation of the role of the monarchy in nation and nationalism. (Post-) modernist approaches, anti-elitist *per se*, declare the monarchy simply as initiator of the ‘national imagination’ which was later carried on by the political rulers. This fails to pay enough importance to aspects such as the *emotional* meaning of the monarchy to the Thai people as can be witnessed with the current incumbent, King Bhumibol. Although I acknowledge that the monarchy was not the sole agent in the development of the Thai nation and nationalism, it was central in shaping them. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the activities and ideas of the monarchy.

To sum up, what is the current view of Thai nationalism in the academic debate dominated by the revisionist school? It seems to be the joint project of ‘deconstructing the Thai nation’⁶¹. This process is based on the perception that the elite used nationalism to gain control of the society when facing modernity. The argument is backed up by the same historical events and theoretical approach: Firstly, the monarchs started this policy at the end of the nineteenth century because they saw it as a means to expand their power and to prevent any calls for democratic change. Therefore, Thailand is another case where nationalism created the nation. This implies that nationalism or the nation were not indigenous ideas but imports of western concepts. Secondly, the civil and military bureaucracy after the revolution in 1932 took over this view and created a uniform and, for ethnic minorities like the Chinese, suppressive Thai culture. Thirdly, Thai nationalism and identity until today are still following the similar pattern, even though there is now more room for expressing someone’s identity, especially on the grass-root level. Finally, the argument was recently added that the biggest challenge for the Thai nation and Thai identity in the future is globalisation and the development of the cyberspace.⁶²

This thesis will apply a different approach in order to address the shortcomings existing in the current literature on the Thai nation and nationalism.

⁶¹ This term was used by Thirayuth, Boonmee, *Chatniyom lae lang chatniyom* [Nationalism and Post-nationalism], Bangkok 2003, p.27.

⁶² Thongchai Winichakul. “Chatthai, mueangthai lae nidhi aeusriwongse [Thai Nation, Thailand and Nidhi Aeusrivongse]”, Bangkok 1995, p.37 and Prasert Chittiwatanapong. “Challenges of and Responses to Globalisation”, Oxford 1999, p.74.

1.2. A Different Approach to the Study of the Thai Nation and Nationalism

This thesis will make four basic arguments. First, the Thai nation was not an invention of the late-nineteenth century but developed gradually out of an *ethnie* and a system of cultural cores [centres of culture with significant influence on Thai culture in politics, society, religion or art], to become first a pre-modern, then a modern nation. Thus the current Thai nation is based on a long existing symbol-myth complex centred on a Thai interpretation of monarchy and Buddhism. However, the current Thai nation cannot be directly equated with earlier forms. Second, Thai nationalism as an ideology was first and foremost a product of an intra-elite power struggle between the monarchs and the nobility in the nineteenth century. It was not a reaction to pressure from ‘below’ and it was based on existing national sentiments. The monarchs actively shaped nationalism in their favour with the help of the existing symbol-myth complex, creating an ideology different from comparable countries such as Japan. This nationalism will be called *monarchical nationalism*. Third, Thai nationalism was never a fixed ideology and changed as a result of competing views of the nation within different ruling power groups and the intelligentsia. This resulted in a contest between *monarchical*, *statist* and *royal* nationalism. Fourth, the current monarch, King Bhumibol, is actively forming the Thai nation and draws on earlier forms of *monarchical nationalism*. Charisma is a key element in this process.

In order to sustain these arguments, this thesis will have to answer several questions first: What are the basic definitions of the terms used in this thesis? What theoretical approach is suitable for the study of Thai nationalism? “When is the Thai nation?” How do different nationalisms compete with each other? What kind of charisma plays a role in the appeal to the masses? Last but not least, a timeframe for this thesis has to be set.

‘Nationalism’ and ‘Nation’

At the beginning, it is necessary to define the theoretical terms used in this thesis. Like many studies about nationalism, this thesis will include a wide range of meanings and connotations, thus reflecting the multi-faceted existence of this word. The basic working definition of ‘nationalism’ is understood as “an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and independence on behalf of a group, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or

potential 'nation'.⁶³ Closely connected with 'nationalism' is the term 'nation' which follows Smith's definition as 'a group of human beings, possessing common and distinctive elements of culture, a unified economic system, citizen rights for all members, a sentiment of solidarity arising out of common experiences, and occupying a common territory'.⁶⁴

One necessary adaptation follows the argument of Brubaker that nationalism should not be conceived as 'essentially or even as primarily state seeking. Nor should it be understood as nation-based'.⁶⁵ If we add Lofgren's proposal that the nation is not an abstract idea but rather 'a cultural praxis in everyday life'⁶⁶, the need for an expanded understanding of nationalism becomes even more evident, especially when discussing non-European forms of nationalism. Modernists and post-modernists emphasised the European nature of nationalism and deny the existence of indigenous variants in Africa and Asia.⁶⁷ Chatterjee argued that such an approach is Euro-centric and implies that non-European people are not capable of acquiring the values of the Enlightenment.⁶⁸ Jackson saw the danger for South East Asian theorists in using the tools of 'deconstruction' to criticize local forms of authoritarianism.⁶⁹ They could become marginalized from local discourses and context by reliance upon a 'foreign' conceptual frame of reference whose tone and nuances are insistently Euro-American.

Stuart Hall called for transculturation or transcoding of western theory.⁷⁰ Western theory of nationalism could therefore be 'translated' and when necessary stretched for the Thai context. It should also address indigenous forms of nationalism, which on the first view do not fit the classical western conception of nationalism. The basic definitions of the term 'nationalism' and 'nation' should be expanded with a cultural dimension, related to tradition and history and mirrored in the belief and feelings of the general population. With the aim to clarify these two dimensions, Meinecke proposed an analytical separation between the 'Staatsnation' (political nation)

⁶³ Smith, Anthony, *Theories of Nationalism*, New York 1983, p.171.

⁶⁴ Smith, 1998, p.188.

⁶⁵ Brubaker, Rogers. "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism", 2000, p.278.

⁶⁶ Cited in Reicher, Stephen/Hopkins, Nick, *Self and Nation*, London 2001, p.15.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Kedourie, 1970, p.29 and Anderson, B. "Untitled", 2003, p.1.

⁶⁸ Chatterjee, 1986, p.10.

⁶⁹ Jackson, Peter. "Mapping Poststructuralism's Border: The Case for Poststructuralist Area Studies", *Sojourn*, 2003, p.63.

⁷⁰ See Jackson, 2003, p.51.

and the 'Kulturation' (cultural nation).⁷¹ Nairn took a similar road when he analysed the role of the British monarchy in his fictive cultural dimension of 'UKania', or what he called the 'spirit-country'.⁷²

In this thesis, I attempt to pay attention to the relevant cultural forces and institutions such as Buddhism. The main focus, however, is on the monarchy.

Ethno-symbolist Approach to Nationalism

This thesis regards the ethno-symbolist approach to study the Thai nation and nationalism as the most suitable because it is able to shed light on the role of the monarchy. While modernist theories focus on the impact of politics on ethnicity and nationalism, the ethno-symbolist approach attempts to explain the impact of ethnicity, culture and nationalism on politics. At the heart of this concept is the idea that nationalism get its power from the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular living past has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias.⁷³ Smith emphasized that traditions, especially religious ones, often shape and inspire the national identities and nationalisms of the modern world. History and culture form integral parts of the fabric of popular visions, and of the social structures and processes in which the designated populations are embedded and through which their elites must forge their strategies.⁷⁴

Out of his concept, Smith formulated this definition: "Ethno-symbolism aims to uncover the symbolic legacy of ethnic identities for particular nations, and to show how modern nationalisms and nations rediscover and reinterpret the symbols, myths, memories, values and traditions of their ethno-histories, as they face the problems of modernity."⁷⁵ All these myths, symbols and memories shape the nation. For Smith, they are not simple 'instruments' of leaders and elites of the day, not even of whole

⁷¹ Meinecke, Friedrich, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State*, Princeton Reprint 1970, p.10 and 18. In his opinion, the cultural nation produced the nation-state and therefore, the state is simply a product of the national culture.

⁷² Nairn, Tom, *The Enchanted Glass*, London 1988, p.92.

⁷³ Smith, 1999, p.9.

⁷⁴ Smith, Anthony. "The 'Sacred' Dimension of Nationalism", *MJIS*, 2000, p.795.

⁷⁵ Smith, 1998, p.224. Smith emphasised that his concept is not a theory. For that reason, I refrain from calling it one. See Smith, Anthony. "The Poverty of Anti-Nationalist Modernism", 2003, p. 359. Smith's ethno-symbolist approach was criticised repeatedly by other academics. See for example Babadzan, A. "Anthropology, Nationalism and the 'Invention of Tradition'", *Anthropological Forum*, 2000, p.150, Özkirimli, U. "The Nation as an Artichoke? A Critique of Ethno-symbolist Interpretations of Nationalism", *Nation and Nationalism*, 2003, pp.339-355 and Breuilly, 1993, p.3.

communities. They are potent signs and explanations, having the capacity for generating emotions in successive generations. Included is an explosive power that goes behind the rational 'uses' which elites and social scientists deem appropriate.⁷⁶

Smith doubted that nationalism could be explained by emphasising solely the construction efforts of the elites.⁷⁷ Elites do play a crucial role in choosing cultural material but this material must be selected out of pre-existing repertoires of ethnic symbols, myths and values. Although nationalism (the ideology and the language used) is a product of intellectuals on the cultural level, their share on the political level is much less evident.⁷⁸ Smith thought that it is the 'intelligentsia'- in his words 'the new priesthood of the nation', who benefits from and disseminates the ideas of nationalism. The intelligentsia consists of professionals on all levels and the intellectuals are a part of it.⁷⁹

Smith's approach is specifically suitable for this case study of Thailand. His emphasis on traditions fits with the historical and political situation in South East Asia as described by Dahm. Drawing on experiences in colonized countries, Dahm stressed the role of cultural traditions in the region. They did determine the identity of ethnic and religious groups and were able to mobilize the masses in their defence before the elites even started to think about the form of an eventual nation-state. Together with religion, the cultural traditions form a constitutive part of Asian nationalism.⁸⁰ Dahm identified so called 'bridge-builders' as crucial for the success of nationalism. These leaders, for example Sukarno, used the revitalized cultural traditions politically, which made the masses recognise the visions and aims in symbolic pictures.⁸¹ Dahm argued further that cultural traditions should be seen as the result of a continuous process of selective adaptation of new elements and their integration into social systems. These social systems have proved in the past to be able to meet the needs of groups, which are concerned about the preservation of their cultural identity. The developed long-lasting norms may be disregarded in normal times but they become important in a time of crisis.⁸²

⁷⁶ Smith, Anthony, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, Oxford Reprint 2002, p.201.

⁷⁷ Smith, 2003, p.361.

⁷⁸ Smith, Anthony, *National Identity*, London 1991, pp.118-120.

⁷⁹ Smith, 2002, p.157. 'New priesthood' because in pre-modern times ideas were mainly disseminated by priests.

⁸⁰ Dahm, 2001, pp.3-4.

⁸¹ Dahm, Bernhard. "Postkoloniale Staatenbildung in Südostasien", Stuttgart 1992, p.81.

⁸² Dahm, 2001, p.6.

'When is the Thai Nation?'

In the academic discourse, Walker Connor's question 'When is a nation?' inhabits a central position.⁸³ It is without doubt a tricky question as its answer depends very much on the definition of the term 'nation'. Max Weber started to define the term 'nation' with a list of what it is *not*.⁸⁴ Hastings applied, among other criteria, the term 'nation' to any social group, who made the transfer from oral tradition to a standardised written vernacular which defined a 'fixed' field of readers.⁸⁵ Smith, however, pointed out that Hastings did not take changes in the social and cultural environment over long historical time into account.⁸⁶ Smith saw the nation as a process, continually forming and dissolving over different periods.⁸⁷ For this reason, the question should not only be 'When is the nation?' but also 'What, where and who is the nation?'⁸⁸

The concept of the nation barely appears without the concept of 'nationalism'. Their connection to each other is vital for the understanding of both terms. We have to ask what came first, the nation or nationalism? Depending on the answer to this question, the analysis of nationalism changes dramatically. As stated, the proponents of the modernist approach argue that nationalism has to exist first in order to create a nation with the help of the state. This is achieved by elites using nationalism as a tool and the invention of its contents as a mean to make their vision of an independent nation a reality. Smith refuted this view "because nationalism is widely seen as a modern ideology, the idea that it creates nations assumes not only that there were no nations before nationalism but there can be no pre-nationalist nations...[My] argument is that earlier meanings of the term 'nation' are necessarily quite different from and have no connections with modern nationalism-dependent meanings...In different parts of the world are different criteria necessary."⁸⁹ He argued that nations *could* exist well before nationalism. Modernists, he stated, took the wrong assumption that all nations must have similar features such as well-defined borders like the existing modern nations.⁹⁰ In another article, Smith saw the formation of a nation as a long process (*longue durée*)

⁸³ Connor, Walker, *Ethnonationalism- The Quest for Understanding*, Princeton Reprint 1994, pp.210-226.

⁸⁴ Weber, 1956, p.528.

⁸⁵ Hastings, 1997, p.12.

⁸⁶ Smith, Anthony, "Theories of Nationalism", London 2000, p.2.

⁸⁷ Smith, Anthony. "When is a Nation?", *Geopolitics*, 2002, pp.11-14.

⁸⁸ Smith, 1999, p.276.

⁸⁹ Smith, Anthony, *Nationalism*, Cambridge 2003, p.93.

⁹⁰ Smith, 2002, p.15. See also Smith, Anthony. "The Problem of National Identity: Ancient, Medieval and Modern?", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1994, p.391; Smith, Anthony. "Were There Nations in Antiquity?", Cambridge 2005 and Hutchinson, John. "Nations and Culture", Cambridge 2001, p.76.

with 'recurrent activities, which had to be renewed periodically'.⁹¹ In his opinion, a nation cannot just be created by a singular event or simply by the creation of suitable institutions or infrastructure.

To avoid the limiting framework of the modernists, Smith developed a model of three phases to identify the development of a common cultural identity which forms the nation. He himself, however, pointed out that the lines between the phases could not be drawn sharply and that not all nations were the result of direct continuation but were more modelled on earlier ethnic communities.

In the first phase, the earliest organised communities with identity should be called *ethnie*. An *ethnie*, defined Smith, is 'a named community of shared origin myths, memories and one or more elements of common culture, inclusive an association with a specific territory'. The next level of collective cultural identity is the nation, whereby Smith did not explicitly declare that this phase is only an intermediate. Smith called this state of the nation a *pre-modern nation*.⁹² Smith defined it as 'a named community possessing an historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs'.⁹³ Pre-modern nations, he argued, are not 'inventions' of nationalists, although they often have rediscovered their existence and significance for designated popular raw material out of which nations may be created. Since such elements are ubiquitous and historically recurrent, there is a real possibility of creating 'nations before nationalism', even if pre-modern nations differed in important respects from modern mass citizen-nations.

The modern nation includes a much wider variety of criteria. Smith defined his ideal type of a modern nation with following elements:

- The growth of myths and memories of common ancestry and history of the cultural unit of population.
- The formation of a shared public culture based on indigenous resource (language, religion, etc.).
- The delimitation of a compact historic territory, or homeland.
- The unification of local economic units into a single social-economic unit based on the single culture and homeland.

⁹¹ Smith, 1986, p.206.

⁹² Hutchinson, John/Smith, Anthony. "General Introduction", London 2000, p.xxxv. For a similar view, see Reynolds, Susan. "The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community", 2005.

⁹³ Both definitions (*ethnie* and pre-modern nation) in Smith, 2002, p.15.

- The growth of common codes and institutions of a single legal order, with common rights and duties for all members.⁹⁴

Central to all the phases and therefore to Smiths' ethno-symbolic approach itself is the argument that nations have historically been formed mainly around ethnic cores or dominant *ethnies*, which have provided the cultural and social basis for the nation. If such a core is missing, like in some African nations, the success of this nation is doubtful.⁹⁵ The cultures of the dominant *ethnies* continue to provide the unifying elements of the modern nation without corresponding on a one-to-one basis.⁹⁶ An important factor for the consolidation of states into *ethnies* and nations was inter-state warfare. It mobilised the members of an *ethnie*, created a bond of solidarity between them and produced heroes and heroines and other material for myth making.⁹⁷

Applying Smiths' concept to Thailand, I will attempt to trace back the origins of the elements which contribute to the Thai nation. It is misleading to understand the Thai nation as an inflexible unit. At no time in history did *the* Thai nation exist in a fixed state. The Thai nation was always an ongoing process which has resulted in a fluid nationalist ideology. Lacking the cataclysmic effects of direct colonisation, the participants in this process, either active or passive, had the chance to develop an ideological framework of nation and nationalism without the constraints and forces of an anti-colonial struggle. The elements of Thai society contributed in one way or another ideas, perceptions, visions, beliefs, loyalties and emotions to the creation of the basic features and elements of what we call the Thai nation and nationalism at various stages in history. The result was a highly flexible interpretation of the Thai nation with only a few unchanging cornerstones such as the monarchy and Buddhism.

Although Terwiel warned that it is a mistake to equate certain persons (especially kings and political leaders) with the idea of an ideology or the policies in his/her period⁹⁸, it would be a similar blunder, especially in a hierarchical society like Thailand, not to examine the ideas of the leaders and their impact on the historical development within a period. Leaders, ideally, are of utmost importance for the

⁹⁴ Smith, 1994, p.381. For an alternative ideal type, see Hobsbawm, 1990, p.37.

⁹⁵ Smith, 2000, p.13.

⁹⁶ Smith, Anthony. "History and National Destiny: Responses and Clarifications", *Nations and Nationalism*, 2004, p.197.

⁹⁷ Smith, 2002, p.23.

⁹⁸ Terwiel, Barend. "The Development of Consensus Nationalism in Thailand", Clayton 1991, pp.133-134.

intellectual orientation of policies and sentiments. Therefore, it is justifiable to expand the question ‘when is the nation?’ to include also ‘why, who and what is the nation?’.

I propose that the analysis of the Thai nation throughout its history should follow the Three-phases model of Smith: identification of the ethnic and cultural core (*ethnie*), the pre-modern nation and finally the modern nation. This mirrors the idea that the Thai nation developed over the *longue durée* out of an ethnic core of the Thais. The Thai ruling elite did not invent the ‘nation’ *ex nihilo* after the *Paknam* crisis in 1893.

Competing Nationalisms: Political and Cultural

John Hutchinson proposed that most nationalisms can be categorised either as cultural or political nationalism and it is possible that both of them are in competition with each other.⁹⁹

According to Hutchinson, cultural nationalism as an ideology perceives the nation in organic terms as a spontaneous order and it operates as a movement of communal self-help, throwing up informal agencies in order to ‘re-create’ the nation from the grass roots up.¹⁰⁰ It is therefore not surprising that in normal times, cultural nationalism is only a small-scale movement and to be found in the circle of historical scholars and artists.¹⁰¹ As a political movement, its primary concern is the regeneration of the historical community against the levelling power of the state.¹⁰² During this process, old symbols are to be transformed and modernised. ‘Folk’-elements are revived and become fashionable. There is generally a belief in the existence of an indigenous high civilisation, now fallen into decay by alien materialism.¹⁰³ The heroic integration of a golden age serves the cultural nationalists as guidance; history becomes a propulsive mechanism for future progress.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the homogenizing citizenship ideal of the state, the cultural nationalist demands that its members must cherish the natural

⁹⁹ The terms ‘political’ and ‘cultural’ nationalisms are in use for a long time. An early example can be found in Briffault, Robert. “The Nationalist Craze in Culture”, *Current History*, 1933, p.521. The earliest mention in the context of South East Asia is in Landon, Kenneth. “Nationalism in Southeastern Asia”, *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 1943, p.139.

¹⁰⁰ Hutchinson, John. “Cultural Nationalism, Elite Mobility and Nation-building: Communitarian Politics in Modern Ireland”, *BJS*, 1987, p.497.

¹⁰¹ Hutchinson, 1987, p.482.

¹⁰² Hutchinson, John, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*, London 1985, p.312.

¹⁰³ Hutchinson, 1985, p.38.

¹⁰⁴ Hutchinson, 1985, p.36.

divisions within the nation- sexual, occupational, religious and regional- for the impulse to differentiation is the dynamo of its creativity.¹⁰⁵

Hutchinson defined that “cultural nationalists perceive the nation not as a state but as a distinctive historical community, which continuously evolving, embodies a higher synthesis of the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’. Since a community is a spontaneous order of different groups and individuals, knit by common sentiments, it cannot be constructed like a state from above, but can only be re-animated from below.”¹⁰⁶ Who are the cultural nationalists? Hutchinson identified two groups. The first one, the intellectuals, is the formulator of cultural nationalism. The second group, and more important, is the intelligentsia. The intelligentsia constituted a novel social stratum of knowledge specialists and appeared in Europe since the eighteenth century. Their characteristic is a secular activism, deriving their identity from their ‘technical training’.¹⁰⁷ The intelligentsia, seen by Hutchinson in a broad sense as professionals, developed by the expansion of education by the modernising state and by efforts to induct the young into an official standardised culture based on the requirements of the political centre.¹⁰⁸ The members of the intelligentsia are crucial for the dissemination of the ideas of nationalism.¹⁰⁹

The rising intelligentsia, argued Hutchinson, felt ‘excluded’ by the state and began to search for roots in the community. Political nationalism is seen as ‘unauthentic’. The final switch to cultural nationalism is accomplished by the growing attraction of it as a political option for the intelligentsia. The dominant political nationalism ossifies into a bureaucratic oligarchy, remote from the community it purportedly serves. This increases the feeling of the intelligentsia to be excluded from power and status in the community, not just by the state but also by an oligarchic machine that has lost legitimacy as the national leader. The intelligentsia is then drawn to the dynamic integral vision of cultural nationalism. This vision, concluded

¹⁰⁵ Hutchinson, 1985, p.32.

¹⁰⁶ Hutchinson, 1987, p.486.

¹⁰⁷ Hutchinson, 1987, p.488.

¹⁰⁸ Hutchinson, 1987, p.490.

¹⁰⁹ Hutchinson, 1985, p.391. Intelligentsia is defined by Hutchinson as a stratum that may contain a diversity of social groups (usually professions). These groups are distinguished first by their possession of higher educational or professional qualifications which are recognised by society as endowing them with a special occupational expertise. Important with this definition is the inclusion of groups outside the usual circle of academics, intellectuals or artists.

Hutchinson, offers both a return to roots in the historical community and a modernising alternative to the worn out legislative panaceas of political nationalism.¹¹⁰

Hutchinson proposed as competitor for the cultural nationalism a political nationalism, whose members “perceive the nation in rationalist terms as a homogenous collectivity of educated citizens. They wish for a state representative of the nation which will break with tradition and raise the people to the level of the advanced ‘scientific’ cultures. Although essentially modernist, they appeal to historic ethnic sentiments in an instrumental fashion in order to mobilize religious and rural support for their goal.” Hutchinson argued further that both cultural and political nationalisms are co-existing and their rise and fall are to be viewed as part of an interactive cycle.¹¹¹ Periodically the cultural nationalism can expand into a major ideological movement that challenges both established political nationalist movements and the existing state in order to regenerate the nation on communitarian lines.¹¹²

Crucial is the argument by Hutchinson/Smith that mass nations are not simply forged by elites, but are created through a complex interplay between rival elites.¹¹³ The question is whether a cycle of competing nationalisms can be found in Thailand? This thesis proposes that Thai nationalism was never a fixed ideology and was changing along competing views of the nation within different ruling power groups and the intelligentsia. This thesis, therefore, accepts Hutchinson’s concept as suitable for the case of Thailand.

As this thesis will focus on monarchy and nationalism, it is helpful to briefly introduce two terms, namely *royal* and *monarchical* nationalism, in order to distinguish the different roles monarchs can play in nationalism. In my understanding, royal nationalism is a nationalism where the monarch is the primary definer of the nation but plays a symbolic rather than an independent political role. As the state is the leader in this kind of nationalism, I would categorise royal nationalism as political nationalism. Monarchical nationalism, on the other hand, is a nationalism where the nation is not only tied symbolically to the figure of the king but the king is also the dynamic (sometimes primary) political agent. With its emphasis on cultural traditions such as the

¹¹⁰ Hutchinson, 1987, p.498.

¹¹¹ Hutchinson, 1985, p.426.

¹¹² Hutchinson, 1987, p.482.

¹¹³ Hutchinson/Smith, 2000, p.xxxvi.

traditional role of the king, monarchical nationalism can be regarded as a kind of cultural nationalism.¹¹⁴

Charisma and Barami

Samuel Huntington made a gloomy prediction in 1968: 'the future of the existing traditional monarchies is bleak'. However, he saw a way out for beleaguered kings: "Those monarchs survive who identify themselves with popular nationalism; those monarchs perish who remain more committed to traditional values, class perspectives, and family interests than to national ones."¹¹⁵ Looking at the strong position of the monarchy in Thai nationalism under the current incumbent, King Bhumibol, it is inevitable to call monarchical nationalism 'popular'. Jones described such popularity of a monarch as a 'mysterious identification of king and people which reaches deep into the unconscious mythology that is behind all this complex relationship'.¹¹⁶

Western political thought explains this 'mysterious identification' with the help of the term charisma. Max Weber defined that 'the term *charisma* will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities'.¹¹⁷ Norbu saw an inseparable link between mass mobilisation and charismatic leadership. He stated that the charismatic leader is the medium through which the masses express their aspirations and sentiments at a critical juncture of their history. He argued also that the charismatic leader is a sort of priest who invokes and interprets tradition, as well as a political leader who analyses the common situation faced by the masses and formulates rational solutions to common problems.¹¹⁸ Only when a leader is able to fulfil this requirement, he can hope that the people would follow him as Greenfeld has described in her definition of charisma: "Genuine charisma thus means the ability to internally generate and externally express extreme excitement, an ability which makes one the object of intense attention and

¹¹⁴ The detailed explanation of these two terms can be seen in chapter 4.

¹¹⁵ Huntington, Samuel, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven 1968, p.165 and 191.

¹¹⁶ Jones, Ernest, *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*, London 1951, p.231.

¹¹⁷ Weber, Max, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York 1964, p.358.

¹¹⁸ Norbu, Dawa, *Culture and the Politics of Third World Nationalism*, London 1992, pp.113-114.

unreflective imitation by others”.¹¹⁹ Shils identified another aspect of the charismatic leader when he argued that such a person is ‘the creator of a new order as well as the breaker of routine order’. Such a charismatic person would influence the ‘central value system’, which is the central zone of society.¹²⁰

This thesis proposes that in the monarchical nation, charisma can play an important role in generating the love of the masses to the king and through him to the nation. To apply the concept of charisma to the case of Thailand, it is important to understand the Thai idea of *barami* which shares many characteristics with charisma as it reinforces the effects of the symbol-myth complex of the monarchical nation by combining the individual, religious and institutional dimensions and elevating it to a spiritual level deeply rooted in the beliefs, myth and tradition of Thai culture.

In the present day use, the word *barami* means ‘prestige, influence, grandeur’.¹²¹ To understand the concept of *barami* clearer, it is useful to look at the original meaning of this term which derived from Buddhism. In the Pali language, *pāramī* or *pāramitā* is translated as ‘perfection’. This concept describes the ten principles of ‘perfection’ leading to Buddhahood: almsgiving and liberality (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekhamma*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*virīya*) forbearance (*khantī*), truthfulness (*sacca*), resolution (*adhitthāna*), all-embracing kindness (*mettā*), and equanimity (*uphekkhā*).¹²² According to Buddhist canonical texts, the *Phothisat* [*Bodhisattva*, the one destined for Buddhahood], who was ‘concerned about the welfare of living beings, not tolerating the suffering of beings, wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings, and being impartial and just to all beings so that they may be happy’¹²³, performed these perfections in order to be born as the Buddha in the last life. This would enable him to teach the universal truth to enlightened human beings in order to lessen their suffering in a religious sense (to eventually reach nirvana).

In the Thai case, inscriptional evidence showed that the concept of *barami* was connected to the monarchy in the fourteenth century when a king openly declared that he was the *Phothisat* who practised the *barami* in order to reach Buddhahood.¹²⁴ Politically interpreted, the comparison of the king to the *Phothisat* indicated that the

¹¹⁹ Cited in Lindholm, C., *Charisma*, Oxford 1990, p.26.

¹²⁰ Shils, 1975, p.4 and 129.

¹²¹ So Sethaputra, *New Model Thai-English Dictionary*, Bangkok 1987, p.528.

¹²² Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, New York 1950, p.110.

¹²³ Nyanatiloka, 1950, p.110.

¹²⁴ Thepparatratchasuda, Somdetphra, *Thotsabarami nai phutthasatsana therawat* [Dasapāramī in Theravāda Buddhism], Bangkok 1982, pp.128-129.

king ruled the kingdom with virtue. His political power was therefore reinforced by his religious power. The connection between the *Phothisat* and the king continued until the eighteenth century with the expansion of the meaning. *Barami* now meant not only the principles for becoming Buddha but was also seen as something the monarch had practised in his former lives which enabled him to gain power (being king) in the current life.¹²⁵

In the nineteenth century, the term *barami* gained the present meaning, reflecting the prestige, influence or power associated with a king. In order to achieve *barami*, the king had to follow the Ten Kingly Virtues (*thotsapitratchatham*) to become a great king. Elements described in these ten kingly virtues closely resembled those ten principles to become a Buddha in content:

- 1) giving (*dāna*): To give help to those that need help because they lack certain things.
- 2) self conduct (*sīla*): To refrain from doing evil things which would create enmity.
- 3) giving up (*pariccāga*): To give up something of lesser use for something of greater use, for example giving up wealth or the own life in doing what is right or in performing one's duty.
- 4) straightness (*ājjava*): To be honest with other people and while carrying out one's work and duty.
- 5) gentleness (*maddava*): To speak gently and to be polite without being arrogant.
- 6) perseverance (*tapa*): To have courage to do what should be done and to do one's duty with regularity and without shortcomings.
- 7) non-anger (*akkhoda*): To have a heart full of kindness based on good wishes.
- 8) not causing injury (*avihīṇsa*): Not to cause troubles for other people both directly and indirectly.
- 9) endurance or patience (*khanti*): To have the capacity to endure hardship: cold, hunger, thirst and all other unpleasant and unenjoyable things.

¹²⁵ Thepparatratchasuda, 1982, p.132.

10) not going wrong (*avirodhana*): Not to do what he knows to be wrong. To maintain fairness and not to be biased because of love, hatred, delusion or fear.¹²⁶

When practising the ten kingly virtues, the king will have *barami* and be loved and respected by the people. This implies an active position of the monarch which was mirrored in the various titles which were bestowed upon the king and defined his roles in traditional society. For example, the title of *phrachao phaendin* (lord of the land) meant that his duty was to ensure that the land was protected. The king had to be not only a great warrior but also needed *barami* to gain power to provide protection to his people. This power was reflected in expressions used while addressing the King such as ‘we escape all dangers owing to your Majesty’s *barami*’ and ‘we live happily under the shade of your Majesty’s *barami*’. The king also owned all the land and granted the right to use the land to the people. The king had the duty to provide prosperity to the land as well; a drought or flooding was a sign that he had failed. King Bumibol, for example, took this responsibility seriously as his development projects such as artificial rain-making showed. Another title for the king was *phrachao yuhua* (lord who is the leader). It meant that the king was the head or leader of the people and the country. *Phramahakasat* (great warrior) again emphasised the duty to be a great warrior and to be the leader of the troops. He had to defend the sovereignty and to ensure stability and safety of the country. *Chaochivit* (lord of life) meant that the king had the power to execute or grant amnesty. This implied that the king had the duty to protect the life of people and to preserve the stability of the country.¹²⁷ All these functions could only be successfully fulfilled when the king had enough *barami*.¹²⁸

The concept of *barami* is important in the relationship between the people and the monarch for two reasons. First, the ten kingly virtues promote the benefit and

¹²⁶ Nyanasamvara, Somdetphra. “Religion and the Ten Guiding Principles for a King”, Bangkok 2000, pp.258-265.

¹²⁷ Kanok Wongtra-ngan, *Naeo phraratchadamri dan kanmueang kanpokkhong khong phrabatsomdetphrachao yuhua* [King Bhumibol’s Concept of Politics and Government], Bangkok 1988, pp.22-23. With the introduction of a constitutional system, the role of the monarchy was legally defined as the Head of State, the Grand Supreme Commander of the armed forces and the patron of all religions. See Chetsada Pornchaiya, *Phraratchamnath khong phramahakasat khong prathet thai kap phrathet angkrit* [The Right of the Kings of Thailand and Great Britain], Bangkok 2003, pp.168-172.

¹²⁸ In practical terms, ‘success’ of a monarch depended very much on the nobles who not only ran the administration and royal trading activities but also controlled directly most of the population necessary for campaigns such as warfare or public works. The nobility, however, was not a closed group. Even foreigners were able to join the nobility when appointed by the king. See Baker, Chris/Pasuk Phongphaichit, *A History of Thailand*, Cambridge 2005, pp.14-19.

happiness of the people. Just like the *Phothisat* wanted to reach Buddhahood to help alleviate the spiritual suffering of humans, the monarch aims to be a Great King in order to help alleviate the suffering of human beings in the secular realm. Second, the people profit from the protection of the king not only in times of crisis. He provides 'the cooling shade' necessary for a stable and peaceful society. In times of crisis or rapid change, the people can rely on the king as an emotional re-assurance and problem solver. The monarch himself gains benefit from following the ten kingly virtues for it enhances his legitimation. The fact that *barami* was originally connected to *Phothisat* and then later transferred to the king provided sacredness for the monarchical owner which was even more enhanced by the adaptation of ceremonies of the *thewaracha* cult during the Ayutthaya period.¹²⁹ The king's *barami* makes him a 'Great King' which gives a constitutional monarch influence beyond his constitutional limits.

Timeframe of the thesis

Analysing the emergence and development of the Thai nation and nationalism requires naturally a wide timeframe where historical, political, economical, social and cultural events are to be considered. Although the origin of the Thai nation cannot be dated precisely, this thesis will look into its various roots in history. It will begin with the most important core elements of the modern Thai nation, starting in the thirteenth century. The end of the study lies in the years 2000/2001. The election of Thaksin Shinawatra for Prime Minister in January 2001 initiated a new phase of Thai nationalism. For the first time in modern Thai history, members of the business elite took direct control of the state. With their pragmatic attitude to support economic development, nationalism lost many of its political functions and was increasingly seen as an instrument to generate economic growth, for example by using national symbols such as the national flag to promote products. This process of a new interpretation of the Thai nation as an economic powerhouse is still ongoing. It must, therefore, remain subject of another analysis in the future.

In order to cover such a long period of time, a variety of sources had to be consulted. My empirical data mainly came from literary works and public speeches but also from the works of Thai academics. Most of this data has never been used in a western language study and grants a new perspective on the Thai nation and

¹²⁹ For details, see chapter 2.

nationalism. However, as this thesis covers a period of several centuries, I was not able to study historical primary sources such as palm-leaf inscriptions but had to rely on published data. Due to the fact that the role of monarchy is rather neglected in nationalism studies, I propose a new concept to theoretically explain the function of the Thai monarchy in the nation. The idea of competing monarchical, statist and royal nationalisms could hopefully be employed in other case studies as well.

Last but not least, this thesis is using the terms 'Tai', 'Thai' and 'Siam'. Following conventional usage, the term 'Tai' refers to the wider ethnic group in an anthropological and linguistic sense, otherwise 'Thai' stands as general term for parts of that group living in the area of modern-day Thailand. The Thais did not use the term 'Siam' but called themselves 'Thai'. 'Siam' was first mentioned in an epigraphy of the Cham in the 11th century and in engravings at Angkor Wat (12th century). The term was 're-introduced' by Western travellers during the Ayutthaya period and made 'official' by King Mongkut in the nineteenth century. 'Siam' was mostly used in communication with foreigners and became interchangeable with 'Thai' similar to 'English' and 'British' (in the eyes of the English). The official name of the country was changed from 'Siam' to 'Thailand' in 1939.¹³⁰

To sum up, the thesis will present an overview of the origin and emergence of the Thai nation and nationalism. It will focus on the interpretation of that nation by the monarchy which was able to dominate other visions of the nation for extended periods of time. The monarchy is leading, shaping and embodying this *King's Nation*. To understand the connection between monarchy and nation, it is necessary to start with a look into the roots of the Thai nation.

¹³⁰ Charnvit Kaset Siri. "What's in a Nation's Name?", *The Nation*, 21 February 2000, p.C1.

Chapter 2

Tracking the Roots: The Pre-modern Thai Nation

This chapter has two objectives. First, it discusses the two early stages of Smith's model in the emergence of a nation, *ethnie* and pre-modern nation. Second, it identifies theoretical elements regarding kingship that are central for the understanding of the monarchical nation and nationalism in later periods. Contrary to the revisionist school's view, I propose that there is evidence of existing (certainly among the elites) strong trans-ethnic attachments to the Thai monarchy which provided building blocks for the later development of the nation. This chapter, therefore, proposes that a Thai *ethnie* gradually developed from the thirteenth until the sixteenth century within the two political units of Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya. Both kingdoms represented cultural cores for the Thai nation. The pre-modern nation of late Ayutthaya progressed slowly into another cultural core from the sixteenth century onwards.

2.1. Early Aspects

Most nationalisms address a myth of origin for the respective *ethnie* or nation. Although some Thai nationalists referred to the origin of the Thais, it cannot be regarded as a dominant or even important feature in Thai nationalism throughout the periods. This anomaly was caused by the fact that despite an intensive academic debate, no proven theory about the origins of the Thais could be established. The basic question is whether the Thais migrated into or always had lived in that area what we now call Thailand.¹ For this thesis, this debate is left out because it is not a significant theme for Thai nationalism itself. As a starting point, this thesis accepts the assumption that Tai/Thai settlements existed probably as early as the seventh but most likely in the ninth century.² Two noticeable elements influenced the future development of the Tai tribe in this area from that time on. First, the Thai groups did not occupy empty space but had to

¹ For the discussions about the origin of the Tais/Thais, see Charnvit Kasetsiri, *The Rise of Ayudhya*, Kuala Lumpur 1976; Winai Pongsripian. "Nan-Chao and the Birth of Sukhothai: Problems of the Twentieth-Century Thai Perception of the Past", *Silpakorn University Journal*, 1990; Baker, Chris. "From Yue to Tai", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 90, 2002 and Paisal Srucharatchanya. "Tangled Roots of Nation Stir Domestic Debate", *FEER*, 18 February 1988, p.51.

² Charnvit, 1976, p.34.

share their territory with other ethnic groups, most importantly the Mons³ and the Khmer whose Kingdom of Angkor was by far the most dominant force during that period.⁴ Contact with other cultures was therefore not uncommon. Second, the individual Thai groups were only loosely connected with each other due to inaccessibility of many areas. This was a familiar feature of early South East Asia (with the exemption of a few highly developed kingdoms such as Angkor) and was described by Kulke as a system of ‘multiplicity of centres’.⁵

This structure in connection with poor communication links affected the development of a common culture resulting in a lack of a central cultural identity. The relative isolation of political centres led to the existence of a multiplicity of cultural centres as well. In my opinion, some of these cultural centres, to be called *cultural cores* in this thesis, provided the basic elements for the later Thai nation. Although there had been a number of cultural centres during a long period of history, this chapter will focus only on two centres, namely Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. This choice is based on two reasons: First, linguistically, the writing system existing in the area of Sukhothai merged with the writing system of the later kingdom of Ayutthaya in the 15th century. Out of this merger, the modern Thai language of the Thai nation-state developed. Although other cultural centres such as Lanna and Lan Chang based their writing system on the Sukhothai model as well, they developed their own distinctive scripts, for example the latter one evolved into Lao.⁶ This indicates different cultural identities which had only minor influences on the main culture of the Thai nation. The second reason for this choice is that this thesis attempts to explain the history of the Thai nation and nationalism. Since the beginning of a linear understanding of Thai history, either the Kingdom of Sukhothai or the Kingdom of Ayutthaya are commonly perceived as the start of Thai history and culture. This plays an important role in the indigenous

³ The Mon kingdoms of Dvaravati and Haripunjaya were among the top cultural and political centres in mainland South East Asia in the first millennium. See Briggs, Laurence. “Dvaravati, the Most Ancient Kingdom of Siam”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 65, 1945, pp.101-104 and Phasook Indrawooth. “Haripunjaya: The Early Buddhist Centre in Northern Thailand”, Hull 1994, pp.117-124. About pre-historic cultures see Higham, Charles/Rachanie Thosarat, *Prehistoric Thailand- From Early Settlement to Sukhothai*, London 1998.

⁴ The oldest known Khmer structure in Thailand is from the 7th century. Settlements such as Phimai and Lopburi (which controlled the entire Chaopraya river valley from the 11th until the early 13th century) were major centres of the polity of Angkor with direct road links to the capital. Talbott, Sarah/Chutima Janthed. “Northeast Thailand Before Angkor: Evidence From Archaeological Excavation at the Prasat Hin Phimai”, *Asian Perspectives*, 2001, pp.179-191.

⁵ Kulke, Hermann, *Kings and Cults*, New Delhi 2001, p.265.

⁶ Suchit Wongthet, *Akson thai ma chak nai* [Where Did the Thai Script Come From?], Bangkok 2005, p.106.

interpretation of Thai nationalism, therefore, this chapter follows suit and starts to analyse the *ethnie* of the Thai with Sukhothai (without the implication of a straight and linear development towards the modern Thai nation).

2.2. *The First Cultural Core: the Kingdom of Sukhothai (ca. 1220- 16th Century)*

This thesis proposes to see the Kingdom of Sukhothai as a first major consolidation of power of an ethnic group and the beginning of a common culture of the Thais. It became the first political and cultural centre of what Smith called an *ethnie*.

Thais took control of Sukhothai, a Khmer city in the lower Northern part of modern-day Thailand, in the 1220s.⁷ While its peak political power lasted only until the mid-fourteenth century, the city continued to play an important role in Thai affairs for centuries. What made this kingdom ‘succeed’ in contrast to other Thai political entities in terms of its long lasting effects on the Thai nation? It was the rule of one man who acted as a catalyst to transform a ‘normal’ kingdom into the dominant Thai kingdom of its time. The reign of the warrior-king Ramkhamhaeng (r.1279-1298) was crucial in many regards. On the political front, he was able to integrate other lords (mostly Mon and Thai) into a single royal elite by offering ‘a kind of Thai brotherhood to subordinate opponents’, in which he saw himself as ‘father lord’ (*phokhun*).⁸ The King himself advertised this image in a famous inscription of 1292.⁹ He depicted his rule as just, benevolent and himself as accessible and beloved by the people.¹⁰ His most important move was this connection between kingship and Buddhism. From then on, Buddhism (with its emphasis on moral achievement not birth rights) legitimised the king whose

⁷ Coedès, George, *The Indianised States of Southeast Asia*, Honolulu 1968, pp.191-219. In another article, Coedès described the take-over as ‘a coup de force, d’inspiration ‘nationaliste’, dirigée contre le ‘resident’ khmèr qui représentait l’autorité de la Cour d’Angkor’. Coedès, George. “L’Art Siamois De L’Époque De Sukhodaya (XIIème-XIVème Siecles)”, *Arts Asiatiques*, 1954, p.293. For a theoretical discussion about state formation in early South East Asia see Kulke, Hermann. “The Early and Imperial Kingdom in Southeast Asian History”, Singapore 1986, pp.5-14.

⁸ O’Connor, Richard. “Sukhothai: Rule, Religion and Elite Rivalry”, Bangkok 1991, pp.277-289.

⁹ The UNESCO declared the inscription as World Cultural Heritage in 2003. A number of academics doubted the authenticity of the stone and saw it as an invention from the nineteenth century. See for this discussion Chamberlain, James (ed), *The Ram Khamhaeng Controversy: Collected Papers*, Bangkok 1991 and Kaye, Lincoln. “Rock of Ages, Set us Free”, *FEER*, 8 November 1990, p.36. However, like the majority of historians, I base this chapter on the assumption that the inscription is authentic.

¹⁰ Wyatt, David, *Thailand- A Short History*, Bangkok 1984, p.43.

characteristic of being a good or great king depended on being a good Buddhist and on his support of Buddhism (practising *dharma*¹¹).

On the cultural front, Ramkhamhaeng's extraordinary power and resources created an environment ideal for the development of a distinguished culture of Sukhothai. It should be noted beforehand that one outstanding feature of South East Asia is the process of 'selective adaptation'.¹² This process means that foreign cultural elements (in the case of the Thais in Sukhothai mainly from India, from the Mon and the Khmer) are accepted and merged into a new cultural amalgam. It was the Thais' mastering of this ability to absorb seemingly beneficial elements of foreign cultures that contributed to their fast rise to one of the most pre-eminent peoples in mainland South East Asia. Selective adaptation did not weaken Thai culture but, on the contrary, strengthened it.¹³ In the reign of Ramkhamhaeng, two main foreign elements were adapted in such a way and turned out to be crucial for the advance of the Thai *ethnie*. One was the connection between Buddhism and kingship, the other one was the introduction of a Thai script, described by Coedès as an 'improvement' of an existing script which was itself an adaptation of Khmer cursive writing.¹⁴ Both elements, Buddhism and Thai script, eventually gave birth to one of the earliest works of Thai literature in the fourteenth century.

Written by King Li-Thai in 1345 with 33 books of the Buddhist Pali Canon as its main sources, *Traiphum Phraruang* (The Three Worlds of Phra Ruang) represents the first systematic construction of a Buddhist cosmology in Thai. The *Traiphum* described the conditions and characteristics of all beings which inhabit the various realms of the Buddhist universe. For this thesis, it is important to see the *Traiphum* from two angles: First, following Pollock's argument that literature addresses, sometimes calls into being, a particular socio-textual community¹⁵, there is no doubt that with a Thai language literature an important element of a Thai *ethnie* came into existence. Second, the *Traiphum* had not a religious role alone but was intended by its author "to confirm the

¹¹ As an exception to the transliteration rules, this thesis uses *dharma* instead of *thamma* for a better understanding.

¹² Dahm, Bernhard. "The Role of Tradition in Historical Developments in Southeast Asia", *Archipel* 57, 1999, p.21. See also Wolters, O.W., *History, Culture, And Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, Singapore 1999, p.209.

¹³ Mulder pointed out that 'behind all the forms that are borrowed and added to the existing we find uniquely Thai meaning'. Mulder, Niels. "Modern Times, Thai Culture, and Development", *JSSR*, 1979, p.100.

¹⁴ Coedès, 1968, p.197.

¹⁵ Pollock, Sheldon. "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular", *JAS*, 1998, p.9.

meaningfulness of karmically calculated human lives within a given multi-tiered universe. Human beings should lead a moral life and by doing so reap the appropriate heavenly rewards.”¹⁶ Besides being a guideline for a moral life, Sombat/Chai-anan pointed out that Li-Thai aimed to instrumentalise Buddhism as a political tool.¹⁷ When considering the circumstances of Li-Thai at the time of writing, this argument can be underlined. An uncle who claimed the throne for himself sent Li-Thai, a grandson of Ramkhamhaeng, to Sri Satchanalai. The fact that he composed the *Traiphum* in ‘exile’ and one important point of the text described the ideal characteristics of a monarch could be interpreted as a demonstration of Li-Thai’s view of his own qualifications and qualities to be king.

The *Traiphum* institutionalised the bond between Buddhism and kingship. The texts included three concepts explaining the ideal Buddhist monarch which are crucial for the understanding of traditional kingship in Thailand and therefore for this study of Thai nation and nationalism.

First, the concept of the ‘Great Elect’ which portrays the origin of the king. In Buddhism, the story goes that the world was in a chaotic state because the good deeds from a previous world cycle, the Golden Age, were lost. In order to put an end to crime and anarchy, the beings got together to select a king from among their ranks to rule over them and maintain order. He was named King Mahasammata [*Maha-great; sammata-elect*]. His election, however, was not just an appointment of a leader. Mahasammata was chosen because he was a virtuous man, an embodiment of *dharma* and destined to become Buddha (*Phothisat*). This process asserts that Buddhist kingship was based on the theory of a social contract. Li-Thai used this episode in the *Traiphum* to explain the origin of the king in relation to the origin of human beings. He described that deities came down to this world to eat fragrant earth. By losing their sacredness because of greed and passion, they turned into human beings with immoral behaviour who quarrel with each other:

“Because the people did not care to perform meritorious and virtuous deeds, or to behave and conduct themselves properly, the nutritive essence of the earth, that they had been eating regularly, sank down into the earth.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Swearer, Donald. “Centre and Periphery: Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand”, London 1999, p.196.

¹⁷ Sombat Chanthonwong/Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Khvamkhit thang kanmueang thai* [Thai Political Thoughts], Bangkok 1980, p.59.

¹⁸ King Li-Thai, *Traibhumikatha- The Story of the Three Planes of Existence*, Bangkok Reprint 1987, p.437. The ‘myth of origin’ is discussed in Prakong Nimmanhemin. “Khwapenma khong phupokhrong:

The human beings came together and consulted each other on how to establish order. From the following paragraph we can interpret that society must have a leader whose duty is to stop unrest:

“We are desolate...We ought to appoint a person to be our lord and leader. Whenever any of our acts are in question in any way, let such a man judge and determine and enforce what is wrong and what is right for us; let him divide up the land for us, and we will give him more fields than we ourselves have.”¹⁹

After this meeting, the human beings went to ask the *Phothisat* to be their leader:

“The *Phothisat* King must be male. The people raise up such a man to be their lord because they see him to be more handsome than other people. He has more wisdom than other people; he is kinder than other people; he is more honest, more straightforward and more concerned with doing merit than other people.”²⁰

The ‘Great Elect’ concept described not only the legitimation of the king as being chosen from the people but also the ideal characteristics of a king.

Second, the concept of the universal, wheel turning monarch (*chakravathin*) gives an example of a Great King. He is part of the Golden Age because his presence is instrumental in maintaining the state of paradise. The king rules with *dharma* and not with the sword. He advances the course of Buddhism and possesses five strengths: physical and mental strength, strength of officials, strength of nobility and strength of wisdom. As a result, poverty, ill-will, violence and wrong-doings are all absent from the kingdom. The *Traiphum* described the characteristics, qualities and activities of a Universal King in detail. In the centre were the personal qualities of a Universal King who had to build up enough merit over previous lives to be able to claim the position. This ensured on the one hand an unquestionable legitimation as soon as the king was on the throne; on the other hand it connected kingship inseparable with Buddhism:

“Those who have performed meritorious deeds in their previous lives...and those who follow the moral precepts, and practice the meditation on loving kindness, when they die, they are usually reborn in heaven. Sometimes, however, they are reborn as great lords and nobles of the human domain, with dignity and honour. They conquer the entire universe. When they speak words or utter commands they do it in accordance

Chak tamnan thai-tai thing traiphum phraruang [The Genesis of Rulers: From Thai-Tai Myths to Traiphumphraruang], *Warasanphasalaewannakhadithai*, 2000, pp.63-77.

¹⁹ King Li-Thai, Reprint 1987, p.441.

²⁰ King Li-Thai, Reprint 1987, p.443.

with the *dharma*. Such a person is entitled to be called a Universal King, the *Cakravartiraja* [*chakravathin*].”²¹

An important part of the activities of the Universal King was the ‘Grand Conquest’. The Universal King had the duty to take control over all lesser kingdoms in order to spread the reach of the *dharma* and to make the people happy. This part of the *Traiphum* added a political dimension to the Universal King who had to have political powers in addition of being a king full of *dharma*. It also legitimised an expansionist policy by a king and provided the justification for his demand of loyalty from other kings to his person. He was in a position to summon kings and chiefs who themselves had the duty to inform their peoples about the supremacy of the Universal King:

“Then the grand minister commanded the chiefs of all the small states to take the ceremonial gongs...and go among their people and deliver the message, thus, ‘...Our Lord is now the *Mahaparamacakravatradhiraja*, the great Universal King of Kings, the One Who Set the Wheel Turning, and who can conquer the Four Continents...”²²

Then the kings and chiefs followed the Universal King on his conquest through all continents and kingdoms. The greatness of the Universal King provided prosperity and peace in the land:

“As they journeyed through the sky, the Supreme Wheel went foremost. Next came the Universal King, and he was followed by his army and the populous. Along both sides of the way they took were trees, and all were laden with fruit and flowers [image of prosperity]. Who so wished to taste the fruit or pick the flowers could reach out and take what they pleased. If they wished for shade [image of stability and peace], they could be under a tree in an instant.”²³

The power of the Universal King enabled him to conquer without the use of arms:

“The many princes and lords...not one of them...could raise arms against the Universal King. They felt only the love towards him...They made their obeisance to the King and vowed their loyalty to him thus, “...From this day on you are our overlord and we thy servants...Our land and our people are yours to do as you please.”²⁴

The Universal King showed his graciousness and explained the duties of a righteous king which included the practising of the ten kingly virtues and an equal love for all subjects:

²¹ King Li-Thai, 1987, p.159.

²² King Li-Thai, 1987, p.173.

²³ King Li-Thai, 1987, p.175.

²⁴ King Li-Thai, 1987, pp.177-179.

“...The Universal King is righteous and just. Be steadfast in the Ten Principles of Kingship. Love thy lords, thy ministers, thy people. Love all equally. Never favour one over the other...Be always mindful of goodness and merit, and be fearful and ashamed of evil.”²⁵

The third important concept in the *Traiphum* is the connection between the *dharma* of the king and its effect on the land and the people. When the king practices *dharma* (for example by following the ten kingly virtues), then the land will progress and prosper and the people will feel happiness. However, when the king has no *dharma*, then the land will experience a crisis and the reign of the monarch will be short. Buddha supposedly said: “A righteous ruler is one who honours, reveres, esteems and relies only on righteousness. With righteousness as his standard, as his banner, as his power and sovereignty of governing, he righteously works for his political principles and policy... watching over and protecting the kingdom...he does so with regard to the scholars, the army, the businessmen, the householders, town and country folk, the beasts and birds alike.”²⁶ For the righteous king, *dharma* as the basis of his rule includes love for all his people independent of their status. He must actively practice *dharma* to fulfil his duty and is rewarded with a long reign. A king without *dharma*, however, will not rule for long for his world will fall apart:

“By the grace and merit of that good lord, the riches and wealth of the land will become plentiful. The rain will fall in season and to the proper amount, neither too much nor too little... However, if any lord reigns not in righteousness, the celestial *deva* [deity] will cause such calamity to the seasons that the crops will be spoilt by drought and rainfall. Not even the sun and the wind or the rain and the moon or the stars will observe their proper courses, for the lord did not abide in the *dharma*.”²⁷

Following the concepts of the universal monarch and the connection between the *dharma* of the king and the fortune of the land, King Li-Thai practised the idea of *dharmaracha* (righteous king) after ascending the throne. He made this clear from the outset by adopting the official name King *Maha* [the Great] *Dharmaracha* Li-thai. Kobkua explained that the *dharmaracha* is an ideal king “who rules by the *dharma*/merit or virtue in accordance with the described precepts of Buddhist kingship. As such, he is the chief patron and protector of the Buddhist faith.”²⁸ Li-Thai followed this idea, for example, by ordaining as a monk and by composing Buddhist literature.

²⁵ King Li-Thai, 1987, pp.179-181.

²⁶ Cited in Siddhi, Indr. “The King in Buddhist Tradition”, Bangkok 1981, p.47.

²⁷ King Li-Thai, 1987, p.189. See also Sombat/Chai-anan, 1980, pp.64 and 70.

²⁸ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, London 2003, p.21.

The concept of the *dharmaracha* became central for the Thai kingship. By connecting the condition of the kingdom with the morality of the ruler and the ruled, the monarch was, at least theoretically, directly connected with his subjects. It was advantageous for the king that Theravada Buddhism constructed kingship in the image of Buddhahood with power as the key denominator. Buddha himself was seen as the consecrator of the land. His physical presence, both with miraculous visits and material representations such as relics, transformed the country into a 'holy land'. Accordingly, an enshrined relic of him in a stupa at the centre of the capital city functioned as a magical centre or *axis mundi* for the kingdom.²⁹

The *Traiphum* did not only institutionalise the connection between Buddhism and the monarchy but also represented a milestone in the development of the Thai *ethnie*. The *Traiphum* demonstrated that there was, at least within the ruling elites, an awareness of 'shared myths of origin, memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs'. How much of this awareness had the subjects in the kingdom of Sukhothai? Were they aware of a common culture, of the meaning of myths and symbols? How common was Thai as a language? Historical sources give not much information about the life and thoughts of commoners and any discussion must be based on assumptions. It is likely that a 'Sukhothai' identity was promoted and reinforced by constant warfare with neighbours such as Ayutthaya or the weakening Angkor empire. Economically, the use of Sukhothai's very own currency (cowrie shells and bullet coins) helped to bring this identity to the awareness of the inhabitants, too.³⁰ However, the most obvious identity markers must have been the transformation of the city of Sukhothai from a mere Khmer-controlled settlement to a distinctively Thai religio-royal centre, especially in regard to art and architecture.³¹ The original city plan was derived from the formal layout of Khmer cities of Angkor, an inner city surrounded by three concentric earth ramparts separated by moats. The Sukhothai Inscription No 2, written shortly before Sukhothai became an independent kingdom, reported that the ruler of the city decided to build stupas which showed his acceptance of Theravada Buddhism.³²

²⁹ Originally, temples were built on sacred sites like mountains. Swearer, Donald, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, Albany 1995, pp.92-94 and Kulke, 2001, pp.286-287.

³⁰ Wicks, Robert, *Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia*, Ithaca 1992, p.182. Law texts in the 14th century calculated fines in cowries. Wicks commented: "The use of the cowry as a measure of value and medium of exchange within Thailand was quite possibly a Thai innovation." It should be noted that coins were extensively used in the Mon kingdoms since the 7th century.

³¹ See Swearer, 1995, p.88.

³² Inscription quoted in Suchit Wongthet, *Krung sukhothai ma chak nai* [Where Did Sukhothai Come From?], Bangkok 2005, p.75.

This can be interpreted as an indicator of a distinguished ethnic awareness since the Khmer followed Mahayana Buddhism which does not know the practice of constructing stupas. Later on, the city centre, the *manansilupatra*, evolved from an altar, to a stepped pyramid where the king granted audiences and to a slender lotus bud tower enshrining a Buddha relic.³³ It became the biggest temple, *Wat Mahathat*, with the stupa as the symbolic and ceremonial centre of the kingdom.³⁴

Following the ideal of the Universal King, King Li-Thai attempted to expand the control of Sukhothai over other cities with the help of Buddhism. This included the construction of lotus shaped stupas in outlying centres as tangible signs of the spiritual links binding capital, province and vassal states. He also sought to unite the kingdom by distributing or discovering Buddha images, relics and Buddha footprints. His territorial rights were further legitimated when Li-Thai travelled in the country. He was 'accompanied' by a giant wheel (*chakra*) and a Buddha image, similar to the Universal King in the *Traiphum*. This, stated Swearer, reinforced his claims over the network of states beyond the capital. Swearer commented that the king 'created a ritual unity joined together by a cult of sacred relics, images, footprints and monks'.³⁵ Religion was without doubt a unifying force.

The identity creating symbolism of all of these events, scripts, buildings etc. were embedded in a long process. Although an ethnic identity existed at the beginning of the kingdom, a distinguished 'Thai' cultural identity in a modern sense did not. This can be demonstrated by the religious beliefs which, as Lieberman argued, were at the beginning a mix of animism, folk brahmanism, court brahmanism, and Pali-language Buddhism with a rather heavy tilt towards animism.³⁶ Under the guidance of the monarchs, however, Buddhism acquired the dominant position during the following century. It is noteworthy that Sukhothai developed a local tradition of the earlier Singhalese Buddhism, while one of its biggest Thai neighbours, Chiang Mai, kept the Singhalese traditions.³⁷

³³ The lotus flower is one of the most common symbols in Thai art. It is said that Buddha walked as soon as he was born and that in his first seven footsteps a lotus flower appeared. The lotus is also a symbol of wisdom. Pinkerton, Ashley. "Symbolism in Thai Religious Art", *Sawaddi*, 1967, p.21.

³⁴ The different styles of stupas built in Sukhothai reflected the process of a developing, distinctive culture, too. Subhatradis Diskul. "Buddhist Art in Thailand", Bangkok 1957, p.30.

³⁵ Swearer, 1995, p.88.

³⁶ Liebermann, Victor, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830*, Cambridge 2003, p.259. Pali is the language of Buddhism. Until today, Buddhist scripts and chants are in Pali.

³⁷ Grave, Peter. "Beyond the Mandala: Buddhist Landscapes and Upland-Lowland Interaction in Northwest-Thailand, AD 1200-1650", *World Archaeology*, 1995, p.247.

To sum up, this thesis suggests there are arguments for categorising the kingdom of Sukhothai as an *ethnie* in the period between the thirteenth and fourteenth century. It fulfilled Smith's definition by having a named community of shared origin myths, memories, a common culture and a territory (albeit small). It was, however, not a pre-modern nation because of the lack of an historic territory. Despite the claims of its ruling elite regarding their far-reaching influence, Sukhothai had only a very limited reach beyond its close vicinity. Although alliances and a feeling of solidarity between the different Thai groups existed, it would be wrong to talk about a common Thai identity in the area of modern-day Thailand.³⁸ The lack of a consistently connected territory resulted in a patchwork of Thai controlled towns (*mueang*) and regions. The land had to be shared with other *ethnies* such as the Mon and the Khmer.

The kingdom of Sukhothai is nevertheless important for its role as cultural core of the later Thai nation. The emerging distinctive culture became one of the most important sources of myths, symbols and traditions for later centuries. It laid the foundation for cultural patterns and behaviour which can be found throughout many periods of Thai history: the readily integration of others groups, selective adaptation of foreign culture and charismatic, benevolent father-like leadership. Furthermore, the role of the king became defined by following elements: the king is elected by the people, he is a *Phothisat*, he is a righteous and virtuous person who practices *dharma* (*dharmaracha*), he has the duty to provide stability, peace and prosperity. It is important to understand the role of both, the cultural patterns (thought, belief and behaviour) and the myths, symbols and traditions, as basis for future Thai societies and the nation. The period of Sukhothai is best summarised by a comment of Coedès: "At Sukhothai, between 1250 and 1350, the Siamese were able to develop their own characteristic civilisation, institutions and art."³⁹

2.3. *The Second Cultural Core: The Early Kingdom of Ayutthaya (14th-15th Century)*

The Kingdom of Sukhothai was an outstanding political and cultural entity, however, it was not the only evolving kingdom of the Thais. Several power centres competed with each other and tried to gain the influence over weaker Thai and non-Thai

³⁸ Constant rebellions against stronger kingdoms weakened the Thai altogether. See Griswold, A./Prasert Na Nagara "A Fifteenth-Century Siamese Historical Poem", Ithaca 1976, p.131.

³⁹ Coedès, 1968, p.222.

chiefdoms.⁴⁰ Cities such as Chiang Mai, Lopburi, and Ayutthaya developed their own political and cultural identity, representing a true system of ‘multiplicity of centres’. Sukhothai gradually lost its dominant position to Ayutthaya in the fourteenth century but existed on as a dependent state.⁴¹ The Kingdom of Ayutthaya became one of the most powerful kingdoms in South East Asia and managed to hold on to its position for more than four centuries. Its ‘secret’ lay mainly within two factors. First, it was a prime example of the ability of the Thais to adapt foreign elements for their benefit and develop it together with indigenous elements into a world-view which was easy to understand for the people and stabilised the system (especially in times of intensive infighting within the nobility). Second, it was economically propelled by a thriving trade with China right from its beginning in the fourteenth century.⁴²

The picture of early Ayutthaya commonly painted in the academic literature is that of a kingdom culturally influenced predominantly by the Khmer despite being ruled by Thais. The ruling elite in early Ayutthaya borrowed heavily from the Angkor empire: its political organisation, many religious beliefs, the material civilisation, the system of writing and the arts.⁴³ However, it would be wrong to interpret this ‘Khmer-ised’ society as a cultural colony of its neighbour.⁴⁴ Rather through the process of selective adaptation, the early Kingdom of Ayutthaya was first and foremost an integral part in the evolution of the Thai *ethnie* and another cultural core for the Thai nation.

This point can be demonstrated in the case of its interpretation of kingship. It is commonly accepted that early Ayutthaya emphasised the concept of the god-king (*thewaracha*). According to Mabbett, the Hindu-inspired cult of the *thewaracha* originated in Angkor and resulted there in a sacred position of the king who was seen to be united with Shiva in the *linga*, the phallic symbol of the god. He was the ‘fixed image’ of the god on earth and the ‘lord of the earth’. The *thewaracha* was the bond at

⁴⁰ See Griswold/Prasert, 1976, p.131. The authors emphasised that any change of power was never a clear-cut succession like in the official historiography depicted.

⁴¹ See Srisak Wanliphodom, *Sayamprathet phumlang khong prathet thai tangtae yuk duekdamban chon thueng samai krungsriayutthaya ratcha-anachaksayam* [Siam: Thailand’s Historical Background from Prehistoric Times to Ayutthaya], Bangkok 1991, p.261.

⁴² About the trade see Ishii, Yoneo. “Some Aspects of the 15th Century Ayudhyan Port-Polity As Seen From a Ryukyuan Source”, *South East Asia Research*, 1994, p.57.

⁴³ Coedès, 1968, p.222, Subhatradis, 1957, p.34 and Condominas, Georges, *From Lawa to Mon, From Saa’ to Thai*, Canberra 1990, p.31 (FN 3).

⁴⁴ Lieberman argued that the leaders of Ayutthaya and Phnom Penh participated in a hybrid culture and regarded themselves as heirs to Angkor’s ‘classical brilliance’ in 1450. Vickery proposed that Ayutthaya represented right from the beginning a Khmer kingdom. Lieberman, 2003, pp.245-246 and Vickery, Michael. “The Constitution of Ayutthaya- An Interpretation into the Three Seals Code”, Bangkok 1996, p.142.

the centre of the kingdom.⁴⁵ The Thai historian Chit Bhumisak emphasised the fact that another form of the *thewaracha* cult which worshiped Vishnu also existed. Angkor in the twelfth century saw an erection of a statue of Vishnu which was named after the king. After his death, the king's bones were buried underneath and a ceremony was conducted to invite the soul of the king to rest inside the statue.⁴⁶

It was this connection of the king with Vishnu which was accepted by the Thais regarding the concept of *thewaracha*. Together with this concept came the cultural system surrounding the cult which included rituals, ceremonies and sacred texts. This system aimed to lend sacredness to the king both as the person and the institution. However, the Thais did not just copy the Angkorian model but adapted it to indigenous ideas. Among the *thewaracha* elements used by the Thais such as the construction of the royal palace, the coronation ceremony, the royal language etc., the best example of selective adaptation by the Thais can be seen in the annual ceremony of the 'oath of allegiance' where officials swore loyalty to the king. During the ceremony, a poem, *Ongkanchaengnam*, written in the reign of King Ramathibodi (r.1351-1369), was recited by a Brahmin. In the eulogy to the three Gods at the beginning of the poem, Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma were addressed by Thai names instead of their Sanskrit names. According to Chit, the vocabulary used in *Ongkanchaengnam* was mostly Old Thai which indicated that Ramathibodi only adjusted the pre-Ayutthayan curse in this Khmer style ceremony.⁴⁷ One part of the poem describes how the great fire destroyed the universe and Brahma recreated the lost worlds. The fresh earth attracted deities to come down to eat. They finally became humans who elected the most powerful as ruler 'who is the beloved king of the people' with the title of *phrachaophaendin* (lord of the land) and the name of *sammaturachachao* ('appointed by the masses', or 'the Great Elect').⁴⁸ Like the *Traiphum* of Sukhothai, this poem was based on the same Buddhist text (*akkhanyasuth*). The most obvious difference between Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya was the fact that the elected ruler was not a *Phothisat* but 'the most powerful', emphasising the importance of power in the understanding of kingship.

⁴⁵ For a theoretical discussion of the *thewaracha* cult see Mabbett, I. "Devaraja", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 1969, pp.204-208; Nidhi Aeusrivongse. "The Devaraja Cult and Khmer Kingship at Angkor", *Ann Arbor* 1976, pp.107-140; Hocart, Arthur, *Kingship*, London 1927, p.10 and Geertz, Clifford. "Introduction", Yale 1983, p.2.

⁴⁶ Chit Bhumisak, *Ongkanchaengnam* [Ongkanchaengnam], Bangkok 1981, p.12.

⁴⁷ Chit, 1981, pp.36-40.

⁴⁸ Ratchabanditthayasathan, *Photchananukrom sap wannakhadithai samai ayutthaya lilit ongkanchaengnam* [Dictionary of Thai Literature of the Ayutthaya Period – Lilit Ongkanchaengnam], Bangkok 2002, pp.7-8.

The concept of *thewaracha* was dominant in early Ayutthaya. This was expressed in the name of the first King: Ramathibodi. The name implied that he was Rama who was an incarnation of Vishnu. The official name of the city itself was also carefully chosen: *Dvaravati Sri Ayutthaya- Dvaravati* was the name of the city of Krishna and *Ayutthaya* the name of the city of Rama, both were incarnations of Vishnu.⁴⁹ While the concept of the *thewaracha* is undisputed in the academic literature, one academic, Chit Bhumisak, proposed that a second concept also found its way from Angkor to Central Thailand in the fourteenth century and should be considered in an analysis of Thai kingship. This concept was the Buddha-king (*phuttharacha*). Chit argued that the *phuttharacha* cult was introduced in the thirteenth century by King Jayavarman VII of Angkor who not only converted from Hinduism to Mahayana Buddhism but also replaced the idea of the king as a god with the idea of the king as Buddha.⁵⁰ This thesis accepts this proposal by Chit as many references to the king as Buddha can be found in Thai history.

The second cultural core of the Thai nation, the early Kingdom of Ayutthaya, was influenced by the concepts of *thewaracha* and *phuttharacha*. This core is significant as it introduced the elements of sacredness and power into the image of the monarchy. It also became a major source for ceremonies which in turn were crucial in creating identity for the Thai *ethnie*.

2.4. The Third Cultural Core: The Unified Kingdom of Ayutthaya/Sukhothai (15th-16th Century)

The first century of the Ayutthaya kingdom was marked by internal power struggles between rivalling dynasties. The fifteenth century, however, saw a stabilisation of the kingdom with the ruling family of Suphanburi taking control of the throne. They regarded Sukhothai as a rival and succeeded in subduing it in 1438. In order to get the support and acceptance of Sukhothai, the Ayutthayan monarchs emphasised Buddhism to gain control. Buddhism, driven by political motifs, paved the way for fusing the first cultural core of Sukhothai with the second cultural core of the early Ayutthaya kingdom, thereby creating a new, third cultural core for the Thai nation. This 'fusion' happened mostly in the reign of King Borommatrailokanat, or shortly

⁴⁹ Chit, 1981, pp.12-15.

⁵⁰ Chit, 1981, p.12.

called Trailok (r.1448-1488) who can be seen as the third important king (after Ramkhamhaeng and Li-Thai) for the Thai *ethnie*. Being born to a Sukhothai princess, Trailok was well aware of the cultural developments in that kingdom. To legitimise his claim over Sukhothai, Trailok followed the model of Li-Thai as *dharmaracha* without giving up the early Ayutthaya views on kingship. The result was a unique combination of the concepts of *thewaracha* and *phuttharacha* of early Ayutthaya with the concept of *dharmaracha* from Sukhothai.

This new approach to kingship was reflected in the official throne name of Trailok: *Somdej Phrachao Ramathibodi Borommatrailokkanat Mahamongkutthepmanut Wisutthisuriyawong Ongkaphutthangkun Borombophit Phraphutthachaoyuhua*. This name was always followed with the small add-on of *songthotsaphitratchatham*.⁵¹ The interpretation of this name shows following elements: *Somdej* (honorific title for King) *Phrachao* (God) *Ramathibodi* (Rama the Superior) *Borommatrailokkanat* (The King Whom the Great Three Worlds Rely on) *Mahamongkutthepmanut* (The Great Crown who is a human being with the state of divinity) *Wisutthisuriyawong* (those who are in the family of the sun [Rama]) *Ongkaphutthangkun* (the future Buddha) *Borombophit Phraphutthachaoyuhua* (the great King who is the Buddha over the head of the people). The add-on *songthotsaphitratchatham* meant 'who maintains the ten kingly virtues'. The references to God and Rama mirrored the idea of *thewaracha*, the terms regarding Buddha reflected the *phuttharacha* and the addition showed that Trailok was a *dharmaracha*. Especially interesting was the term *thepmanut* (a human being with the state of divinity), clearly indicating the different idea of the *thewaracha* in contrast to the Khmer interpretation of the god-king.⁵²

In order to present himself as *dharmaracha* like Li-Thai, Trailok diffused Buddhism by ordering the translation of the *jataka* of the last life of Buddha before Buddhahood into Thai (*Mahachat*). The *jatakas* are 547 Buddhist stories of the previous lives of the Buddha. The most popular of the *jatakas* are the last ten lives which reflect the ten perfections (*barami*), each of the ten associated with one particular perfection. The *Mahachat*, emphasising the perfection of giving (*dāna*), became the most important *jataka* in Thailand. Sombat interpreted Trailok's composition of *Mahachat* as his

⁵¹ Winai Pongsripian (ed) *Kotmonthianban chabap chaloemphrakiat* [Kotmonthianban- the Edition in Honour of His Majesty], Bangkok 2005, p.63.

⁵² See the discussion about *thepmanut* in Winai Pongsripian. "Khwa mrurueang sathaban phramahakasat lae 'kot monthianban' [The Knowledge About the Monarchical Institution and the *Kot Monthianban*]", Bangkok 2005, pp.9-12.

political tool for it emphasises that to be king, one has to have *barami* of former lives. The *barami* of Prince Vetsandon, the protagonist, is depicted through scenes such as trees and animals bowed to salute him wherever he went.⁵³ This was similar to the account of fruit-laden trees in the *Traiphum* during the journeys of the Universal Monarch. Another trace of the *phuttharacha* found in the text was the use of Trailok's name such as Phratrailokkanat or Phratrailokmuninat to refer to Prince Vetsandon or Buddha.

Trailok used *Mahachat* not only for his legitimation as *dharmaracha* but also to remind the people of their duty to be obedient to the king: 'the people must accept the full right and power of the king over the kingdom and the people'.⁵⁴ Trailok could also show that being king meant that he deserved to be in this position and that it was the duty of other lords to accept his superiority. This *jataka* was an ideal medium to disseminate the king's claim to power and vision of kingship because it was widely used as a sermon by monks all over the kingdom and most likely people even in remote villages would have known the story.⁵⁵

Being aware of the resentments of the people of Sukhothai against Ayutthayan rule, Trailok again sought to create loyalty to him through other elements of the *dharmaracha* concept. The Buddhist *sangha* was the key to success for merging the people in the countryside with the government for the monks were able to communicate into almost every village in the kingdom. Understanding the power of symbolism, Trailok won over the *sangha* in Sukhothai by adopting its religious traditions and customs for Ayutthaya. He also ordained as a monk in a mass ceremony together with 2,348 other monks in Sukhothai in 1465. By making these monks his 'colleagues', he was able to get their support, especially when they returned to villages all over the country.⁵⁶

While *Mahachat* and the ordination were important instruments to communicate with the masses, Trailok developed a medium to connect with the elites through the first sophisticated law code, the palace law (*Kot Monthianban*), to organise his court and

⁵³ Sombat/Chai-anan, 1980, pp.122-123.

⁵⁴ Sombat/Chai-anan, 1980, p.117.

⁵⁵ Anuman Rajadhon, Phya, *Thai Literature in Relation to the Diffusion of Her Cultures*, Bangkok 1989, p.11.

⁵⁶ Charnvit Kasetsiri, *Ayutthaya: prawattisat lae kanmueang* [Ayutthaya: History and Politics], Bangkok 1999, pp.174-189.

administration in 1458.⁵⁷ It represented a complete legal code and was intended to bring order to the social world in order to fit in the cosmic world. O'Connor called the introduction of this traditional law a 'historically unique birth of a Southeast Asian system of positive law'.⁵⁸ The *Kot Monthianban* organised almost every imaginable aspect of royal life: the palace, royal speech, the honour and status of the monarch, the royal behaviour in different situations, the royal duties, ceremonies etc. The legal aspects covered the protection of the king, a 'state of emergency'- law and palace law.⁵⁹ This law code became a central element for symbolically displaying a continuation between the different kingdoms over centuries. It was constantly revised and the later versions, for example under King Rama I (r.1782-1809), were not fully identical with the earlier ones.⁶⁰

Following the ideal of the Universal Monarch and the Great Elect who must have political power and bring order to society, Trailok started extensive reforms with the aim to centralise power in his hands. The most important one was the overhaul of the hierarchical *sakdina* system.⁶¹ The 'Law of the Civil Hierarchy' and the 'Law of the Military and Provincial Hierarchy' in effect 'delineated an enormously complex hierarchical society in which the place and position of every individual was carefully specified'.⁶² As the instrument to show someone's status, the amount of *sakdina* was related to the number of people someone controlled. The king himself possessed unlimited *sakdina*, reflecting his extraordinary position. A normal subject possessed 25 units (*na*). One unit represented symbolically one *rai*, the Thai measurement for areas of

⁵⁷ Quaritch Wales, H.G., *Ancient Siamese Government and Administration*, London 1934, p.19. See also O'Connor, Richard. "Law As Indigenous Social Theory: A Siamese Thai Case", *American Ethnologist*, 8, 1981, pp.227-229. Based on the Mon idea of a separation between cosmic law and ordinary law, the Thais used the *thammasat* (natural law), which was derived from an Indian precedent, as the law core for their legal code and incorporated the edicts and decisions of their kings to create a system of positive law. The acts of kings were therefore illustrations of the Eternal law, because he had the authority due to the fact that he embodied the cosmic law. Unlike in the West, stated O'Connor, the natural law did not replace the sacred law but was placed in it. The king was at the pivot of the legal system but he could rule only by delegating his powers. This meant that the officials in provincial towns made regulations and administered justice within the king's laws.

⁵⁸ O'Connor, 1981, p.225.

⁵⁹ Winai, 2005, p.29.

⁶⁰ Winai, 2005, pp.28-29.

⁶¹ Girling, John, *Thailand- Society and Politics*, Ithaca 1987, p.21. See Prasert Na Nagara/Griswold, A., *Epigraphic and Historical Studies*, Bangkok 1992, p.111, Siffin William, *The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional Change and Development*, Honolulu 1966, p.18 and Seksan Prasertkul, *The Transformation of the Thai State and Economic Change (1855-1945)*, Cornell 1991, p.1.

⁶² Wyatt, 1984, p.62.

0.16 ha.⁶³ Although some Marxist writers compared the *sakdina* system with European feudalism, the two systems were too different to equate them with each other.⁶⁴ The Thai peasants enjoyed a far higher grade of freedom than their European counterparts. Most important, the *sakdina* system was an important link between the population and the nobles who depended on the system for ‘manpower’ to produce goods for the royal monopoly of trade.⁶⁵ An efficient system such as *sakdina* had presumably created a strong identity directly connected to the king.

We see the emergence of what became the third cultural core of the Thai nation through the efforts of King Trailok to unify the two kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. This period was an ongoing process which saw the introduction of many elements of a pre-modern nation. However, what was lacking in Ayutthaya of the 15th and early 16th century was a widespread awareness of a common culture or identity outside Buddhism. Just like in Sukhothai, the rulers of Ayutthaya (and other Thai kingdoms at that time) were only able to mobilize the population within a certain reach under their direct or –limited- indirect control. This restricted their ability to achieve a common identity beyond the geographic sphere of influence of each kingdom. The lack of a consistent homeland with a widespread common culture and, as a result, a lack of solidarity between the Thai groups weakened the kingdom. The 16th century saw multiple raids and attacks from the Burmese and the Khmer which resulted in serious losses and damages for the Thais. Ayutthaya itself fell into Burmese hands in 1569.⁶⁶

I propose to call this period of the kingdom of Ayutthaya another step in the development of the Thai *ethnie*, albeit with many characteristics of a pre-modern nation mostly created by the merger between elements of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya.

⁶³ For a detailed list of all grades see Kachorn S. “The Free Man Status”, *JSSR*, 1976, p.105. A detailed study of *sakdina* can be found in Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873*, Bangkok 1996.

⁶⁴ For a Marxist interpretation see Chit Bhumisak’s famous study *Choomnaa sakdina thai* [The Face of Thai Sakdina] which was translated by Reynolds, Craig, *Thai Radical Discourse*, Ithaca 1987. For counter-arguments see Rosen, G., *Peasant Society in a Changing Environment*, Chicago 1975, p.133 and Jacobs, Norman, *Modernization Without Development*, New York 1971, p.112.

⁶⁵ Wicks, 1992, p.181.

⁶⁶ Wyatt, 1984, p.97.

2.5. The Pre-modern Thai Nation as the Fourth Cultural Core: The Later Period of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (16th-18th Century)

In 1515, the Portuguese Tome Pires, one of the first Europeans to visit Ayutthaya, portrayed the kingdom as a rather diverse society. He claimed, for example, that the hairstyle and customs of the common people, and almost all the language, were like those of (Mon) Pegu. Lieberman interpreted this remark that many *phrai* (free commoners or freemen) still did not fully identify with the culture of the elite.⁶⁷ The events of the sixteenth century seem to confirm Lieberman's comment. Many freemen lacked an awareness of solidarity and common identity. Permanent warfare with Burma and Cambodia put a heavy burden on the shoulder of commoners.⁶⁸ Every rampaging army demanded to be fed; constant military and labour services for the Thai king drained even more resources. The Thai chronicles complained that many freemen fled into the forest to be out of reach of the state. This indicated that some people were not willing to fight for the king.

The first fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese was a political watershed and would help to form a pre-modern nation. War and occupation generally are an important catalyst for the development of self-awareness and a sense of solidarity of the affected population. After the fall, the kingdom was humiliated in war, plundered and partly depopulated. The Burmese king installed Maha Thammaracha, the governor of Phitsanulok, as the vassal king. It can be assumed that at least parts of the elite and of the population shared the feeling of powerlessness and alienation. All it took was a charismatic leader who was able to assemble a big military force to fight against the Burmese in order to restore the control of the country. This leader was ironically the son of Maha Thammaracha, King Naresuan (r.1590-1605). His family was a scion of the earlier Sukhothai ruling house and his coronation in 1590 would symbolise the full return of the Sukhothai dynasty to the most powerful and prominent position in Thailand.⁶⁹ Naresuan, growing up as a hostage in Burma, was a highly successful military leader on behalf of the Burmese until he turned against them and defeated them repeatedly during his reign. He appeared to conceive the unity of the country within a broader ethnic, cultural, and political framework. The fact that a 'Sukhothai' king would

⁶⁷ Lieberman, 2003, p.324.

⁶⁸ This argument is based on the data provided by Charnvit, 1999, pp.207-212.

⁶⁹ The last king of Sukhothai transferred his capital to Phitsanulok in the 1420s. Griswold/Prasert, 1976, p.132.

opt to lead from Ayutthaya indicated a developing awareness of a unified kingdom, occupying the historical territory of the Thais (along the Chaophraya river).⁷⁰ Besides that, Ayutthaya as a trading powerhouse offered far better economic possibilities than agrarian-orientated Sukhothai.

The political independence and growing identity awareness within the elite were good pre-conditions for the development of a pre-modern nation. The question, however, must also be: what was the attitude of the common people? While literature or laws were important in educated circles to develop a common identity, the mass most likely developed parts of their common identity through warfare. The effects on identity of the successful Naresuan campaign against the Burmese and his charismatic rule can be seen in western reports. Compared with Pires at the beginning of the 16th century, Ribadeneira gave a very much changed picture at the end of that century: “they love their country loyally, and would give anything to prove Siam is better than any other kingdom, or nation.” Van Vliet observed in the 1630s: “in general the Siamese are cowardly soldiers, but cruel towards their subdued enemy, or to those who are rejected by the King... Also they are proud and fancy that no other nation can be compared with them, and that their laws and customs are better than anywhere else on earth.” Gervaise mentioned in 1688 that ‘today they [Mon, Lao, and other war-captives] have merged so completely with the Siamese that it is quite difficult to tell them apart’.⁷¹ The German physician Engelbert Kaempfer reported in 1690 a distinctive identity: ‘the Kingdom of Siam is the most powerful, and its Court the most magnificent among all the black Nations of Asia...The natives call the kingdom Muan [mueang] Thai, which is as much to say, the Land Thai’.⁷² Both, identity and sentiments, were fostered by an elaborate system of festivities and ceremonies. Foreign observers, such as the French priest Gervaise, were impressed: ‘in the Indies there is no state that is more monarchical than Siam’ and ‘there has never been any court anywhere in the world more ritualistic than the court of the king of Siam’.⁷³ It seems that the ceremonies fulfilled their function well- if Europeans were impressed, how much more impact they had on the Thai people who witnessed and understood the ‘sacredness’ of the rituals.

⁷⁰ Wyatt, 1984, pp.88 and 105. Wolters called Naresuan’s loyalty to Ayutthaya ‘one of the momentous decisions in Thai history’. Wolters, O.W. “Ayudhya and the Rearward Part of the World”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1968, p.166.

⁷¹ The reports of the travellers are cited in Lieberman, 2003, p.324.

⁷² Kaempfer, Engelbert, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, Bangkok Reprint 1998, pp.30,39 and 41.

⁷³ Gervaise, Nicolas, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, Bangkok Reprint 1989, pp.67 and 221.

Self-awareness and a kind of national sentiments must have been common, at least in the elite, since Naresuan's reign. The next important step in the development of the pre-modern nation happened in the mid-seventeenth century and was again connected to the reign of a monarch. King Narai (r.1656-1688) undertook expensive military campaigns which forced him to open the country to more foreign trade in order to finance them. This resulted in an influx of foreigners who brought new knowledge and technologies into the kingdom. Narai, stated Wyatt, had 'a desire to make his kingdom known and recognised abroad' and sent embassies to the courts in Europe to build direct relations.⁷⁴ This contact with the West led to a new, revolutionising view on history.

Traditionally, Thai historiography followed Buddhist convention where monarchs were described in connection with their promotion of Buddhism. Charnvit argued that history in this sense was not exclusively concerned with the past. The past was continuous with the present and the present was also part of the future. Events were understood to occur within one single unit and this unit was formed by the Buddhist tradition, not concepts such as race, territory or period. Narai, however, ordered the start of a dynastic history (*phongsawadan*). In 1680, the *phraratchaphongsawadan krungsri ayutthaya chabap luang prasoet* (The Luang Prasoet Chronicle of Ayutthaya) dealt with events in Ayutthaya between 1324 and 1604.⁷⁵ Somchai argued that Narai's main motivation for this chronicle was to provide historical information for Europeans and to send it to King Louis XIV of France.⁷⁶ It represented for the first time a history of the state which began with the foundation of the kingdom and the activities of the kings. This indicates that history was used as evidence for a Thai identity and there was awareness of a historical territory.

The elite became not only conscious about history but also developed a view of the kingdom as a complex system consisting of elements of a pre-modern nation. The book *Lakchai* or *Phrapichaisena*, an undated guide for state officials, explained that in order to be sovereign, a state needs to house four spirits, namely *Phrasuemueang* (represents Buddhism), *Phrasongmueang* (represents a kingdom ruled by law), *Phralakmueang* (represents the protector/government) and *Phrakanmueang* (represents

⁷⁴ Wyatt, 1984, pp.98-99.

⁷⁵ Charnvit, 1976, pp.2-9.

⁷⁶ Somchai Phirothirarack, *The Historical Writings of Chao Phraya Thipakorawong*, DeKalb 1983, pp.16 and 22. For more about traditional historiography see Wyatt, David. "Chronicle Traditions in Thai Historiography", Ithaca 1976, pp.107-122.

the military and the people).⁷⁷ The concept of the four spirits could be interpreted as an indigenous perception of a pre-modern nation.

The self-awareness of the elite as a pre-modern nation included the view that subjects were defined independently from their ethnic background. There was a shift from the earlier understanding of the Thai *ethnie* which had to live alongside other *ethnies* such as the Mon and the Khmer. In the pre-modern nation, the Thai incorporated members of such *ethnies* with the basic idea that as long as the individual was loyal to the monarchs and participated in the social system, he was regarded as belonging to the Thai society. Every freeman got a tattoo as registration for administrative purposes and was required to perform corvée labour. The abundance of land enabled people who were not willing to do that to move away and avoid any obligation. Kasian argued in this context that integration in Thai society was not determined by cultural assimilation but by political assimilation into Thai society.⁷⁸ The monarchs distinguished their subjects from others not along ethnic lines but only if they were under his control or not. In the *Long Song Prophecy* written in the reign of Narai, the openness and hospitality of Ayutthaya to everybody was praised. It was also shown that all this was the result of the benevolent reign of the monarch:

“Twelve in tongue and wrung from every land,
Gladly come and stand, safe in this sire,
Of cities, whose men are freed of danger dire,
Of sin, desire, pain, sorrow and distress.”
“As for His Majesty, the King of Kings,
By rule he brings to all their happiness,
Through his decrees, his care and success,
He strives to bless us all- with joy we shine.”⁷⁹

This trans-ethnic view of defining a member of society becomes more evident with a comparison between a poem and an edict. In the poem *Khlong chaloem phra kiet somdetphranaraimaharat*, written in 1658 during the reign of King Narai, the writer

⁷⁷ Sombat/Chai-anan, 1980, pp.149-152. The exact publication date of this book cannot be established and only fragments have survived. Sombat, however, is convinced that the book is genuine.

⁷⁸ Kasian Tejapira. “Pigtail: A Pre-History of Chineseness in Siam”, *Sojourn*, 7, 1992, p.107. See also Terwiel, Barend. “Tattooing in Thai History”, *Bangkok Post*, 9 October 1977, p.6.

⁷⁹ Cushman, Richard (trans). “The Long Song Prophecy for Ayutthaya”, *JSS*, 2001, p.5.

praised the total destruction of the 'Lao' [of the North, not subjects] by the king.⁸⁰ In an edict from 1763, however, the 'Lao' [under the control of the monarch] were put on an equal status like the Thais: 'henceforth, Thai, Mon, and Lao are forbidden to have sexual intercourse in secret with Indians, French, English and Malays because they are heathens'.⁸¹ The edict, nonetheless, indicated that there were limits to the tolerance of the monarchs, related to Buddhism. Other religions than Buddhism were tolerated as long as they were not conceived as a danger to Buddhism and therefore indirectly to the monarchy.⁸²

National sentiments of the general population seemed to have been widespread. Lieberman argued that warfare encouraged popular identification with the capital. It did this by generating anti-Burmese stereotypes, by mixing local units into royal armies, and by encouraging psychological dependence on the throne.⁸³ An example of national sentiments can be seen in an incident in Tavoy where a popular rebellion chased British troops out of town.⁸⁴ The trans-ethnic appeal of these national sentiments was demonstrated by thousands of Chinese volunteers fighting alongside the Thais in their wars against the Burmese in the 1760s.⁸⁵ The Thai language as *lingua franca* enabled the direct and easy communication between the court and all subjects and the creation of a common identity within the different ethnic groups. This was helped by the fact that monastic education was almost universal for boys. The reign of King Narai saw the introduction of the first Thai language textbook (*chindamani*) which supported the spreading of literacy.⁸⁶

Another aspect was the crucial role of the capital city Ayutthaya. In some European countries, the capital proved to be central for the development of a nation-state. Hastings wrote about London: "The role of London in creating the nation-state can hardly be overemphasised. It was already the heart pumping the economy, but it was more than that. There was no other town of remotely comparable size, but

⁸⁰ Wenk, Klaus, *Studien zur Literatur der Thai*, Band 1, Hamburg 1982, p.31.

⁸¹ Cited in Reynolds, 1987, p.134.

⁸² Narai, for example, sponsored the construction of a mosque. But Catholics were limited in their activities in 1730: it was forbidden to write any book on Christianity either in Thai or Pali, to evangelise in Thai, to convert the Siamese, Laotians or Mons and to blame Buddhism. Ishii, Yoneo. "The Thai Muslims and the Royal Patronage of Religion", Paper Presented at the 13th IAHA-Conference, Hong Kong 1991, pp.3-4.

⁸³ Lieberman, 2003, p. 318.

⁸⁴ Kullada Kesboonchoo. "Kansueksa prawattisat thai nai dan kanmueang rawang prathet [The Study of Thai History in the Aspect of International Relations]", *Sangkhomsat parithat*, 1972, pp.100-103.

⁸⁵ Wyatt, 2000, p.481.

⁸⁶ Reid, Anthony, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, New Haven 1988, p.223.

London's national unifying role was so effective because it was neither a regional nor a royal one."⁸⁷ Ayutthaya played a similar role in Thailand except that its position was so powerful because it was the royal city, thus controlling all trade in and out of the kingdom. It was even for European standards a huge city with an estimated population of 150,000 in the early seventeenth century.⁸⁸ Ayutthaya was indeed the dominant market place in the kingdom and one of the biggest in the whole of South East Asia. Its position was boosted in the seventeenth century by a trading boom, a period called by Dhiravat as 'age of commerce in Thailand'.⁸⁹ That century saw a surge in trade of five newly desired products (refined sugar, tobacco, tea, coffee, and opium), paving the way for a European-led proto-globalisation. Bayly called this an 'archaic globalisation' which helped to create a regional identity. Besides that, the economic development involved large sections of the whole society in trade and production.⁹⁰ As a result, the distance between the human and the sacred world grew and the society moved towards a material world.⁹¹ This was an important pre-condition for rational and individual behaviour in a pre-modern nation.

It also meant that the kings had to make more efforts to create a bond between the monarchy and the people. Ceremonies became more public, displaying rituals, symbols and traditions. Buddhist ceremonies were especially suitable to make them visible to the masses.⁹² One example is the *kathin* (presenting the robes to monks) procession which was held for the first time on land and on the river in the early seventeenth century. The *kathin* ceremony itself was already conducted in the Sukhothai period but was transformed into a public spectacle in Ayutthaya. An European observer gave a description of such an event: "His Majesty has around him a great number of mandarins on foot who accompany him sedately and modestly, some of them carry his weapons; others his betel box and betel; and three of those who approach him nearest each hold a large parasol made of gold brocade having a handle of massive gold or silver. These parasols follow him everywhere and throughout the kingdom they are

⁸⁷ Hastings, Adrian, *The Construction of Nationhood*, Cambridge 1997, p.40.

⁸⁸ Reid, Anthony. "Global and Local in Southeast Asian History", *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 2004, p.7.

⁸⁹ Dhiravat na Pombejra. "Ayutthaya at the End of the Seventeenth Century: Was There A Shift to Isolation?", Ithaca 1993, p.250.

⁹⁰ Bayly, C. "'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, ca. 1750-1850", New York 2002, pp.65-67.

⁹¹ Reid, Anthony, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, Volume Two, New Haven 1993, p.329.

⁹² Ceremonies of other cultures were tolerated, for example, of the Shi'ite Indian Muslims which attracted a big crowd but were not connected to the king. Reid, 2004, p.11.

looked upon as symbols of the divinity of the king, to which, it is said, the people give the same honour on earth as they give to the gods who have already entered Nirvana.”⁹³ This display of insignia of rank and honour as a ritual contributed to the creation of a common identity. Public ceremonies and the appearance of the monarch were crucial because the normal life in court was totally reclusive.⁹⁴

Another important element of a pre-modern nation was introduced in 1595. A revision of the existing law code focussed now on giving concrete case studies of decisions of kings for the use in legal processes. Lingat called this a ‘real code of law’ which was applied throughout the kingdom. Decisions of the king became permanent rules. Thailand had its first common law code separated from cosmological laws.⁹⁵

Thai culture was now less and less influenced by Khmer culture. Examples were art and architecture where Sukhothai-style became dominant while the Lopburi-style (Khmer-style) lost importance.⁹⁶ The design of Buddha statues, for example, reflected features from the Sukhothai period which were mixed with other elements. Similarly, the style of paintings developed slowly from a Khmer to a distinct Thai style which included polychrome with gold leaf applied to important figures and motifs. Last but not least, the architectural style changed from a Khmer to a Sukhothai-inspired style in the 16th century as well.⁹⁷

To sum up, the kingdom of Ayutthaya began to develop into a pre-modern nation between the 16th and 18th century. Both the ruling elite and the general population were aware of their identity as members of the Ayutthayan kingdom. Although the people in Ayutthaya did not call themselves a ‘nation’ (the term in the modern sense was unknown to them), there was without doubt a wide range of elements of a pre-modern nation existent. These elements were enforced by the dominant role of Ayutthaya as capital city with an elaborate symbolism, a great variety of cultural activities, a deep ‘market’-economic penetration into the countryside, a highly developed and geographically widespread *sangha*-organisation under the control of a strong central administration, a sophisticated law code and continuous military campaigns. All these point to a cohesive political community with a common identity.

⁹³ Cited in Kemp, Jeremy, *Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century*, Bangkok 1969, p.23.

⁹⁴ Phaulkon, a Greek working with the court, described the situation in 1689: “All what takes place in the interior of the palace is an impenetrable secret to the officers on the outside.” Cited in Kemp, 1969, p.8.

⁹⁵ Lingat, R. “Evolution of the Conception of Law in Burma and Siam”, *JSS*, 1950, pp.27-28.

⁹⁶ Vilailekha Thavornthanasan. “The Role of Lopburi During the Reign of King Narai (A.D. 1656-1688)”, Honolulu 1986, p.134.

⁹⁷ Subhatradis, 1957, pp.32-34.

It is important to emphasise that the process of becoming a pre-modern nation cannot be narrowed down to the reign of one specific king. However, King Naresuan could be considered as the monarch who triggered the development through his warrior leadership. The process never stopped and went on for two centuries. During this time, the merging of the cultures of Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya became complete and together with the influences of other cultures, a new form of Thai culture was created. This became the fourth cultural core for the later Thai nation. The distinctively Thai culture was transferred into a common cultural identity of the Thais and could be compared to a pre-modern national identity. The readiness to fight against the Burmese indicated the existence of pre-modern national sentiments as well. However, it would be a mistake to equal the pre-modern nation in Ayutthaya with the modern perception of the Thai nation. Although the kingdom had far reaching influence, its power was limited.⁹⁸ Ayutthaya represented in these two centuries very much a core area of the Thai nation and culture.

⁹⁸ Wyatt, David, *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, Bangkok 2000, pp.93 and 135. This does not mean that Ayutthaya did have no influence in far away areas at all. For example, Chinese ship captains reported to Japanese officials in 1692 that Ayutthaya sent an army to Pattani (which resulted in a defeat for the Malay kingdom in 1694). Report printed in Ishii, Yoneo (ed), *The Junk Trade From Southeast Asia*, Singapore 1998, pp.62-74.

Chapter 3

The Dawn of the Modern Nation (1782-1851)

This chapter focuses on the third part in Smith's three phases model, the beginning of the modern nation, and identifies two important elements of this process. First, it discusses why there was a transformation from a pre-modern to a modern nation. Second, it looks into the method on how the emerging modern nation was built with the help of the symbol-myth complex of the pre-modern nation. This resulted in an apparent similarity between the pre-modern and the modern nation, although they were not identical entities. Contrary to the view of the revisionist school, I propose that this process started before the influence of modern western political thinking and resulted in a Thai nation with distinctive indigenous features and a national consciousness analogous to some European nations.

3.1. The Transformation from the Pre-modern to the Modern Nation

I argue that Thailand is one of the earliest modern nations in South East Asia. The question is, therefore, why this happened in the Thai case earlier than for example in neighbouring Burma? The answer lies in the events of 1767 when the capital of Ayutthaya, known to Westerners as one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in South East Asia, was conquered for the second time by the Burmese army and totally destroyed. The royal family was killed or abducted, a fate shared by many people who were brought to Burma as prisoners of war.¹ Ridden by chaos and warfare, the country fell into a period of 'primitive power'² which saw the reign of brutal force. General Taksin, governor of Tak province during the raid on Ayutthaya, was able to subdue rival leaders and establish a new kingdom in Thonburi (today part of Bangkok), which lasted for only fifteen years. In 1782, Taksin's commander-in-chief, General Chakri, became the new ruler and moved the capital across the river to Bangkok, which developed into the political and

¹ For the destruction of Ayutthaya and its effects, see Wyatt, David "The 'Subtle Revolution' of King Rama I of Siam", New Haven 1982, p.11.

² Term coined by Pye, Lucian, *Asian Power and Politics*, Cambridge 1993, p.33.

cultural heart for the revival of Thai society. The second fall of Ayutthaya meant the destruction of the pre-modern nation with its 'outdated' social organisation and worldviews, an event missing in Burma until the arrival of the Europeans. This major rupture in Thai history meant that when the modern Thai nation formed, it could not be viewed as 're-birth' of the nation. The emerging nation represented a new entity which used extensively existing elements to promote loyalty and unity. This extraordinary process was only possible because warfare and displacement of large masses of people caused the destruction of local identities. Indirectly, it resulted in the strengthening of a common Thai identity and the rise of a new ruling elite whose need for legitimation would change the history of the Thai nation forever.

The Destruction of Local Identity and the Strengthening of Thai Identity

During the pre-modern nation in the kingdom of Ayutthaya, local identities were still strong. The reach of the central government and culture was limited to the core areas and smaller political units were able to maintain much of their local political and cultural freedom. However, the eighteenth century was a time of constant warfare and population movement in the whole of South East Asia.³ This not only had devastating effect on the living conditions of the people but also on the whole framework of their identity. If Wyatt's conclusion is correct that probably only a few people lived in the early nineteenth century at the place where they were born, a widespread destruction of local identities was highly likely for the Thai case.⁴ Crucial for the future development of a modern nation was the fact that these conditions were ideal for a total re-organisation of the society. With the weakening of local identities and the need for secure life after warfare and displacement, people were more responsive to new identities.

Being geographically uprooted, the people now lived closer together with other ethnic groups and were directly confronted with different traditions and

³ See in detail Liebermann, Victor. "Mainland-Archipelagic Parallels and Contrasts, c. 1750-1850", London 1997, pp.27-30.

⁴ Wyatt, David "History and Directionality in the Early Nineteenth-Century Tai World", London 1997, pp.433-436. Not all places witnessed this destruction, especially where local identities were closely connected with religious ones. Best example is Pattani on the Malay peninsular that projected itself as a centre for reformist Islam and Malay culture. See Lieberman, Victor, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830*, Cambridge 2003, p.334.

beliefs. The frequent contact between the groups also strengthened the ethnic awareness of the dominant Thais. For example, literary works of King Rama II (r.1809-1824) described ethnic groups with characteristics like hairstyle and made negative remarks about the Chinese.⁵ The most famous writer of his time, Sunthon Phu, referred to the Chinese only with the derogative word *jek* and called their pig tail a 'rat tail'.⁶ In a poem of 1842, *Niratphrapatham*, Sunthon Phu clearly showed his national sentiments. The fact that he was a commoner may indicate that this feeling was widespread among the ethnic Thais:

“At the tax farmer’s shed with its loud gong
The important figure sits illuminated by candlelight.
He’s wearing his queue and displaying his fair-skinned
Young wife,
A Chinese from somewhere else, another *mueang* [city or country].
He has no schooling and no learning, striving only to make
Himself influential,
Knowledgeable only in [the trade of] big hog-legs.
Thinking about this, we Thai grow angry.
We do not operate the gambling *akon* [tax farm]. We starve.
How do we overcome this fate?”⁷

The tectonic shifts in the population landscape in the early Bangkok era were potentially dangerous for the stability and development of the kingdom. While there was an openness for a broader identity within many displaced groups, the only ethnic group capable of providing this identity, the dominant Thais, became more self-aware of their own ethnic identity. Considering the fact that the ethnic Thais (localised mainly in the central part around Bangkok and along the Chaophraya River) did not represent the majority of the population, the potential

⁵ Suvanna Kriengkraipetch. “Characters in Thai Literary Works- ‘Us’ and ‘The Others’”, Bangkok 1995, pp.138-140.

⁶ Wenk, Klaus, *Texte und Interpretationen von und zu Sunthon Phu und seinem Kreis*, Hamburg 1985, p.18. Sunthon Phu mentioned other ethnic groups such as the Mon, Lao and Lawa but only in a servile, inferior function.

⁷ Cited in Reynolds, Craig, *Thai Radical Discourse*, Ithaca 1987, p.141.

for conflict was tremendous.⁸ Indeed, historical records showed that the decade of the 1840s, for example, saw some serious inter-ethnic problems.⁹

How did the Thai monarchy manage to solve this problem and ensure the loyalty of many different ethnic groups living together in the kingdom? This thesis proposes that the answer was a state policy based on the traditional trans-ethnic understanding that loyalty to the Thai king meant membership in the Thai kingdom. King Rama I (r.1782-1809), for example, launched a large-scale program to house and feed a large group of Mons (30,000 people) who fled oppression in Burma in 1814. To win their loyalty, the King (who himself had some Mon ancestry) awarded their leaders with royal titles and allowed the Mons to keep their language and their traditions. He also ordered to register, tattoo, enlist and enrol all Mons like any other subject of him.¹⁰ This case included two important elements on how the early Kingdom of Bangkok dealt with the problem of integration of diverse groups. First, by awarding royal titles to the chiefs of ethnic minorities and thus including them into Thai society, the king 'de-captivated' these groups and ensured their loyalty to him. Second, the Mons were administratively incorporated into the Thai state and society with their registration and tattooing. The awareness of being a subject of the Thai king was created with the help of the *sakdina* system which placed every individual at a specific place. These two elements could be called 'push' factors in order to ensure control over the groups.

Maybe of even greater importance were the 'pull' factors. In the case of the Mons, the ethnic group itself was not forced to become culturally Thai in the emerging modern nation of the beginning nineteenth century. However, it was very attractive for the leaders of these groups to become 'Thai' with the help of royal titles which ensured access to high positions and business opportunities, as the report of a German missionary showed in 1831: "Within two or three generations

⁸ In the mid-19th century, Pallegoix gave a number of 404,000 for the total population of Bangkok, of which 120,000 were ethnic Thai. Crawford estimated the total population of the kingdom of 2.9 million in 1821- about 1.2 million of whom were Thai. Other main ethnic groups were Lao, Khmer, Malay and Chinese. Pallegoix, J., *Description of the Thai Kingdom or Siam*, Bangkok Reprint 2000, p.29 and Crawford, J., *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina*, Kuala Lumpur Reprint 1967, p.452.

⁹ The Chinese suffered the biggest harassment by the Thais. In 1848, a rebellion by Chinese settlers in Chachoengsao province ended in a pogrom by both government troops and locals with thousands of victims. Westerners were also target of anti-foreigner sentiments, albeit on a much smaller scale. Terwiel, Barend, *Through Travellers' Eyes: An Approach to Early Nineteenth Century Thai History*, Bangkok 1989, p.169 and p.220.

¹⁰ Terwiel, Barend. "Between Moulmein and Bangkok: The Mass Migration of Mons in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century", Leiden 2003, pp.107-115.

all the distinguishing marks of the Chinese character dwindle entirely away, and a nation which adheres so obstinately to its national customs becomes wholly changed to Siamese...To them nothing is so welcome as being presented by the King with an honorary title, from that moment they become slaves of the king.”¹¹

How was the Thai identity strengthened? One factor was the ongoing war with Burma which had a tremendous unifying effect on the Thai people and caused national sentiments to arise. Even in the chronicles of the kingdoms of northern Thailand, normally emphasising their independence, the term ‘unity of the Thais’ started to appear.¹² Another factor was the increasing awareness of other cultures within the kingdom and the integration of elite (political and business) ‘foreigners’ into the Thai society which did sharpen the profile of the ethnic Thai core of the nation. Traditionally the borders between this core and the surrounding ‘diaspora’ *ethnies* [Mon, Khmer, Lao etc] were rather blurred. Now the borders became more distinguished but not closed. With the weakening of local identities and the attractiveness of Thai identity, this core was expanding and able to incorporate more groups. However, the nation still lacked a cohesive ideology about identity. The emerging nation was ‘glued’ together by a strengthening Thai identity, the Thai language as *lingua franca*, and especially the Thai king who was via *sakdina* theoretically connected with every member of Thai society.

A New Ruling Elite

The transformation from a pre-modern to a modern nation would not have been possible without the ascent of the new ruling elite who sought legitimation for their rule.

The most important factor in this process was the fact that King Rama I was a member of the former nobility in Ayutthaya. Indeed, the founding of the Bangkok kingdom could be described as a takeover of power by four prominent noble families¹³ which changed the traditional relationship between ruler and nobility.

¹¹ Printed in Farrington, Anthony (ed), *Early Missionaries in Bangkok*, Bangkok 2001, p.72. For the integration of foreigners see Thawesak Phueaksom, *Khonplaekna nanachat khong krung sayam* [International Strangers of Siam], Bangkok 2003.

¹² Lieberman, 2003, p.328.

¹³ It should be remarked that none of the four families were of pure Thai origin. They were Persian, Indian, Mon and Chinese. Wyatt, David. “Family Politics in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

The monarchs in Ayutthaya, stated Ishii, kept control of the nobility by splitting functions in the bureaucracy into 'administrators' and 'experts'. The 'experts' (i.e. Brahmins, jurists, the Chinese in charge of foreign trade and craftsmen) were mostly foreigners placed under the direct and exclusive control of the king and none of them were allowed to become 'administrator' (but were part of the nobility). The monopoly of these resources of expertise in the fields of state ritual, military technology, and overseas trade strengthened the political power of the monarch.¹⁴ This traditional limitation of the power of the nobility was 'disturbed' in Bangkok. The former royals were replaced by parts of the former nobility consisting of members of the 'administrators' and 'specialists'. The new King Rama I could only claim the throne with the help of other noble families, making him dependent on their cooperation. He publicly stressed the duty of the nobles to assist and enable him to do his duty to take care of the people in the state.¹⁵

As a nobleman, Rama I had no blood connection to the monarchs in Ayutthaya and Thonburi and lacked therefore legitimation. One way to gain legitimation was to build a new relationship between the king and the people. Contrary to a monarch of Ayutthaya, Rama I saw the people in a more important role. He wrote in his version of the *Ramakian* epic: 'the city [land] is like the body, the king is the soul who chairs the body'.¹⁶ The King went on to compare the people to the weapons in the body's hands. For the time being, the 'people' were still excluded from the 'body' but acknowledged as an important tool for the monarchy to rule and maintain order. A second way to gain legitimation was to portray himself more as a *dharmaracha* than a *thewaracha*. Following the ideal of the Universal King, Rama I showed the duty of the king in his poem *Nirat rop phama thi thadindaeng*, written in 1786:

"The Burmese army is in hasty retreat.

Many of them lay dead on the ground

Because of the *barami* I have done.

Siam", Paper Presented at the Eight Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Kuala Lumpur 1980, pp.1-6.

¹⁴ Ishii, Yoneo. "Religious Patterns and Economic Change in Siam in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century", Ithaca 1993, p.185.

¹⁵ Saichol Sattayanurak, *Phuttasatsana kap naeokit tangkanmueang nai rajasamai phrabatsomdetphraputhajodfachulalok* [Buddhism and Political Thought in the Reign of Rama I], Bangkok 2003, p.254.

¹⁶ Phutthayotfachulalok, Phrabatsomdatphra, *Ramakian* Volume 1, Bangkok 1967, p.831.

I was determined to support
and elevate Buddhism,
To defend the territory,
And to take good care of my people and ministers.”¹⁷

That Rama I stressed the victory as a result of his *barami* and placed Buddhism ahead of kingdom and people showed his aim to rule as a *dharmaracha*. As this resolution appeared in the poem describing a battle with the Burmese, it was Rama I’s political tool to prove his moral superiority over other Buddhist kings especially the rival Burmese ruler. As in the case of the Mons, Rama I granted them asylum and provided the necessary supplies not only to get more subjects (i.e. their labour) but also to prove his moral position.

To emphasise the goodness of Bangkok in contrast to the wickedness of the Burmese, King Rama I also ordered the rewriting of accounts of earlier wars. According to Saichol, early Bangkok had to depict itself as the superior Buddhist kingdom in order to attract the loyalty of political allies and vassal kings. Those rulers were assured that Bangkok did not intend to suppress them and that the ‘royal tradition’ and the ten kingly virtues would always be maintained by the Thai king.¹⁸ Thai monarchs were under considerable pressure to comply with their announcements because in that period, it was still easy for a vassal king or for an individual farmer to switch loyalties to either another overlord or to ‘leave’ Thai society by moving to areas not under control of the Bangkok administration. By defining themselves as *dharmaracha*, the monarchs followed the Sukhothai ideal described in the *Traiphum* although they publicly emphasised the continuation of Ayutthaya.

The fact that Rama I and his associates were part of the nobility in Ayutthaya was important in another regard as well. The Ayutthayan nobility was actively involved in foreign trading and the new king was well aware of the chances foreign trade offered for Bangkok. Nidhi pointed out that the destruction of Ayutthaya and the years of turmoil afterwards seriously undermined the ability of the new administration to finance the state through the traditional system of control

¹⁷ Cited in Plueang Na Nagara, *Prawat wannakhadi thai* [History of Thai Literature], Bangkok 2002, p.223.

¹⁸ Saichol, 2003b, p.150.

of the freemen (*phrai*). Rama I saw in trading a lucrative alternative which could offset the losses quickly. These trading activities were mostly conducted by the royal family/nobility and the Chinese merchants. Both groups were closely connected because some important Chinese were appointed to nobility or inter-married with them.¹⁹ Trade, therefore, held a prominent place in the activities of the nobility and helped them to understand and accept the 'real' world in contrast to a mystic world before. Nidhi proposed that this was reflected in the literature of the early Bangkok period. In the reign of Rama II, literature increasingly used real places and names, described products in detail and depicted urban life, all in all subjects not to be found in the Ayutthayan literature. Most importantly, prosperity of the nobility was seen as the result of work and labour and not any longer the result of *bun* (merit) as it was before.²⁰

The trading activities and the ongoing reconstruction of the state required more and more skilled workers who had to be hired and paid in cash. The need for cash to pay for imports required by the state and the affluent nobility and merchant class increased.²¹ The introduction of a poll tax instead of corvee labour supported the spreading of the cash economy but also freed people from obligations away from home and enabled them to produce for the export economy.²² To cater the modernising economy and to standardise it, Rama III (r.1824-1851) considered introducing modern, flat coins to replace the traditional bullet coins (*pod duang*). The modern nation was to have a common currency in 1835. The introduction failed, however, when the king declined the proposed design of the coins as not fitting.²³

The strong promotion of economic development by trade-minded monarchs was very important for the growth of national awareness within both the ruling elite and the people. By becoming part of a countrywide trading network organised through royal monopolies, even distant villagers must have known not only about the central role of Bangkok but also about the existence of other countries.

¹⁹ Nidhi Aeusrivongse, *Pakkai lae bairuea* [The Quills and The Sails], Bangkok 1995, pp.136-142.

²⁰ Nidhi, 1995, pp.220-225.

²¹ Nidhi, 1995, pp.105-113.

²² Wenk, 1968, pp.32-35.

²³ It was planned that the coins should have an elephant and a lotus flower on it. The coins also included the year of production and the name of the country written in Thai: *Mueang Tai* [sic]. The king, however, interpreted the elephant as symbol of Sri Lanka. The lotus flower was already in use as the symbol for the port authority. Graham, Marc/Winkler, Manfred, *Thai Coins*, Bangkok 1992, pp.110-111.

Although some academics argued that the Thai economy only changed after the signing of the Bowring treaty with the United Kingdom in 1855, there is sufficient evidence that the Thai economy produced extensively for export decades before that date.²⁴ An example was the development of the Thai sugar industry after 1810 with sugar turning into the biggest export commodity of the country in the first half of the nineteenth century. King Rama III wrote in a letter in 1843: "Because sugar is an export crop, it brings revenue to the government...If more sugar was produced, even more ships would come, and government revenue from collecting shipping fees would be increased. This would benefit the people and the prestige and honour of the capital will rise. Therefore the governor, as the representative of the king, should encourage the Chinese, Lao, Khmer and the people of Nakhon Chaisri [province] to plant more extensively than before...If the holding was too large for the owner to manage, the governor should arrange for it to be cultivated with cane by others, and not left to be vacant."²⁵ This letter showed the active promotion of the economy in the agricultural areas by the monarch and demonstrated how Thais and other ethnic groups became part of the trading network. The Bangkok rulers used the traditional organisation of the trading sector to create a territory-wide economy. This structure was, however, updated and adapted as seen in the example of a re-organisation of the sugar trade with the help of a royal monopoly in 1842. An important pre-condition for this process was a sense of individualism that motivated people to enter the system of export production and cash economy. This individualism was supported by the Thai form of Buddhism and the tolerant attitude towards different cultures and religions shown by Thai monarchs.²⁶

A similar combination added to the rise of a national awareness in the United Kingdom, where a strong sense of individualism was connected to liberty of

²⁴ Authors arguing against an early economic development were for example Chattip Nartsupha. "The Village Economy in Pre-Capitalist Thailand", Bangkok 1986, p. 158 and Ingram, J., *Economic Change in Thailand, 1850-1970*, Stanford 1971, p.34. For the counter-argument see mainly Terwiel, 1991, pp.40-41 and the discussion in Sturm, Andreas, *Die Handels- und Agrarpolitik Thailands von 1767-1932*, Passau 1997, chapter 4.

²⁵ Cited in Hong, Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century*, Singapore 1984, p.54.

²⁶ The influence of Buddhism on attitudes to rational and economic behaviour is widely discussed in the literature. See for example Rosen, G., *Peasant Society in a Changing Economy*, Chicago 1975, p.136; Phra Debvedi, *Buddhist Economics*, Bangkok 1992, p.39; Keyes, C. "Economic Action and Buddhist Morality in a Thai Village", *JAS*, 1983, p.852 and p.865 and Cohen, P. "The Sovereignty of Dhamma and Economic Development: Buddhist Ethics in Rural Thailand", *JSS*, 1984, pp.197-211.

thought and religion by law. MacFarlane argued that this contributed to the early national awareness of the English which 'led foreigners to think of the English as an arrogant and self-sufficient nation'.²⁷ It is ironic that the British emissary John Crawford reported a similar attitude of Thais in 1822: "the extravagant national vanity of all classes, down even to the slave or peasant, is a part of their character not so easily accounted for, unless it maybe explained by their having been surrounded for ages by conquered or tributary states, and their practical ignorance of all national superiority. This appears to have been an attribute of the Siamese character in all ages...although capable of performing the most degrading or servile offices towards their superiors, yet no reasonable reward would induce them to perform any menial office for us [foreigners]."²⁸ It can be assumed that Thai national awareness was therefore supported by the participation of the individual in the nation-wide trading network of the kings and the nobles.

The trade orientation of the king and the nobility also resulted in the appearance of a rational worldview. According to Smith, when secularisation and the reform of religion takes a foothold in society, it represents the arrival of rationalism and, in the long term, the dissolution of tradition and religion, which are ideal conditions for an early nationalism.²⁹ In the Thai case, rationalism was a product of limited secularisation caused by the expansion of trade. This rationalism moved kingship from a superhuman into the 'real' world connected to a humanistic interpretation of Buddhism. Another result of the rational worldview was a different view on time. For Rama I, the new kingdom was a new beginning based on the old kingdom of Ayutthaya which was seen as something of the past. Just like in the French revolution a few years later, the new beginning was to be symbolised by a new time.³⁰ In earlier times, the 'past' was perceived only in religious terms (a past life, for example). Under Rama I, the 'past' became part of the present, something which could teach a lesson and explain the changes in society. The downfall of Ayutthaya, for example, was understood to be a result of the failure of the last ruling dynasty and the moral bankruptcy of the old capital.

²⁷ MacFarlane, Alan, *The English Individualism*, Oxford 1978, pp.165-166.

²⁸ Crawford, 1967, pp.143-144.

²⁹ Smith, Anthony, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1979, p.37.

³⁰ See Gillis, John. "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship", Princeton 1994, p.7.

This accusation can be found in a poem written by the viceroy of Rama I:

“Because they did not listen to the old legend,
that is why we lost, we lost the [royal] family,
We lost our rank, we lost our honour,
We lost our land, we lost our palace.”³¹

Rama I solely blamed the former dynasty for the moral decay of Ayutthaya. In the newly written chronicles, the last king's death was depicted pitifully- a far cry from a heroic death suitable for a king: “The Holy Lord of the realm fled forth from the municipality, went on board a small boat with two pages, and went to hide in a grove of trees. The pages accordingly abandoned him...and His Holiness starved all by himself.”³² The moral decay of the old society and its destruction was described in traditional terms as the *kaliyuk*, the ‘age of destruction’.³³ In the eyes of the new rulers, their task was, therefore, not only a physical but also a moral reconstruction of the old kingdom, a new ‘golden age’.

The intellectual changes caused by the rational worldview were not limited to the monarchical elite alone. They spread into other groups of the population as well. An example was the poet Sunthon Pu who was popular with people of all classes because his poems were written in *klon* (most simple Thai verse form). In the first period of his work, Sunthon Pu emphasised the rightfulness of the monarchy. When he fell out of favour at court (in the 1820s), he published a poem, *Phra chaisuriya*, describing the ruin of a fictive society caused by the misbehaviour of the nobles, immoral monks and a general moral decline.³⁴ The fact that he dared to criticise the king (‘connected with a number of young girls’) of that fictive country clearly indicates a rational worldview where a monarch could be reduced to a normal human being.

Another example for the intellectual change at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the book *Nangnopphamat*.³⁵ The unknown author presented

³¹ Mahasurasinghanat, Somdetphrabawonraratchao. “Phlengyao rueng ti muengphama [The Long Song about the Battle against Burma]”, Bangkok 2002. p.27.

³² Wyatt, David (ed), *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, Bangkok 2000, p.521.

³³ Gesick, Lorraine. “The Rise and Fall of King Taksin: A Drama of Buddhist Kingship”, Yale 1983, pp.87-97.

³⁴ Sombat Chantornvong. “The Political World of Sunthonphu”, Bangkok 1985, pp.55-74.

³⁵ Nidhi estimated that this work was written between 1817 and 1835. Nidhi Aeusriwong. “Lok khong nangnopphamat [The World of Nangnopphamat]”, Bangkok 1996, pp.129,148 and 154. The

a new worldview by refuting the Sukhothai-period *Traiphum* view of a mystic *Mount Meru* in the centre of the universe. Instead (s)he accepted a division of the world into many states which (s)he listed with the languages as far as they were known, although the author acknowledged that there were many more existing. A detailed description about border length revealed a sophisticated understanding of geography and the territorial dimension. This territorial understanding included the notion that a king who rules his territory rules all the people in it as well. It meant that vassal states should not be any longer under the rule of local kings but under the king of Bangkok. To smoothen his/her argument, the author explained that a state consists of people of many languages and races, hence differences are not important for living together. Accordingly, a king who does not care about race or language is to be praised. Besides that, a king should prefer diplomacy and not war. Such a king makes the country prosper and safe, with people praising the honour of him and asking to settle in the kingdom. Religion should flourish, too.³⁶

The fact that Rama I was not of royal blood resulted in his need of legitimation. That he was a member of the trading nobility in Ayutthaya triggered the chain of events and developments which gave birth to a new worldview and national awareness of the ruling elite that spread to the broader population. It was this change that could be seen as an important element in the emergence of the modern nation.

The Expansion of the State

The transformation to a modern nation would not have been possible without the aspiration of the Bangkok rulers to expand direct control. It must be emphasised that Rama I or his two successors did not intend to build a modern nation but were interested in the strengthening and legitimising of their rule. It could be said that the elements of the modern nation emerged more as a by-product of these efforts. Crucial in the early stage of the modern nation was the help of the state which ensured a fast dissemination of the symbols and ideas of this nation. Facing a situation where many areas were more or less independent after 1767, the

book is reprinted in Suchit Wongthet (ed). "Rueang nangnopphamat rue tamrap thaosrichulalak [The Story of Nangnopphamat or The Textbook of Thao Srichulalak]", Bangkok 1996.

³⁶ Suchit (ed), 1996, pp.22-26.

King pushed hard to increase the reach of his administration. His policy was so successful that only a few decades after the total collapse of a central government, Thailand had a 'fine-meshed net' administration.³⁷ However, it would be a mistake to think of it only in modern bureaucratic terms of administration as Day argued that, in pre-modern South East Asia, the 'ordering efficacy of ritual activity across the landscape' is not to be neglected.³⁸

Indeed, the royal administration in the old kingdom of Ayutthaya had been limited in its reach to the area surrounding the capital, still the city was able to maintain its supremacy in the region over four centuries. The reach of the 'state', however, changed dramatically in the Bangkok era, symbolised by a royal decree in 1803. It abolished the right of provincial governors to appoint their own town councils, legal officers, heads of customs posts and several other important officials.³⁹ Using travelogues and diaries from that period, Terwiel was able to show that a strong bureaucracy was active down to the village level (mostly but not exclusively in the central part).⁴⁰ The early kings of the Bangkok era developed an actual administration policy (*rathaphibannayobai*), which was implemented even in the far away North East.⁴¹

Rama I saw a close relationship with local elites as an efficient way to build up an administration and to extend the Thai core culture beyond Bangkok. He ensured that all officials stayed in close contact with his government with the help of public rituals and service rotas to the capital. Wilson proposed that the Bangkok administration was very skilled in the use of symbols and rituals. At court, for example, every tribute mission was treated to ceremonies designed to be as impressive as possible, the very visible display of Bangkok-Thai culture and custom. Members of the missions got personal gifts like garments and coins from the king. The effects on the recipients of these rituals and presents were

³⁷ Wenk, 1968, p.28. This view is refuted by some academics. See for example Chattip Nartsupha. "Watthanatham tawantok kap phatthanakan sangkhom thai [Western Culture and the Development of Thai Society]", Bangkok 2001, p.9 and Evers, Hans-Dieter. "The Bureaucratization of Southeast Asia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1987, p.669.

³⁸ Day, Tony, *Fluid Iron- State Formation in Southeast Asia*, Honolulu 2002, p.179.

³⁹ Terwiel, Barend "The Bowring Treaty: Imperialism and the Indigenous Perspective", *JSS*, 1991, p.40.

⁴⁰ Terwiel, 1989, p.238-239.

⁴¹ Kusuma Rakshamani. "Phuminam an pen mongkhon [Auspicious Place-names]", Bangkok 1999, p.86. The main interest of the Bangkok administration, however, was focussed on the central part.

summarised by Wilson as ‘considerable’ and had a highly integrative character.⁴² Lieberman argued similarly that the training of sons from influential families as court pages, and the trips of provincial officials with their entourages to the capital for festivals were crucial to maintain the ties. On their return, they transmitted cultural patterns of the capital in architecture, dress, poetry, ritual and speech to their home districts.⁴³ Official contact between the central government and its civil servants or even the people was not limited to Bangkok only. Royal decrees were transmitted through the registry office to the provinces and municipalities, where the texts were read to the people who were called together by the sounding of a gong. Communication between the capital and distant villages was made easier by the fact that many men were literate (through spending time as Buddhist monks).

How efficient this system must have been becomes clear from observations by Christian missionaries in 1841. While the conclusion was related to missionaries, it can be assumed that it was valid for the reach of the central government as well: “The Siamese are almost... as much in the habit of coming several times a year to Bangkok, as the Jews were of going up to Jerusalem to worship.” The report went on: “Still it is certain that vast numbers [of government officials] do spend their three months yearly at Bangkok, in performing various kinds of government service... It will be doubted whether there is another country in the world, of equal magnitude with this, every part of which can be so easily and effectually reached by a missionary stationed at one point.”⁴⁴

In 1805, Rama I commissioned a collection, compilation and revision of the old laws of Ayutthaya to achieve an administrative and legal standard. This law was later called the Three Seals Law (*Kotmai trasamduang*). Rama I gave as purpose of this revision that “for the secular world, the king who maintained the land has legislated the ancient law as a standard to give a just verdict to the people. Now all this has heavily deviated because of greedy and shameless people who adjusted the law according to their needs. This resulted in the loss of justice in the land. His Majesty, therefore, ordered....to make a revision of all the laws which

⁴² Wilson, Constance. “The Thai State in the Khorat Plateau and the Middle Mekong Valley, 1827-1892”, Paper Presented at the 14th IAHA-Conference, Bangkok 1996, pp.3 and 11. That the system was not always perfectly working can be seen in the example of Chiang Mai, which hesitated to support Bangkok in its war against the Lao of Vientiane in 1827. See Wyatt, David. “Palm-Leaf Manuscripts and History-Writing in Pre-modern Northern Thailand”, Paper Presented at the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies, Chiang Mai 1996, p.8.

⁴³ Lieberman, 2003, p.317.

⁴⁴ Cited in Lieberman, 2003, p.317.

existed in the royal hall in order to be accurate and to classify them. He also adjusted some points to be just. So it will be useful for the kings to maintain the land in the future.”⁴⁵ Rama I followed with this law the ideal of the ‘Great Elect’ duty of the king to maintain order. John Crawford’s comment from 1822 showed that the justice system was highly sophisticated: “There exist distinct courts for the administration of civil and criminal law...No capital execution can take place without a warrant of the court and in all cases there is an appeal to the chief judge. All evidence is taken upon oath and the law proceedings which are operose and tedious are invariably committed to writing. The Siamese laws themselves exist in the form of a written code.”⁴⁶ The importance of this law code lay in the fact that it was an ‘update’ from the traditional law with additions the administration saw necessary for its period. The modern nation, therefore, was ruled with an indigenous legal code.

3.2. *The Emergence of the Modern Nation*

Although the modern Thai nation started to emerge in the early Bangkok period (1782-1851), it is important to stress that it was an ongoing process. None of the members of the nobility, including the three monarchs of that period, possessed the idea of a fixed ideology of a modern nation which could have given the direction for the policies. Due to the limited contact to western ideas, the perception of a nation in the western sense was hardly on the mind of the monarchs.⁴⁷ The Bangkok rulers aimed to create a unified kingdom which was partly motivated by the wish to strengthen the country against further Burmese attacks but also to expand their political and economical control as well as to maintain their rule. Lacking alternatives, they had no other choice than to design the kingdom on already existing indigenous material. Therefore, the main theme focussed around a moral recovery, a going back to the roots and an avoidance of the moral mistakes of late Ayutthaya. To achieve an emphasis on continuity while

⁴⁵ Mahawithayalai Thammasat (comp), *Pramuan kotmai ratchakanthi 1* [Collection of Law of Rama I], Bangkok 1986, p.4.

⁴⁶ Crawford, 1967, p.125.

⁴⁷ The British had only loose official contact with Bangkok since their occupation of Penang in 1786 and did not have significant influence on the developments in Bangkok. Webster, Anthony, *Gentlemen Capitalists- British Imperialism in South East Asia, 1770-1890*, London 1998, p.159.

creating a new entity, the new ruling elite made extensive use of well-known symbols, myth and traditions with Buddhism as central element.

The Role of Buddhism

Just like King Trailok in the fifteenth century, the new King Rama I was confronted with the task of unifying his kingdom. To achieve this aim as fast as possible, he relied on a similar strategy: the promotion of Buddhism whose representatives and ideas were under the control of the central government. For this purpose, he ordered the writing and translation of Buddhist texts into Thai to ensure a broad dissemination into every village. Buddhist texts were usually written in the traditional language of Buddhism, Pali, which only educated monks were able to read. With the use of Thai, many more people had now access to Buddhism texts. Besides this unifying effect, the promotion of Buddhism also enabled Rama I to depict himself as protector and patron of the religion, an important traditional duty of the monarch. To achieve a standardisation of the Buddhist canon (*tipitaka*) and to control its content, Rama I organised a Buddhist 'council' for its revision in 1788: "The Pali canon has heavily deviated from the Buddha's teaching. Thus it is difficult for the monks to study and continue Buddhism. I have already invited all the senior monks to conduct the rehearsal of the Pali canon in order to ensure that the teachings were pristine and perfect..."⁴⁸ Along with the canon, the *sangha* itself was purged and 'unworthy' monks dismissed.⁴⁹ The fact that Rama I was able to organise such a council to do revisions was seen as a proof of his greatness for only 'Great Kings' would be able to do so. This was an important legitimation of Rama I in comparison with other kings who had to acknowledge his superiority.

Corresponding to the more rational worldview in the Bangkok elite, the new Thai Buddhist canon reflected a more humanistic view of Buddhism as it claimed to follow strictly the teaching of Buddha. It was based on the idea that all human beings, independent of their status, would receive the same result for their deeds. A king and a slave, for example, were to be rewarded with the same amount of merit (*bun*) or demerit (*baap*) for the same deed. It implied that all people could

⁴⁸ Mahawitthayalai Thammasat, 1986, p.2.

⁴⁹ Wenk, 1968, p.39.

have relationships without caring about the status of another person.⁵⁰ The effects of such thinking on all aspects of society must have been tremendous. It dissolved any obligation to a specific class or clan and, with its emphasis on good behaviour, introduced a duty of every individual to all the people in the society. This approach created, theoretically at least, the condition for a unified people living together in equality. It was a central idea for the modern Thai nation which was based on the interpretation of Buddhism and differed from western ideas.

The rulers in Bangkok needed the unifying power of Buddhism urgently. After a long period of relatively lawlessness without a central authority, rebellions were common occurrences. These revolts under the leadership of wise men (*phuwiset*) or holy men (*phumibun*) were suppressed by the military. In the long term, however, Rama I had to win the loyalty of the people. Buddhist thoughts were the easiest way to reach out into the countryside in order –as one book from that era described it- ‘to reduce the problem that the people do not have solidarity’.⁵¹ With a humanistic version of Buddhism, the ruling elite tried to counterbalance the appeal of the *phuwiset/phumibun* and their use of supernatural beliefs.⁵² It was also helpful to integrate the large number of foreigners (mainly Chinese immigrants fleeing political turmoil at home) living in the kingdom because it made it easier for them to accept the official version of Buddhism.⁵³ Religion was, therefore, essential for the development of identity in the modern nation.

The Use of Symbols, Myths and Traditions in Art and Culture

Rama I supported his political attempts to unify a rapidly expanding kingdom with a vast range of cultural measures. They were aimed to enhance his and the kingdoms legitimacy and to create a sense of unity within the people. The heavy use of symbols, myths and traditions gave the people the feeling of continuity and emotional assurance. For example, the king chose as name for his family dynasty the term ‘Chakri’ which was his own title as supreme commander of the armed forces under King Taksin. ‘Chakri’, explained Mattani, was

⁵⁰ Saichol, 2003b, p.248.

⁵¹ Cited in Saichol, 2003b, p.174.

⁵² Saichol, 2003b, pp.174-177.

⁵³ Saichol, 2003b, p.178.

symbolically associated with Vishnu, the bearer of the discus (*chakra*), which became the crest of the dynasty. The king was to personify Vishnu incarnate, the Great Preserver, who would save the Thai world from its evil enemies and who restored peace, harmony and prosperity to the land.⁵⁴ It should also be noted that the (later introduced) common name for all Thai kings, Rama, was an incarnation of Vishnu. To project the symbol publicly, Rama I ordered the introduction of the official flag for the dynasty, a red flag with the *chakra* on it, in 1799.⁵⁵

The fact that Rama I lacked a blood connection to the royal houses in Ayutthaya and Thonburi led him to look for a new relationship with the people. In a symbolic way, this was possible by emphasising that he was chosen by the people and therefore a 'Great Elect'.⁵⁶ To make him more human and accessible, he changed the procedure of the Oath of Allegiance in 1785. Officials were now supposed to worship Buddha images and no longer images representing former kings during the oath. This was not only a shift of the object for veneration but also a yielding up of the superior position to Buddha. The images of the former kings were representing *thewaracha* or 'god-kings', a cult discouraged by Rama I.⁵⁷ He emphasised the principle of the righteous king (*dharmaracha*) and his own behaviour was intended to be exemplary for his officials and subjects.

At the heart of his cultural efforts was a revision and new edition of the *Ramakian* (the Thai version of the Indian *Ramayana*) to restore the Thai culture of Ayutthaya.⁵⁸ Srisurang called the revision a 'nationalisation of a foreign epic'.⁵⁹ The new version included, for example, a coronation ceremony of Rama similar to that of a Thai king. Using the *Ramakian* to spread Thai culture (mostly with the help of performing arts like dances) was an efficient way because of its centuries-long tradition and popularity in Thailand. It was an attempt to build the new Bangkok kingdom on the historic core cultures of the Thai. It was also an important integrative element while the new kingdom with its sparsely populated and multi-

⁵⁴ Mattani Rutnin, *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand*, Chiang Mai 1996, p.53.

⁵⁵ Royal Decorations and Coin Division. "The Dynastic Marc", Bangkok 1989, p.2.

⁵⁶ Reynolds, Craig. "Religious Historical Writing and the Legitimation of the First Bangkok Reign", Singapore 1982, pp.99-100.

⁵⁷ Akin, 1996, pp.54-56. In a 1782 royal decree he ordered the destruction of the *lingas*, symbols of the cult of *thewaracha*. See also Somboon Suksamran. "Buddhism, Political Authority, and Legitimacy in Thailand and Cambodia", Singapore 1993, p.120.

⁵⁸ The *Ramayana* epic was known in Sukhothai period as the name of King Ramkhamhaeng indicates. The indigenisation to the Thai *Ramakian* happened during the Ayutthaya period.

⁵⁹ Srisurang Poolthupya. "Thai Customs and Social Values in the Ramakien", Munich 1983, p.99.

ethnic society was in constant conflict with the Burmese. Rama in the *Ramakian* came to earth to bring order and harmony. It must have been reassuring for the readers and spectators of the *Ramakian* that their king was going to do the same.

The new rational thinking resulted in a new understanding of history. Rama I used that for his own goals. He ordered to revise all known chronicles of the Ayutthaya period, to start a collection of legends, and to translate Buddhist, Mon and Chinese manuscripts and inscriptions.⁶⁰ Nidhi pointed out that the re-writing of chronicles included not only a change of style but also of the content ‘to put a new story in an old one and to change the old story’.⁶¹ By portraying the inability of the last king in Ayutthaya and crediting the downfall to his negligence to rule according to the ten kingly virtues, the chronicles legitimised the new ruler who followed the virtues. At the same time, it included a lesson for the reader about the value of solidarity and order under a strong government. Due to the new territorial dimension in thinking and the claim to govern all Thais, it was only logical that Rama I was interested not only in Ayutthayan chronicles. New editions of the ‘Northern Chronicles’ with a focus on the period before Ayutthaya and the so-called ‘British Museum Chronicles’ followed. The latter presented a history of ‘Siam’ (*sayamprathet*) from the time of Sukhothai until the reign of Rama I. The naming of the country differed from the traditional habit of calling a kingdom according to the name of the capital. The new edition of the chronicles showed that there was a Thai state before the Ayutthaya period and linked the different kingdoms together during the rule of King Phra Ruang of Sukhothai.

A historical connection with previous kingdoms and rulers was also drawn in literature called *sangkhitayawong* (The Family Who Supports Buddhism). It was written during the Buddhist council in Bangkok in 1788.⁶² The content praised Rama I for organising that council, something only ‘Great Kings’ such as Asoka were able to do. The story included a list of all kings from Ayutthaya down to Rama I and called them the ‘Siam-Thai Family’ (*sayamthaiwong*). The kings, all from one line descending, ruled ‘The Kingdom of Siam’ (*sayamratchaprathet*).

⁶⁰ The collection of foreign stories and legends served a similar purpose. The main theme of these stories, such as the “Three Kingdoms” from China, was about the rule and duty of leaders.

⁶¹ Nidhi A., *Prawattisat rattanakosin nai phraratchaphongsawadan krungsriayudhya* [History of Rattanakosin in the Ayutthaya Chronicle], Bangkok 1980, p.21. See also Thamsook Numnonda. “Kansueksa prawattisat nai prathet thai [The Study of History in Thailand]”, *Phasa lae nangsue*, 1990, p.16.

⁶² Somdetphrawannarat, *Sangkhitayawong* [The Family Who Supports Buddhism], Bangkok 1978.

The author practically merged the various kingdoms into one big country. He also described 'real' countries such as Siam, Cambodia, Laos and Burma, departing from the mystic world of the *Traiphum* of the Sukhothai period.⁶³

The efforts of the ruling elite and its intellectuals to create unity among the people were not limited to literature. Assmann argued that religious objects such as relics could be vital for the creation of identity.⁶⁴ Rama I recognised this aspect as well. His outstanding tool to build a sense of identity within the population was the statue of the Emerald Buddha. This Buddha statue, captured from the Lao in Vientiane in 1778 by Rama I himself (when he was still a general), was housed in a specially erected temple (*Wat Phra Kaew*) on the grounds of the Grand Palace. Tambiah compared the meaning of this Buddha statue to the tooth relic in Sri Lanka.⁶⁵ Since 1782, the Emerald Buddha became identified with the *chakravathin* himself. As a visible sign, the statue was imbued with full royal regalia. Reynolds argued that the king gained through the proper veneration of the statue the support of sovereign power in its most potent and beneficent form. The king's connection imbued him with that power and thereby enabled him to exercise power, to establish order and to guarantee the prosperity and protection of the kingdom.⁶⁶ Rama II, for example, had to rely on the reputation of the statue when a cholera epidemic caused public uproar in the 1820s. He organised a variety of traditional ceremonies to get rid off the disease. Highlight of the activities was a procession with the Emerald Buddha to ward off evil spirits.⁶⁷

To take advantage of the integrative power of the Emerald Buddha more regularly, a ceremony to change its outfit was introduced. First this ceremony was held twice a year but a third time was added under King Rama III. The temple housing the statue was itself full of symbolism. Its wall was decorated with mural paintings depicting scenes from the *Ramakian*. Praising the God Rama as the great hero, the visitors of the temple were supposed to realise the connection with the king who himself was understood to be Rama.⁶⁸ The integrative power of the statue,

⁶³ Somdetphrawannarat, 1978, pp.368-369.

⁶⁴ Assmann, Jan, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis*, Munich 2000, p.63.

⁶⁵ Tambiah, Stanley, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge 1976, p.97.

⁶⁶ Reynolds, Frank. "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Some Aspects of Buddhist Symbolism and Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos", Chambersburg 1978, pp.183-184. See also Jory, Patrick. "The Vessantara Jataka, Barami, and the Bodhisatta-Kings", *Crossroads*, 2002, p.46.

⁶⁷ Terwiel, Barend. "Asiatic Cholera in Siam: Its First Occurrence and the 1820 Epidemic", Singapore 1987, pp.150-152.

⁶⁸ Reynolds, 1978, p.185.

however, aimed not only on domestic use. Accepting the superiority of the owner of the sacred statue, other kings and lords swore their fealty to Bangkok.

The monarchical elite displayed continuity to the core culture of Ayutthaya. Similar to the case of the inscriptions, Rama I reinforced his claim to power with the help of relics from the first cultural core: the kingdom of Sukhothai. He ordered the transport of an eight-meter-high Buddha statue (casted in 1350) from Sukhothai to Bangkok, where it was received with a great ceremony and was installed in the temple *Wat Suthat*.⁶⁹ By moving this statue to his capital, Rama I created a direct connection between the early kingdom of Sukhothai, the kingdom of Ayutthaya and his kingdom of Bangkok. Bangkok should be seen as being firmly rooted in a long, linear history.

Rama I attempted to make his vision of the kingdom more visible to the common people. His capital, Bangkok, played an important role in it. Following the traditional belief that the capital was the centre of the whole country, Rama I installed a city pillar (*lak mueang*)⁷⁰ which was considered to be the sacred heart of the state in April 1782. The name of the city was chosen to be *Krung Sri Rattanakosin* (the Royal City of the Green Jewel) in reference to the Emerald Buddha.⁷¹ The layout of the palace and the whole city followed the layout of Ayutthaya. Newly constructed temples mirrored their Ayutthayan predecessors and even were named after them.⁷² Well aware of the importance of ceremonies, Rama I regularly organised festivities to celebrate progress in the construction of the city. With each building and its consecutive inauguration with a public festival, he included the people in the process of nation-building. They could literally witness the growth of the new nation rising out of the 'ashes' (bricks from the ruins of Ayutthaya were widely used) of the old kingdom of Ayutthaya. Each completed construction project contributed to the grandeur of the kingdom and increasingly of the dynasty. To prevent the people to forget the events, he made sure that the

⁶⁹ Rama I collected more than 1,200 Buddha images from Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and elsewhere, and installed them in temples in Bangkok. This symbolised the city's role as the capital of the kingdom. Aasen, Clarence, *Architecture of Siam*, Kuala Lumpur 1998, pp.129-132.

⁷⁰ City pillars were a custom that was unknown in Ayutthaya. Bangkok Post. "The Power of Pillars", 13 January 2000. See also Pornpan Kerdphol, *Kanplianplaeng khatikhwamchuea rueang saolakmueang samai rattanakosin* [The Changes in the Belief in the City Pillar in the Ratanakosin Period between 1782 and 1992], Bangkok 1999.

⁷¹ Aasen, 1998, p.122.

⁷² Wenk, 1968, pp.19-20.

building process and the glorification of Bangkok as the new capital appeared, to use the word of Mattani, 'purposefully' in all major literary works of the time.⁷³

Other public festivities on a grand scale were organised regularly. Rama I set up a commission to examine and collate old traditions so that full and lengthy ceremonies could be carried out. Every time a ceremony was revived, he issued a proclamation explaining its origin and meaning. Cremations of members of the royal family were especially popular and well organised.⁷⁴ The king also liked to stage ceremonies with specific reference to King Borommakot (r.1733-1758) of Ayutthaya, who was famous for his elaborate festivities.⁷⁵ The emotional appeal of Rama I's ideas and policies transmitted to his compatriots via such ceremonies cannot be estimated but must have been significant.

His successors followed a similar policy of disseminating symbols and ideas to create unity within the people. Rama II was a vivid artist who wrote many poems and supported theatre. Rama III, however, showed a rather limited encouragement of literature. Vella argued that his support was in reality more an expression of his interest in the preservation of heritage than a demonstration of his devotion to literature for its own sake.⁷⁶ A devout Buddhist, Rama III focussed more on the construction of temples. In 1839, a massive renovation program started in *Wat Pho*. The King saw the temple as a medium to educate the people and transformed it into a centre of knowledge, preserving traditional secular and religious knowledge and science. Inscriptions and paintings depicted the Life of Buddha and his disciples, astronomy and astrology, geography and the races of men, mythology, poetry and medicine.⁷⁷

In the end, the new rational worldview was also reflected in the art and culture of the emerging modern nation. The idea of realism resulted in the depiction of real persons in sculpture and paintings. 'Real' landscapes replaced mystic ones.⁷⁸ This change happened before any western influence on significant scale arrived in the country in the mid of the nineteenth century and was an important part of the emerging indigenous nation.

⁷³ Mattani, 1996, p.53.

⁷⁴ Wenk, 1968, p.11. See Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life*, London 1967, pp.92-94.

⁷⁵ Wyatt, 1982, p.17.

⁷⁶ Vella, Walter, *Siam Under Rama III*, Locust Valley 1957, p.54.

⁷⁷ Aasen, 1998, p.126.

⁷⁸ See more in Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Kanmueang lae sangkhom nai sinlapa sathapattayakam sayam samai thai prayuk chatniyom* [Politics and Society in Arts and Architecture in the Periods of Modern Siam, New Thailand, and Nationalism], Bangkok 2004, p.30.

Following the ideal type definition of a modern nation of Smith, we can identify most of the required elements for the period of the early Bangkok kingdom.⁷⁹ Firstly, the period saw the frequent use of myths, symbols and history by the intelligentsia. Based on the existing symbol-myth complex, these instruments to create a sense of being a nation must have been widely understood by the people. Secondly, a public culture did exist and was based on the ethnic core of the Thai. It was dominated by Buddhism and was partly transmitted with the help of the Central Thai language. This public culture was actively disseminated into the provinces via the state, culture and religion. Thirdly, local economies were connected and merged into a national economy. This was supported by a switch from corvée labour to individual taxation which was spreading the cash economy. Fourthly, the expansion of state bureaucracy resulted in the spreading of the common codes and law institutions. Fifthly, a sense of a historic territory existed, although it was not delimited by fixed borders.

Was the population aware of being part of a modern nation? This question is difficult to answer but some indicators point towards a consciousness, at least in some groups. The term 'nation' itself was not unknown as foreigners such as Crawford used the term 'nation' in negotiations with government officials in the 1820s.⁸⁰ Only a short time afterwards, in the reign of Rama III, the term *chat* appeared in the meaning of *ethnos* and was later transformed into the modern meaning of *nation*.⁸¹ One important element of a modern nation was missing at this point in Thai history: citizenship. However, if we understand this indigenous form of a nation as an entity defined through the monarch, citizenship could at this early stage be replaced by the idea of a 'subject people'. The emerging modern Thai nation was not a nation by the people but by the monarchy, a king's nation.

To sum up, the early Bangkok period saw the emergence of many elements of a modern nation. As with the earlier stages of the Thai nation, this step in its development can only be understood as a process over a period of time. The ignition for this process was the exceptional circumstance of a total destruction of the old kingdom and a rational thinking ruling elite in the ascendant. They aimed to

⁷⁹Smith, Anthony. "The Problem of National Identity: Ancient, Medieval and Modern?", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1994, p.381.

⁸⁰ Crawford, 1967, pp.29 and 43.

⁸¹ Rosenberg, Klaus, *Nation und Fortschritt- Der Publizist Thien Wan und die Modernisierung Thailands unter König Chulalongkorn (r.1868-1910)*, Hamburg 1980, p.118.

rebuild the glory of the former kingdom of Ayutthaya in Bangkok. Rama I himself, however, spoke of 'restoration' and not of a simple return to older days. To legitimise the new dynasty, the changes were masked behind continuity or, in the words of Terwiel, it was 'innovation in the guise of orthodoxy'.⁸² Due to the fact that this transformation happened before the heydays of colonialism in mainland South East Asia, the rulers had to use indigenous concepts to create a bond of loyalty and solidarity between the people. It would be wrong, however, to think of the ideas of the Thai rulers as a ready-to-use ideology. The Thai nation at the point in time was just that: a nation. In the period of the next ruler, King Mongkut (r.1851-1868), Thailand saw a considerable change. The nation was to be defined by an ideology: monarchical nationalism.

⁸² Terwiel, Barend, *A History of Modern Thailand, 1767-1942*, St. Lucia 1983, p.70.

Chapter 4

The Emergence of Monarchical Nationalism (1851-1868)

During the early period of the Kingdom of Bangkok, the new rational worldview led to reforms in some aspects of Thai society. One of the results was the emergence of an indigenous interpretation of a modern nation. An ideology, however, that would define this nation and point towards the future direction was lacking. This chapter deals with the birth of such an ideology, namely nationalism. The central argument is that the indigenous Thai nation generated on the initiation of the monarchs themselves a kind of nationalism which included distinctive indigenous elements as well. Contrary to the view of the revisionist school, I propose to see this new nationalism neither as a reaction against a popular movement nor an official nationalism.

4.1. King Mongkut and Nationalism

Anderson argued that the emergence of nationalism in Asia in the nineteenth century was a result of imperialism and its military power, capitalist penetration, industrial civilisation, administrative and educational modernisation. He added: “The historical timing of nationalism’s birth was tightly synchronised with the appearance of vernacular newspapers, job market education, industrial production and consumption, mass migration by railways, steamship, and motor vehicle, and the spread of clock time and Mercator space.”¹ I propose, however, that in the case of Thailand, these conditions were not the decisive factors for the emergence of nationalism.

I have argued in the previous chapter that a modern nation has already been emerging when King Mongkut (Rama IV, r.1851-1868) ascended the throne in 1851. Nonetheless, there was no attempt to develop an ideology or movement which, in Smith terms, aimed ‘to maintain autonomy, unity and identity and could be called nationalism’.² For nationalism to emerge, an awareness of the nation and the wish to bind the loyalty of the people to it was needed. The early kings of Bangkok could be

¹ Anderson, Ben. “Nationalism”, Oxford 2001, p.576.

² Smith, Anthony. “Nations in Decline? The Erosion and Persistence of Modern National Identities”, London 2007 (forthcoming), p.3.

called 'old patriots'³ for they harboured national sentiments. Their aspirations, however, was to focus the loyalty of the population on their persons and the monarchical institution. In contrast to his predecessors, Mongkut saw himself in a different position. The king was no longer aloof and 'the owner' of the nation but became part of it and was its embodiment. Although Mongkut was without a fully developed and cohesive ideology of nationalism at the beginning, his policies and actions were aimed to promote nationalism through the loyalty to the monarch.

Why was King Mongkut interested in promoting nationalism? I suggest as reason that he himself was a nationalist. Mongkut received both traditional and modern education from the court scholars and western missionaries. He had a reputation of having a very thorough knowledge of western culture, history and international relations. Mongkut, therefore, was well aware of the term 'nation' in a western sense as it is documented that he asked the US missionary Bradley about the meaning of 'a civilised and enlightened nation' in 1851.⁴ It is also known that Mongkut consulted the *Anthropological Review* in search for an answer to this question.⁵ This awareness of the term nation was a necessary pre-condition of the transformation of the national sentiment for the indigenous nation into nationalism.

An example to demonstrate Mongkut's nationalistic feelings was his attitude towards China. The King was unhappy about the increasing influence of Chinese culture on Thai architecture and religion during the reign of Rama III.⁶ Before, Thailand and China had a good relationship with a booming trade based on tribute missions from Thailand and many Chinese immigrants settling in the kingdom. In the 1840s, the opium wars and the Taiping rebellion brought this relationship to a halt. After Mongkut became king, he rejected the demand of the Chinese to restart the tribute relationship

³ Bayly used this term in his description of the precursors of Indian nationalism. For Bayly, 'patriotism' expresses the sense of loyalty to place and institutions which bound some Indians, even in the immediate pre-colonial period, to their regional homelands. Bayly, C, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia*, New Dehli 1998, p.vii.

⁴ Charnvit Kasetsiri. "Siam/Civilization- Thailand/Globalization: Things to Come?", *Thammasat Review*, 2000, p.120. The desire of the Thai elite for 'civilisation' is best described in Thongchai Winichakul. "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilization Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam", *JAS*, 2000.

⁵ Thawesak Phueaksom, *Khonplaekna nanachat khong krung sayam* [International Strangers of Siam], Bangkok 2003, p.148.

⁶ The increased Chinese influence was the result of a close relationship between the Chinese merchant class and the Thai nobility. The Chinese style became fashionable through Chinese craftsmen as can be seen in the architecture of *Wat Pho* [temple]. Nidhi Aeusriwongse, *Pakkai lae bairuea* [The Quills and the Sails], Bangkok 1995, pp.136-142 and Somchai Nimlek. "Ekkalak thang sathapattayakam nai samai somdetphranangklaochaoyuhua [The Architectural Identity in the Reign of King Rama III]", Bangkok 1982, p.412.

and offered a trade relationship on the basis of equality instead. The sending of royal tribute missions was in his eyes a demotion of Thailand to a vassal state of China. He considered former Thai kings 'stupid' because they allowed the Chinese to take advantage of them.⁷ Mongkut started to curb the Chinese influence and ordered a return to the style and forms of the former kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya in order to show the independence and long history of the kingdom. Most visible was this switch in architecture. Mongkut himself financed and supervised the restoration of the biggest stupa in Thailand in Nakhorn Pathom province. He chose to revive a round form which he regarded as pure, being the form of stupas in Sri Lanka (Thai Buddhism was initiated from Buddhism in Sri Lanka). His going back to the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya style was, therefore, not only an aesthetic change but also a return to the roots, or in other words, a return to a pure Thai nation.⁸

The second reason for Mongkut wishing to promote nationalism was an intra-elite power struggle between him and the nobility. As mentioned before, the restoration of Thai society and economy after the foundation of Bangkok was very much a result of a cooperation between the previous monarchs and the nobles. The close access to power and the possibility to participate in an expanding foreign trade prominently propelled one family into the top positions of government: the Bunnag. Its senior members were able to control the most precious assets, namely people who were their 'manpower' or labour (especially in and around Bangkok) and the military.⁹ After the death of King Rama III in 1851, the Bunnag used the lack of a hereditary system to their advantage and assumed the role of kingmakers. To make sure that the candidate would be easily controllable and not a threat to their power, the Bunnag rejected several princes as possible monarchs because they deemed them as too progressive.¹⁰ Their choice went to Prince Mongkut who at that time had been a monk for decades and thus had no power base for he controlled no people and had neither influence in the military nor wealth.

⁷ Subsaeng Pramboon, *Sino-Thai Tributary Relations, 1282-1853*, Madison 1971, pp.280-290.

⁸ Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Kanmueang lae sangkhom nai sinlapa sathapattayakam sayam samai thai prayuk chatniyom* [Politics and Society in Arts and Architecture in the Periods of Modern Siam, New Thailand, and Nationalism], Bangkok 2004, p.91.

⁹ Thoetpong Khongchan, *Kanmueang rueang sathapana phrachomklao* [Politics in the Enthronement of King Mongkut], Bangkok 2004, p.27. Bradley, who came to Thailand in 1835, was impressed by the sophistication of the Bunnag. They were interested in modern technology and were even able to build ships based solely upon their observations of European ships. See Somchai Phiroththirarak, *The Historical Writings of Chao Phraya Thipakorawong*, DeKalb 1983.p.46.

¹⁰ Thoetpong, 2004, p.59.

With his good knowledge of English, the Bunnag saw Mongkut as the ideal king to deal with the increasing contacts with the West.¹¹

This episode shows that Mongkut was in a very weak position against the nobles right from the beginning. Mongkut himself revealed in a letter the limits of his influence: “But when the king orders someone influential to do something, when that someone does not do that something as the king requested, it is not a problem. That is because the king does not cause these people to fear or to be in awe. They can act as they please or follow their own destiny without fear because they believe that the king will not interfere. This must be tolerated.”¹² These words show that the Bunnag had been powerful long before and were not willing to give up their position easily.¹³ The King, therefore, had to find a power base for himself in order to be able to fend off the nobles and to strengthen his own family’s grip on power as the traditional power bases were out of reach for him. Mongkut chose to transform the people into citizens, being well aware about the development of nations in Europe and especially the increasing role of monarchical representation in Great Britain.¹⁴ This thesis proposes that the promotion of nationalism enabled him to get direct access to the people and bypass the nobles.

Mongkut’s attempt was nothing less than a break with the traditional concept of power. The King now regarded the nation as his power base. Mongkut considered a monarch the ‘leader of the land’ (*namphaendin*) who must have the highest power to fulfil his duty to make the country prosper.¹⁵ His diligence and insistence to run the government business mostly on his own enabled him to expand his influence and to reduce his dependency on the nobility. This was so successful that one minister made the comment to Bradley: ‘We have now got no government...but now only one king’.¹⁶

Another factor contributed to Mongkut’s decision to promote nationalism: the increasing knowledge about western thought and concepts and the arrival of western

¹¹ Thoetpong , 2004, pp.75-77.

¹² Cited in Attachak Sattayanurak. “The Intellectual Aspects of Strong Kingship in the Late Nineteenth Century (Part 2), *JSS*, 2001, p.12.

¹³ The letter also confirmed that Wyatt’s argument that Mongkut gave almost unlimited power to the Bunnag is misleading. See Wyatt, David. “Family Politics in Nineteenth Century Thailand”, Cambridge 1976, p.68.

¹⁴ Most likely, Mongkut got many of his ideas about the monarchy from the newspapers. Queen Victoria’s appearances in the public, for example the royal pomp at the opening ceremony of the Great Exhibition in 1851, were well covered. See Tyrell, Alex/Ward, Yvonne. “‘God Bless Her Little Majesty’. The Popularising of Monarchy in the 1840s”, *National Identities*, 2000, p.109.

¹⁵ Attachak Sattayanurak, *Kanplianplaeng lokkathat khong chonchan phunam thai tangtae ratchakan thi 4- pho so 2475* [The Change of Worldview of the Thai Leaders from the Reign of King Mongkut to 1932], Bangkok 1995, pp.101 and 127.

¹⁶ Somchai, 1983, p.55. Bradley, however, remarked that Mongkut feared of being deposed by the cabinet.

powers which had significant influence on trade and politics. Mongkut, for example, was very well aware that the West constituted a serious danger for the independence of the country and the rule of his own dynasty: 'if any dispute should arise out of our refusal to allow entry to the British warships, the British might make a forced entry into the [Chaophraya] river, and whatever fortress they arrived at, they might make their way into it to spike and dismantle the guns in the manner similar to what they had done in China and elsewhere'.¹⁷ Arrogant western behaviour also fuelled Mongkut's resolution for nationalism.¹⁸

4.2. *Elements of Thai Nationalism under King Mongkut*

To promote nationalism successfully, national identity had to be strengthened. According to Smith, national identity is 'the continuous reproduction, reinterpretation and transmission of a pattern of symbols, values, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of a nation, and the identification of individuals with the cultural elements of that heritage'.¹⁹ In creating a Thai identity, Mongkut took as source for the required symbols, myths and tradition the core culture of the Thai and adapted it to the requirements of a national culture of an emerging modern nation. The King, however, made sure that the door 'to join' the national identity was not closed for other ethnic groups. As an open-minded person, he followed the traditional openness of the Thai monarchs: 'be it hereby declared as follows to all servants of the crown of higher and lower rank and to all persons under Siamese flag, to Chinese, Annamites, Laos, Cambodians, Burmese [etc]'.²⁰ The defining term was now 'under the Siamese flag' which symbolised the trans-ethnic Thai nation. This was also reflected in the Thai army. The majority of its members were ethnically not Thai, even the King's Guards consisted

¹⁷ Cited in Riggs, Fred, *Thailand- The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, Honolulu 1966, p.32.

¹⁸ Mongkut was especially upset by a case in 1865. The French consulate granted a Chinese murderer asylum after he claimed to be French. Bradley, a close personal friend of Mongkut and most likely mirroring his opinion, wrote in his newspaper that Thais and 'everybody living under the shadow of the Thai flag' who converted to Catholicism and regarded themselves as French to avoid paying taxes were not good because they split the country. The row was only resolved after Mongkut complained directly with Napoleon III. Krairoek Nana, *King Mongkut yut yurop yuet sayam* [King Mongkut Stopped Europe to Take Over Siam], Bangkok 2004, pp.36-37.

¹⁹ Smith, 2006, p.3.

²⁰ Cited in Seni Pramroj/Kukrit Pramroj, *A King of Siam Speaks*, Bangkok 1987, p.42.

mainly of Khmer and Lao soldiers.²¹ In a royal decree from the year 1867, Mongkut announced: “the word *jin* (Chinese) means a person with a pigtail. If sons or grandsons wear a pigtail but are tattooed on their wrist and registered in a list, then they are Thais.”²² The nation was, therefore, made out of the cultural core of the Thais but open to people willing to adapt. Before, it was sufficient to be a subject of the king and to obey the law to be accepted (see for example the mentioned case of the Mon refugees), now with a sense of monarchical citizenship loyalty to the king meant loyalty to the nation.

How was this achieved? Mongkut attempted to redefine the monarchy as the embodiment of the nation and not any longer as the mediator between the supernatural and real world. To create a sense of belonging and a connection between the monarchy and the nation, Mongkut and the intellectual elite of his time pursued a wide range of programmes including the purification of Buddhism, the reinterpretation of history, the standardisation of language, the delimitation of land and naming the nation, the acceptance of common rights and duties and the revival and adaptation of ceremonies and festivals.

As a long-time monk, Mongkut was especially interested in religion and showed his nationalistic ambitions for a return to the ‘real’ Thai culture in his initiatives towards Buddhism. Mongkut started to reform the Buddhist *sangha* when he was ordained, finding the traditional monk hood unacceptable.²³ Mongkut argued that a new Buddhism was necessary because the old teachings and *sangha* disappeared in 1767. The existing remnants were full of flaws and did not comply with what the Buddha taught. He especially rejected everything that claimed to be of supernatural origin. The King followed the example of Rama I by purging elements from the *sangha* and teachings he thought were not fitting with his ideas of a pure, Thai Buddhism. In the foundation of the new, ‘pure’ sect *thammayut*, Mongkut re-interpreted the teaching and added new contents. First, he emphasised in his preaching the importance of rational analysis and understanding of *dharma* before practicing it.²⁴ Second, he reconstructed ‘original’ ceremonies from the time of Buddha and insisted on the exact recitation of Buddhist

²¹ Anderson, Benedict. “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies”, Athens 1978, p.202. See also Terwiel, B., *Through Travellers’ Eyes: An Approach to Early Nineteenth Century Thai History*, Bangkok 1989, p.253.

²² Cited in Kasian Tejapira. “Pigtail: A Pre-History of Chineseness in Siam”, *Sojourn*, 1992, p.108.

²³ Attachak Sattayanurak. “Kankoet naewkit natiponlamueang nai rat thai samai mai [The Birth of the Concept of Civic Duty in the Modern Thai State]”, *Ratthasatsan*, 1988–89, pp.209-210.

²⁴ Mettanando Bhikku, *Kamnoet lae attalak khong thammayutikanikai* [The Birth and Identity of the Thammayut Sect], Bangkok 2005, p.57.

texts in Pali.²⁵ Third, he stressed the capability of human beings as central to Buddhism. Fourth, he shifted the meaning of karma, stressing that past lives have less influence than the conduct in the present one. Reynolds argued in this context that the reform of Buddhism was an attempt to reconstitute the traditions so that it would be not in conflict with new ideas and institutions being absorbed from the West.²⁶ Indeed, Mongkut's efforts to 'streamline' Buddhism was important for nation-building. To bind Buddhism to the monarchy, he insisted on the traditional role of the king as protector and patron of Buddhism. Mongkut's reforms had tremendous impact on the religion and were even compared by Keyes to the importance of Luther's reformation.²⁷ It must be noted, however, that although Mongkut had a clear conception about Buddhism and saw it as central for Thai identity, he granted the right of religious freedom by law in 1855.²⁸

The second field that had high priority for Mongkut was history. The King hoped to achieve two objectives with the use of history and historiography. Firstly, it was one method to deal with the imperial powers. Secondly, he attempted to create a sense of national belonging.

Faced by European challenges, Mongkut saw history as a way to demonstrate the ancientness of the Thai civilisation. This was projected to provide the proof for the right for independence. One example was his writing of a concise chronicle of Cambodia as historical evidence of the rightfulness and legality of the Thai claim on Cambodia. This chronicle was sent to the French government in 1861.²⁹ His main target group for the reinterpretation of history, however, were the Thai people. The King built his version of Thai history on the model of a 'Golden Age': the Kingdom of Sukhothai. Smith argued that a 'Golden Age' was a vital component of nationalist mythology: "The appeal of a 'Golden Age' is fundamental for locating and re-rooting the members of a community within a wider universe of communities by providing the community with a specific location and with definite roots. The myth reinforces the attachment of the

²⁵ Mettanando Bhikku, 2005, pp.67-68.

²⁶ Reynolds, Frank. "Dharma in Dispute: The Interactions of Religion and Law in Thailand", *Law and Society Review*, 1994, p.438.

²⁷ Keyes, Charles. "Buddhism Fragmented: Thai Buddhism and Political Order since the 1970s", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.6.

²⁸ Ishii, Yoneo. "The Thai Muslims and the Royal Patronage of Religion", Paper Presented at the 13th IAHA-Conference, Hong Kong 1991, p. 4.

²⁹ Thamsook Numnonda. "Kan sueksa prawattisat nai prathet thai [The Study of History in Thailand]", *Phasa lae nangsue*, 1990, p.16. See also Mongkut's own account in Chomklaochaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Chumnum phrabaromrachathibai lae prachumphraratchaniphon phakpakinnaka* [Collections of the Royal Essays and Miscellaneous Writings], Bangkok 2004, p.184. Mongkut divided Cambodia into four parts and called the part West of the Tonle Sap 'Khmer-Thai'.

people to their land by turning territory into a national homeland. To create the conditions for a renaissance of the nation, it becomes necessary to re-root the community in its soil.”³⁰ Mongkut’s version of the Golden Age of Sukhothai included the ideal for his kingship, namely the righteous monarch who practices the ten kingly virtues and is a father to his people. In return, he can expect the loyalty and love of his people. Mongkut based his idea on the already mentioned *Ramkhamhaeng* inscription from 1292 (see Chapter 2) which he discovered in Sukhothai province. The inscription described not only a huge area under control of the Thai king but also a sophisticated yet idyllic society. It depicted the kingly ideal of the wise, brave and compassionate father of the people.³¹ For Mongkut, the Sukhothai period was a Golden Age for all Thais under a just ruler. It was also the starting point of his version of Thai history which portrayed an uninterrupted continuity of Thai kings from Ramkhamhaeng right up to himself. Additionally, he revived the myth of the people’s king and chose as part of his official name the title ‘elected by all the people’ (*Mahachonnikonsamosonsommat*).³²

Mongkut himself authored several volumes about Thai history. One of these books, ‘History of the Thai’ (*prawattisat thai*) described the origin of the Thais until early Bangkok period. It centred on the idea that the king is the ‘maker’ of the state and responsible to maintain it in an orderly state until it prospers.³³ Besides composing western-style historiography, Mongkut revised Ayutthayan chronicles (*phraratchapongsawadan chabapphraratchahatthalekha*- The Royal Autograph Chronicle) and included his ideas about kingship in the new edition. For him, the activities of the king had to be beneficial for society. He gave more importance to the people or, to use the metaphor from the *Ramakian*, moved the people from being a weapon to be a part of the body. One episode added by Mongkut in the chronicles reflected this change. When the future King Taksin predicted the downfall of Ayutthaya and prepared to retake the capital in order to take care of the people, he was described as having asked his soldiers and the people about his plan to become king before they eagerly agreed.³⁴ This story represented Mongkut’s idea of the Thai nation and

³⁰ Smith, Anthony, *Chosen People*, Oxford 2003, pp.190 and 215.

³¹ Girling, John, *Thailand- Society and Politics*, Ithaca 1987, p.21.

³² Skrobaneck, Walter, *Buddhistische Politik in Thailand: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des heterodoxen Messianismus*, Wiesbaden 1976, p.42.

³³ Attachak, 1995, pp.54 and 65

³⁴ Attachak, 1995, p.69.

corresponded to the legend of the 'Great Elect': the king being legitimised by the people; his duty was to lead and to protect them.³⁵

To connect the nation with the past, Mongkut wrote the first accounts of, in his view, three extraordinary kings (Ramathibodi, Naresuan, Narai) and their service to the kingdom.³⁶ He also awarded the title 'the Great' to outstanding monarchs. These activities can be interpreted as an early concept of heroes, a sign for nationalist historiography. In another article, Mongkut merged the previous capitals and Bangkok together into one line and based the roots of the Bangkok dynasty firmly in the past.³⁷ Mongkut was moreover the first Thai ruler to institutionalise cultural heritage.³⁸ The King financed the renovation of Buddhist sites like *Phra Pathom Chedi* in Nakhorn Pathom province. This stupa was very old and could be used as further evidence for the long history of the Thais, adding a political purpose to the religious one. In addition, he founded a small museum with antiquities aiming at European visitors. These antiquities consisted of artefacts, indicating the culture, unity, continuity and legitimacy of the Thai state. Although this museum was not open to the public, it represented a step to an awareness of a 'unique' culture.

Another field for Mongkut's activities to promote nationalism was the Thai language. Knowing several languages including Latin, the King was annoyed that the Thai language had no standard like English and every writer followed his own rule.³⁹ Mongkut aimed, therefore, to standardise the language based on the Central Thai dialect. After foreign missionaries started to research the Thai language and published a Thai grammar book in 1850, Mongkut produced long lists of verbs and co-occurring prepositions and systemised the future and past tenses. The king went on to propagate

³⁵ Mongkut used the myth of the 'Great Elect' on several occasions. In his book *Nanathamwicharin*, he discussed the origin of justice and based his explanations on the same Buddhist story of the 'Great Elect'. Mongkut emphasised that the elected king was full of knowledge, wisdom, justice and diligence and wanted that everybody be happy. Thanet Aphornsuvan. "Kannoet kanmueang lae khwamyuttitham nai samai ton krungrattanakosin [The Birth of Politics and Justice in the Early Rattanakosin Period]", *Sinlapawatthanatham*, 2001, p.110.

³⁶ Attachak Sattayanurak. "The Intellectual Aspects of Strong Kingship in the Late Nineteenth Century (Part 1)", *JSS*, 2000, p.88. Thai art changed in Mongkut's time. Earlier temple murals depicted the life of Buddha and *jatakas*, now they showed 'real' history such as a fighting King Naresuan on an elephant. Chatri, 2004, p.22.

³⁷ Chomklaochaoyuhua, 2004, p.27.

³⁸ Askew, Marc. "The Rise of Moradok and the Decline of Yarn: Heritage and Cultural Construction in Urban Thailand", *Sojourn*, 1996, p.188. Mongkut protected cultural goods in monasteries by law in 1853. Prapat Trinarong. "Kotmai kiao kap sappayakon watthanatham phurai khut wat [Law about Cultural Materials Stolen by Criminals from Monasteries]", *Sinlapakon*, 1989, p.89.

³⁹ Chomklaochaoyuhua, 2004, pp.7-17.

the 'new' language whenever he could and threatened penalties on those who violated the language rules.⁴⁰

The next important field of Mongkut's activities concerned the delimitation of land and the naming of the nation. One of the major problems in identifying a nation in a western sense in South East Asia was the lack of clearly demarcated borders until the arrival of the Europeans. Traditional Thai rulers were aware of a concept of borders but in their position as *chakravatin* (universal rulers) not interested in it.⁴¹ The control of people or 'manpower' in the sparsely populated areas of the region was far more important. Solomon pointed out that traditional South East Asian rulers used territory for diplomacy, depending on their own strength to gain or lose land. As long as the Thai rulers were able to expand into non-Thai areas, subsequent losses of the same territory were tolerable. It also confined destructive fighting to the enemies' land or buffer zones.⁴² King Mongkut, however, was the first king to officially accept that the world was round and that there were many countries, some subordinate to others, around the world, giving up the cosmology of the Buddhist *Traiphum* from the Sukhothai period.⁴³ In 1854, he discussed the drawing up of boundaries with Burma. A few years later, Mongkut was worried about the progress of the French in Indochina, who seized Saigon in 1862 and established a protectorate over Cambodia in 1863.⁴⁴ When the French asked him to recognize this protectorate, Mongkut ordered a survey of the Mekong-region in 1866.⁴⁵ The core of the Thai nation was expanding, with the result that many formerly independent political units had then to decide on which side of the border they wanted to live.

Mongkut connected the developing territorial dimension of the nation with the monarchy as well. He used consistently the phrase *phaendin khong phramahakasat*

⁴⁰ Vandergeest, Peter. "Constructing Thailand: Regulation, Everyday Resistance, and Citizenship", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1993, p.144.

⁴¹ Wijevewardene, Gehan. "Ethnicity and Nation: The Tai in Burma, Thailand and China (Sipsongpanna and Dehong)", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.6 and Somkiat Wanthana. "Rat thai: nammatham lae ruppatham [Thai State: Abstract and Concrete]", 1988-89, p.191. The first time a Thai king was made aware about European style borders was in the Burney treaty with Great Britain in 1826. Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life*, 1967, p.158.

⁴² Solomon, Robert. "Boundary Concepts and Practices in Southeast Asia", *World Politics*, 1970, p.12.

⁴³ Attachak, 2000, p.81.

⁴⁴ Stuart-Fox, Martin. "Conflicting Conceptions of the State: Siam, France and Vietnam in the Late Nineteenth Century", *JSS*, 1994, p.138. In the same year, the Thai government fixed the borders to Burma with piles of stones and wood, displaying Thai and Mon letters. See Thiphakorawong, Chaophraya, *The Dynastic Chronicles Bangkok Era: The Fourth Reign*, Tokyo 1965, p.360.

⁴⁵ Suarez, Thomas, *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia*, Hong Kong 1999, p.263.

(territory of the king) instead of the term 'country'.⁴⁶ Another popular term of Mongkut was *ekarat* (a country unified under a king) for 'sovereignty'. His signature was even more revealing: *krung sayam* (the Siamese country, also King of Siam). By calling himself 'Siam' he indicated that he embodied the nation but also that he saw Siam on the same level as countries such as Great Britain (*krung angrit*). On other occasions, Mongkut named himself 'King of *syam rath*' (State of Siam).⁴⁷

Mongkut ensured that the new understanding of the nation and its name was disseminated in the country. In 1853, Mongkut ordered the introduction of paper money. The money was stamped with a red *chakra* and a Thai-style crown, symbolising the Chakri dynasty and Mongkut (= crown) himself. The denomination was written in twelve languages including Khmer, Laotian, Mon and Burmese to show the far-reaching size of his kingdom. A second set of paper money was in use between 1856-1860, displaying only a monogram in Latin letters: 'S.P.P.M., Mongkut K.S.' (H.M. King Mongkut, the Sovereign of the Siamese Kingdom). Similar, when the first set of flat coins was introduced, it had no name of the country but the royal seal (*chakra* with white Elephant) of Mongkut.⁴⁸ The Thai chronicles commented: 'The new coins were enthusiastically put into use by the people all over the kingdom'.⁴⁹ The King himself helped to spread the money (and the money economy). On his trips upcountry, he gave money to people who brought him presents.⁵⁰ Money was one of the most efficient ways to spread the symbols of the nation. Another means to promote the name of the nation was his designation of a protective spirit (*Phra Sayam Thewathirat*) for 'Siam'.⁵¹ He explained that this spirit would protect Thailand whenever it is in danger of losing its sovereignty.⁵²

A different field of Mongkut's activities were the common rights and duties of people. Although those were already known in the early reigns of the Bangkok kingdom, Mongkut led them forward towards civil rights more commonly connected with a modern nation. The most important breakthrough in this direction was Mongkut's

⁴⁶ Attachak, 1995, p.73.

⁴⁷ Sunait Chutintaranond. "The Image of the Burmese Enemy in Thai Perceptions and the Historical Writings", *JSS*, 1992, p.94. Mongkut was the inventor of the term 'Syam Rath', using it for the first time when he (as a monk) wrote a letter to the *sangha* in Sri Lanka in 1822. Somkiat, 1988, p.192.

⁴⁸ Bank of Thailand, *Centenary of Thai Banknote, 1902-2002*, Bangkok 2002, pp.14-16.

⁴⁹ Thiphakorawong, 1965, p.259.

⁵⁰ Thiphakorawong, 1965, p.342.

⁵¹ See Sulak Sivaraksa. "The Crisis of Siamese Identity", Clayton 1991, p.14 and Stuart-Fox, 1994, p.141.

⁵² Rungarun Kunlathamrong. "Phrasayamthewathirat mahithithep nai prathet thai [Phrasayamthewathirat: the Greatest Angel in Thailand]", *Nationsutsapda*, 2004, p.78.

acceptance of private ownership of land. It was traditionally understood that all land belonged to the king, as the Three Seals Law stated: 'All the land of Ayutthaya territories belongs to the King and as such has been given to his people as his slaves. Thus it cannot belong to them'.⁵³ Mongkut, however, argued in his proclamation that 'this law has become punitive and is not based on the principles of justice'. He decided therefore that the state had to pay for land at a fair market price.⁵⁴ The acceptance of private land ownership had three important effects. First, it was a massive boost for the monetarisation of the economy. Second, individual rights to landownership motivated investors and farmers to transform swamp areas into cultivated land in order to produce rice for a booming and profitable export industry in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Third, as Rosen argued, the booming trade further changed the old value system. Since the reign of Rama II, financial income from trade increasingly was met more with the same social acceptance than the income from the traditional control of 'manpower'.⁵⁶ This sped up the dissolution of the old system which was the backbone of political power of the nobility. Nobles adapted to the new situation by increasingly transforming themselves into landowners and speculators, an activity many found pleasant as this letter from a nobleman revealed in 1899: "After the careful consideration and much experience in many kinds of trade, I can say that there has never been any business comparable to speculation in land which was the proper and secure business for Thai noblemen."⁵⁷

Mongkut's acceptance of private ownership of land was a milestone on the route to citizen rights as was the already mentioned acceptance of religious freedom. Besides that, he strengthened individualism, an essential element in the future economic development and also provided the nobility with an alternative to their traditional source of income, the control of people. By depriving the nobility of this power base but offering lucrative profits from trade, Mongkut scored an important point in the intra-elite struggle between the monarchy and the nobility. However, these processes were ongoing and remained unfinished in the reign of Mongkut.

⁵³ Cited in Thai Khadi Institute, *Persistence Within Change*, Bangkok no date, p.53.

⁵⁴ Printed in Chattip Nartsupha/Suthy Prasartset (eds), *Socio-Economic Institutions and Cultural Change in Siam, 1851-1910*, Bangkok 1981, pp.291-296.

⁵⁵ See data for the rice exports in Feeney, D., *The Political Economy of Productivity*, Vancouver 1982, p.127.

⁵⁶ Rosen, G., *Peasant Society in a Changing Environment*, Chicago 1975, p.134.

⁵⁷ Cited in Sungsidh Piriyanangsan, *Thai Bureaucratic Capitalism, 1932-1960*, Vancouver 1983, p.48.

The last and maybe most important program by Mongkut was the revival and adaptation of ceremonies and festivals. Thai culture relied traditionally on the transmission of the meaning of rituals and symbols during ceremonies. They provided a sense of belonging. Wilson commented that 'the ceremonial life of the Thai was very rich, and the state ceremonies in which people from all levels of society took part, gave the Thai a sense of cultural and political unity and a strong national pride'.⁵⁸

The power of rituals and symbolism to generate a sense of unity is well documented in the academic literature. Not much could be added to Walzer's statement that "politics is an art of unification; from many it makes one. And symbolic activity is perhaps our most important means of bringing things together, both intellectually and emotionally, thus overcoming isolation and even individuality. The union of men can only be symbolised."⁵⁹ In a time without mass media or in the case of newspapers rather limited in their reach, rituals, ceremonies and festivities were the ideal means to disseminate nationalism in Thailand. These activities were firmly based on traditions, myth and symbols which the public could understand and ensured a broad participation of the people. These undertakings of the monarchy were not an invention of tradition in order to control the masses. The high attendance rates of the people at ceremonies showed the popularity of the king⁶⁰ and reflected his function to give the people emotional reassurance in exchange for their loyalty. That was one of the main reasons for the success of Mongkut's nationalism.

Mongkut did not revolutionise the ceremonial sector but his activities were a 'ritual involution'.⁶¹ He himself planned and organised ceremonies, emphasising or adding Buddhist elements in the procedures. In the view of Tambiah, however, brahmanical features of rituals of kingship were not fully eliminated by Mongkut because he was fully aware that they were a part of the identity and majesty of his office. The King introduced new Buddhist festivals like the commemoration of the Birth, Enlightenment, and Death of Buddha and adapted western ceremonial ideas to a Thai context (King's Birthday or Coronation Anniversary celebrations).⁶² During the

⁵⁸ Wilson, Constance, *State and Society in the Reign of Mongkut, 1851-1868: Thailand on the Eve of Modernization*, Cornell 1970, p.259.

⁵⁹ Walzer, Michael. "On the Role of Symbolism in Political Thought", *Political Science Quarterly*, 1967, p.194.

⁶⁰ For a comparison of the popularity of the monarchy in the United Kingdom at that time see Martin, Kingsley, *The Magic of Monarchy*, London 1937, pp.25-30.

⁶¹ Tambiah, Stanley. "A Performative Approach to Ritual", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1979, p.160.

⁶² Tambiah, Stanley, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge 1976, p.227.

ceremonies and festivities, Mongkut took his part seriously, for example, by dressing up in traditional costumes. His son Chulalongkorn commented later that ‘the purpose [of Mongkut] in riding on elephants in a grand procession was to engage anew in the customs and ceremonies as in the old days’. Chulalongkorn also wrote that Mongkut sought examples of royal ceremonies in the Ayutthayan palace law in order ‘to combine with new customs and establish them, in condensed form, as models’.⁶³ Mongkut himself continually adapted and revived myths, symbols or traditions. He expanded and elaborated the ceremonialism surrounding the kingship, making his position and power more visible for his subjects and, in his own words, ‘to add a human touch’.⁶⁴

Mongkut’s awareness of symbolism became evident in another example, the ‘Oath of Allegiance ceremony’ (see chapter 2).⁶⁵ Mongkut ordered a statue made out of a stone he brought from a pilgrimage to the Buddha footprint in Saraburi province. The stone originated from a place next to the footprint which was well-known for housing a spirit. It was commonly believed that this spirit fulfilled wishes of worshippers. Mongkut invited the spirit to take residence in the statue and placed it next to the Emerald Buddha during the oath ceremony. Mongkut gave the ceremony a new dimension with the incorporation of the spirit. A civil servant now took the oath to be loyal to the king in front of the Emerald Buddha (symbolising the dynasty) and of a previous ‘provincial’ spirit which was elevated to a ‘national’ spirit. The spirit served as a guarantee for reward for the oath taker’s loyalty. Mongkut went with his modifications even further. He changed the Ayutthayan text of the ceremony which was full of references to ‘old’ spirits unknown to his contemporaries. By introducing a ‘fashionable’ spirit, he was able to raise the interest of the participants of the ceremony and make it more binding. The people were reportedly afraid of ‘disappointing’ the spirit by not following their oath. Besides this direct spiritual sanction, it also enhanced the position of Mongkut. A king had to be very powerful to gain the ‘cooperation’ of an important spirit. Mongkut, therefore, successfully drew loyalty away from nobility and transferred it to himself and the nation.

Another change was equally important, as Mongkut became the first king to drink the water of allegiance himself. Not only did he confirm the ‘sacredness’ of the

⁶³ Cited in Mattani, 1996, p.75.

⁶⁴ Cited in Riggs, 1966, pp.97-105.

⁶⁵ This paragraph is based on Sunait Chutintharanon. “Lilitongkanchaengnam lae phraratchaphithi thuenamphraphiphatsattaya [Lilitongkanchaengnam and the Royal Oath of Allegiance Ceremony]”, Bangkok 1995, p.17.

water, he also demonstrated that he was a just and fair ruler by drinking it like everybody else. Mongkut argued that the king had to drink otherwise he would not be bound to keep any promises or to be loyal on his part. As a result, a sovereign might plan or commit harmful actions against his subjects. To stress the importance of the ceremony, Mongkut connected it with the past by visiting the ashes of his ancestors and asking them for protection.⁶⁶ Sunait pointed out that Mongkut switched from a 'forced' ceremony to a 'promise' between the monarch and his civil servants. In the king's own words, he intended 'to declare that we are one group' (*prakat phuak diaw kan*).⁶⁷ The ceremony was indeed a manifestation of the nation as the king entered a kind of social contract with his people. He was no longer aloof but part of the nation which he embodied.

Another royal ceremony of note planned by Mongkut was the coronation anniversary. Quaritch Wales commented that this ceremony was 'a demonstration of the desire of Mongkut to bring his country into line with those more advanced countries of the West, and to inspire the people with the spirit of patriotism'.⁶⁸ Although this ceremony was new, it was not directly an invented tradition. Nearly all components of the ceremony were drawn on rites found in Thai religion and culture- the material that lay ready to hand and was most easily understood by the people.⁶⁹ Pictures of the ceremony were produced and widely distributed so that even people not attending the festivities were aware of the event. As constant reminders, temple murals started to depict realistically twelve royal annual ceremonies from the Ayutthaya period but in Mongkut's way to orchestrate and conduct the ceremonies.⁷⁰

Mongkut was interested that ceremonies or other activities were either held in public or included a procession for the public to watch. He allowed the people to look at him which was traditionally strictly forbidden. For his 60th birthday, he held a grand celebration 'like the kings of Europe and the Emperor of China' [Mongkut].⁷¹ To achieve the participation of the people, he asked them to invite monks to chant and give sermons, all at the same time and throughout the kingdom. In the evening, the people lighted lanterns and raised them high on flag poles. The court chronicles reported that

⁶⁶ Thiphakorawong, 1965, pp.413-415.

⁶⁷ Sunait, 1995, p.20.

⁶⁸ Quaritch Wales, H.G., *Siamese State Ceremonies*, London 1931, p.214.

⁶⁹ Quaritch Wales, 1931, p.215.

⁷⁰ Sutha Linawat. "Chittrakam nai samai phrabatsomdetphrachomklaochaoyuhua [Paintings in the Reign of King Mongkut]", Bangkok 2005, p.158.

⁷¹ Cited in Wilson, 1970, p.290.

‘every household joined in. Even the poorest of people’. Mongkut drove up and down the river to look at the lights.⁷² With this simple method, the lighting of lanterns, Mongkut enabled the participation of the whole population all over the country and to share a common sense of belonging.

Other royal ceremonies were conducted to connect the monarchy to a nation with a long history as well. For example, cremation ceremonies for members of the royal family became a public event. In some of them, the urns with the ashes of the ancestors, the first three kings of the Chakri dynasty, were displayed.⁷³ On other occasions, Mongkut staged mock battles with war elephants and traditional features for delegations of European ambassadors.⁷⁴

4.3. Supportive Elements

An important aspect for the success of Mongkut’s nationalism was his *barami* (charisma) which attracted the loyalty of the people. This included the *barami* traditionally connected to the king and was reflected in stories about nature paying respect to him.⁷⁵ However, his personal charisma contributed as well, for example, to gain many disciples and followers for his *thammayut* sect during his time as a monk.⁷⁶ In contrast to earlier kings who virtually never left the palace, personal contact with common people was important to Mongkut. He knew many parts of his kingdom from personal experience and was aware of a territorial dimension, calling the monarchy ‘the heart of the land’.⁷⁷ With his journeys in the countryside, Mongkut claimed the land for his nation, or, in the words of Geertz, he marked the territory ‘like some wolf or tiger spreading his scent through his territory’.⁷⁸ Mongkut mixed with the people and appeared eager to hear of their troubles. Akin argued that the king was able to create a link between himself and the people against the nobility’s abuse of power. The king was,

⁷² Thiphakorawong, 1965, p.328.

⁷³ Wilson, 1970, pp.291-295.

⁷⁴ Battge, Noel, *The Military, Government and Society in Siam, 1868-1910: Politics and Military Reform During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, Cornell 1969, p.69.

⁷⁵ So Plainoi, *Phrabatsomdet phrachomklao phrachaokrungsayam* [King Mongkut The King of Siam], Bangkok 2001, pp.62-64.

⁷⁶ Mettanando, 2005, p.57.

⁷⁷ Atcharapon Kamutpitsamai, *Udomkan chatniyom khong phunam thai* [Nationalist Ideology of the Thai Leaders], Bangkok 1982, p.18. See Chula, 1967, p.180. Mongkut even visited hill tribe people in the North. But not only the king alone, also a wider circle at the court started to travel in the country. Nidhi Aeusrivongse. “Utsahakam thongthiao kap phon krathop to wathanatham [The Tourist Industry and Its Effect on Culture]”, Bangkok 1995, p.74.

⁷⁸ Geertz, Clifford, *Local Knowledge*, New York 2000, p.124.

therefore, the person to whom the people looked for redress of their wrongs. He became the protector of the people.⁷⁹ The traditional belief of healing powers of monarchs supported Mongkut's position even further. For example, when people in the royal camp fell ill during a trip to Kanchanaburi province, the king, as reported in the chronicles 'gave all the sick persons sacred water blessed over Buddhist prayers and all those who felt ill recovered again without ever having been in danger'.⁸⁰

Mongkut ensured that the people would be informed about his activities. In 1858, for example, he founded 'The Royal Gazette' to publish all his activities, orders, decisions and laws.⁸¹ Due to Mongkut's openness to new technology, he embraced printing technology to disseminate ideas and symbols. He was supported by his friend Bradley, who re-published the first Thai primer, the *Chindamani*, in 1861. Based on an older version of Rama III, Bradley included lessons in Thai language and moral teachings, particularly on the subject of duty and loyalty to the throne and society.⁸² Another way to spread Mongkut's personal symbol and to connect it with beneficial royal activities, was the order to place his royal seal above the entrance doors of newly erected buildings open to the public.⁸³

Mongkut believed that a king was responsible for the happiness and prosperity of the people. He wrote in an announcement in 1864 that 'many through his [Mongkut's] *barami*, power and goodness, have progressed and have found happiness for a long time'.⁸⁴ Mongkut emphasised the active role of the king and because of his exalted position with the public, he was able to force the nobility into playing a more passive role and to create the charismatic leadership necessary for his nationalism.

An important factor in the success of King Mongkut's nationalism was that although he was the key intellectual leader in its promotion, he also received support from a new generation of intellectuals in Bangkok who contributed to the expression of nationalism at that period.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period 1782-1873*, Bangkok 1996, p.62.

⁸⁰ Thiphakorawong, 1965, p.341.

⁸¹ Bangkok Post. "1836: Birth of Thai Printing", 30 June 1973, p.3.

⁸² Mattani Rutnin, *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand*, Chiang Mai 1996, p.73.

⁸³ Chatri, 2004, p.94.

⁸⁴ Cited in Attachak, 2000, p.16.

⁸⁵ For an excellent analysis of the early intellectuals, see Rosenberg, Klaus. "Das Thema 'Eintracht' im thailändischen Schriftum der Epoche König Chulalongkorn's (r. 1868-1910), Hamburg 1978, pp.94-118.

One of the most important intellectual contributions of Mongkut's period was the book *Kitchanukit* which was written in his reign but published posthumously in 1869. The book 'attacked' traditional Buddhist cosmography and demanded a 'true Buddhism' connected with modern science.⁸⁶ The author, Chaophraya Thiphakorawong, was close to Mongkut and a significant contributor to the emerging nationalism. Together with Mongkut, Thiphakorawong was at the forefront of intellectual debate. His books were directed against the activities of Christian missionaries, who arrived in large numbers during the reign of Rama III. In one particularly interesting newspaper debate, some missionaries accused Mongkut of leading his people to a false God. Both, Mongkut and Thiphakorawong, answered anonymously or under a pseudonym with articles concerning Buddhism and Christianity. Thiphakorawong denied the claim that Buddhism was dragging down Thailand and was the reason of all misery. He dismissed the argument that once Thailand would embrace Christianity, the nation would become prosperous and gain the respect of other nations. Thiphakorawong countered with the statement that the prosperity of these nations (esp. France, Great Britain and the USA) resulted solely from the intellectual achievements of their people. Religion, stated Thiphakorawong, was not the main cause of progress, as there were many countries which had adopted Christianity but still remained poor.⁸⁷

Thiphakorawong's argument reflected the main attitude of intellectuals during the mid-nineteenth century which sought to adopt only those western achievements that could be accommodated by Thai society. Mongkut himself remarked: "The science I receive, astronomy, geology, chemistry- these I accept; the Christian religion I do not receive, many of our countrymen do not receive it."⁸⁸ Thiphakorawong also altered historical accounts to give a favourable image of Thai kings in the past. For example, Rama I was not depicted as a king with an elaborate lifestyle and cruel executions were omitted. Any hint that a Thai king was subject to the sovereignty of the Chinese emperor was eliminated as well.⁸⁹ Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn, acknowledged the important influence of Thiphakorawong by conferring to him an 'Order of the White Elephant' in recognition of his work, his loyalty and his patriotism [sic] in 1870.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ See Batson, Benjamin, *Influences from the East etc.*, Bangkok no date, section 2, p.1. See also Day, Tony/Reynolds, Craig. "Cosmologies, Truth Regimes, and the State in Southeast Asia", *Modern Asian Studies*, 2000, p.9.

⁸⁷ The debate is discussed in Somchai, 1983, pp.83-87.

⁸⁸ Cited in Somchai, 1983, p.88.

⁸⁹ Somchai, 1983, p.206.

⁹⁰ Somchai, 1983, p.69.

Mongkut's efforts to promote nationalism had a profound impact on the intellectuals. After his death, as proof of his success an eulogy (*plengyaw chaloemphrakiat*) appeared. The poet substituted the name of Thailand with *phutthakhet* (buddhist land) and the term 'our country', in the interpretation of Wenk, with the word *nai trai chak* (triple discus- the royal symbol).⁹¹ An indication that the nation was now firmly identified with the monarchy.

4.4. Royal or Monarchical Nationalism?

How could the nationalism of King Mongkut be categorised? I propose to see the nationalism under Mongkut as a distinctive non-European interpretation of the concept of nationalism. The main features of this form of nationalism were:

- a merger between a traditional concept of 'nation' with an adapted western idea of nationalism.
- a leadership role of the monarchy and the transfer of the paternalistic image of the king from the kingdom to the nation.
- non-secular, non-democratic. Nationalism was not a new secular religion and not a substitute for religion.
- a revival of cultural traditions as expression of national identity.
- a national identity, based on Thai culture, which was open for others to accept.

King Mongkut's intellectual efforts were essential for the development of early Thai nationalism. He was one of the first 'bridge builders' between eastern and western concepts in South East Asia. Dahm argued that 'bridge builders' saw a cultural revival (reactivation of own traditions, included revitalising of Buddhism, cult of heroes etc) as a crucial reaction in the face of modernity or colonialism. They used 'politically revitalised cultural traditions, which made the masses realise the new visions and aims in symbolic pictures'.⁹² Mongkut's policies, ideas and activities such as the reform of

⁹¹ Wenk, Klaus, *Studien zur Literatur der Thai*, Band 3, Hamburg 1987, p.50.

⁹² Dahm, Bernhard. "Postkoloniale Staatenbildungen in Südostasien", Stuttgart 1992, pp.74 and 81. Dahm listed as examples Sukarno, Aung San and Ho Chi Minh. There is maybe no better manifestation of this attitude than the architectural style of Mongkut's summer palace in Phetchburi province. Located on top of a single mountain, it reflected the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology just like the royal palace in Bangkok and included a temple called *Wat Phra Kaew*. The palace itself, however, was built in a Mediterranean style. The whole complex combined the traditional worldview with a new, western one. For the palace, see

Buddhism, his use of symbols and traditions but also his openness for western thought and technology, confirm his position as bridge builder. This was also reflected in his ideas about nationalism. Mongkut was not a democrat and had no intention of allowing direct participation in politics by the people. The nation could not mean a nation by the people in which 'the people would worship themselves'.⁹³ Attachak, calling the King a man with a mission, argued that Mongkut was determined to be the supreme intellectual leader of the kingdom and to make the monarchy stronger.⁹⁴ The nation could, therefore, only be the king's nation.

In academic debate, there have been several attempts to explain the role of the monarchy in nationalism in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the case of the British Empire, Cannadine used the term 'royal empire', which was 'presided over and unified by a sovereign of global amplitude and semi-divine fullness, and suffused with the symbols and signifiers of kingship, which reinforced, legitimised, unified and completed the empire as a realm bound together by order, hierarchy, tradition and subordination'.⁹⁵ Hobsbawm argued that 'nationalism became a substitute for social cohesion through a national church, a royal family or other cohesive traditions, or collective group self-representations, a new secular religion'.⁹⁶ The royal person became exploited "on elaborate ritual occasions with associated propagandist activities and a wide participation of the people, not least through the captive audiences available for official indoctrination in the educational system. Both made the ruler the focus of his people's or peoples' unity, the symbolic representative of the country's greatness and glory, of its entire past and continuity with a changing present. Yet the innovations were perhaps more deliberate and systematic where, as in Britain, the revival of royal ritualism was seen as a necessary counterweight to the dangers of popular democracy."⁹⁷

Prudhisan Jumbala, "Phrabaromrachanusawari phrachomklao [The Monument of King Mongkut]", Bangkok 2003, p.4. Another example is Mongkut's answer to western critics about his polygamous lifestyle. He defended it as a cultural practice in line with Buddhism. Jeffrey, Leslie Ann. "Imperial Desire: Gender and National Identity in Nineteenth Century Siam", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.9.

⁹³ Hutchinson, J., *Modern Nationalism*, London 1994, p.39.

⁹⁴ Attachak. 2001, p.15.

⁹⁵ Cannadine, David, *Ornamentalism- How the British Saw Their Empire*, London 2001, p.102.

⁹⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric. "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914", Cambridge 1983, p.303.

⁹⁷ Hobsbawm, 1983, p.282,

Similar to Hobsbawm's approach, Nairn claimed about 'royal nationalism' that 'a personalised and totemic symbolism was needed to maintain the nation'.⁹⁸ Arblaster stressed the point that 'royal nationalism' needed the 'invention of tradition'. The monarchy required only 'judicious touching up and energetic marketing in order to become the revered, untouchable symbols of a new, fundamentally fake but politically indispensable, version of national identity'.⁹⁹ Another conception but with a similar result was offered by Breuilly.¹⁰⁰ He argued that in a colonial state a nationalist movement had to reform society and to take over the state. In countries which escaped European colonialism, however, a nationalist movement had to transform the state institutions in order to be effective. This reform impulse originated within rather than outside the state itself. The difficulty began when reformers envisaged a total transformation, and critics of the existing state became more radical. The appeal to national identity provided a basis on which their criticism and eventual opposition could be justified. The ruling elites introduced as a consequence nationalism from above to tackle these critics. It expressed itself much more in political than in cultural terms compared with many anti-colonial movements. The focus was on military reform in order to combat direct threats from western powers.

Breuilly listed Japan as an example of such a 'reform nationalism'. In the Japanese case, the nation was identified as a specific nation rather than an incomparable civilization such as China. The essence of this nation could be preserved through a period of major change as long as the loyalty to the emperor was central.¹⁰¹ In 1876, nevertheless, a Japanese intellectual came to the devastating judgement that 'in Japan there is a government but no nation'.¹⁰² However, the cases of Japan and Thailand are not comparable. Before the Meiji reformation in 1868, Japan was without a central authority and was governed by the Tokugawa Shogunate which resulted in powerful regional lordships with their own armies, laws, administration, taxation or education. Religion was another important aspect because the change of government went along with a change of religion. While the Shogunate favoured Buddhism, the new central state introduced Shinto. As a result, Buddhists were persecuted and Buddhist statues

⁹⁸ Nairn, Tom, *The Enchanted Glass*, London 1988, p.11. The term 'royal nationalism' in connection with Thailand was first used by Thongchai Winichakul. See his article "A Short History of the Long Memory of the Thai Nation", Victoria 2003.

⁹⁹ Arblaster, Anthony. "Taking Monarchy Seriously", *New Left Review*, 1989, p.102.

¹⁰⁰ Breuilly, John, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd edition, Manchester 1993, pp.220-243.

¹⁰¹ Breuilly, 1993, p.243.

¹⁰² Cited in Doak, Kevin. "What is a Nation and Who Belongs? National Narratives and the Ethnic Imagination in Twentieth Century Japan", *The American Historical Review*, 1997, p.286.

removed.¹⁰³ Kiyota pointed out that the majority of the people did not support the new religious policies and only the introduction of religious freedom solved the stalemate in 1890.¹⁰⁴

The situation in Thailand was different. The destruction of Ayutthaya required the rebuilding of Thai society in a new kingdom. The result was a centralised state, a modern nation and a religious structure which was to a certain degree under the control of the king. Buddhism had the full support of the people. These changes and adaptations happened before the West had any significant impact. Therefore, an important aspect of nationalism in Thailand was, contrary to Japan, not an ideology primarily to fend off the West but a vital tool in an intra-elite power struggle between the weak monarch and the mighty nobility.¹⁰⁵ For Mongkut, there was no motivation to preserve the status quo with the help of nationalism. He attempted to regain the power of the monarch, and nationalism as a symbol of progress was an important tool for him. Mongkut saw the monarch as the leader in a quest to bring the Thai civilisation to a higher level. Consequently, his nationalism had to focus on an active monarch. I propose to call this form of nationalism ‘monarchical nationalism’.

This nationalism differs from the earlier mentioned ‘royal nationalism’. Nairn’s term is suitable for the cases of Great Britain and Japan. In my understanding, *royal nationalism* is a kind of political nationalism which tries to achieve its goals using the symbolic power of the monarchy. It requires a passive but cooperative role for the monarchy. The unquestioned national leader is the ‘state’ (government or bureaucracy), legitimised and strengthened by the monarchy in its function as the symbol of the nation. A royal nation is, therefore, very much connected with the loss of real power for the monarchy. With a weakening monarchy, royal nationalism in the long term played an important part in democratisation and increasing secularisation. While the British ‘state’ took control of the nation and reduced the monarchy under Queen Victoria to its symbol, the Thai monarchs actively tried to create loyalty to the nation through the monarchy itself. It was they who used the state as a means to achieve this aim and not the opposite way. In my view, *monarchical nationalism* is a form of cultural nationalism under the leadership of the monarch himself. It calls for a charismatic monarch who is able to bind

¹⁰³ Kawanami, Hiroko. “Japanese Nationalism and the Universal Dharma”, London 1999, p.105.

¹⁰⁴ Kiyota, Minosu. “Meiji Buddhism: Religion and Patriotism”, *AS*, 1966, p.51.

¹⁰⁵ Breuilly’s argument that nationalist movements focussed on military reform in order to combat direct threats from Western powers is not valid in Thailand. Mongkut did not pay much attention to the military. The number of soldiers guarding the capital was 700 in the 1850s and rose to only 1,000 in 1865. Battge, 1974, p.70.

the loyalty of the people to the nation. The monarch is less the symbol than an embodiment of the nation. In monarchical nationalism, the 'state' plays only a supportive role and a strong monarchy is required.

In the case of King Mongkut, he used the existing nation as basis and transformed it with the help of nationalism. Like 'nation-building' in earlier periods, Mongkut's activities to aid the development of a monarchical nationalism should be seen as a process which was not finished at any certain point in time. Although his reign saw a modern Thai nation and nationalism, one important aspect was still missing. Thailand was not yet a modern nation-state. This would occur in the reign of Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn. Combined with the far-reaching possibilities of a nation-state, monarchical nationalism would eventually be on the peak of its influence.

Chapter 5

The Peak of the Monarchical Nation (1868-1910)

Hardly any country in South East Asia was better prepared for the challenges brought by nineteenth century imperialism than Thailand: a modern Thai nation was emerging and a loyalty binding ideology, namely monarchical nationalism, developing. However, the rapid changes in the political and economical environment required even more adaptations. The result was the introduction of the nation-state which gave the proponents of the monarchical nation and nationalism in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r.1868-1910) unheard possibilities to expand their power and ideology. Together with an exceptional personal charisma of the King, the new nation-state enabled the monarchical nationalism to reach its peak of influence and importance. Although European influence was important at this point in history, it was not the decisive factor as argued by the revisionist school.

5.1. King Chulalongkorn and the Nation

King Chulalongkorn faced during his reign three challenges which would effect his ideas and policies regarding nation and nationalism.

The first challenge was the power of the nobility. When King Mongkut died of malaria in 1868, his fifteen-year-old son Chulalongkorn was chosen to succeed his father. However, the head of the Bunnag family, Chaophraya Suriyawong, became Regent until the young king turned 20. In a letter from 1894, Chulalongkorn described his situation: "I was only 15 years....I had no mother and the relatives from my mother's side were unreliable or...not in an important position...My relatives from my father's side, all [members of the] royal family, were under the power of the Regent. They all had to protect themselves and their lives...Although I had some civil servants who loved me and were friends, most of them were still in a low rank. Those who were seniors had no power to support...I was only a child. I had no ability to know all the administrative work... Moreover, I was very ill that I almost died, nobody believed that I would survive. What was

the most dangerous [event] was the death of my father at that moment. I was like the one who lost his head, they just put my body on the throne as a symbol of the king. My suffering was beyond words...The weight of the crown was too much for my neck to bear it...I had open enemies around me, both inside and outside the country...I considered that [coronation] day the most unfortunate day ever since I was born.”¹

The fact that Chulalongkorn faced the same problem as his father at his accession to the throne showed that King Mongkut was not totally successful in lessening the influence of the nobility. Monarchical nationalism was not yet an institutionalised ideology and still depended on the personal charisma and power of the king. Young and weak, Chulalongkorn had no other choice but to follow his father’s ideals of monarchical nationalism to build up his power base. This process was sped up by the death of his main opponents from the Bunnag family which gave him more freedom for his own decisions.² Although he soon gained the upper hand in the intra-elite struggle, a new and even more dangerous threat made it necessary for Chulalongkorn to maintain and adapt the monarchical nationalism.

The second challenge Chulalongkorn faced was the increasing aggressiveness of the colonial powers in South East Asia. In 1885, the King was shocked when the British took full control over Burma.³ In the same year, China acknowledged the French protectorate in Indochina which increased the pressure on Thailand from the North and North East.⁴ The loss of sovereignty became almost a reality in 1893, when the French used gun-boat diplomacy in the so-called *Paknam* crisis to force Chulalongkorn to concede a vast area of land east of the Mekong river. His inability to prevent the loss of land left Chulalongkorn personally offended. He pointed out that in the past, the size of the country depended on the power of the king. Therefore, to gain or to lose territory meant for the ruler to gain or to lose honour: “That I lose territory means that I lose honour in

¹ Letter printed in Chai-anan Samudavanija/Khattiya Kannasut (eds), *Ekkasan kanmueang kanpokkhong thai (pho so 2417-2477)* [Documents on Thai Politics and Government (1874-1934)], Bangkok 1989, pp.129-134.

² The members of the Bunnag family were successively replaced in their positions by Chulalongkorn’s own relatives. See in detail Wyatt, David. “Family Politics in Nineteenth Century Thailand”, Cambridge 1976, pp.54-72.

³ Sumet Jumsai. “Prince Prisdang and the Proposal For the First Siamese Constitution”, 2004, p.107.

⁴ In that area, Thai troops battled for years against rebelling Ho-Chinese who took control of several cities in the Mekong region. France recognised Thai suzerainty over the Lao kingdom in 1886, this agreement, however, was short-lived. Stuart-Fox, Martin. “Conflicting Conceptions of the State: Siam, France and Vietnam in the Late Nineteenth Century”, *JSS*, 1994, pp.139.

a big way.”⁵ What seemed like a defiant stand by Chulalongkorn revealed only his powerlessness against the bullying of the imperialists countries: “If I don’t have full power over an area, then it is better not to possess it.”⁶ The situation of Thailand had so deteriorated that the ‘vision’ of a British commentator in 1888 seemed to become certainty: “It may be interesting to know that the ultimate delimitation of the British, Chinese and Siamese may perhaps leave British and French acquisitions in Indo-China separated by but a narrow strip of alien territory.”⁷ Chulalongkorn realised the threat to his reign and the independence of Thailand and was convinced that only a modern, civilised nation would be safe from a colonial take-over.⁸

The third major challenge to Chulalongkorn’s reign came from radical, young intellectuals demanding far-reaching reforms. In a petition addressed to the king in 1885, a group of princes demanded that Chulalongkorn should introduce a system of parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy. They criticised the growing concentration of power in the hands of the king which would lead to negligence by an overworked monarch. In their view, this reform would strengthen Thailand against the West.⁹ The most important non-royal intellectual of his time was the journalist Thianwan (1842-1915), who was the first Thai outside the traditional elite to deal with ‘unity’ and ‘nation’. Thianwan connected the idea of the nation with the search for progress and civilisation. For him, only a national consciousness and patriotism could be the suitable fundament for the development of Thailand to become a strong, modern, westernised and democratic state. This, however, did not mean that Thianwan wanted to surrender to the West. On the contrary, he sought adoption of western means to safeguard the country’s independence.¹⁰

⁵ Cited in Attachak Sattayanurak, *Kanplianplaeng lokkathat khong chonchan phunam thai tangtae ratchakan thi 4 – pho so 2475* [The Change of Worldview of the Thai Leaders from the Reign of King Mongkut to 1932], Bangkok 1995, p.140.

⁶ Cited in Attachak, 1995, p.142.

⁷ Yate, A. “The Shan States”, *The Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 1888, p.321.

⁸ Sunait Chutintaranond. “The Image of the Burmese Enemy in Thai Perceptions and the Historical Writings”, *JSS*, 1992, p. 94.

⁹ Wyatt, David, *Thailand- A Short History*, Bangkok 1984, p. 184.

¹⁰ Rosenberg, Klaus, *Nation und Fortschritt- Der Publizist Thien Wan und die Modernisierung Thailands unter König Chulalongkorn (r.1868-1910)*, Hamburg 1980, p.106. For Thianwan’s work see Thianwan, *Ruam ngan khian khong tianwan* [Collected Writings of Thianwan], Bangkok 2001. See also Batson, B., *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Singapore 1984, p.15 and Murashima, Eiji. “The Origin of Modern Official State Ideology in Thailand”, *JSEAS*, 1988, p.83.

For Chulalongkorn, the answer to these three challenges lay in the creation of a modern nation-state with the monarchy in full control of the state and the nation: 'government reform is the key to success'.¹¹ Indeed, the reign of King Chulalongkorn saw a massive modernisation of the existing structure of the state bureaucracy and institutions into a regulated legal system. The King also transformed the fundamentals of society by abolishing for example slavery and corvée labour and replacing it with per capita tax. By reforming the administration of the country towards a modern bureaucracy, he created a 'state' in a Weberian sense.¹² This new bureaucracy enabled Chulalongkorn to disconnect the nobility from their traditional power bases and to replace them in many key positions by his own relatives. It was also a sign towards the colonial powers that Thailand was modernising and that there would be no need to colonise in order to 'civilise' the country. The King also silenced the radical reformers with these first steps towards a modern state which they could connect with the hope for a constitution and a parliament in a long term.

One part of this modern state is of special interest because it would lead to the rise of a competing elite group which would bring an end to the monarchical rule and nation in 1932: a professional army. Chulalongkorn was very much interested in military affairs and disagreed with members of the government who favoured a 'civilian' attitude. This group argued that any military defence against the European armies would be useless and that the state should instead focus on government and the promotion of railways, irrigation and trade. Chulalongkorn, however, was convinced that the only deterrent against the Europeans would be the prospect of a costly war with substantial losses. The task to build an army capable of being such a deterrent was formidable for Chulalongkorn because the country had only a few thousand combat ready troops. At the time of his death in 1910, the army boasted 20,000 standing troops and was called by a French observer 'a truly modern national army'. However, that army did not contribute significantly to the nationalisation of the masses because conscription was limited and not yet

¹¹ Cited in Sumet, 2004, p.112.

¹² See Somkiat Wanthana. "Rat thai: nammatham lae ruppatham [Thai State: Abstract and Concrete]", *Ratthasatsan*, 1988-89, p.193. See for the discussion about the term 'state' Stuart-Fox, 1994, p.135 and, generally, Dahm, Bernhard, "Postkoloniale Staatenbildungen in Südostasien", Stuttgart 1992, p.92. For a theoretical discussion of the modernisation see Smith, Anthony, *National Identity*, London 1991, p.101.

organised in most parts of the country.¹³ The modernisation of the army was an efficient way to take control of another power base of the nobility. In addition, Chulalongkorn realised that ‘militaristic’ issues did win him the approval of intellectuals such as Thianwan during the *Paknam* crisis in 1893. In his article ‘France and Thailand’, Thianwan demanded patriotism which, according to Rosenberg, reflected the wish of many Thais to volunteer as soldiers against France.¹⁴ In one poem, Thianwan demanded that the Thai love the ‘king, country, nation and religion’:

“Children read this and aim to
Love the Thai nation and your elders,
Love your religion and the Buddha’s words,
Love your ancestry and fight all enemies.”¹⁵

While taking full control of the state was connected with administrative reforms, Chulalongkorn had to develop an ideology to achieve the same with the nation. In this ideology, he put a strong emphasis on the central role of the monarchy. His aim was to strengthen the monarchical nation in order to modernise the country, reinforce the position of Thailand against the colonial powers and to ensure the prolongation of the rule of his family. In this regard, the monarchical nationalism of Chulalongkorn was basically not different from the nationalism his father propagated. What was different, however, was the development of this monarchical nationalism into a well-organised and theoretically well-founded ideology of the Thai nation. This was the work of mainly two men, namely the King himself and his younger brother Prince Damrong who was the Minister for Interior and Education and holder of several other key positions. Their vision of the monarchical nation followed traditional elements but stressed three main aspects, namely the role of the king, the trans-ethnic understanding of Thai identity and last but not least the full acceptance of citizenship.

The king occupied the central position in this monarchical nation. He was to be the undisputed leader of the nation (termed ‘the one who does something’ or

¹³ Battge, Noel, *The Military, Government and Society in Siam, 1868-1910: Politics and Military Reform During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, New York 1974, pp.397-426 and pp.542-543.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, 1980, p.84.

¹⁵ Cited in Vella, Walter. “Thianwan of Siam: A Man Who Fought Giants”, Honolulu 1986, p.88.

phukratam).¹⁶ It was mostly this demand for active rule that differentiates the monarchical nation from other systems of monarchical rule. In 1887, Chulalongkorn himself described a duty of the Thai king as to seek and manage change: “In other countries, the people demand change and the monarch follows. In our country, however, it is only the king who thinks what should be done to solve the problems and make the people happy.”¹⁷ Chulalongkorn was convinced that only the ability to change would guarantee the survival of the country and the ruling family. This change, however, should never be allowed to upset the old system as can be seen in a speech in 1908: “The key to a ruler’s success lies in his ability to engage his own times. In his own time, there was a necessity for reforms but these had to be pursued with thoughtfulness so that changes would not upset the traditional customs and habits of the people.”¹⁸ Accordingly, he and Damrong did not revolutionise the role of the king but adapted the traditional concept of the king as *dharmaracha* to connect it with the nation.

In Chulalongkorn’s eyes, love for the nation was inseparable from the love to the monarchy. In a letter to his brother after the Front Palace Crisis in 1874, Chulalongkorn wrote: “I want to tell the ‘Young Siam’ [a group of his supporters] that what the viceroy has done [to visit a foreign ambassador] clearly showed that he should not be considered a citizen of the *Siamese nation* because he has no love for the country and no love for the [royal] family. He sought [help] from a foreign power to threaten to take control of the country.”¹⁹ Love to the King was a necessity because unity (*samakphi*) could only be achieved under a king. This unity would then result in prosperity and success.²⁰ Essential was the unity between the monarchical rulers and the populace which would create a sense of ‘being one and united nation’ (*chat annueng andiao*) regardless of ethnic and religious differences. A newspaper commented about this idea: “The spirit of unity, inspiring mutual confidence and help among all, from prince to peasant, is the ideal His Majesty sets

¹⁶ See more in Attachak, 1995, pp.91-94.

¹⁷ Document printed in Duangdao Yangsamat, *Banlang phrapiya– botwiko phraratchahatthalekha suanphraong* [The Throne of King Chulalongkorn: An Analysis of his Private Letters], Bangkok 1995, p.96.

¹⁸ Cited in Peleggi, Maurizio, *Lord of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Modern Image*, Honolulu 2003a, p.135.

¹⁹ Printed in Duangdao, 1995, p.42. Emphasis added. The Front Palace crisis was a conspiracy against Chulalongkorn headed by the viceroy.

²⁰ Reynolds, Craig. “State Versus Nation in Histories of Nation-Building with Special Reference to Thailand”, *Warasan thaikhadisueksa*, 2004, p.12.

before the nation. It never has been realised anywhere but it is the end that every good ruler and patriot strives for.”²¹

An important image of the king in the monarchical nationalism created by Mongkut was that of a king working for the benefit of the people. Accordingly, Chulalongkorn thought that a monarch could not solely legitimise his position with the kingly virtues but must have the willingness and power to be active. In a letter to Prince Damrong, the King wrote: “a monarch must earn the loyalty of the people. The relationship must be based on moral and benefit. A leader doesn’t have to rely on the royal virtues but must have power to act.”²² He saw his own work in line with this idea: “What I have successfully done, our people have gratefulness for that. The important themes of what I have successfully done are the loyalty of the people of ours and the belief that if there is any business I have to deal with I will do it for the prosperity, benefit and goodness of all the people.”²³ The image of the monarchy was of special concern for Prince Damrong. He argued that whenever the country was in danger of losing its freedom, the Chakri dynasty always managed to maintain it. The King was the moral leader who would preserve the independence, maintain the freedom of the nation and prevent the country of becoming a slave. Following the ideal of *dharmaracha*, another image promoted by Damrong was that of a ruling monarchy aiming solely to solve problems for the people and to develop the country in all aspects. As a result, the land has honour and the people should be proud and love the country.²⁴

In Damrong’s view, a king had to travel into the countryside, to look after the population and to know about the activities of the civil servants. He had to improve the lives of the people and make them happy. Damrong emphasised that the Thai kings used their power more wisely than in other countries.²⁵ He called the monarch ‘King of/for the people’ (*khongratsadon* and *phuearatsadon*) which would be the reason behind the popularity of the king. He moved the image of the king away from being connected with royal power (*phraratchaamnat*) to an image

²¹ Cited in Peleggi, 2003a, p.135.

²² Letter printed in Duangdao, 1995, p.98.

²³ Cited in Attachak, 1995, pp.156 and 159.

²⁴ Saichol Sattayanurak, *Somdetkromphrayadamrongrathanuphap kansang attalak mueangthai lae chan khong chaosayam* [Prince Damrong and the Creation of Thailand’s Identity and the Class of the Siamese], Bangkok 2003, pp.87 and 104.

²⁵ Saichol, 2003, pp.115 and 157-158.

of a beloved king.²⁶ This extended to religious affairs because the Thai king was to be open to all religions and was the protector of faith: “From time immemorial [Thais enjoyed] complete toleration of the freedom of religious thought. It is recognised that religions confer happiness on the people, and the king’s support of all the faiths is, in effect, the people.”²⁷

The second important element of the monarchical nation under Chulalongkorn was the maintenance of the traditional trans-ethnic nature of Thai identity in order to gain trust and access to all citizens even in areas rarely accessed by the Thai central state. Thai identity was to be kept open in order to enable all cultural groups residing in the country to feel being part of the nation. National identity in the monarchical nation consisted therefore of a cultural umbrella made up from the core culture of central Thailand under which sub-cultures such as the Lao or the Mon could exist. The main condition was, however, to accept the sovereignty of the Thai king as the highest authority. This ‘open system’- approach and umbrella model enabled Chulalongkorn to interpret existing differences in culture as merely branches of a broader Thai culture: “The Land of Siam is composed of the people who are considered of the same nationality because they have the same king as ruler and they speak the same language. Although some speak Thai and some speak Lao, the languages are only slightly apart. It is not that they speak different languages.”²⁸ In the case that the differences were too big to hide, the King emphasised the idea of citizenship within the monarchical nation: “the Chinese are not like foreigners but are our citizens.”²⁹ Comparable was his protective stand regarding the Muslim population in the Southern provinces as mirrored in the ‘Bill for Governing Seven Vassal States, 1901’. The Muslim areas were given a high degree of cultural autonomy and Islam was recognised as religion and culture. Although he granted a high decree of freedom to the general Muslim population, the King was very strict with his civil servants who had to learn Thai language, Thai manners and to show a ‘Thai heart’.³⁰

²⁶ Saichol, 2003, pp.141-142.

²⁷ Cited in Saichol, 2003, p.169.

²⁸ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua Phrabatsomdejphra. “Phraboromrachathibai waduai khwamsamakkhi [The Royal Explanation on Unity]”, Bangkok Reprint 1973, p.47.

²⁹ Cited in Amara Pongsapich, *Khwam laklai thang watthanatham* [Cultural Varieties], Bangkok 2002, p.144.

³⁰ Piyanart Bunnag. “Ethnic Problems and the Unitary State of Thailand: A Case Study of the Muslim Ethnic Group in the Southern Border Provinces (1892-1932)”, Baden-Baden 1999, pp.136-138.

The King himself made the trans-ethnic identity the guideline for his policies. For example, he insisted in a letter to a Thai negotiator who discussed a treaty with the British government on including the title 'King of Siam, Lao, Malay, Karen, etc' to show that these groups belonged to Thailand.³¹ This was also reflected in the design of bank notes in 1891. The bank notes included four regional languages namely Thai, Malay, Laotian and Khmer. In addition, English and Chinese were added.³²

Understanding the Thai nation more as a cultural than a political entity, Chulalongkorn was firmly rooted in the existing structures of the monarchical nation and did not replace it with a western form of nation. Saichol argued that Prince Damrong as Interior minister was one of the main proponents of this trans-ethnic approach as he dealt with all ethnic groups and was aware of potential conflicts. This caused him to avoid the image of a Thai nation consisting of only ethnic Thai people. In Damrong's view, the Thai race were part of the Siamese people, who consisted of several groups and nationalities under the power of the Thai king and the Thais as the biggest group. For Damrong, Thai culture had a unique feature which resulted in its dominant position among all other cultures in Thailand: the love of national independence, toleration, and power of assimilation. Damrong warned explicitly against policies which would give other ethnic groups the feeling that they were forced to change into being Thai. Everybody should love the nation and that being a citizen should be the first preference. In his opinion, a citizen could be Malay or Thai: "That is not important. The target for the government must be happiness in all regions, independently which nationality or language."³³ The Thai king would care for every nationality, all are Siamese, all are under his cooling shade. In a poem written to King Chulalongkorn, Damrong summarised the role of the monarch:

"The king is the force to protect

³¹ Letter printed in Duangdao, 1995, p.50. For the integration of hill tribe people in the North in that period, see Renard, Ronald. "The Differential Integration of Hill People into the Thai State", London 2000, p.63.

³² The bank notes were never printed due to the high costs of the conflict with France. Bank of Thailand, *Centenary of Thai Banknote, 1902-2002*, Bangkok 2002, p.28.

³³ Cited in Saichol, 2003, p.59 and 63-64 and Khanakammakanekkalakkhongchat, *Udomkan khong chat* [National Ideology], Bangkok 1983, p.7. A census from 1904 did reflect this attitude. It listed ethnic sub-groups such as the Chinese, Malay, Khmer and Burmese. Only in 1919 this was changed to Thai as a general category. Grabowsky, Volker. "The Thai Census of 1904: Translation and Analysis", *JSS*, 1996, p.50.

And to give shade for the people
So that the country achieves unity.³⁴

The third main element of Chulalongkorn's interpretation of the monarchical nation was the official acceptance of citizenship with the introduction of a modern legal code. The legal change was initiated by Prince Phichit Prichakorn, a brother of the King, who called for a new interpretation of law in 1885. He wanted the traditional 'Lord of Life' interpretation for the king abolished and replaced with a socially responsible position. The king should not only protect the kingdom but must provide for the welfare of the people as well.³⁵ The king therefore should perform socially necessary tasks. His legislative powers were to be defined by the basic needs of the people. The system of law should arise not from any sacred and mysterious source but from the nature and practice of men as social beings. Chulalongkorn accepted this proposition and abandoned his 'Lord of Life' title. He also gave the people the right to choose their own representatives on a local level within the framework of his bureaucratic reform. Riggs' statement that there were no citizens, only subjects under monarchical rule cannot be confirmed.³⁶ Engel commented that 'it was perhaps a paradox that, as the Thai monarchy reached its zenith of power under Chulalongkorn, the rights of private citizens also attained an unprecedented and probably irreversible stage in their development'.³⁷ A modern Thai law code with a standardised judiciary was introduced and finally applied throughout the whole kingdom in 1902, when the Sharia law was replaced in the Muslim areas in the South.³⁸ This modern law code, stating the common rights and duties of the individual, helped Chulalongkorn to finish the process started in the early Bangkok period. With the nation-state in place, Thailand finally fulfilled the last missing element of the modern nation, namely citizen rights. It also meant that Thai citizens had now legally binding duties towards the monarchy and the nation.

³⁴ Cited in Saichol, 2003, p.69.

³⁵ Engel, David, *Law and Kingship in Thailand During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, Ann Arbor 1975, p.11.

³⁶ Riggs, Fred. "The Malady of Modernity: Some Remedies", London 1999, p.9.

³⁷ Engel, 1975, p.95.

³⁸ Bin Wan Mahmood, Suria. "De-Radicalization of Minority Dissent", Quezon City 1999, p.123. Exemptions for the Muslims were family and inheritance cases.

An important aspect of monarchical nationalism was the personal charisma of the ruler. King Chulalongkorn was in this regard an exceptional monarch and was very popular with the people.³⁹ His charm even won over foreign visitors, for example one German traveller described the King as a man of *bezaubender Liebenswürdigkeit* [enchanted kindness] and called him the most handsome man in the country.⁴⁰ Cecil Carter found a long list of praise for the King in his travelogue as well: "Siam owes much of her prosperity to her King's energy and initiative...He works harder than most of his subjects, whose welfare he ever has at heart...Under his wise and beneficent rule the future prosperity of Siam is fully assured."⁴¹ Chulalongkorn was able to connect to the masses with his down to earth attitude especially when travelling upcountry.⁴² His popularity with Thais became most evident when he died in 1910 and 'the whole kingdom was in shock, many wept openly and the dress and shaved heads of mourning were everywhere.'⁴³

The peak of the dominance of the monarchical nationalism was a result of a combination of several elements, namely the introduction of the nation-state, a sophisticated ideology as guideline and the personal charisma of the king. With these elements in place, King Chulalongkorn and his associates were able to disseminate the ideas within the population.

5.2. Means of Dissemination of Monarchical Nationalism

With a developed ideology available, Chulalongkorn and the royal family had to find ways to disseminate their ideas and promote the love to the monarchy and nation. Although modern means of communication were much more readily available in Chulalongkorn's reign than in Mongkut's, they were still limited.

Chulalongkorn was well aware that one of the most common ways to instil loyalty to a nation is through education; however, the modern educational system

³⁹ This does not imply that he had not his critics. One example was the poet Tim Sukayang who blamed the 'Thai leaders' in an anti-war poem (*nirat*) about a loss ridden army expedition to Nongkhai in 1875. See Wedel, Yuangrat, *The Thai Radicals and the Communist Party*, Singapore 1983, p.16. Another critic was the writer Kulap Kritisananon. See Reynolds, Craig. "The Case of KSR Kulap: A Challenge To Royal Historical Writing in Late Nineteenth Century Thailand", *JSS* 1973, pp.63-90.

⁴⁰ Hossens, Carl, *Durch König Tschulalongkorns Reich*, Stuttgart 1912, p.5.

⁴¹ Carter, Cecil, *The Kingdom of Siam*, New York 1904, pp.3-4.

⁴² Chali Iamkrasin, *Muea phraphutthachaoluang niyomphrai* [When King Chulalongkorn 'Went to the Forest'], Bangkok Reprint 1995, p.5.

⁴³ Wyatt, 1984, p.197.

in Thailand was just at its beginning and for decades to remain rather underdeveloped. The first state primary school open for commoners was founded in Bangkok in 1884. The aim to instil patriotism was openly stated in the textbooks: “Don’t forget- we love our nation and our king more than we love ourselves.”⁴⁴ The study of royal chronicles, regarded as an important tool to build up this loyalty, was put as a part of the curriculum. In 1901, the education ministry commented that the chronicles were significant books for the nation ‘because if we don’t know the royal chronicles, we don’t know ourselves and if we don’t know ourselves, how could we know other people?’⁴⁵ While the patriotic education started in Bangkok, the government had a long way to go in the outer provinces to build up a nation-wide school system.⁴⁶ In Chulalongkorn’s reign, the Thai government began to build up education as a pillar to promote nationalism but it was still too weak and limited in its reach to have a significant impact on the general population.⁴⁷ The King had to find other means to communicate with a bigger part of the population. Chulalongkorn followed his father in using symbols and festivals as a means to promote nationalism. However, what was due to his own initiation- and what this chapter will give special attention to- was his use of modern paintings and poetry as well as monuments as the means to disseminate the ideas of monarchical nationalism.

The Use of Symbols and Festivals

In 1873, Chulalongkorn introduced the Royal Coats-of-arms which symbolised the claim to power by the Chakri dynasty over a specific territory. Its main elements comprised a Thai style crown symbolising the Thai monarchy, a

⁴⁴ Printed in Duangdao, 1995, p.57.

⁴⁵ Cited in Attachak, 1995, p.184.

⁴⁶ Reports from the 1880s showed that the use of Lao was still common in temple schools in the North East and that the Thai script was limited to urban areas. This did not change considerably over time as a report from 1900 complained that only the administrative officials and their families could read and write Thai. It was not until 1921, in the reign of Chulalongkorn’s son Vajiravudh, that basic education became compulsory for all children from the age of 7 to 14. Even then only 42% of all eligible pupils in the whole country were enrolled in a school. Paitoon Mikusol. “Education and Socio-Cultural Assimilation in Northeastern Thailand”, *Asian Review*, 1988, pp.87-95 and 103.

⁴⁷ This was officially acknowledged in a report from 1926: “We can see that a lot has already be done administratively to make them [people in the provinces] realise they are Thai people. If we do more to develop schools, and if communications with Bangkok in the future will become more convenient, these people will probably feel more and more that they are Thai.” Cited in Paitoon, 1988, p.103.

chakra (disk) and a *tri* (a trident) symbolising the Chakri dynasty, and a three-headed elephant, symbolising the North, the Central and the South regions of Thailand. A white elephant represented the Lao territories and a *kris* (knife) represented the Malay territories were also included. Local symbols clearly reflected Chulalongkorn's emphasis of the trans-ethnic character of the Thai nation.⁴⁸

Good examples of his use of festivities were the celebrations of his becoming the longest reigning king in Thai history. As he wanted to publicly demonstrate a line of succession of Thai kings since ancient times, the celebrations were designed on a historical theme with reference to the previous record holder, King Ramathibodi II (r.1491-1529), and held in the former capital Ayutthaya. During the festival, eulogies to the Ayutthayan kings were presented and Chulalongkorn was portrayed as the inheritor of their power and virtue. Following them, he saw it as his duty to give the country prosperity, stability and freedom. During the festivities, Chulalongkorn launched the Archaeological Society to stress the importance of history for the Thai nation. He proposed starting the study of the several regional polities that had been powerful at one time or another in order to advance knowledge of the thousand years of Thai history. In this speech, he acknowledged the existence of parallel political units which eventually melted into the nation.⁴⁹ This legitimised not only the claim of the monarchical nation over lesser kingdoms and other ethnic groups but also firmly rooted it back in the past.

The Use of Paintings and Poetry

In using art and literature as means to present 'national history', Chulalongkorn initiated an exhibition to decorate the royal pyres of his wife and three children at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok in 1887. This exhibition consisted of 92 glass-framed paintings depicting scenes from Thai history. These paintings combined western techniques (perspective, shadows, realism) with a typical Thai content. Attached to these pictures were poems narrating the events shown. Chulalongkorn published these poems in a booklet entitled *Klong pap*

⁴⁸ Bank of Thailand, 2002, pp.34 and 44. The Coat-of-arms was later replaced by the *garuda* (a mystical man-bird which was a vehicle of Vishnu) as state emblem because Chulalongkorn thought it was too western.

⁴⁹ Peleggi, 2003a, pp.130-131.

phraratchaphongsawadan (Poetry Depicting the Paintings from the Royal Chronicles) which was distributed to visitors.

The fact that this project was initiated by Chulalongkorn and conducted under his supervision underlines the importance for the analysis of monarchical nationalism. The king did almost everything by himself, selecting the historical events from the Royal Chronicles to be painted, choosing the painters and the poets and last but not least composing nine poems himself. Stating in the booklet that the exhibition was targeting the masses, Chulalongkorn could not have chosen a better opportunity to present the 'national history' to his people by combining this exhibition of paintings into the royal event which traditionally attracted the crowds.⁵⁰ He intended this project to be a symbol of gratitude of all Thais to the former kings of Ayutthaya and Bangkok. It was clearly stated in the prologue that the nation was prospering because these kings did good things for it. They fought with the enemy to protect and expand the kingdom, developed the country until it became beautiful, introduced law codes to create peacefulness and practised *dharma* so that Buddhism flourished. Therefore, all of them deserved high praise.⁵¹ The prologue displayed not only the connection between the monarch and the nation but also how the Thai kings practised their *barami* in a concrete way, following the concept of *dharmaracha*.

After the prologue came 92 poems describing 92 historical events painted in the pictures, starting with the construction of Ayutthaya to the signing of the Burney treaty in 1826.⁵² Thailand was outlined as a nation with a long, continuous history and an historic territory. The poems then revealed the important elements of the nation, namely the monarchy, the civil servants, the citizens and the *sangha*, together with their duties. The heroic deeds of people who sacrificed themselves for king and nation, including non-Thai ethnic groups were recalled and the 'national characteristics' of the Thais were praised. The poetry also demanded sovereignty as a necessity for the surviving and developing of the nation. It is clear that the ultimate aim of the paintings and poems was to stir up nationalistic feelings.

⁵⁰ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Klong phap phraratchaphongsawadan* [Poetry Depicting the Paintings from the Royal Chronicles], Bangkok 1983, preface.

⁵¹ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, p.1.

⁵² Chulalongkorn used the Royal Chronicles as the blueprint for his historical narrative. This resulted in Ayutthaya as the starting point for the history because Sukhothai, having inscriptions instead, was not part of the chronicle tradition.

These 92 poems were composed in four or six four-line stanzas of the *khlong* style, a versification used since early Ayutthaya to describe historical events, heroes and in didactic poetry. Almost every poem followed the same structure. It described the event along the chronicle tradition, telling ‘who did what, when and where.’ The last stanza, however, ended with a comment or an opinion of the poet, an innovation from the chronicles which normally strictly reported on the event. Already in the very first poem, written by Chulalongkorn himself, the framework for the whole project of a ‘national history’ becomes clear. After a description about the location of the new city and the ceremonies conducted, Chulalongkorn ended his poem with the connection of the long-lasting power of Ayutthaya and the Siamese nation:

“This city lasted for 400 years,
He [Ramathibodi, the founder] is the first king who ruled Siam.”⁵³

Chulalongkorn implied in these two lines that every king since then was in direct line with the founder of Ayutthaya. As part of his duties, it was the king who ‘created’ Siam as a nation. The use of the term ‘Siam’ instead of the historic correct name ‘Kingdom of Ayutthaya’ emphasised the roots of the modern Siamese [Thai] nation lay in the faraway past. Another important duty of a king as the protector and patron of Buddhism was shown in a poem describing the construction of the biggest standing Buddha-statue, ‘bigger than any neighbouring country ever had’, by King Ramathibodi II.⁵⁴ Contrary to other poems, the poet of this one does not give a comment on the event for the very scene itself visibly reflected the glory of the king whose duty is to support Buddhism.

Well aware of the western imperialism of his time, Chulalongkorn stressed another duty of a king, to maintain the independence of the nation. He allowed as many as 17 poems in praise of King Naresuan, the leader who brought freedom to the country. In one poem, Naresuan is shown to lead his soldiers to victory although the Thai troops were inferior in numbers.⁵⁵ The message sent was that a good leader makes all the difference.

⁵³ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, p.6.

⁵⁴ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, p.12.

⁵⁵ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, pp.36-37.

For Chulalongkorn, a king's fulfilment of his duty was only one part of the legitimacy of kingship. Any king must also possess enough *barami* which he had practised both in former lives as well as the present. Poem No 4 told an event when the two sons of King Ramesuan (early Ayutthaya period) fought each other to succeed their deceased father to the throne and died in the battle. The poem explained the death of both princely contenders as a result of the lack of *barami* while the youngest brother who possessed enough *barami* was elected to be the new king. The myth of the 'Great Elect' was again referred to by the poet:

“[The nobility] invited the youngest prince Samphraya to rule the kingdom, to cover the head of all the people [to give protection to his people].”⁵⁶

Though following traditional myth, Chulalongkorn stated clearly that the *barami* a king practised in his present life was also very important. The best example can be seen in the poems about King Rama I, who was considered by Chulalongkorn a ruler with exceptional *barami*. One poem written by Chulalongkorn himself showed that though the *barami* of the king was always depicted in the form of miracles, the explanation for each miracle was very realistic and truthful. In contrast to other poems which all began with the title 'In the reign of...', this poem started with 'When Thonburi was in chaos (*chalachon*)'. It told the episode when General Chakri (the future Rama I) was with his troops in Cambodia and heard about the chaos after King Taksin had become insane. When he was about to mount his elephant to return to Thonburi, his body was radiating with golden rays and he looked 'gracious beyond compare'. The troops instantly recognised the sign and all knelt down to pay respect to him. Chulalongkorn commented in the last stanza:

“The *barami* of him now goes up to the white [royal] umbrella,
[For] he brings an end to the turmoil and cools the head of the people
[protects the people].”⁵⁷

The most revolutionary aspect of the monarchical nation was the inclusion of the people to a central position. One poem describes the filling of a river by the Burmese in order to move their troops to Ayutthaya ahead of their first conquest in

⁵⁶ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, p.9.

⁵⁷ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, pp.80-81.

1596. With no mention of the king at all, the whole poem was a eulogy to the ordinary people who started to fight on their own to protect the city:

“The people who lived around the city,
shoot fire arrows,
to kill the Burmese,
many of them were lying dead.”⁵⁸

In another poem, the style and rhyming of the words were carefully chosen to reflect the enthusiasm of ordinary soldiers to fight against the invading Khmer and win the decisive victory. The poem stirred up nationalistic feelings in the reader by using modern words so that the reader could identify themselves with the Thai soldiers of the past. This poem also depicted the Khmer (in a case of constructing ‘the Other’) as immoral and untrustworthy because they sneaked in and kidnapped the Thais. The Thais, in contrast, went to war for a just cause only.⁵⁹ These two poems were evidence of King Chulalongkorn’s intention to set a role model for his people. He also expected them to love the nation. He included the incident when the ‘Siamese’ attacked Maha Thammaracha who was an ally of the Burmese and came to Ayutthaya for negotiation. Both the painting and the poem showed Maha Thammaracha fleeing with indignity and fear after the fierce attack. Calling the attackers ‘Siamese’ (*chao sayam*) and the traitor *padet chat* (the one who destroys the nation), the poem indicated a national identity. The words used by the poet together with the image of the fearful ‘traitor’ enhanced the message to be transmitted: the ordinary citizen must love his nation.⁶⁰ To emphasize the duty of the citizens, another poem gave a stern warning to the reader that ‘even the elephants knew to love their country’.⁶¹

Chulalongkorn’s vision of the monarchical nation included special national characteristics of the Thais. From the civil servants, he expected loyalty to king and nation. For the Thais themselves, he praised the fighting spirit. In a poem about a Thai boxer who defeated all Burmese boxers, the Burmese king lamented:

⁵⁸ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.25.

⁵⁹ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.8.

⁶⁰ In the chronicles, this episode was only reported that Maha Thammaracha had to flee.

⁶¹ The painting and poem portrayed two white elephants being transferred to the Burmese in exchange for the release of the Siamese crown prince. Both elephants refused to accept Burmese mahouts and misbehaved so violently that the Burmese king sent them back to Thailand. Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.20.

“The Siamese people even in the time of disarray,
having only bare hands, the enemy could not touch them.
This picture confirmed the old saying,
that had been said many times,
the Kingdom of Ayutthaya never lacked a good man,
this picture just confirmed it.”⁶²

For this praise of ‘typical’ Thai traits, Chulalongkorn did not forget the trans-ethnic character of his monarchical nationalism. Chinese troops under the command of King Taksin were glorified for their bravery and success.⁶³ Chulalongkorn implied that even when somebody was not ethnic Thai, he still could be loyal to the Thai king and fight bravely for the king and the nation. A key to the success of a nation was solidarity which he emphasised in one poem written by himself: King Taksin and four soldiers were able to defeat 30 Burmese soldiers because they knew the meaning of solidarity.⁶⁴ In another poem, a fire in the throne hall was extinguished by the solidarity of the royal family, the civil servants and the monks.⁶⁵

In outlining his idea about the historical territory of the Siamese nation, Chulalongkorn included poems describing wars with the Burmese, the Khmer and the northern Thai kingdom of Chiang Mai.⁶⁶ With the western powers expanding on the borders of Thailand, Chulalongkorn sought to remind at least the Thais about the importance of the country in the past. He chose to include the story of the visit of the Ayutthayan ambassador to the court of Louis XIV as an equal partner:

“The two cities (*nakhon*) from different continents and different directions,
The two nations (*chat*) with different religions,
The two cities (*mueang*) had friendship to each other,
The two countries (*prathet*) had all the benefits they wanted to have.”⁶⁷

⁶² Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.77.

⁶³ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.72.

⁶⁴ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.70.

⁶⁵ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.91.

⁶⁶ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, pp.40;41 and 46. Tribute missions from Malay areas were also mentioned.

⁶⁷ Chulachomkhaoyuhua, 1983, p.51.

The use of the four different terms (*nakhon*, *chat*, *mueang* and *prathet*) was an ingenious stroke by the poet. By equating the traditional and well-known concepts of the country with the rather new term of *chat* (nation), the writer was able to transmit the meaning of the latter one to the masses. He also connected the city (of Ayutthaya) with the whole nation by equating it to the modern nation. The history of Ayutthaya became now the history of all members of the Thai nation. This was an academic expansion of the core culture of Ayutthaya.

In the epilogue of the poetry, Chulalongkorn offered a kind of ‘social contract’ to his people. As the sole leader of the nation, the monarch had to fulfil his duties to make the nation prosper and beautiful. In exchange, the civil servants and citizens gave loyalty to him and through him to the nation. This ‘contract’ could be seen as the declaration for the monarchical nation:

“Siam is beautiful and full of perfect things,
full of knowledge of every kind.
All of this is because of the King
And the bravery of soldiers in war.”
“So all the citizens in the whole country,
should be grateful to the King,
loyal and honest to him,
and give your life under his feet.”⁶⁸

The *Khlong phap phraratchaphongsawadan* project was an excellent means to transmit the idea of monarchical nationalism in a time without efficient mass media. The outstanding feature of the paintings and poetry was the mix between tradition and modernity. Battle scenes were depicted realistically but in a style that reminded the viewer of familiar battles from the *Ramakian* epic in temple murals. The modern viewers were therefore able to identify themselves with the struggles or heroic deeds shown. The poems had a similar aim to encourage identification. By choosing the *klong* style, Chulalongkorn connected the visitors and readers of the booklet to a recognisable world of traditional literature while stirring up nationalistic feelings by the word-rhyming technique. The use of modern terms enabled the reader to connect with the described scenes which became not only

⁶⁸ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, pp.102-103.

alive but relevant. The exhibition also set up the framework for national history, a framework not much changed since.

With its function to transmit monarchical nationalism, this project could be considered the answer to the increasing power of western imperialism in South East Asia. As the exhibition was organised years before the 1893 *Paknam* incident (French gun-boat diplomacy) which was seen by academics of Thai nationalism as the starting point for nationalism in Thailand, it was more likely that Chulalongkorn increased his efforts to promote nationalism after Burma fell to the United Kingdom in 1885.

This exhibition was also the answer to the demand for constitution and democracy. Through the paintings and poetry, Chulalongkorn successfully demonstrated that the monarchy was not replaceable and had to be the centrepiece of the nation. His repeated emphasis that the kings are kings because they have *barami* added a sacred dimension to the monarchical nation. It not only legitimised the position of the king but also prevented any democratic leader from replacing him. Thailand as a nation was only prosperous and beautiful because of the kings. Chulalongkorn, however, in his position as monarchical ruler who was well aware of anti-monarchical forces in Europe, offered a social contract. Although the king had enough *barami* to be in the position in power, he still had to fulfil his duties. He had to follow the ten kingly virtues (which more or less teach the monarch how to gain *barami*) and to make the land, the people and the religion prosperous. With the combination of the past and newly to be acquired *barami*, Chulalongkorn hoped to set measurable targets for the monarchs themselves which then in turn would pre-empt any attempt to abolish the monarchy. By connecting the monarchy with the nation, he aimed to bind loyalty to the king and to the nation which he saw as being in danger from western imperialism. It was this very blending of the modern nation with the sacred dimension of kingship that made monarchical nationalism successful. It reassured the people that while the old traditions were still alive, the nation was on its way into the modern age led by the king.

It must be mentioned that after the exhibition and cremation, Chulalongkorn ordered to re-use the wood of the pyre for the construction of a hospital. His practise of this *dāna barami* was praised in the poetry as *dhana phiset* (special

‘giving’) which earned the king great merit because he helped to save the life of the people, something ‘which never happened before’.⁶⁹

The Use of Monuments

Only a year before the exhibition and the construction of the hospital, the earliest nationalistic monument on public display appeared. Though it could not perfectly portray the idea of a monarchical nation, it was important as the first monument and the first one to be dedicated to the people. In 1886, King Chulalongkorn erected the *anusawari prab ho*, the monument to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the campaign against the rebellious Ho Chinese who took control of several cities in the Mekong region between 1877 and 1886. Situated in the province of Nongkhai on the Mekong River, the monument was a traditional stupa blended with western design elements, with a pyramid in the centre and small transepts on all sides. Each of the four sides was decorated with a commemorative text in different languages: Thai, English, Chinese and Lao. Praising those who died as having loyalty, the text made the promise that ‘their name would be honoured forever’. It also emphasised that they died ‘with loyalty to the king, with bravery and without fear of death’.⁷⁰

The king was clearly in the focus of this nationalism. The fallen soldiers became immortal first and foremost for their loyalty to the monarch and then through him to the nation. In addition, the use of commemorative text in four languages reveals the monument’s function as a border mark of Thai territory towards the French colony of Laos and it could also be interpreted as a symbol for the trans-ethnic nature of the monarchical nation. The written eulogy to fallen heroes in four languages invited readers of different ethnic backgrounds to become a subject/hero of the king as well. With the building of this monument, King Chulalongkorn was quite up-to-date as Smith states that in Europe it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the masses began to be ‘invited’ into the heart of the nation and religious symbols for common soldiers replaced the single hero.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Chulachomkloachaoyuhua, 1983, pp.4-5.

⁷⁰ Kromsinlapakon, *Anusawari nai prathethai* [Monuments in Thailand], Bangkok 1998, pp.125-129.

⁷¹ Smith, Anthony. “Will and Sacrifice: Images of National Identity”, *MJIS*, 2001, p.580.

In 1887, the construction of *Siriraj Hospital* from the left over wood of the royal pyres and the exhibition underlined Chulalongkorn's point that a king must acquire constantly new *barami* by doing beneficial deeds for the people. Named after his dead son, the hospital could be interpreted as a monument of the benevolent monarchy. It also became the blueprint for future monuments of the monarchical nation: a connection between the monarchy and their good deeds for the people.

One of the most important monuments during this period of the monarchical nation is the equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn (*phraboromrachanusawari phrapiyamaharat*) in Bangkok. The statue, the first public depiction of a human being in Thailand, was unveiled with a big ceremony in 1908.⁷² With the exception of the current incumbent King Bhumibol, King Chulalongkorn was the most beloved Thai monarch. The feelings of the people towards their monarch were expressed by a large sum of money donated to build the monument and the surrounding plaza on the occasion to celebrate the longest reign- up to that time- in Thai history. In the speech of Crown Prince Vajiravudh, who spoke in the name of the people to present the monument as a gift to the King, he connected the monument with the idea of the monarchical nation: “[King Chulalongkorn's] reign is a record in the history of the Siamese nation that surpasses those by all previous sovereigns, from ancient Ayutthaya down to the present. The statue is a testimony for future generations of shared feelings which shall forever stand as a national monument of our heartfelt devotion to Your Royal Person.”⁷³

Chulalongkorn placed his statue at the centre of a new square which was designed to become the centre of Bangkok and therefore symbolically the centre of the kingdom/monarchical nation. The King, portrayed as an elegant and westernised horseman, was the embodiment of the nation. At its base, a long inscription praised the king which could be taken as perfect statement for the ideals of the monarchical nation: “His Majesty is endowed with all the greatest attributes

⁷² The first statue of a monarch in Thailand was produced in the reign of King Mongkut. It was, however, not on public display. The first statue of a ruler on public display was ironically a foreign ruler, Queen Victoria whose statue was placed in front of the British consulate in Chiang Mai. Hossens, 1912, p.299.

⁷³ Cited in Peleggi, Maurizio. “Siam/Looking Back- Thailand/Looking Forward: King Chulalongkorn in Thai Collective Memory”, Paper Presented at the Conference “King Rama 5: Siam and Southeast Asia”, Bangkok 2003b, p.4.

of a wise ruler. He has devoted his whole heart to the care of his dominion, to preserve them in a state of national independence and to promote the unity and contentment of his people...He is highly gifted with a keen perception of all that is good and evil in the manners and customs of this country, and has always eliminated the bad and introduced nought but what is good and beneficial. He has always set himself as a meritorious example and guided his people in the path of progress and lasting benefits. He has succeeded by his high personal qualities in conferring happiness and contentment upon his people...He has been the true father of his people. His great qualities and exalted traits of character have brought the kingdom of Siam to the high state of prosperity and independence which she enjoys at the present time, and earned the undying love and gratitude of his people.”⁷⁴

The statue became an object of veneration and its surrounding plaza was used for important state ceremonies as well as a place for relaxation for ordinary people which added another beneficial function to the monument.

Chulalongkorn struck the right chord with his monarchical nationalism and was able to appeal to the masses with his use of traditional concepts. The monarchical nation was able to expand fast and met more or less no serious resistance which could have endangered the system. However, it was not a ‘perfect picture’ of a feverish mass of people crying out loud for nationalism in the Thailand of the early twentieth century.⁷⁵ Obviously, the lack of a colonial government which provided an easy ignition for patriotic feelings as in other countries was an obstacle (from the point of view of nationalism). The Thai government under the king was generally not perceived as foreign or oppressive even in the outer parts of the now clearly delimited nation-state. Otherwise, the number of millenarian resistance movements would have been far greater than the relatively small number of revolts that have occurred (independent from their local significance).⁷⁶ Mostly, the people in the regions adapted themselves quickly to the expanding nation and nation state.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cited in Peleggi, 2003a, p.198.

⁷⁵ Breuilly pointed out that it was only after 1870 that the most developed states in Europe experienced the rise of mass politics. Even then, stated Breuilly, this mass politics was more important in promoting national integration than explicit nationalism. Breuilly, John “The State”, San Diego 2001, p.784.

⁷⁶ The big exception was the volatile situation in the southern-most region. Piyanart, 1999, pp.138-142. For local rebellions see Ramsay, Ansil. “Modernization and Reactionary Rebellions in

Chulalongkorn's nationalism appealed to the emotional side of many Thais. The ongoing strength of tradition in the general population in Thailand around the change of the century was Chulalongkorn's strongest asset that he maintained well. Warrington Smyth, who was the head of the Department of Mines for five years, wrote in 1898: "How blindly tradition is revered among the people. Tradition is as sacred as the King's person. Like the King's acts, it is never questioned. Custom is, without further ado, invested with a sanctity which commands the greatest respect and even devotion."⁷⁸ Smyth's account gave an insight in the power of traditional thinking in Thailand even when the intellectual elite had already begun to adapt and modernise. Any attempt to establish nationalism as a tool for political ends had to face the gap between traditional and modern concepts of the nation. In addition, tradition in Thailand is until today very much connected with Buddhism. Any secular movement would face difficulties in winning the hearts and minds of the population unless it had recognised, for example, that Buddhism does not pay much attention to the creation of the world. Nationalistic approaches based on a common origin had to keep this fact in sight.

Theravada-Buddhism practised in Thailand focused on the individual and not on the society. A society is only the sum of its individuals, it can be good only if they are good human beings. This view supports individualism in every day life and makes it difficult to rally the masses behind a common goal.⁷⁹ An important feature of nationalism is nostalgia for the past. Smith explained that people sought to overcome death and the futility with which death threatens mortals. By linking oneself to a 'community of history and destiny' the individual hopes to achieve a measure of immortality.⁸⁰ In comparison with neighbouring Cambodia, Thais never built monuments for immortality like the huge temple complex of Angkor. There is no belief of immortality but only of a next life. Nostalgia has therefore its limits in

Northern Thailand", *JAS*, 1979; Keyes, Charles. "Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society", *JAS*, 1977; Ishii, Yoneo. "A Note on Buddhist Millenarian Revolts in Northeastern Siam", *JSEAS*, 1975 and Chattip Nartsupha. "The Ideology of 'Holy Men' Revolts in North East Thailand", Osaka 1984.

⁷⁷ Proof for this claim could be the acceptance of new culture in cities such as Chiang Mai. Thanet reported that most Northerners readily wore the Bangkok-style 'royal pattern shirt' (*suaratchapataen*) which was introduced by Chulalongkorn himself. Thanet Charoenmueang, *Ma chak lanna* [Coming from Lanna], Bangkok 1993, p.44.

⁷⁸ Smyth, W., *Five Years in Siam (1891-1896)*, Bangkok Reprint 1999, p.20.

⁷⁹ Even much later, in the reign of Vajiravudh, jokes were made about the attempts to stir up patriotism. See Barmé, Scott, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, Lanham 2002, p.1.

⁸⁰ Smith, 1986, p.175.

Thailand. Last but not least, the means to spread nationalist ideas quickly were rather limited due to the just developing modern educational system and limited access to villages.⁸¹ Therefore, the success of monarchical nationalism lay in the application of traditional concepts adapted for the needs of the monarchical nation.

There could not be any doubt of Chulalongkorn's nationalism. Smith proposed that nationalism includes the rediscovery, reinterpretation and regeneration of the community. The rediscovery has to contain the quest for authentic communal ethno-history, the recording of memories and the collection of indigenous myth and traditions. The reinterpretation means the selection of myth and memories to locate the community in a significant context. The regeneration, finally, involves a summons of all the people.⁸² Chulalongkorn and his monarchical nationalism met these requirements. His and Prince Damrong's systematic search for historical events and places, myths, symbols and traditions of the Thai represented 'rediscovery'. The exhibition of the paintings and the connected foundation of a national history were an example of reinterpretation. Finally, Chulalongkorn's concept of unity and the call for loyalty to the nation and monarchy provided the last part, the regeneration. It must be kept in mind that Chulalongkorn did not think in terms of a modern political nation which in the long term would have required the participation of the masses. The King attempted to renew or reform indigenous Thai culture and traditions to meet the challenges of modernity.

Nevertheless, whatever the main reason behind Chulalongkorn's drive for a national identity was, it was not a drive with high speed. Rosenberg believed that Chulalongkorn hesitated to play the nationalist card for he saw the danger of nationalism for the absolute monarchy because of its democratic and egalitarian elements.⁸³

⁸¹ See Darling, Frank, *The Westernization of Asia*, Boston 1979, p.296. The construction of roads, for example, started only in the 1930s. Falcus, Malcolm. "The Economic History of Thailand", *AEHR*, 1991, p.65.

⁸² Smith, Anthony, *Myth and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford 1999, pp.177-178.

⁸³ Rosenberg, 1980, p.87.

Chapter 6

The Decline of Monarchical Nationalism (1910-1932)

In the previous chapter I have proposed to see the reign of King Chulalongkorn as being the peak of the monarchical nation and nationalism. After his death, the monarchical element weakened with the result that a competing view of the nation could establish itself within groups of a new bureaucratic elite. I will argue in this chapter that an increasing influence of the ideas of political nationalism in the monarchical nationalism itself, insufficient personal charisma by the monarchs, the strengthening of the state and its representatives and a difficult economic environment led to the end of the dominance of the monarchical nation. The main argument of the revisionist school that increasing pressure from below and the development of alternative views on the nation played a role is also included.

6.1. King Vajiravudh and Nationalism

In contrast to his predecessors, King Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925) did not face a power struggle with the nobility when he ascended the throne. Although lacking this important motif for monarchical nationalism, his name is generally associated with Thai nationalism. What influenced King Vajiravudh, who is in my opinion wrongly seen by many academics as ‘the father of Thai nationalism’¹, to emphasise the concepts of nation and nationalism? Several factors can be identified. First, Vajiravudh was the first Thai monarch to be educated abroad (in the United Kingdom) where he witnessed the jingoistic and nationalistic euphoria in Europe at the turn of the century.² Second, he

¹ Vella, W., *Chaiyo- King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Honolulu 1978, p.xiii. Those who share Vella’s view include, for example, Wilson, D., *Politics in Thailand*, Ithaca 1966, p.109, Kershaw, R., *The Changing Face of Monarchy in Southeast Asia*, Southeast-on-Sea 1979, p. 16, Darling, Frank, *The Westernization of Asia*, Boston 1979, p.303, Ling, T., *Buddhism, Imperialism and War*, London 1979, p.91, Skinner, W., *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, Ithaca 1962, p.159, Thirayuth B., *Chatniyom lae lang chatniyom* [Nationalism and Post-nationalism], Bangkok 2003, p.104, and Manit Nualla-or, *Kanmueang thai yuk sanyalak rat thai* [Thai Politics during the Symbolic Thai State], Bangkok 1997, p.96.

² Patriotism was inflamed in Britain during the Boer Wars (1899-1902). See Attridge, S., *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture*, Houndsmill 2003, p.9. An interesting insight into Vajiravudh’s thoughts was his final thesis at Oxford University. He wrote about the war of Polish succession and commented full of contempt about the intention of King Augustus to divide the country between Austria, Russia and Prussia as ‘infamous’. Surely, he saw Thailand in a similar position and

experienced as a prince the loss of substantial parts of Thailand to the imperial powers during the reign of his father.³ When he became King, nobody could know for sure whether the colonial danger for Thailand was over or not. Third, Chinese nationalism in South East Asia became more prominent after China's defeat against Japan in 1885. In the case of Thailand, the first Chinese newspaper was published in 1906 and small revolutionary cells were organised after a visit by Sun Yat-Sen in 1908. Chinese schools were established soon afterwards. Skinner pointed out that the ties between the overseas Chinese and the homeland became stronger: "For the first time, they [the overseas Chinese] looked to a Chinese regime as their home government. The overseas community gained a new awareness of its Chinese character and nationality."⁴ Vajiravudh, well aware of these events, was seriously worried when the October 1911 revolt in China resulted in the abdication of the Qing dynasty and the appointment of Sun Yat-Sen as the leader of the republican government.⁵ The Chinese in Thailand reacted with an outburst of Chinese nationalism whose republican ideals represented a serious threat for the Thai monarchy.⁶ The fourth reason for Vajiravudh's interest in strengthening nationalism was the discovery of a plot against his own government in March 1912, representing the first direct challenge to the power of the monarchy. I propose that these four reasons motivated Vajiravudh to strengthen Thai nationalism.

What did King Vajiravudh's interpretation of nationalism look like? This thesis proposes that his reign represented a fundamental change in the concept of nationalism as it became a mix between monarchical and political nationalism. Vajiravudh

rejected any concessions. Crown Prince of Siam [Vajiravudh], *The War of the Polish Succession*, Oxford 1902, p.9.

³ Thailand lost ca. 90,000 square miles of land to the colonial powers between 1850 and 1909. Solomon, Robert. "Boundary Concepts and Practices in Southeast Asia", *World Politics*, 1970, p.13.

⁴ Skinner, 1962, pp.155-159.

⁵ Fairbank, J./Reischauer, E./Craig, A., *East Asia- Tradition and Transformation*, London 1973, pp.742-745. See also Godement, F., *The New Asian Renaissance- From Colonialism to the Post Cold War*, London 1997, p.45. Sun and Liang Chi-Chao were the main protagonists of a new China. Sun developed earlier the concept of the 'Three Principles of the People': Nationalism, democracy and 'people's livelihood'. These principles were directed against the Manchu and were pro-republican. Liang was a 'pure' nationalist, who demanded a switch of loyalty from the rulers to the nation. Both Sun and Liang were highly popular with the majority of the Chinese and it is not difficult to imagine the fear of King Vajiravudh regarding a developing Chinese nationalism that demanded nothing else than the abolition of the absolute monarchy. The Chinese Nationality Law of 1909 supported the identification of the overseas Chinese with the homeland. Following *jus sanguinis*, all overseas Chinese were regarded as Chinese. See Reid, Anthony. "Entrepreneurial Minorities, Nationalism, and the State", Seattle 1997, p.52. These events had an impact on Thai perceptions of the Chinese. Skinner proposed that Vajiravudh was influenced by anti-Chinese bias of Europeans in Thailand. See Skinner, 1962, p.155.

⁶ For example, Chinese cinemas in Bangkok showed Sun's image and played the Chinese national anthem. Vajiravudh ordered the showing of his image and the playing of the royal anthem. Dome Sukwong/Sawasdi Suwannapak, *A Century of Thai Cinema*, Bangkok 2001, p.110.

maintained some elements of monarchical nationalism such as the close connection between the nation and the monarch, the central role of the king and the trans-ethnic nature of Thai identity. However, the King also developed his own ideas and introduced concepts such as race, the maintenance of freedom of the nation, the need for purity of Thai culture and the highlighting of the importance of the nation.

The monarchical nationalism was mainly represented by his emphasis on the connection between the monarch and the Thai nation. Following the tradition of monarchical nationalism, Vajiravudh tied the happiness and prosperity of the nation to his own fate. In a speech to the people in December 1911, Vajiravudh said: “I realise deeply at the moment that I was given the big and most important burden: I have the happiness and Thainess of the nation in my hands. We [Vajiravudh] were born as Thai and in the royal dynasty, and our ancestors helped each other to build the Thai nation and to preserve it. This demands sacrifice of blood and flesh from everybody to maintain the Thainess of the nation.”⁷ Vajiravudh called on every Thai to feel loyalty ‘to the one who protects the territory according to the legal traditions’ [the king], to love the nation and to believe in the religion. Only unity between the groups and the avoidance of conflict would create stability to make the nation free.⁸

This speech also was an example of Vajiravudh’s view that the role of the king was crucial. He called kings the creators of the Thai nation. Interestingly, the idiom used by him for ‘king’ (‘the one who protects the territory according to the legal traditions’) is unusual. Suitable for the developing nation-state, Vajiravudh included a territorial dimension. He also provided himself with legitimation, both in legal and historical terms. His role as ‘protector’ indicated an emotional dimension which would suit the picture of the king as the ‘father’ of his people who could feel safe under his leadership. The idiom used for ‘citizen’ was *phraifahkaphaendin* which literally meant ‘*commoner who serves the sky* [king], *servant of the land*’. This points to an interpretation of the monarchical nation which was non-democratic and non-secular, similar to earlier versions.

The third maintained element of monarchical nationalism was trans-ethnicity. Many studies focusing on his anti-Chinese sentiments concluded that he was a racist. Indeed, the King complained in countless articles and plays about the Chinese who

⁷ Khanakammakanmunnithiphaboromrachanuson phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua (ed), *Phraratchadamrat khong phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua ruam 100 khrang* [100 Royal Speeches of King Vajiravudh], Bangkok 1986, p.13.

⁸ Khanakammakanmunnithiphaboromrachanuson, 1986, p.13.

supposedly exploited Thailand. However, the description of racist for Vajiravudh falls short of the wider picture. I propose that Vajiravudh still continued the trans-ethnic approach to Thainess by presenting a very open concept of who is Thai and who is not. Just like his predecessors, Vajiravudh thought that loyalty to the king was the only criteria for being Thai. He communicated that clearly to minorities such as the Muslims in 1910: “Now the Muslims have seen the real policy of the Siamese kings in the past that they had an intention to support the people, no matter what race, language and religion who came to be under royal protection. They would support everyone equally. I, the Crown Prince, also have the same intention. I will give friendship to the Muslims, no different to other religious believers who come to live in Siam. Please believe that I will do my duty as your patron to my full strength so that you all will be happy like you used to be.”⁹ Vajiravudh defined the Thai nation trans-ethnically: “The word *chat* [nation] originally means ‘family’ or ‘types of people’. *Chat* literally means only ‘birth’. But we Thai used this word later to call a group of people who lived together as *chat* which actually is not wrong. Because the people of Thai nationality are those who are born Thai, the ones who are born among the people who call themselves Thai.”¹⁰ Confirming the traditional view of Thai kings, this definition enabled everybody to be Thai as long as he calls himself Thai or is born in Thailand. This thought became even more pronounced in a statement by Vajiravudh in 1915: “The way to decide whether anyone belonged to which nation, is to consider whom he pays loyalty. If he pays loyalty to the King of Siam, he is a real Thai. However, if anyone proclaims that he is independent, pays loyalty to no one, we can consider him as a person without a nation.”¹¹

Therefore, Vajiravudh’s anti-Chinese sentiments were directed only against China and the Chinese who lived in Thailand but did not integrate into Thai society. In a play written to promote the Wild Tiger Corps, he explicitly let a character warn of a military invasion if the Thai government would dare to disobey China.¹² Internally, the King distinguished between two groups of Chinese in Thailand. One group, the *kuli*

⁹ Cited in Piyanart B., *Nayobai kanpokkhong khong ratthaban thai to chaotai mutsalim nai changwat chaidaeen phaktai (pho so 2475-2516)* [Administrative Policy of the Thai Government Towards the Thai Muslims in the Southern Province (1902-1973)], Bangkok 1988, p.89.

¹⁰ Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Plukchaisueapa lae khlontitlo* [Encouraging the Wild Tigers and Clogs on Our Wheels], Bangkok Reprint 1951, p.56.

¹¹ Asvabahu (pseu.), *Khwampenchat thai doi thae ching lae maphraotuendok* [To be the Real Thai Nation and *Maphraotuendok*], Bangkok Reprint 1977, p.16.

¹² Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Huachai nakrop* [The Heart of a Fighter], Bangkok Reprint 1991, p.35.

(*coolie*), would stay only temporary, while the other one, the merchants, would live permanently in the kingdom. The King explained that the first group had no roots and they would not learn the language. Even in that case, Vajiravudh argued that one could count them as Thai but only in a very distant way. However he emphasised that they were still under the law of Thailand. This would also be valid for other nationalities living in the country.¹³ Despite all his anti-Chinese propaganda, Vajiravudh did not issue anti-Chinese laws in his reign.¹⁴ Vajiravudh stressed that the Thais should be respectful to other nations. For example, in a speech to Thai students abroad in 1916, he said: “To love our nation is something good and suitable. But it is not necessary to show our patriotism by looking down on or hate other nations.”¹⁵

Vajiravudh’s introduction of the concept of race did not contradict the trans-ethnic approach to Thai identity. It was an elaboration of Chulalongkorn’s description of a ‘fighting spirit’ as the national characteristic of the Thais. Based on the meaning of the name ‘Thai’, Vajiravudh linked this to the idea of race. To be ‘Thai’ [free] was meant to love freedom: “Our Thai nation originally did not have a nation or even a language. It was a group of people who had a brave heart and who were not willing to be enslaved. They tried to free themselves from suppression and founded their own group [kingdom]. They gave this group the name *Thai* because they achieved full freedom and were not the slave of anyone. Later the Thai nation gradually stabilised and prospered.”¹⁶ This quote showed that the King saw race not as a biological concept. This was also reflected in the poem ‘Love of Race and Fatherland’ (written in English), in which Vajiravudh appealed for love and unity within the nation:

“Having once been well-born.
Let us not forget our Race and our Faith;
Let us not be born in vain
Amongst a race that is Free!
...

¹³ Asvabahu (pseu.), 1977, p.14.

¹⁴ There was one exception which could be interpreted as a forceful integration of the Chinese into Thai society. In 1913, Vajiravudh attempted to replace Chinese clan names because he linked them with gangster solidarity, archaism, national division and political subordination. Kasian Tejapira, *Commodifying Marxism- The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958*, Kyoto 2001, p.34. See also Amara Pongsapich, *Khvam laklai thang watthanatham* [Cultural Varieties], Bangkok 2002, p.144. Amara argued that Vajiravudh’s laws actually aimed to enable a better assimilation of the Chinese.

¹⁵ Cited in Prudhisana Jumbala. “Hak rak chat sat kasat chong chai det hai pen kun [If You Love Nation, Religion and King, Please Use the Power for Benefit], *Matichon*, 2004, p.7.

¹⁶ Cited in Chanida Phrompayak Phueaksom, *Kanmueang nai prawattisat thongchat thai* [Politics in the History of Thai National Flag], Bangkok 2003, p.83

Therefore, comrades, let us be loyal to our King,
And be true to our nation and our Faith;
Let us lay down our lives without regret,
That we may preserve the Freedom of the Free!”¹⁷

The fact that race and freedom were based on a concept of the monarchical nationalism, distinguished them from European understandings. In practical terms, the trans-ethnic approach was maintained despite racist rhetoric. An example was the Nationality Act of 1913 which stated that citizenship was primarily related to being born to a Thai father. In reality, however, citizenship was awarded to everyone born on Thai soil¹⁸ and the monarchical nation still tolerated everybody who was loyal to the king. Nevertheless, it was Vajiravudh who gave the term *race* a place in Thai political thought and nationalism, a move that would lead to massive discrimination against the Chinese minority in Thailand in later periods.

The idea of race was also connected to the idea of a pure Thai culture. An example can be seen in Vajiravudh’s reaction to an announcement of his father shortly before his death: “I will let my son Vajiravudh give a gift to the people immediately when he ascends to the throne. I will let him give a parliament and constitution.”¹⁹ What Chulalongkorn understood as the apex of the monarchical nation in order to incorporate oppositional forces, was seen by Vajiravudh as threat to the ‘real’ Thai culture. For him, a constitution was unthinkable because Thais were always led by a monarch. The King regarded Thai society as not yet ready for democracy because the people were not educated which would make them vulnerable to bribery by politicians.²⁰ Although he agreed with his father that only a strong and civilised nation would be able to survive in a dangerous environment, Vajiravudh disagreed with him on how to build that nation. Chulalongkorn adopted western elements, Vajiravudh, however, regarded Thai culture itself as the basis to develop a civilised society equal to other great cultures. He warned not to follow western ways too willingly: “Progress of the Europeans is something which killed already weak nations. It also makes strong nations weaker when they get

¹⁷ Printed in Samakhomnisitkaoaksonrasat chulalongkonmahawitthayalai (ed), *Phraratchaniphon roikhrong roi rueang nai phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua* [100 Pieces of Poetry of King Vajiravudh], Bangkok 1995, pp.30-31.

¹⁸ Renard, Ronald. “The Differential Integration of Hill People into the Thai State”, London 2000, p.79.

¹⁹ Cited in Sukanya Tirawanit, *Phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua kap kannangsuephim* [King Vajiravudh and the Press], Bangkok 1989, p.27.

²⁰ See for this discussion Kanpirom Suwunnononda, *Phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua kap kansang chat thai* [King Vajiravudh and His Nation-building Programmes], Bangkok 1981, pp.53-54.

too much *siwilai* [western civilisation]. We are more afraid of this illness *siwilai* than of any other illness.”²¹

It was ironic that Vajiravudh’s search for a pure Thai culture often followed western models. For example, he decreed that Thai women should wear traditional long skirts and blouses in order to look ‘like a ma’am [madam]’. In another example, Vajiravudh identified ‘language’ as the key for a nation to work and to create the feeling of belonging to the nation. He coined new words to replace common English terms. However, he also attempted to reform the language by placing all vowels on the same singular line like in European languages [instead of the usual placing of vowels on top and under the consonants].²²

An important alteration to monarchical nationalism was Vajiravudh’s upgrading of the importance of the nation in comparison with the monarchy. Before, the nation was embedded in the monarch but Vajiravudh emphasised the nation as an independent entity led by the King. This model was mirrored in his slogan ‘Nation-Religion-King’ where the nation and religion were of the same importance as the monarch. The motto, although in its form a copy from the United Kingdom, was in its basic idea an indigenous concept comprised of already existing elements. Vajiravudh visualised the slogan with the introduction of a new national flag in 1917. Its colours (red, white and blue) were chosen because they were the colours of the allies in the First World War (France, United Kingdom and the United States). Vajiravudh had entered the war on the side of the allies and demonstrated with his choice of colours the equal status of Thailand. In a poem, Vajiravudh explained the meaning of the tricolour differently. White symbolised purity and therefore the Buddhist *dharma*. Red stood for the blood the Thais sacrificed for the protection of the nation and Buddhism. Blue was Vajiravudh’s colour and represented the monarchy.²³

With the nation on a prominent position, Vajiravudh had to stress even more the need for leadership of the monarchy. To support this claim, he sought legitimation by the Buddhist *sangha*. The Supreme Patriarch, himself a member of the royal family, complied but not without reminding the King of a central concept of the monarchical

²¹ Cited in Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Kanmueang lae sangkhom nai sinlapa sathapattayakam sayam samai thai prayuk chatniyom* [Politics and Society in Arts and Architecture in the Periods of Modern Siam, New Thailand, and Nationalism], Bangkok 2004, p.239.

²² Kanpirom, 1981, pp.176 and 188.

²³ Chanida, 2003, pp.68-69 and 78.

nation, namely righteousness: “When a herd of cattle is fording a stream, if the leading ox leads straight, all the other oxen will follow straight. It is the same among men. If he whom the people call the highest is righteous, even so would the rest of the people follow his lead in the way of righteousness, then is the whole of his dominion happy.”²⁴

This thesis proposes that the main reason for this switch in the interpretation of nationalism lay in the fact that Vajiravudh was western educated. His idea of nationalism was very much influenced by European versions of nationalism of his time which were dominated by political nationalism. Therefore, King Vajiravudh put less emphasis on traditional concepts such as *barami* but more on the importance of the greatness of the nation itself. Inevitably, this contributed to the demise of monarchical nationalism and in the long term to the end of monarchical rule. This process was even more hastened by an unlucky choice of means of dissemination.

6.2. Writing the Nation- King Vajiravudh and His Literature

King Vajiravudh could be considered the most prolific poet and playwright in Thai history.²⁵ It was only logical that he used all genres of his writings as the main means to disseminate his ideas about the nation. In the preface of the play *Khomdamdin*, Vajiravudh stated clearly: “I didn’t write this play only for entertainment but I hope this play will remind the reader of the legend of the Thai nation and that the Thai nation is not a new born nation. Our nation is an old one which has a legend and I hope this play will let the reader see that our ancestors raised up to be independent out of a state of being a slave of the Khmer who are the foreigners and who are a different race and language. We will try hard to preserve the Thainess of the nation which is very difficult to receive.”²⁶ Many of the King’s plays explained the meaning and emphasised the importance of the three institutions ‘Nation, Religion and King’. He employed his

²⁴ Vajirañana, Prince. “Buddhist Attitude Towards National Defence”, Bangkok no date, p.11.

²⁵ His body of work consisted of hundreds of plays and poems and more than a thousand articles. See the list in Munnithiphaboromrachanuson phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua, *Saranukrom phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua* [Encyclopaedia of King Vajiravudh], Bangkok 1997, pp.272-311.

²⁶ Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Botklon lakhon rueang khomdamdin botlakhonrong rueang phraruang botlakhonrong rueang phrakiattiroi botlakhon rueang khunchangkunphaen chut taeng-nganphrawai* [Khomdamdin, Phraruang, Phrakiattiroi, and Khunchangkunphaen: Plays in Verse], Bangkok 1972, preface.

literature to teach the duty of the citizen towards the three institutions and warned the people about the danger of their loss.²⁷

Many of his writings were based on historical events and figures. By placing the stories back in time, Vajiravudh could connect the present with the past with access to characters already known to the people. Through these heroic figures, he created a model of an ideal Thai society with values he tried to promote. In his 'Chao Taksin- An Opera in 3 Acts', Vajiravudh used the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 to present the effects of disunity and treason among the Thai. He depicted the last Ayutthayan king as unjust and the courtiers as envious. In the end, treason by the Thais themselves allowed the Burmese to take the city.²⁸ Vajiravudh also repeated the basic theme of freedom as the utmost desire of Thais. When the war leader and future King Taksin entered the recaptured city of Ayutthaya, the people greeted him with shouts:

“Freedom, Freedom!
Now for us recovered.
Never again shall thou be
From us severed- Never!”

One of the nobles then told Taksin:

“Sire, all our lives we offer.
What service thou desir'st,
We value nothing dearer
Than freedom. Gracious King!”²⁹

Vajiravudh reinforced the image of the monarchy as guarantor for the independence and freedom of the nation. What he expected from the people in return was gratitude, loyalty and the willingness to sacrifice their lives.

Vajiravudh also used legends as a source for his plays because he was convinced that they were based on historical reality. His favourite was the legend of King Phra Ruang which he took from the Northern Chronicles and used as plots for several versions of his drama. Vajiravudh praised Phra Ruang as a national hero because he led

²⁷ His plays with these themes included *Huachai nakrop* [The Heart of a Fighter], *Siasala* [Sacrifice], *Coup d'Etat* etc. For details of his plays see Pin Malakul, *Ngan lakhon khong phrabatsomdetphra ramathibodisrisintharamahawachirawut phramongkutklaochaophaendinsayam* [Dramatic Works of King Vajiravudh], Bangkok 1977.

²⁸ Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Chao taksin bot mahaupparakon phasa angkrit 3 ong* [Chao Taksin- An Opera in 3 Acts], Bangkok Reprint 1988, p.4.

²⁹ Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, 1988, p.14.

the Thai to independence from the occupation by the Khmer. With a king as hero in the stories, Vajiravudh underlined the dominant position of the monarch as the leader of the nation. In his Thai-style opera *Botlakhonrongrueang phraruang*, the request of the people for the leadership of the king was strongly pronounced when Vajiravudh let the people sing:

“We Thai are loyal to the King,
We want to rely on you and to be your servant all the time.
We are willing and we volunteer to fight with the enemy.
We don’t regret our lives, our lives are given to you.
We are brave in protecting the nation and the religion,
If we really have to die, we will die embracing your feet.”³⁰

Another version of this legend, the play in verse *Botlakhonphutkhamklonrueang phraruang* (written in 1917), told about how Phra Ruang outwitted the Khmer occupants in his hometown of Lopburi. He escaped arrest by fleeing to Sukhothai. There he again foiled an assassination attempt, defeating the Khmer troops on the battlefield, and thus independence was achieved. The people of Sukhothai then invited him to become their first king. The main theme of *Phra Ruang* was the love of freedom of the Thai race. The fact that Vajiravudh considered Phra Ruang as the first Thai king, showed that he wanted to demonstrate that Thais loved freedom from the very beginning. Right from the first stanza of the play, the character of Phra Ruang moaned:

“Born Thai [free] but enslaved is a dreadful fate,
Bowling our heads to the Khom [Khmer] masters’ will,
The mere thought of it nearly breaks the breast!
How to escape the demons’ clutch, and once
Prove ourselves worthy of the name of Thai?”³¹

Vajiravudh also placed several desirable values for the Thai audience in the story. In the first act, for example, Thais were portrayed as loyal so long as they were well treated. They also welcome foreigners and treat them well. Their leader was the

³⁰ Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Botlakhonphutkhamklonrueang phraruang* [Phraruang – A Play in Verse], Bangkok Reprint 1977, pp.127-128.

³¹ King Vajiravudh, *P’ra Ruang*, Translated by Prem Purachatra, Bangkok 1979, p.1. See for an alternative analysis Vella, 1978, pp.209-211.

king who was smart and ingenious.³² In the second act, Vajiravudh mentioned that Thais are happy when 'our superiors are happy' and that the Khmer 'are more like demons than humans'.³³ Vajiravudh repeatedly depicted the Thai king as gracious (did not kill enemies although they wanted to kill him first), praised his kingly virtues and ensured the audience that a Thai king loves his Thai kin 'as if they were all children of his flesh'.³⁴ The grand finale of the play was a speech of Phra Ruang to his people who just elected him to be King. The long monologue full of modern terms seemed rather odd in relation to the atmosphere of the story, so it was likely that Vajiravudh wanted to speak directly to his people through the character of Phra Ruang:

"Think least of your own selves, shun selfish lures,
Vie not to win favours with shameless greed.

...

By hurting your own kin in rivalry,
You bring certain destruction on yourselves!
Beware of rumours and foul calumnies,
That undermine the Safety of the State;
For a cunning foe, seeking to destroy,
Will sow their seeds of hate and suspicion.

...

Wherefore We pray you, who are Thai, to love
And cherish, help and honour fellow Thai;
Unite in one free brotherhood, a rock that will not crack before the tide of
war.
United we Thai may and must and shall
Defend our land against the strongest foe."³⁵

The last sentences of the play are famous in Thailand for they were used as a lyric of a famous patriotic song in a later period. The above translation, however, did not fully represent the original version of the King but rather reflected the anti-communist mood in 1979. For this reason, I use for the analysis of the following part my own translation based on the original:

³² King Vajiravudh, 1979, pp.1-7.

³³ King Vajiravudh, 1979, p.9.

³⁴ King Vajiravudh, 1979, p.40.

³⁵ King Vajiravudh, 1979, p.41.

“One thing alone from you we ask,
 Harm not those who are your relative,
 Because we share the nation, we should share [unite] our heart as well.
 Instead of Thais harming fellow Thais,
 We should come together with both our souls and our strength
 To guard the country.
 So that other countries will respect and praise our glory,
 Until the name Thai resounds throughout the world.
 We should support the nation and religion to live forever,
 Let’s cheer for the Thai progress, Chaiyo!”³⁶

In this version of *Phra Ruang*, Vajiravudh used a whole range of elements of nationalism to promote his vision of the Thai nation. First, he revived the myth of the Golden Age of Sukhothai with King Phra Ruang at its centre. Secondly, he painted a picture of the ‘Other’ (in this case the Khmer) as foreign enemies who could not be trusted. Thirdly, he praised a leader who was decisive and intelligent and depicted the Thais as happy when following him. Fourthly, he presented the role model of good people who trusted their king and supported him wholeheartedly. Fifth, Vajiravudh packed into the story values such as unity, solidarity and warned against new ideologies, conflict and selfishness. Lastly, the king was portrayed as ingenious, benevolent, forgiving and risk-taking because he loved the people like his own children.

As a writer, Vajiravudh saw literature as the ideal means to disseminate his ideas. He attempted to distribute his works to a wider circle, for example by giving his books for free to civil servants or to schools to be used as textbooks and even put them on sale in the markets. His articles were sent to newspapers and his plays performed for free or for charity, often with himself in a leading role.³⁷ However, the efficiency of literature and drama to disseminate nationalism must be doubted. Despite his great effort to distribute his works, its reach was still limited to small circles such as courtiers,

³⁶ Mongkutklaochaoyuhua, 1977, p.39. The text in the translation of 1979:

*One thing alone of you We ask: Harm not
 Those who are your brothers, shed no Thai blood,
 But come together in fraternity,
 Resolved to guard your fatherland from harm.
 Love race and creed, as in the days of yore,
 And Thailand’s fame shall live for evermore!”*

Vajiravudh, however, did not mention ‘race’ defined by blood.

³⁷ Kanpirom, 1981, pp.208-209.

newspaper readers and people attending the performances. In addition, Vajiravudh's literary works were sophisticated and for the masses difficult to understand. This was reinforced by Vajiravudh's use of foreign concepts without sufficiently adapting it to Thai culture. The best example was his work *Chao Taksin* which was written in English in a western style opera. While this perhaps was attractive in court circles, it was most likely not effective with the masses.

6.3. King Vajiravudh and Other Means to Promote Nationalism

Besides using literature to promote his ideas of the nation, Vajiravudh employed other means to communicate with his people as well. Therein, a rather inconsistent nationalist ideology with the combination of monarchical and political nationalism can be seen. In the tradition of monarchical nationalism, he drew on a broad range of symbols, myths and traditions. History was one favourite way to connect the modern Thai nation with a glorious past. In 1922, for example, he staged a historical show for the public to re-enact the offensive of Thai troops against the Burmese in Tavoy. The official publication stated the aim of the performance as 'to show in the form of a play an example of the deeds accomplished by our ancestors for the love of their country, which are well worth remembering with gratitude'.³⁸ During the lavish performance, the Burmese soldiers were depicted as aggressive fighters who in the end were defeated by King Rama I and his forces.³⁹

Following his father's lead, monuments with a beneficial function played a crucial role in Vajiravudh's promotion of monarchical nationalism. The high degree of influence on Vajiravudh by his father is shown by the fact that most of the monuments stand in direct association with Chulalongkorn. An example is the establishment of Chulalongkorn University. In 1910, Vajiravudh used the remaining money left over from the equestrian statue to introduce new departments such as medicine and engineering to the School for Royal Servants. The name of the school was changed to Chulalongkorn University in 1915 with an intention to make it a monument to King Chulalongkorn. At the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for a new building in

³⁸ Committee of the Military Tournament For the Year B.E. 2465, *Explanatory Notice On the Display of Ancient Warfare*, Bangkok 1922, p.1.

³⁹ Committee, 1922, pp.3-5. Vajiravudh also rewrote and changed some chronicles. For example, he added details to a battle in 1767. See Reynolds, Craig. "State Versus Nation in Histories of Nation-Building with Special Reference to Thailand", *Warasan thaikhadisueksa*, 2004, p.15.

January 1915, Vajiravudh said: “According to the wish of my father who wanted to create a university for the Siamese but was not able to achieve his goal during his time, it is my duty as his son to make his wish come true. When it is finished it will be the royal monument to remember him. It is necessary to construct this big and permanent royal monument as it will be of benefit for the Thai nation eternally.”⁴⁰

Following his view that Thai culture itself was a great civilisation on par with other civilisations, Vajiravudh supported the development of architecture which was orientated on traditional style in contrast to his father’s rule where western architectural design was favoured. The buildings of Chulalongkorn University and the Suan Kularp School (opened in 1913) were excellent examples for this neo-traditionalism. Thai culture was no longer seen as inferior to western culture. At the foundation stone laying ceremony of one university building, Vajiravudh made clear that he saw architecture as an important means to promote Thainess: “It is necessary that we preserve Thai architectural art while we build this first university in Thailand. It should be heritage for our children for there is no better way than to have a model for the students to see and to know regularly.”⁴¹ Architecture was to present Thai identity to the world and at the same time represented the ideals of Vajiravudh’s political nationalism.

Other constructions, such as bridges and hospitals, were connected with the benevolence of the monarchy. In a speech at a bridge-opening ceremony in October 1912, Vajiravudh reminded his people that not only that bridge-building was a favourite activity of Chulalongkorn but also underlined the importance of bridges as monuments. The bridge was useful and popular with the people and represented an excellent kind of monument, too. The people who would cross this bridge would think everyday about the *phradetphrakhun* (graciousness/ force and favour) of Chulalongkorn.⁴² Vajiravudh saw bridges as symbols for unity (‘bridges unite people’).⁴³ At the opening ceremony of Chulalongkorn Hospital in May 1914, Vajiravudh mentioned that his father emphasised things that had value and were beneficial for the citizens. The aim was to bring happiness to the people. In this sense, Vajiravudh wanted the hospital to be a royal monument.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Chulalongkorn Mahawithayalai, *Nangsue Mahawithayalai* [University Annual Book], Bangkok 1997, pp.347-348.

⁴¹ Chatri, 2004, p.225. Interestingly, the architect of this ‘Thai’ building was British.

⁴² Khanakammakanmunnithiphaboromrachanuson, 1986, p.28.

⁴³ Ratana Tanadbanchee Tungasvadi, *King Vajiravudh’s Moral Concepts for Citizenship*, Philadelphia 2004, p.135.

⁴⁴ Khanakammakanmunnithiphaboromrachanuson, 1986, p.57.

Other ways to promote his idea of the monarchical nation were by travelling to the provinces and the use of symbols. To achieve his target, Vajiravudh counted on the effects of his presence: "Visiting any place, a large number of people come and wait to pay respect to me. Some of them bring one gifts...They keep looking at me. It seems that they would like to see me as much as they can. By seeing the king in person, the people feel more and more loyal to him. And in turn, this also makes them feel loyal to the government officials (who govern them) as they feel loyalty to the king."⁴⁵ In his speeches to the people he gave the listeners the feeling that they as an individual were important for the nation: "Even though a person is a very small part of the nation, when these parts work together, the nation can prosper."⁴⁶ The power of symbols was prominent in Vajiravudh's speeches and deeds. In every province he visited, he would give a sword to the governor with these or similar words: "Let the governor, government officials and citizens receive this royal sword with due respect. For the ruling officials, know that this sword is the symbol of the king's power, shared with you to use honestly in order to make the people happy and peaceful and to subdue criminals who do harm to our people. The scale is the symbol for the officials to govern securely with justice, being as just as the scale. For the people, know that this sword is the symbol of peaceful living."⁴⁷

Central to all activities was the emphasis that loyalty to the king was loyalty to the nation. Just like his grandfather, King Mongkut, Vajiravudh argued that the King ruled the country for the sake of the people and acted for the benefit of the country: "Be loyal to the king who takes care of the people so that they are happy and peaceful."⁴⁸ For this benevolence, Vajiravudh expected the Thai people to correspond with gratitude: "The kings have been so kind to the Thai people in providing them with happiness and peace from the past to the present time. As a result, the Thais should feel gratitude and repay the king's benevolence as preached by Lord Buddha."⁴⁹ However, he was aware that in the monarchical nation, the king had to play his part as well: "The King has the duty to develop the prosperity in the nation. He can be compared to the nation's flag of history. The nation's prosperity depends on the king who develops the country. At the same time, the nation and the religion are related to each other; if there is no nation,

⁴⁵ Cited in Ratana, 2004, pp.45-46.

⁴⁶ Cited in Ratana, 2004, p.132.

⁴⁷ Cited in Ratana, 2004, p.132

⁴⁸ Cited in Ratana, 2004, p.89.

⁴⁹ Cited in Ratana, 2004, p.153.

then religion cannot survive.”⁵⁰ Buddhism was for Vajiravudh essential because as the source for morality, it enriched the nation helping it to become civilised. Without religion or morality, the nation would be destroyed.⁵¹ Vajiravudh went one step further and connected himself personally with Buddha. In Nakhon Pathom province, the King added as a special feature to the famous stupa (which he called ‘one of the most sacred and visited shrines in all of Thailand’) a standing Buddha statue. Its head was originally attached to an image of the Sukhothai period. After his death, the ashes of Vajiravudh were deposited within its base. Reynolds interpreted this statue as being a representation of the continuation of the Buddha’s life and work in the life and work of the Thai kings, and the establishment and the maintenance of the Buddhist faith as a basic element in the civic religion of the Thai nation.⁵²

In the economic field, Vajiravudh supported the use of Thai products. His aim was to preserve local handicrafts such as the weaving of silk in order to keep the currency inside Thailand and ensure self-reliance in times of crisis.⁵³ He also introduced the first images on bank notes in 1923. Contrary to Europe, he did not choose his picture to be placed on but decided instead on the scenery of *raek na kwan* (first ploughing ceremony) which he regarded as an important part of Thai culture.⁵⁴

6.4. Challenging Monarchical Nationalism

In the reign of Vajiravudh, the appeal of the monarchical nation and nationalism began to decline. This was not only a result of the mixing of monarchical and political nationalism but also of a variety of political, social and economical reasons. In addition, problems within the royal family contributed to this process.

On the political level, Vajiravudh’s decision not to allow a constitution or a parliament caused discontent with the developing middle class who were mostly a product of the expanding nation-state and flourishing trade. The first challenge to the monarchical nation was made in March 1912. In that month, a group of 92 soldiers and civilians were caught while planning a coup against Vajiravudh. The main reasons for

⁵⁰ Cited in Ratana, 2004, p.90.

⁵¹ Ratana, 2004, p.20.

⁵² Reynolds, Frank. “Buddhism as Universal Religion and as Civic Religion: Some Observations on a Tour of Buddhist Centres in Central Thailand”, *JSS*, 1975, pp.37-38.

⁵³ Mongkutkloachaoyuhua, Phrabatsomdetphra, *Phuak yiw haeng buraphatit lae mueangthai chong tuen thoet* [The Jews of the Orient and Wake Up Siam], Bangkok 1984, pp.56-57.

⁵⁴ Bank of Thailand, *Centenary of Thai Banknote*, Bangkok 2002, p.70. The first picture of a king on a Thai banknote appeared following a proposal by the European printing house in 1928.

their revolt, stated Kanpirom, was their dissatisfaction with the privileges of the paramilitary Wild Tiger Corps, a pet project of the king, and the waste of money by the royal household. The conspirators rejected monarchical rule with the argument that it resulted in a fast decay of the nation. They demanded a system of 'limited monarchy' with a king under the law. The money spent by the king would be better invested in weapons in order to protect the nation in case of war.⁵⁵ Kullada regarded this group as pioneers for Thai nationalism, calling them 'liberal nationalists'.⁵⁶ However, I propose to see them as pioneers for political nationalism in Thailand. Influenced by the writings of Thianwan and the events around the Young Turks, Iran and China, there was no shortage of references to the nation in their writings. Their slogan indicated that they interpreted the nation differently from the King as they aimed to preserve the nation against the King: 'better to lose one's life than the nation'.⁵⁷ Although this group was nationalistic, they represented more a movement of disgruntled soldiers and not so much a wide-spread nationalist ideology. There were for example no demands for a broader participation of the masses or national education. Lenient in his punishment of the conspirators, Vajiravudh did not categorise the coup attempt as a struggle between two different visions of the nation but treated the conspirators more like misled people: "some people who considered themselves as 'siwilai [civilised] and modern' want to get rid of everything which is old to create a world that they want."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, he was reminded that he had to step up his nationalist campaign to bind nationalist forces to the monarchical nation. However, his public reaction was to appeal to unity and loyalty: "Peace is what is wanted in order to ensure the stability of the nation, and peace can only be obtained through unity. We must be one, not divided against ourselves. Be honest, be firm, but above all be united. Then shall we have the chance of remaining forever free as our name. Lastly, my friends, be loyal. Cling to loyalty, as to rock immobile and prominent, as our most valued possession. Loyalty, true patriotism, and Our Holy Faith guild our hearts towards the attainment of the highest goal of the United Nationhood and Prosperity."⁵⁹

A few years later, the subject of nationalism was back on the public agenda. However, it was not Thai but Chinese nationalism which was directed against the

⁵⁵ Kanpirom, 1981, pp.86-103.

⁵⁶ Kullada Kesboonchoo, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, London 2000, p.14.

⁵⁷ Cited in Skrobaneck, Walter, *Buddhistische Politik in Thailand: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des heterodoxen Messianismus*, Wiesbaden 1976, p.55.

⁵⁸ Cited in Sukanya, 1989, p.30.

⁵⁹ Cited in Sukanya, 1989, p.113.

Japanese. Boycotts of Japanese products were organised in 1919, 1926 and 1928.⁶⁰ The Chinese increasingly organised themselves in unions and strikes were frequent in the late 1910s and 1920s. The most famous strike was the tramway strike for better payment and working conditions in 1923 in which different visions of the nation played a big role. The mouthpiece of the strikers was the newspaper *kammakorn* (Worker) which was founded by Thawat Rittidet. In one article, he argued that royal absolutism was both an affront to the dignity of the individual and an inefficient way to manage a modern nation.⁶¹ Interestingly with the boycotts in mind, the workers considered themselves as Thai and this labour conflict as an intra-Thai conflict. This indicated that a dual identity was prevalent among the Chinese labourers. Brown quoted a newspaper article in which the willingness of Thai officials to talk and compromise with the workers was praised: “The men had felt proud that Thais are fully united. The *phuyai* [superiors] show consideration towards the *phunoi* [little people, in this case the workers], whilst the *phunoi* is respectful of the *phuyai*. This is appropriate for prospering nations and shows that there is no disadvantage in being born a member of the Thai nation.”⁶²

The subject of nationalism was not only popular within the Chinese labour community but also increasingly within the Thai intelligentsia.⁶³ This intelligentsia was a product of the ongoing reforms in the bureaucracy started by King Chulalongkorn in 1892. The number of civil servants had increased dramatically from around 12,000 in 1892 to around 80,000 in 1918.⁶⁴ Patriotism was proudly displayed in this circle and a lively debate in newspapers and publications about the nation developed. Many intellectuals proposed an alternative to the monarchical nation. A public discussion was possible because Vajiravudh himself actively took part by writing many articles under a pseudonym (Asvabahu). Other protagonists, stated Pasuk/Baker, were businessmen with their idea of an economic nationalism and dissident bureaucrats with a world-view of rationalist humanism. The latter argued on nationalist grounds that the royalist regime was bad for Thailand. It manifestly failed to provide Thailand with the economic and

⁶⁰ Brown, Andrew, *Labour, Politics and the State in Industrializing Thailand*, London 2004, p.20.

⁶¹ Pasuk Phongpaichit/Baker, Chris, *Thailand- Economy and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur 1995, p.180.

⁶² Cited in Brown, 2004, p.27.

⁶³ One of the factors why race and nationalism became more important was a popular book written by William Dodd in 1923. Thais understood his argument that the Tai were not only the elderly brother of the Chinese but also the continuation of a ‘pure’ Yun Thai dynasty since 1350 as confirmation of their own greatness. Dodd, William, *The Tai Race- Elder Brother of the Chinese*, Bangkok Reprint 1996, p.18.

⁶⁴ Chaiyan R., *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy*, Bangkok 1994, p.105.

political strength required to survive and prosper in a competitive world.⁶⁵ Phra Sarasas, for example, was an intellectual who perceived Japan as role model for Asia. He was against despotism by an absolute monarch which he regarded as an obstacle for the development of the nation. Phra Sarasas saw in democracy the only legitimate form for the nation because only the people could be the nation. A developed, healthy and wise people would be able to form that nation. For that reason, stated Phra Sarasas, Thailand was not yet a nation.⁶⁶ Not all nationalist thinkers limited themselves to academic debate. Some founded a publishing group (*khana yuwasan/* Youth Journal Group) which distributed a series of books cheaply in the markets. The group was successful with titles about history and politics which aimed to instil patriotism into readers.⁶⁷

This intellectual debate was only possible because King Vajiravudh actively encouraged the freedom of the press. He remarked that he was educated in the United Kingdom and therefore did not want to 'to shut up the newspapers'.⁶⁸ The King supported the newspaper sector (even owned some of them) with the result that the print media widely expanded: 63 publications existed in the period between 1910 and 1921 (including eleven daily newspapers). This number went up to 81 publications (including eight daily newspapers) in the period from 1921 to 1925.⁶⁹ This expansion and the possibility to openly criticise the monarchy paved the way for demands of democracy. Copeland's conclusion that there is little to indicate that the court succeeded in dominating the course of the nation's intellectual development is correct for the period of the 1920s and early 1930s.⁷⁰ The emergence of alternative views of the nation meant that they became the competitors of monarchical nationalism. With a changing political environment, calls for a change in government became louder. With increasing criticism towards monarchical rule, the prominent position of the monarchical nation declined

⁶⁵ Pasuk/Baker, 1995, p. 262.

⁶⁶ Nakharin Mektrairat. "Phalang khong naewkit chat-chatniyom kap kanmueang thai nai samai raekroem khong ratphrachachat [The Concept of Nation and Nationalism and Thai Politics in the Early Period of Nation-State]", *Ratthasatsan*, 2000, pp.44-46. See also Batson, Benjamin. "Phra Sarasas: Rebel With Many Causes", *ISEAS*, 1996, pp.150-165.

⁶⁷ Titles such as 'Hitler' (1934) and 'Siam and the Next World War' (1934) sold more than 5,000 copies which is a high number even for modern standards. Nakharin, 2000, p.43. See also Ivarsson, Soeren. "Making Laos 'Our' Space: Thai Discourse on History and Race, 1900-1941", Copenhagen 2003, pp.239-264.

⁶⁸ Cited in Kanpirom, 1981, p.229.

⁶⁹ Nakharin, 2000, p.34 and Sukanya, 1989, p.159.

⁷⁰ Copeland, Matthew, *Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Canberra 1993, p.210. The monarchical nationalists attempted to control the output of nationalist writers when it was deemed as unsuitable. For example, Prince Damrong stopped the publication of a book called 'Memoirs From the Time When France Occupied Chantaburi' in which it was described that the Thai king was forced at gunpoint by the French. Damrong worried about the effects on royal dignity by this book. Ivarsson, 2003, p.242.

more and more. This slip in popularity was intensified by the lack of personal charisma of Vajiravudh (and later King Prajadhipok as well).⁷¹ An important factor in the ‘war of the pen’⁷² between Vajiravudh and his critics was that the King’s participation damaged the sacredness of the monarchy decisively. Vajiravudh himself saw the monarch more and more in the role of a Prime Minister: “The king can be compared to a Prime Minister. He takes responsibility for the nation...The king will use his power for the happiness and benefit of the people.”⁷³ This political definition of the role of the king weakened the monarchy even more in the face of criticism.

Bad news was coming for Vajiravudh not only from the political but also from the economic front. The King did not show much interest in overall economic policies, leaving most development projects such as irrigation systems insufficiently funded. Newspapers were critical about Vajiravudh’s agrarian policy which lacked initiatives.⁷⁴ He was very keen, nevertheless, to seek a revision of the unfair trade treaties with other countries from the nineteenth century (which was finally achieved in 1925) in order to establish Thailand as equal partner on the world stage.⁷⁵ His lack of interest for domestic agricultural problems, however, resulted in a catastrophe, especially when natural disasters caused hunger crises in 1917 and 1919. The government mismanaged the situations, causing outbreaks of personal criticism directed at the King.⁷⁶ His unwillingness to cut the lavish expenditure of the court fuelled the dissatisfaction with the crown even further than the political woes already did.

Another important factor for the weakening of the monarchical nation was a conflict within the royal family itself. The King lost during his education in Europe the close contact with his family. When he ascended the throne, he did not rely on the experienced ministers and consultants of his father but replaced them with young men with no experience from outside the royal family. One of the ‘sacked’ ministers was his uncle, Prince Damrong, a key architect of the monarchical nation. Although Damrong

⁷¹ The German doctor Friedrich Schäfer, who worked in Bangkok between 1909 and 1912, mentioned in his diary repeatedly the low popularity of the king with the people. Schäfer, Friedrich, *Siamesisches Tagebuch*, Bonn Reprint 1991, p.232.

⁷² For detail of ‘the war of the pen’ see Sukanya, 1989, pp.67-76.

⁷³ Cited in Kanpirom, 1981, p.49.

⁷⁴ Vella, 1978, p.169.

⁷⁵ Oblas, P., *Siam's Efforts to Revise the Unequal Treaty System in the Sixth Reign (1910-1925)*, Ann Arbor 1974, p.12.

⁷⁶ Sunthari Asawai. “Wikrittakan khao lang songkhramlok khrangthinueng [The Rice Crisis After World War I]”, *Warasan sethasat thammawat*, 1988, p.157.

kept several important positions outside the government, the monarchical nationalism had lost with Chulalongkorn and Damrong the decisive driving forces.

6.5. King Prajadhipok and the End of the Monarchical Nation

One of the characteristics of the monarchical nation is a charismatic and active monarch who is the intellectual leader with the help of monarchical nationalism. There could not be a starker contrast to this ideal than Vajiravudh's brother, King Prajadhipok (r.1925-1935), who took up his position amidst a financial crisis. The treasury was empty and the state burdened with a large sum of debt. The situation was so serious that it required the full attention of the King to manage the financial turmoil. Prajadhipok, generally perceived as a non-charismatic ruler, introduced a strict budget discipline and succeeded in improving the situation. The recovery, however, was only short lived because the outbreak of the world economic crisis affected Thailand as well. This crisis would turn out to be the catalyst for dissatisfaction with monarchical rule and would lead to a change of government.

The trouble for Thailand started with the withdrawal of the Austrian and German gold reserves from London in 1929. This move forced the British government to allow a drastic devaluation of the Pound by giving up the gold standard. The fall of the Pound had tremendous impact on the British colonies, the main trading partners of Thailand. It also affected the country's foreign currency reserves that were mainly held in Pound. A 50% decrease in value limited the Thai money supply considerably with the result of income losses for consumers and the trading sector and drastically reduced tax revenues for the state.⁷⁷ To add to the woes, the maintenance of the gold standard for the Thai currency (Baht) until May 1932 led to a strong rise in value which resulted in increasing prices of Thai exports such as rice and decreased demand. The export revenues decreased between 1927 and 1933 around 45%.⁷⁸ To cope with the overall loss of income, the Thai government decided to follow an even stricter budget discipline in September 1930.

The effects of the world economic crisis on South East Asia were widely discussed in academic literature. In many countries, the economic troubles led to farmer

⁷⁷ Vichitvong Na Pombhejra. "Thailand's Monetary Development in the 1930's", Bangkok 1978, p.417.

⁷⁸ See table in Fistié, Pierre, *L'Evolution de la Thaïlande Contemporaine*, Paris 1967, p.112.

revolts such as the Hsaya San rebellion in Burma.⁷⁹ The highly commercialised farming sector in the colonies was especially sensitive to disruptions in world trade so that the crisis reinforced existing problems as the following comment about the situation in Burma showed: ‘the depression did not cause, it only accelerated an agrarian crisis that was under way decades before 1930’.⁸⁰ Although some academics portrayed a similar picture of devastation in the Thai countryside, the economic data does not support such a claim.⁸¹ Farmers in some commercialised areas in Central Thailand did suffer from the decline of rice exports; the majority, however, reacted with a diversification of their farming activities to other products which decreased their dependency on the export industry. Thailand was therefore a unique case in that the world economic crisis did not cause farmer revolts but hit the urban middle class working in the expanding bureaucracy the most. Rising costs of living while the government scaled down on wages and salaries led to widespread dissatisfaction in the cities. In the end, it was a mix of political and economic discontent within the bureaucratic elite which led to the change of government. Together with a competing view of the nation, namely a state-dominated one, this was enough motivation to end the dominance of the monarchical nation.

King Prajadhipok was not able to stop the increasing number of oppositional forces using the ‘love to the nation’ as the basis of their criticism.⁸² The decreasing attractiveness of monarchical nationalism and the growing opposition to monarchical rule is reflected in an account written by a contemporary, Quaritch Wales, in 1931. He quoted an article of the newspaper ‘Bangkok Daily Mail’ from October 1930: “Owing to the failure of the public in general to give proper attention and due respect to His Majesty the King when the Siamese National Anthem is played after performances...the police have been instructed to remind the public when the tune is being played, and to take down the names of the offenders in the case of government officials and military men.”⁸³ Quaritch Wales commented that the abolition of old customs was to blame for

⁷⁹ See Hall, D., *A History of South East Asia*, London 1988, p.822.

⁸⁰ Cited in Johnston, David. “Rice Cultivation in Thailand: The Development of an Export Economy by an Indigenous Capital and Labour”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 1981, p.124.

⁸¹ See Sturm, Andreas, *Die Handels- und Agrarpolitik Thailands von 1767-1932*, Passau 1997, chapter 5.

⁸² Nationalist feelings became more widespread and could even be found in the provinces. For example, the Thai authorities quickly crushed a local rebellion in the province of Saraburi in 1925. What was unusual about this rebellion was the fact that its leader sent a message to the king complaining that foreigners, particularly the British and French, were oppressing the Thai people. He gave the King seven days to throw off the foreign domination, otherwise he would deal with the situation himself. Batson, B., *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Singapore 1984, Footnote 31, p.183.

⁸³ Cited in Quaritch Wales, H.G., *Siamese State Ceremonies*, London 1931, p.6.

the behaviour of the people: “What was left in its place? Instead of a gradual modification, the schooling of the people in the new etiquette, they were, except for the immediate entourage of the king, left in complete ignorance as to what they should do in such circumstances...This opened the door for the ‘dark teachings of communism’.”⁸⁴ Quartich Wales clearly disliked the direction towards modernity Thailand was heading under King Prajadhipok, criticising the modern lightning effects and semi-European uniforms during the King’s coronation. His comments, however, gave insight to a development which in hindsight is highly interesting in regard to the dwindling attractiveness of monarchical nationalism which depended so much on charisma and emotional appeal: “The structure and appearance of the type of throne used, the lack of self-prostration, indeed the proceedings in general, made it difficult to connect the present spectacle with its prototype in ‘Old Siam’.”⁸⁵

Prajadhipok, limited in his financial means, attempted to continue some traditions of the monarchical nation, for example the erection of monuments. In 1932, he ordered the construction of a bridge over the Chaophraya River to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Bangkok. At one end of the bridge, he built a monument of King Rama I. In the official notification for the memorial, monarchical nationalism was still alive: “His Majesty has decided that such a Memorial, if provided by himself alone, will not, from the private nature of the undertaking, be worthy of the Great King to whom Siam owes not only the establishment of the Dynasty and the Capital, but the very foundation of the present independent and prosperous position of the Country itself. It is fitting therefore that the Memorial should be provided, not by His Majesty only, but by King and people together, as a token of public gratitude to him to whose labours in peace and activity in war the country owes the beginning of the position in which she stands.”⁸⁶ Prajadhipok also issued an appeal for voluntary public subscription for the “national memorial”, again reflecting the monarchical nation: “the people of Siam, both Siamese nationals as well as those of other nationalities who reside and benefit in this country, may have an opportunity of showing their sympathy in this laudable undertaking by contributing towards its realisation, of their own will and without any obligation to do so whatever.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Quartich Wales, 1931, p.6.

⁸⁵ Quartich Wales, 1931, p.179.

⁸⁶ Printed in Kromsinlapakon, *Phraratchaphithi chalongphranakhon khrop 150 pi* [The Royal Ceremony of Bangkok’s 150th Anniversary], Bangkok 1982, p.9.

⁸⁷ Printed in Kromsinlapakon, 1982, p.101.

When this bridge was opened, the King was already in a weak position. It could be seen as an irony of history that his last public speech before the revolution in June 1932 was a kind of testimony of monarchical nationalism. He admonished Boy Scouts to love their country and their religion but never to the point of *denigrating the race, country, or religion of others*. The King stressed that all of the great religions taught noble moral values, and urged the scouts to respect and admire the accomplishment of peoples of every race and creed.⁸⁸

To sum up, with the end of the era of monarchical rule, the question arises as to why it was that the initially so successful monarchical nationalism was unable to prevent the loss of its supporting governmental system? The reasons for the change are complex and include a variety of political, social and economical elements. However, with a weakening of monarchical nationalism since the reign of King Vajiravudh, competing notions of the nation emerged which were partially responsible for the fall of the old regime. While following his father's concept of the monarchical nation, King Vajiravudh unintentionally lessened the appeal of monarchical nationalism by including in it the elements of political nationalism such as the emphasis on the greatness of Thai race and civilisation. By giving utmost significance to the nation, symbolised by his slogan 'Nation, Religion and King', he lessened not only the 'above all' position of the monarchy but also undermined the sacredness of the monarchical institution. Together with the lack of personal charisma of the monarchs, it allowed oppositional groups to legitimise their demands for an abolition of the monarchical rule by claiming that a change of the system of government was necessary out of love for the nation. Indeed, Vajiravudh cannot be seen as the father of Thai nationalism but as a catalyst for the change from the dominance of monarchical nationalism to political nationalism. Only 50 years later, monarchical nationalism would rise again under King Bhumibol who did not repeat the mistakes of his predecessors and adapted the idea of a monarchical nation to the requirement of a modern civil society.

⁸⁸ Batson, 1984, p.61. Emphasis added.

Chapter 7

Dominance of the State: Statist Nationalism (1930s-1950s)

The monarchical orientation of the nation was first and foremost the work of the royal family. Although the monarchs themselves were very active in developing ideas and concepts, they would not have been able to disseminate the ideology to a broader audience in the whole country without the help of the bureaucracy headed by princes and nobles. The expanding bureaucracy of the nation-state era (since 1890s) proved to be a highly efficient instrument in promoting monarchical nationalism. However, this bureaucracy, both civil and military, increasingly became a source of dissatisfaction with monarchical rule itself. Many non-royal members of the bureaucracy received scholarships and were educated in Europe (mostly in the United Kingdom, France and Germany). Their contact with western ideas of democracy, equality and nationalism turned into frustration upon their return to Thailand where royals and nobles dominated the bureaucracy and occupied the leading positions. When the world economic crisis accelerated the economic and financial woes of the country, some members of the bureaucracy saw the necessity to 'save the nation' and to seek a change of government.

This chapter looks into the period between 1932 and 1957. It proposes that the vision of the nation promoted by a dominant fraction inside the new ruling group was very much influenced by western perceptions of the nation and the developments in Europe and Japan in the 1930s. The Thai nation was to be solely defined and led by the state. I propose to classify this nation as *political nation* and the corresponding nationalism as *statist nationalism* which is to be understood as a sub-category of political nationalism. As described in the first chapter, Hutchinson argued that political nationalists "perceive the nation in rationalist terms as a homogenous collectivity of educated citizens. They wish for a state representative of the nation which will break with tradition and raise the people to the level of the advanced 'scientific' cultures. Although essentially modernist, they appeal to historic ethnic sentiments in an instrumental fashion in order to mobilize religious and rural support

for their goal.”¹ With the term *statist nationalism*, I emphasise the importance of the state in this vision of the nation. Similar to other systems of *statism*, the leaders of the Thai state in this period aimed ‘to control the economic and social affairs’.² However, they understood the state not in a pure rational sense as expressed in Schiller’s famous comparison with a machine.³ Their idea of the state was much nearer to an ‘emotional’ nature of a nation. Therefore, the term *statist nationalism* takes into consideration this altered form of *statism*.

The reign of King Vajiravudh saw the start of increasing influence of political nationalism although the weakening monarchical nationalism remained the dominant form. With the revolution of 1932 and the abolition of monarchical rule, the weight of monarchical nationalism decreased even more but was not immediately suspended.

7.1. A Period of Transition (1932-1938)

After the revolution on 24 July 1932, members of the coup group lowered the royal flag over the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall and raised the national flag instead. This was to symbolise that the nation was to be more important than the monarchy.⁴ The removal of the monarchical government was the common denominator all factions within the coup group (*khana ratsadorn* or People’s Party) could agree on. As soon as this target was achieved, the members of the coup group broke their unity. Coherent policies to promote nationalism were almost impossible with factions favouring such contradictory directions as socialism, militarism and constitutionalism.⁵ Nakharin pointed out that the term *nation* came to the forefront just during the abdication of King Prajadhipok in 1935.⁶ However, this did not mean that the idea of nationalism was absent in the political elite as the example of the new

¹ Hutchinson, John, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*, London 1985, p.426.

² McLean, Iain (ed), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, Oxford 1996, p.477.

³ See Kedourie, E., *Nationalism*, Oxford 2000, chapter 3

⁴ Chanida Phrompayak Phueaksom, *Kanmueang nai prawattisat thongchat thai* [Politics in the History of Thai National Flag], Bangkok 2003, p.127.

⁵ See more about the different groups in Nakharin Mektrairat. “Phalang khong naewkit chat-chatniyom kap kanmueang thai nai samai raekroem khong ratphrachachat [The Concept of Nation and Nationalism and Thai Politics in the Early Period of Nation-State]”, *Ratthasatsan*, 2000, pp.59-63.

⁶ Nakharin Mektrairat, *Kanpatiwat sayam phoso 2475* [The Siamese Revolution of 1932], Bangkok 1997, pp.304 and 309. For example, a Member of Parliament felt sorry about the abdication of the king but stressed that the nation was more important than one person.

national anthem with its nationalistic spirit showed in 1933.⁷ A year later appeared a proposal to the cabinet to re-settle Buddhist Thais to Muslim areas via a programme called 'Persuade' (*chungchai*) aiming to encourage Thais to marry Muslims and bring them 'to the same nation' (*chat diaokan*) as the settlers. The project, however, was rejected.⁸ The government became more active in promoting nationalism when its popularity fell in many parts of the population in 1935. A new project to instill a love for the nation (*khroongkan plukchai hai rakchat*) which targeted young people was initiated with daily ceremonies in schools such as a flag-raising ritual in the morning. To reach the rest of population, the project called for the erection of monuments in every province. These monuments were to depict war heroes and heroines 'who did good deeds for the nation and sacrificed themselves'.⁹ In 1937, the government again paid more attention to nationalism. Public holidays were regulated for the first time since the government take-over five years before. Until then, the old royal regulations (since 1925) were still valid. A National Day (24th of June, the day of the revolution) was introduced in January 1938 and celebrated with parades from the military and Boy Scouts. A proposed Nazi-style torch procession, however, was not approved.¹⁰

In the period of transition and internal government conflicts, there was no stringent ideological direction and the promotion of nationalism was not the government's main priority. Therefore, aspects of monarchical nationalism remained in place. This period ended with the rise to power of Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram. With him, a new direction of Thai nationalism emerged: statist nationalism.¹¹

⁷ For the original lyrics (later changed under Phibun) see Wilson, H. "Imperialism and Islam: The Impact of 'Modernisation' on the Malay Muslims of South Thailand", *The Southeast Asian Review*, 1989, p.59.

⁸ Piyanart Bunnag, *Nayobai kan pokkhrong khong ratthaban thai to chaothai mutsalim nai changwat chaidaeen phaktai (pho so 2475-2516)* [Administrative Policy of the Thai Government Towards the Thai Muslims in the Southern Province (1902-1973)], Bangkok 1988, p.98.

⁹ Nakharin, 2000, p.72.

¹⁰ Somsak Chiamthirasakun. "Prawattisat wanchat thai chak 24 mithuna-5 thanwa [The History of Thai National Day from 24 June to 5 December]", *Fadiaokan* 2004, pp.99-100.

¹¹ Some academics argued that Thai nationalism itself started only under Phibun. See for example Anderson, B. "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies", Athens 1978, p.220, Wyatt, D., *Thailand- A Short History*, Bangkok 1984, p.230 and Terwiel, B. "The Development of Consensus Nationalism in Thailand", Clayton 1991, p.134.

7.2. Statist Nationalism in Full Swing (1938-1944)

Phibun Songkhram's appointment as Prime Minister not only represented a power shift inside the coup group towards the younger members but was also the beginning of nationalism as a prominent feature in state policies again. What were the reasons for this rather sudden surge in nationalistic rhetoric and actions? As during the monarchical rule, an intra-elite power struggle between factions of the coup promoters played a role. However, the use of nationalism as a tool in this power struggle was of less importance than other aspects. This thesis proposes that three main factors contributed to the lively nationalism of this period.

First, Phibun was part of a new breed of bureaucrats who were a result of the modernisation of the administration since the 1890s. Educated in France, Phibun was a professional soldier and strongly influenced by western political ideas. He came into the limelight as a hero of the new government after he led the suppression of a royalist revolt in 1933 and became the defence minister a year later. After presenting himself as a militarist during the first years of his political career, he increasingly combined militarism with nationalism. In a radio address in April 1937, he claimed that the country was 'not long ago weak and trampled on' and was still subject to bullying. He therefore called on the entire country to arm itself in self-defence because its security and independence were threatened.¹² Second, the international environment in the 1930s made ideologies such as militarism and nationalism fashionable for aspiring politicians such as Phibun. In 1938, the year he came to power, the world came nearer to a global conflict and the need for a strongman at the helm seemed to become urgent and natural. Events like the *Anschluss* of Austria with the German Reich, the Munich crisis in September and the fall of Canton to the Japanese played into the hands of Phibun with his admiration for fascist states.¹³ Third, since the coup in 1932, the new ruling group sought to legitimise their control of government. An emphasis on the utmost importance of the nation (which was seen as being disconnected from the monarchy and closely bound to the state) automatically increased the legitimisation of its leaders.

¹² Stowe, Judith, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, Honolulu 1991, p.94.

¹³ Stowe, 1991, p.112.

Phibun's Vision of the Nation and the Shaping of Statist Nationalism

Phibun and his chief ideologist, Luang Wichit Wathakan (Head of the Fine Arts Department since 1935), developed a clear vision of the nation. Phibun aimed to create a 'new Siam' and to place the country among the great civilisations of the world. To achieve this, he planned to turn the people into patriots with discipline and willingness to sacrifice themselves for the national unity.¹⁴ For Wichit, the 'nation' consisted of a group of people belonging to the same biological race with the same cultural life. Every individual should perform his duty and not interfere in the duties of others. The nation could improve automatically if each individual improves himself. Wichit envisioned a system of individuals where power and strength emanates only from the group leader who makes all the important decisions. In his concept, freedom, equality and rights of the individual were inferior to that of the state.¹⁵ Drawing on western linguistic and ethnological studies, Wichit also developed a concept of race (*chonchat*) based on blood ties that included Tai-speaking people outside the borders of Thailand. Wichit's view of Thainess had no place for regional cultures and every difference between the regions was erased to show that all people were part of one Thailand. He believed that the spirit of nationalism would make for a well developed nation, citing Japan as role model.¹⁶ For both Phibun and Wichit, the state was the undisputed leader of the nation which was to be a great power.

This view of the nation was reflected in the policies of statist nationalism. Interestingly, this nationalism had some similarities with the nationalism policies of King Vajiravudh who mixed monarchical with political nationalism. Phibun maintained elements of political nationalism but discontinued the elements of monarchical nationalism, most prominently the connection between the monarchy and the nation, the role of the king as leader and the trans-ethnic understanding of Thai identity.

To break with the monarchy and its past was Phibun's first aim. After his appointment as Prime Minister, Phibun confiscated all the private possessions of the

¹⁴ Suchit Bunbongkarn. "Political Power of Thai Military Leaders: A Comparative Study of Field Marshal P. Phibulsongkram and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat", *Social Science Review*, 1977, p.193.

¹⁵ Saichol Sattayanurak, *Khwamplianplaeng nai kansangchat thai lae khwampenthai doi Luang Wichitwatakan* [The Change in the Construction of the Thai Nation and Thainess by Luang Wichitwatakarn], Bangkok 2002, p.14.

¹⁶ Keyes, Charles. "Presidential Address: 'The People of Asia'- Science and Politics in the Classification of Ethnic Groups in Thailand, China and Vietnam", *JAS*, 2002, p.1180.

former King Prajadhipok¹⁷ (who abdicated in 1935 and lived in the United Kingdom) and arrested many royalists including the guardian of the new King Ananda Mahidol (r.1935-1946), who lived in Switzerland. To ideologically support his crusade against the Chakri dynasty, Phibun declared the *Ramakian* epic as undesirable.¹⁸ In the explanation of Wichit, the hero, Rama (at the same time the official names of the Chakri kings), was a weak and indecisive character. To humiliate the Chakri dynasty further, he declared the former (non-Chakri) King Taksin as national hero.¹⁹ This showed that Phibun was not an anti-monarchist *per se* but he used monarchical elements for his own construction of a national past. He did not cut out the monarchy in the public perception but, on occasion, seemed to enjoy personally taking over its function. For example, Phibun was performing state rituals in the name of the absent King Ananda, alternatively designating them as state ceremonies (*ratphiti*) or royal ceremonies (*ratchaphithi*).²⁰ Nakharin proposed that Phibun sought to destroy the general view of the monarchy as a guarantee of Thailand's sovereignty.²¹ This was an attempt to sever the connection between the monarchy and the nation. In order to replace the monarch as the leader of the nation, Wichit and Phibun created a cult around the Prime Minister. Phibun's photograph was everywhere, and his slogans 'were plastered on newspapers and billboards and repeated over the radio'.²² The public face of the monarchy was directly replaced by declaring Phibun's birthday (14 July) a national holiday, by playing his song (*sadudiphibun*, 'In Praise of Phibun') during his public appearances and by showing his picture and playing his song before films so that the people paid respect.²³

Probably the biggest change was the abandonment of trans-ethnic views by Phibun and his government. The group hardest hit by this new direction was the Chinese. What motivated Phibun to turn against this big ethnic group? First, the

¹⁷ Phibun also ordered the removal of all portraits of Prajadipok, of the former Queen and of the Prince of Nakhorn Savan from public offices. *The Times* (London). "Telegrams in Brief", 19 July 1939, p.13.

¹⁸ Manas Chitakasem. "Nation Building and Thai Literary Discourse: The Legacy of Phibun and Luang Wichit", Bangkok 1995, p.38.

¹⁹ For an example of the praise of Taksin in the Phibun era see Prida Srichalalai. "Ngan sangchat thai khong somdetphrachaotaksinmaharat [The Nation Building of King Taksin]", Bangkok 1941.

²⁰ Gray, Christine. "Hegemonic Images: Language and Silence in the Royal Thai Polity", *Man*, 1991, p.50.

²¹ Nakharin Mektrairat. "Rabop ratthaniyom chompon po pibunsongkhram: kankorup khong naewkhwamkit lae khwammai thang kanmueang [The Ratthaniyom of Field Marshal Phibun Songkram: the Emergence of the Concept and Political Meaning]", *Ratthasatsan*, 1988-89, p.254.

²² Wyatt, 1984, p.244.

²³ Pra-ornrat Buranamart, *Luang Wichit Wathakarn kap bottakon prawattisat* [Luang Wichit Wathakan and Historical Plays], Bangkok 1985, p.67.

Chinese were the easiest target to stir up nationalistic feelings because they dominated the trade sector and especially many unpopular professions such as money lenders and middlemen. Second, the verbal attacks of King Vajiravudh against the Chinese already created a basic ideology well-known to the population. Third, the Chinese themselves contributed to the rise of Thai nationalism by increasingly displaying Chinese-ness because of the political situation in their homeland (Japanese occupation): “The Chinese in Thailand reaffirmed their Chinese-ness and sovereignty of their community through the act of hoisting the Chinese flag. Flags emphasised the estrangement between them and the indigenous people. On the Thai side, the government considered such flag hoisting as an overt challenge.”²⁴ Fuelling the anti-Chinese feelings was a boycott of Japanese products by the Chinese in Thailand. This included a stop of Thai rice exports to Japan which was seen as an attack on the Thai economy.²⁵

Wichit started the attacks by calling the Chinese the ‘Jews of the East’. He claimed that the large sum of money remitted back home was damaging the Thai nation. Stowe pointed out that Wichit’s accusation caused a public reaction demanding that the Chinese cease exploiting the country. Counting on the popular dissatisfaction with the Chinese, Phibun issued laws specifically against the Chinese minority.²⁶ Another field where Phibun’s nationalist policies were strictly anti-Chinese was the economy since he feared that the economic power of the Chinese could one day be transformed into a political one. He propagated a ‘Thai-ification’ of the commercial sector especially of the rice sector, which was traditionally dominated by the Chinese.²⁷ In line with that policy, Phibun founded over 100 state enterprises between 1939 and 1957.²⁸ However, Phibun was flexible enough to encourage the

²⁴ Supang Chantavanich. “From Siamese-Chinese to Chinese-Thai: Political Conditions and Identity Shifts Among the Chinese in Thailand”, Madison 1997, p.247.

²⁵ Stowe, 1991, p.102.

²⁶ Phibun directed his anti-Chinese laws not against the individual Chinese but against the loyalty the Chinese felt to China. He always stressed the fact that he himself had Chinese blood. Supang, 1997, p.240.

²⁷ Ayal, Eliezier, Public Policies in Thailand Under the Constitutional Regime: A Case Study of an Underdeveloped Country, Cornell 1961, p.243. See for details of his economic nationalism Vinita Krairiksh, The Politics of Phibun: The National Leader, 1932-1944, Washington 1975, p.259 and Thompson, Virginia. “Thailand Irredenta- Internal and External”, *Far Eastern Survey*, 1940, p.245. Not only Chinese companies were his targets, in 1939 he forced the international oil companies out of the country in order to trade oil with the Japanese government. Stowe, 1991, p.124.

²⁸ Christensen, Scott/Ammar Siamwalla, *Beyond Patronage: Task for the Thai State*, Bangkok 1994, p.5. See also Ayal, Eliezier. “Thailand”, Ithaca 1969, p.300.

Chinese in the country to assimilate, a 'proposal' he underlined by the closing down of Chinese schools and the targeting of new immigrants.²⁹

Phibun's policy was 'instrumentalist' in nature and included a cost-benefit analysis. As soon as a Chinese accepted Thai nationality and Thai culture, he was regarded as 'integrated'. This clearly indicated that Phibun understood the nation as identical with the state and required proper documentation and citizenship to become a part of it. Anderson called the whole process of anti-Chinese repression more 'a matter of extortion than of nationalism'. Otherwise the Thai government would have stopped the immigration of the 'golden-egg-laying geese' which only happened in 1947.³⁰

Closely connected to the abandonment of trans-ethnicity was the concept of race which Phibun and Wichit took over from Vajiravudh. Wichit commented: "In the past, the Thais were attacked by the Chinese and escaped from the centre of China as evident in history. The real Thai (*chonchat thai thae*) in that period who loved the nation strongly have been mixed with the blood of other races until the Thai blood became diluted. This dilution of Thai blood makes the implementation of patriotism much more difficult. King Vajiravudh had the wisdom to see clearly that the Thai race is swallowed by cross-breeding (*pasompan*)."³¹ The identification and acceptance of the existence of 'mixed blood' made it easier to incorporate other ethnic groups into the Thai race which was defined in an open way. Contrary to fascist ideologists in Europe, a term like 'Thai' was for Phibun not strictly an ethnic term. All regional groupings should be called simply 'Thai' rather than using the previous particular names, including the non-Thai Muslims in the South.³²

Politically, Phibun used his interpretation of race to promote this idea of Pan-Thaiism.³³ He reinforced the claimed status as great power of Thailand by demanding the return of the 'lost territories' (seceded under Chulalongkorn) when France was

²⁹ Likhit summarised assimilation as 'integration into the mainstream of the new Thai nation, consisting of Bangkok dialect, Buddhism and the metropolitan culture of the capital'. Likhit Dhiravegin "Nationalism and the State in Thailand", Boulder 1988, p.93. Supang explained why assimilation was so 'easy' for the Chinese. In her opinion, it is possible to be Thai and ethnic Chinese at the same time. Thais see their national identity in political and cultural terms, not in ethnicity or the origin. As long as someone is loyal to nation, religion and king, ethnic identity is no problem. Supang, 1997, p.254.

³⁰ Anderson, 1978, p.212.

³¹ Somsak, 2004, p.99.

³² Batson, Benjamin, *Influences from the East etc.*, Bangkok no date, p.15.

³³ Crosby, Josiah. "Siamese Imperialism and the Pan-Thai Movement", *Forthnightly*, 1943, p.304. Wichit wrote a book to justify the claim on 'the lost territories'. See his views in Vichitr Vadakarn, Luang, *Thailand's Case*, Bangkok 1941.

defeated in Europe. Phibun threatened the use of military force and organised demonstrations for his support. His anti-French rhetoric was such a success that donations for an anti-French campaign poured in and nearly 70,000 men volunteered for military service. In the forefront of the protest, a newly formed group *khana luad thai* (Thai Blood) organised boycotts of French products and complained about the Roman Catholic Church, whose bishop was French. Although the government did not allow attacks on western foreigners, it did adopt an anti-Catholic policy by banning all non-Buddhists (including Thai Muslims) from working in the government or serving in the military service.³⁴ After a short armed-conflict with France at the end of 1940, the Thai government declared the result as heroic victory and reclaimed large parts of the former territories with the help of Japan.³⁵

The idea of race led to the concept of the purity of the Thai culture which was another element Phibun maintained from the nationalism of Vajiravudh. Phibun aimed for a total re-design of Thai culture so that Thailand could appear 'civilised' to the outside world. To foster this new Thai culture, he introduced a cultural policy which described 'Thai culture' in detail. These cultural laws became known as *ratthaniyom*, the twelve cultural mandates in which the government prescribed how to behave or to eat.³⁶ The mandates demanded, for example, a new dress code stating that Thais should wear European style clothes because traditional ones were not 'proper' for a civilised society.³⁷ An integral part of these orders was economic nationalism. Thais should use and consume only Thai products and become economically active for themselves.³⁸ Phibun understood this new culture as nothing less than the restoration of true Thai culture. Like Vajiravudh, Phibun identified the Kingdom of Sukhothai as source for this culture. Prince Wan, Foreign Minister under Phibun, named the content of the Ramkhamhaeng inscription as model and

³⁴ Stowe, 1991, pp.157-158 and 200. On a Buddhist holiday on 11 February 1941 nearly a thousand people, most of them Roman Catholics, publicly announced their conversion to Buddhism. Reynolds, Bruce. "Phibun Songkhram and Thai Nationalism in the Fascist Era", *European Journal Of East Asian Studies*, 2004, p.126. For 'Thai Blood' see also Manit Nualla-or, *Kanmueang thai yuk sanyalak rat thai* [Thai Politics during the Symbolic Thai State], Bangkok 1997, p.101. Muslims generally were hard hit by Phibun's policies. He forced the Muslim civil servants to attend Buddhist ceremonies. See Diller, A. "Islam and Southern Thai Ethnic Reference", Gaya 1988, p.159.

³⁵ Christian, John. "Thailand Renascent", London Reprint 2001, p.187.

³⁶ Six were introduced in 1939, three in 1940, two in 1941 and one in 1942. Thamsook N., *Thailand and the Japanese Presence, 1941-45*, Singapore 1977, p.23. See all the orders in Thak C., *Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents, 1932-1957*, Bangkok 1978, pp.244-254. See also Manit, 1997, p.92.

³⁷ 'Success' was celebrated in the newspapers: "About 1,000 Thai Muslims in Anghong have given up their former style of dress in order to conform to the State Convention and the national culture." Cited in Diller, 1988, p.159.

³⁸ Likhit, 1988, p.96.

encouraged the government to strengthen ‘the Thai spirit which looks back for inspiration to the golden age of Ramkhamhaeng’.³⁹ In a foreword to a book about the Kingdom of Sukhothai, Phibun called the period a reminder of a glorious Thai past and a ‘treasure of national value’.⁴⁰ For Phibun, the reference to a well-known ‘Golden Age’ made more sense than to appeal to a relatively unknown and especially uncertain ‘myth of origin’ commonly found in nationalisms.⁴¹

The cultural mandates echoed Phibun’s understanding of his new culture: “Only the culture of the Thai nation is the heart of our success. A Thai with a good culture must be a real Thai at heart. He must really love Thai, do everything for Thai and have hope into the Thai nation. This will result in the development of the nation onto the same level as other civilised countries.”⁴² A *real* Thai meant, for Phibun, those who accepted the new culture he wanted to build. In his opinion, Thai identity was not rooted in Buddhist cultural traditions, but in a ‘civic identity’ predicated on the cultural heritage all Thai shared.⁴³ Phibun did not hesitate to eliminate old traditions and ceremonies, one example being the abolition of prostration and crawling in front of the royal family. He furthermore abolished titles bestowed by the king with an aim to cut off loyalty to the monarchy.

Phibun’s *ratthaniyom*-orders sought to create a unified Thai national culture. In the ‘National Culture Act B.E. 2485 (1942)’, culture was defined as ‘progress, order, unity and moral of the citizens’.⁴⁴ Every individual had to observe the national culture and the government had the task ‘to regulate and seek ways and means to instil national culture as to create national habits’. Remarkably, traditions were not mentioned.⁴⁵ Part of this national culture was a reformed Thai language which was one of Phibun’s pet projects during the war years. He explained the reform with the

³⁹ Wan Waithayakorn. “Thai Culture”, Bangkok Reprint 1991, p.37.

⁴⁰ Peleggi, Maurizio, *The Politics of Ruins and the Business of Nostalgia*, Bangkok 2002, p.39. Between 1953 and 1955, funds of the State Lottery Bureau were used to start the restoration of some of the ruins in the old capital.

⁴¹ See Smith, Anthony. “The Resurgence of Nationalism? Myth and Memory in the Renewal of Nations”, *BJS*, 1996, p.590.

⁴² Cited in Manit, 1997, p.109.

⁴³ Phibun also reformed the Buddhist Sangha in 1941 by introducing democratic elements but at the same time put it under close regulation by the state. Yos S. “Buddhist Cultural Tradition and the Politics of National Identity in Thailand”, Amsterdam 1998, pp.317-318.

⁴⁴ Document printed in Office of the National Culture Commission, *Organizational Structure of the Office of the National Culture Commission*, Bangkok no date, p.23.

⁴⁵ Chai-anan argued that the new national culture was a culture of the bureaucrats: “It set a state identity apart from popular cultural identities especially at the local levels. Many popular traditions and cultures became ‘folk’ or ‘sub-cultures’. At state functions official versions of cultural dances were performed and presented in genuine tradition of the Thai state.” Chai-anan S. “State Identity Creation, State Building and Civil Society, 1939-1989”, Clayton 1991, p.71.

need to counter the pressure of the Japanese to introduce Japanese in Thai schools: “Some nations have lost their independence because they have failed to promote their language.”⁴⁶ At the same time, his abolition of the royal language and the simplification of the writing system (without regards to Sanskrit or Pali roots) not only made him look like Ramkhamhaeng (who was considered by Thais as the ‘inventor’ of the Thai language) but also lessened the importance of the monarchy by ‘equalising’ the language.⁴⁷

The main elements of statist nationalism were to be symbolised by the official renaming of the country from ‘Siam’ to ‘Thailand’ on 23 June 1939.⁴⁸ First, it demonstrated that the country was that of a clearly defined race. In Phibun’s opinion, ‘Siam’ lacked any ethnic connotation, whereas ‘Thailand’ would stress the importance of the ‘Thai’. Second, Phibun understood ‘Siam’ as being the synonym for monarchical rule while ‘Thailand’ (Land of the Free) was the synonym for his version of democracy. ‘Free’ meant free from the old system as well as free from foreign powers.⁴⁹

The name change and the cultural policies indicated that Phibun interpreted the nation as a state-led and dominated entity which should dominate the political, social, cultural and economic spheres of Thai society. The dominance was so overwhelming that the nation was identified with the state. Phibun actively sought to disseminate this vision of the nation within the people. For example, he used the radio extensively as a means to spread his ideals.⁵⁰ This thesis looks into another way to present Phibun’s vision of the nation: the construction of monuments.

⁴⁶ Cited in Reynolds, Bruce. “Imperial Japan’s Cultural Program in Thailand”, 1991, p.101.

⁴⁷ Sulak Sivaraksa. “The Crisis of Siamese Identity”, 1991, p.52.

⁴⁸ Charnvit Kasetsiri. “Laying ‘Siam’ to Rest”, 2000, p.C1. The name ‘Siam’ was reintroduced, but only in English, between 1945 and 1948. Two more discussions at government level were held regarding a re-naming in 1961 and 1975, both without success. For the pro-arguments regarding a name change to Thailand see Charnvit Kasetsiri. “From Siam to Thailand”, 2000, p.C1.

⁴⁹ Manit, 1997, p.91. Manit’s argument differed from most other academics who see an ideological reason for the name change rather than a political one. See also Stowe, 1991, p.122.

⁵⁰ One of his innovations was the founding of the Radio Station of Thailand. Apart from propaganda programmes, the station also broadcast nationalistic songs such as ‘Following the Leader’, ‘In Praise of Phibun’ and ‘Wear a Thai Hat’. Charnvit Kasetsiri et al, Chompon Po Phibunsongkhram kap kanmueang thai samai mai [Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram and Modern Thai Politics], 2001, p.394.

Monuments as a Means to Disseminate Statist Nationalism

The statist nationalism was mirrored in monuments erected by the Thai government in the 1930s and 1940s and served to disseminate its ideology. In 1936, the first public monument of the political nation, the Monument for the Protection of the Constitution (*anusawari phitak ratthatammanun*) was unveiled. Its function was to commemorate the victory of government forces against royalist rebels in 1933. The monument is in the shape of a bullet with the constitution lying on top of it. Its decoration includes images of a farmer's family and the wheel of *dharma*, symbolising the willingness of the state to defend the constitution, the Thai people and Buddhism.⁵¹

The most famous landmarks of this period were the Democracy Monument (*anusawari prachathipatai*) and the Victory Monument (*anusawari chaisamoraphum*) in Bangkok. While the first one was to celebrate the introduction of democracy in Thailand, the latter one was constructed after the outbreak of armed skirmishes with French troops in 1940 on the border to Indochina and the following re-gaining of territories. Heroic realism dominates this monument, centred by a huge obelisk. Five life-size bronze figures are at the base, displaying the activities of army, navy, air force, police, and civilians. The purpose of the monument was to evoke nationalist feelings against an outside enemy and to represent the new role of Thai citizens in contrast to their former role of subjects. At the opening ceremony in 1942, Phibun said: "This Victory Monument will eternally remind all Thais that this country successfully retrieved its honour by the hands of the Thai heroes of the five groups namely the army, the navy, the air force, the police and the civilians. This important monument, apart from being a memorial to the glory of the Thai heroes, it implants [the idea] in the next generation of Thais to have perseverance, patience and braveness and to be without fear of dying for retrieving the honour of the nation. It also implants the perfect love of the nation as well. Every time our fellow countrymen pass by this monument, they will remember all this goodness. The Victory Monument is the destination of the solidarity of all the Thai people to integrate and to preserve

⁵¹ Kromsinlapakon, *Anusawari nai prathetthai* [Monuments in Thailand], 1998, pp.191-193.

the Thainess of Thailand forever.”⁵² From Phibun’s speech, the Victory Monument can be considered an excellent symbol of statist nationalism.

One monument which could have been the pinnacle of representation of the political nation if it would have been constructed, is the *Thai Monument (anusawari thai)*. The monument was designed as a huge stupa with a base length of 100 meters on each side. It was to be surrounded by buildings which were intended to house an economic museum to showcase products, a restaurant and ballroom, a hotel and a conference centre. Foreign guests were supposed to feel, in the words of the project leader Wichit, ‘immediately how prosperous our country is’.⁵³ This stupa was not supposed to have any religious function but was to create solely the feeling of love to the nation. It was the combination of a building in the style of a stupa, representing Thainess, and the modern amenities representing progress, that was revolutionary. Wichit commented in 1939: ”When the Thai Monument is finished, it will not only be the most important and lasting piece in Thailand but could be one of the ‘wonders-of-the-world’ in terms of culture and art. We can show the world the history of Thai architecture in a way no one or no king could ever do. If we can build this monument in our period this will be a great and lasting honour for us. King Chulalongkorn invested five million Baht to build the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall without benefit for the glory of the nation. This monument will be for the glory of the nation and of us.”⁵⁴ However, because of budget restraints, the monument never came into existence.

Was statist nationalism a success and did it win the loyalty of the people for the political nation? I propose that this kind of nationalism under the leadership of Phibun and Wichit was a failure.

Due to the strong emphasis on the state, the form of this state was crucial in the effectiveness of statist nationalism. It is useful to set the Thai state policies of that period in context with the international political environment, especially fascism, to uncover some of the reasons for the failure of statist nationalism. Although Phibun

⁵² Cited in Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Khanaratsadon chalong ratthathammanun: prawattisat kanmueang lang 2475 phan sathapattayakam ‘amnat’* [Khanaratsadon Celebrating the Constitution: Political History after 1932 as Seen Through the Architecture of ‘Power’], 2005, p.81.

⁵³ Cited in Chatri Prakitnonthakan, *Kanmueang lae sangkhom nai sinlapa sathapattayakam sayam samai thai prayuk chatniyom* [Politics and Society in Arts and Architecture in the Periods of Modern Siam, New Thailand, and Nationalism], 2004, p.383.

⁵⁴ Cited in Chatri, 2004, p.383.

was an admirer of Mussolini, he cannot be categorised as a fascist. Gentile defined fascism as follows: "Fascism is a modern political phenomenon, which is nationalistic and revolutionary, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist, organised in the form of a militia party, with a totalitarian conception of politics and the State, with an ideology based on myth; virile and anti-hedonistic, it is sacralised in a political religion affirming the absolute primacy of the nation understood as an ethnically homogenous organic community, hierarchically organised into a corporative State, with a bellicose mission to achieve grandeur, power and conquest with the ultimate aim of creating a new order and a new civilisation."⁵⁵

The main weakness of Phibun's concept was located in his attempt to disguise his version of political nationalism, namely statist nationalism, as 'fashionable' fascist pomp and ceremony. By not following the fascist model to the letter in practice, he ironically lessened the effectiveness of his nationalism. Phibun's regime supports Breuilly's argument that nationalism took a less radical form in states where politics continued to be based on more traditional kinds of authoritarianism.⁵⁶ Phibun failed to sacralise politics or, in other words, to create a political religion. Gentile defined sacralisation of politics as the formation of a religious dimension in politics that is distinct from, and autonomous of, traditional religious institutions.⁵⁷ Phibun did the opposite thing, he tried to politicise the traditional religion, namely Buddhism. To underline this point, it is useful to look at the construction of Wat Prachatipatai (Democracy Temple, nowadays called Wat Phrasimahathat) in Bangkok, near Don Mueang airport. It was designed to be the temple for the group of the People's Party. Phibun tried but failed to convince both Buddhist sects, the *Thammayuth* and *Mahanikai*, to run the temple together. By making the temple the resting place for the remains of the most important persons of his version of the Thai nation, he copied the model of the Pantheon in Paris.⁵⁸ Although the Pantheon is housed in a former church, it was deconsecrated beforehand. Phibun, however, built a fully functioning temple and did not attempt to use nationalism as Ersatz-religion.

⁵⁵ Gentile, Emilio. "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation", *TMPR*, 2004, p.329.

⁵⁶ Breuilly, John. "The State", San Diego 2001, p.786. Phibun can be categorised as a military dictator rather than a totalitarian dictator. For a discussion of these categories see Maniruzzaman, Talukder. "Military Rule", London 2004, p.251.

⁵⁷ Gentile, Emilio. "The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism", *TMPR*, 2000, p.21

⁵⁸ Chatri, 2005, pp.77-78.

Phibun's policy to hold on to Buddhism to gain legitimation crippled his efforts to promote statist nationalism because Buddhism was traditionally close to the monarchy and every move to support Buddhism automatically strengthened the monarchy as well. Smith proposed that "religious traditions, and especially beliefs about the sacred, underpin and suffuse to a greater or lesser degree the national identities of the populations of the constituent states. In fact, these beliefs and practices often shape and inspire the national identities and nationalisms of the modern world, lending them a power and depth which serves to ground the inter-state order in the 'will-of-the-people' in ways that democratic practices often fail to do."⁵⁹ Monarchy in Thailand represented such a sacred dimension which was (and is) difficult to explain in a rational way. This sacred dimension of the monarchy was inseparably imbedded in the already existing monarchical nation. Phibun's efforts became even more difficult by the fact that the earlier monarchical nation already 'occupied' many symbols, myth and traditions, connecting them in the minds of the people with the king as active leader of the nation. The same difficulty appeared also with history as Chulalongkorn and Damrong essentially fixed national history to the monarchy. Phibun's failure to secularise and 'republicanise' the 'available' history, symbols etc, resulted in a reinforcement of the emotional bond between the people with the monarchy instead of cutting it.

Apart from the elements of the fascist role model, Phibun also failed to win the hearts and minds of the people by not allowing democracy. In 1936, Phibun said in private: 'to rectify the weakness of the nation it is essential that discipline be maintained; to be quite blunt, one must employ the methods of dictatorship'.⁶⁰ Though continuing to make public references to constitutional and democratic ideals, he never delivered this to the people. By promising democracy but not following up on his words, Phibun weakened his own position within the political elite and the people. He also tried to build a loyal following to his own person and viewed the nation's course as a matter of personal destiny leading him to see his personal interest as the nation's.⁶¹ With this connection between nation and political leader, he was in direct competition with the loyalty to the monarchy. An example to demonstrate how Phibun fell short in his effort to draw loyalty away from the monarchy, was an

⁵⁹ Smith, Anthony. "The 'Sacred' Dimension of Nationalism", *MJIS*, 2000, p.795.

⁶⁰ Cited in Reynolds, 2004, pp.104.

⁶¹ Reynolds, 2004, p.133.

incident which occurred in 1948. The exhibiting of statues of King Chulalongkorn and Phibun in a government shop came under heavy criticism by visitors because both statues were of the same height and placed at the same level. The disapproval was so strong that the government had to publish an explanation in the newspapers that the display was not thought to represent the 'real' persons.⁶² Phibun underestimated the emotional appeal and sacred dimension of the monarchy and could therefore not convince the masses of his idea of the nation.

Statist nationalism as an ideology was dealt an additional blow when Phibun, a close ally of the Japanese, had to step down after the defeat of Japan became obvious in 1944. Although Phibun was able to return to power, the changed international situation and the failure of statist nationalism in its previous form required the adoption of a new approach.

7.3. A New Version of Statist Nationalism (1950-1957)

Phibun, who became Prime Minister for a second time in 1947, had to acknowledge that his earlier version of statist nationalism failed and therefore decided to put more emphasis on the role of the monarchy. Phibun tried to re-interpret statist nationalism as royal nationalism. However, he failed again because of his lack of commitment to the monarchy and the lack of cooperation from King Bhumibol Aduljadej (r.1946-).

In his first term as Prime Minister, Phibun was powerful enough to promote the view of the nation as identical to the state and to reduce the people to mere followers of an autocratic regime. His second term of power, however, saw two significant problems. First, his position was jeopardised by internal power struggles within the ruling circles. Second, a short democratic spell between 1944 and 1947 gave birth to oppositional forces which consisted mainly of intellectuals with socialist ideas.

To strengthen his own position both inside and outside the ruling elite, Phibun aimed to win the hearts and minds of the population by changing his strategy regarding nationalism. His target was to maintain his power, and the threat of

⁶² Chatri, 2005, p.195. Similar, Sharp and Hanks reported from the field studies in a Thai village in the late 1940s that the villagers did not change their perceptions of other races despite government propaganda. Sharp, Lauriston/Hanks, Lucien, *Bang Chan- Social History of A Rural Community in Thailand*, Ithaca 1978, p.184.

communism offered him a unique chance to succeed. Anti-communism provided the image of an external threat that helped Phibun to gather support for his government. It also opened the door for massive US funds for development and modernisation of army and the countryside. Phibun found another use for anti-communism as well, namely as a formidable weapon in the fight against his political enemies and emerging regionalism.⁶³ He portrayed the communists as a danger to the security of the Thai government, departing from the older 'official' perception (propagated since King Vajiravudh) that communism would destroy the monarchy and create chaos. He accused communists of having connections to Vietnam and Laos and called them 'enemies of the nation' and 'people who sell the nation'. Phibun did not hesitate to label his political opponents like the liberal Pridi Panomyong, an ex-Prime Minister of the democratic period, as communists.⁶⁴

Phibun and the Monarchy

Phibun used anti-communism before western governments started to voice warnings about communism in South East Asia.⁶⁵ The mind behind this decision was again Wichit, his chief ideologist. Wichit still preached that nationalism was good for smaller nations but his basic assumption had changed in the wake of a bipolar world. In contrast to his pre-war aversion to Buddhism and the monarchy, these two

⁶³ The biggest opposition to Phibun came from a political movement based in the North East. Its root lay in the *seri thai* (Free Thai), the anti-Japanese and anti-Phibun resistance organisation during WWII. After the war *seri thai* members joined the *samakkhitham* (Solidarity) movement in the North East under the leadership of Krong Chandavong, an associate of the Socialist Front who was able to build up a strong peasant organisation with thousands of members. This was not a separatist movement with the aim of unification with Laos but had a strong regional identity. Phibun subsequently arrested and jailed its leaders. Some of them, like Krong, were executed. Haseman, J., *The Thai Resistance Movement during the Second World War*, DeKalb 1978, p.152 and Somchai P. "Political Resistance in Isan", *Tai Culture*, 2002, pp.117-121. Another hotbed was the Muslim area in the South. Phibun's national culture was even more appalling for them. In order to get away from Thailand the Malay population hoped after WWII that the British would occupy the provinces. Jones, F./Pearn, B., *The Far East- 1942-1946*, London 1955, p.240. See also Whittingham-Jones, B. "Patani Appeals to UNO", *Eastern World*, 1948, p.4.

⁶⁴ See Tamthai Dilokwityarat. "Phaplak khong kommiwnit nai kanmueang thai [Images of Communism in Thai Politics]", *Ratthasatsan*, 2003, pp.164-178.

⁶⁵ The warnings in the West started in November 1948 when the Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in South East Asia reminded London about the consequences of a communist victory in China. Phibun's strategy of anti-communism, symbolised by his decision to ally himself with the USA in Korea in 1950, was endorsed when the US ambassador to Thailand warned him about communist subversion in 1951 before any real communist threat to South East Asia had emerged. Turnbull, C. "Regionalism and Nationalism", Cambridge 1999, p.269. This prediction was the predecessor of the Domino theory announced by President Eisenhower in April 1954. See also Saitip Sukatipan. "Thailand- The Evolution of Legitimacy", Stanford 1995, p.201.

institutions were now highlighted as central in the fight against communism and Thainess was equated with anti-communism and modernisation. Wichit proved again to be influential in giving the definition of Thainess for some time to come.

Phibun translated Wichit's theoretical approach into policies. In a report in 1950, the British Foreign Office commented that Phibun had discovered the value of the monarchy for him. The report stated that Phibun did not intend to rebuild the real power of the monarchy, only its glory. Phibun started to whitewash the person of King Prajadhipok and arranged the transfer of his ashes from England with pomp and ceremony in 1949. In 1950, Phibun announced the return of King Bhumibol, who was then living in Switzerland, to Thailand and tried to establish himself as protector of the monarchy. The report went on: "Tremendous public interest and enthusiasm were aroused by the three ceremonies of the cremation of King Ananda's remains, the Royal wedding of Bhumibol, and the Coronation, which took place in March, April and May, and which were carried through with the greatest solemnity and traditional pageantry." Phibun's 'royalism', however, concluded the report, was largely a matter of convenience and he 'might be tempted to engineer dynastic changes if his support of the King would not yield better dividends'.⁶⁶

With mounting pressure from political opponents and the rise of nationalist feelings outside the ruling elite⁶⁷, Phibun realised that the monarchy was useful for him to maintain his position. However, his ability to generate benefits from the monarchy for himself was hampered by his poor relationship with the Chakri family. The new and young King Bhumibol turned out to be not the push over Phibun had hoped for. Bhumibol, born in the USA, ascended to the throne unprepared, shy and rather unfamiliar with Thailand after his elder brother, King Ananda, was found shot dead in his bed in Bangkok in 1946.⁶⁸ Contemporary observers commented rather

⁶⁶ British Foreign Office FO371/92952/FS1011/1.

⁶⁷ This movement was mainly influenced by the Stockholm Peace Appeal in March 1950. An article appearing in the weekly magazine *Kanmueang* [Politics] branded the USA as a threat to the peace in Asia and a cause of hardship for Thai people in May 1950. When a follow up signature campaign against the government was able to collect 150,000 signatures, Phibun realised that the mobilisation of Thai troops for Korea was unpopular with Thais and an attractive subject for intellectuals. Katsuyuki, Takahashi. "The Peace Movement in Thailand after the Second World War: The Cases in Sakhon Nakhon and Sisaket", Bangkok 2002, pp.110-140. In addition there were other opposition groups: Khana Ku Chat (left wing military), CPT and the Workers Movement. See Suthachai, 1991, pp.282-311.

⁶⁸ For the 'mysterious death' see Suphot Dantrakun, *Khothet ching kia kap karani sawannakot* [The Fact about the Death of the King], Bangkok 2001 and The Times (London), "King Ananda's Mysterious Death in Bangkok", 11 March 1949, p.5. Bhumibol wrote a letter to his dead brother, showing his unpreparedness: "I can't stop thinking about you, Brother. I thought, I will never be far

pessimistically about his future. Thompson/Adloff saw the prolonged residence of two successive Thai monarchs in Europe (Bhumibol stayed in Switzerland to finish his studies until 1951) as a reason for diluted allegiance of the Thai people to the Chakri dynasty.⁶⁹ The British Foreign Office commented in its annual review for 1952: “King Bhumibol has shown no disposition to take any part in affairs, or even to appear in public more than is required by the strictest demands of duty...the monarchy does not play in Thailand the role it could.”⁷⁰ The British ambassador in Bangkok wrote in 1953: “The King has made but few public appearances and the gravity and reserve of his manner (in contrast to the charm of Queen Sirikit’s personality) make it unlikely that he will ever command a strong personal following as distinct from the respect traditionally accorded to monarchy in this country.”⁷¹ However, the King was able to gain immense popularity with the people. For example, his decision to ordain as a Buddhist monk in Wat Bowonnivet for two weeks in 1956 dramatically increased his charisma in the eyes of the public.⁷² Bhumibol’s position was strengthened by field trips in the North East in 1955. Contrary to what observers had predicted, his enthusiastic welcome by the population showed that the charisma of traditional kingship in Thailand had not suffered from the revolution and its following policy of statist nationalism or from the lengthy absence of a king. Phibun seemed to be envious about the success of Bhumibol on these trips as he refused to finance any further excursions.⁷³

As history has shown, Bhumibol’s limited public appearances had nothing to do with inability but much more with his distrust of Phibun. Bhumibol said in 1950 in a public speech with a clear hint on Phibun: “However, I want to tell you that there are several who tried to quote ‘loyalty’ for their own private and personal interest.”⁷⁴ The truth of the death of his brother was never satisfactorily discovered (at least in public) and his life could have been in danger as well. Phibun’s numerous decisions

away from you, Brother, my whole life, but it’s karma. I never thought that I will be the King, I only thought I will be the little brother of you.” Cited in Suphot, 2001, p.15.

⁶⁹ Thompson, Virginia/ Adloff, Richard. “Southeast Asia Follows the Leader”, *Far Eastern Survey*, 1949, p.254.

⁷⁰ British Foreign Office FO 371/106882/FS1011/1.

⁷¹ British Foreign Office FO 371/112261/DS1011/1.

⁷² Skrobaneck, Walter, *Buddhistische Politik in Thailand: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des heterodoxen Messianismus*, Wiesbaden 1976, p.224.

⁷³ Gray, Christine. “Royal Words and Their Unroyal Consequences”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 1992, p.449.

⁷⁴ Cited in Skrobaneck, 1976, p.223. Another reason for the rather low profile of Bhumibol was his lack of money, making it difficult to sponsor festivities. See Gray, 1991, p.51.

against the interests of the Chakri family were not forgotten. Kobkua argued that in 1951 when Phibun conducted a coup against his own government, his main target was the royal family. Phibun reversed the trend in the previous constitutions of 1947 (provisional) and 1949 (permanent) which gave the King such rights as veto power over legislation and the right to appoint senate members. The new constitution in 1952 limited the role of Bhumibol again and reduced him to being a symbol of the unified Thai nation whose main functions consisted of performing religious and traditional ceremonies. Bhumibol's reaction to his new limits was a restriction of his participation in public affairs. The only concession Phibun made to the King was that he was allowed to look after his own domain, a decision central to King Bhumibol's strong economic basis today.⁷⁵

The Dissemination of the New Version of Statist Nationalism

As in his first term in power, Phibun ensured that his interpretation of the nation was disseminated throughout the population. It is noteworthy that Phibun changed his image from the 'leader' to 'father' of the nation just like King Ramkhamhaeng.⁷⁶ Part of this image was his effort to present himself as patron of Buddhism, a role traditionally played by the kings. A visual sign of this role was Phibun's order to restore 1,239 temples all over the country in 1956. A high-profile opportunity to show the dominance of the state over the monarchy was the festival regarding the 25th centennial celebration of Buddhism in 1957. Phibun paid only lip service to the King and depicted the government as official sponsor of the 'national religion': "The Thai nation has believed in the Buddhist religion since time immemorial and has received great benefits from its faith in Buddhism. Governments of the country in all ages, have respected Buddhism as the national religion. On this august occasion, the government plans to hold a special celebration so the people can take part in the festivities."⁷⁷ As the King played no important part in the activities,

⁷⁵ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian. "Thailand's Constitutional Monarchy, A Study of Concepts and Meanings of the Constitution, 1932-1957", Paper Presented at the 14th IAHA-Conference, Bangkok 1996, pp.6-11. The coup was staged when Bhumibol was on the last leg of his journey home- he was only two days away from Bangkok. British Foreign Ministry FO 371/101164/FS1011/1.

⁷⁶ Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Bangkok 1979, pp.96-97. Phibun's fascination with Ramkhamhaeng survived from his first term in power to the second one. He founded a political party with the name 'Phakmanangkhasila' ('Party of the Throne of Ramkhamhaeng'). Sulak, 1991, p.53.

⁷⁷ Cited in Thak, 1979, p.98.

Bhumibol decided to stay away from most ceremonies. This boycott made Phibun's effort to shine as the patron of Buddhism more or less useless. Another example was his visit to Ayutthaya together with the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu. Thak argued that the people saw the prerogative for righting an ancient conflict as of the king and not of a commoner like Phibun. Rumours spread that during the visit, the city was covered with darkness and ghostly wailing was heard indicating the displeasure of the ancestors.⁷⁸

Another means to disseminate the statist nationalism in Phibun's second term in power was the use of culture and entertainment. Phibun argued that 'our culture is as old as our nation' and was of utmost importance. However, this culture was under communist danger and had to be strengthened again. He criticised the political left for not respecting the culture of their grandparents: 'they do not respect their parents, their teachers, the elders, Buddhism, *dharma* and *sangha*'. The absence of the monarchy in this quote was not surprising because Phibun went on to lash out against the right wing, e.g. royalists, as well by accusing them of living in the past. He argued that they aimed to destroy the culture of liberal democracy and to just 'plough the field' [a reference to the Royal First Ploughing of the Field Ceremony]. Therefore, stated Phibun, he founded the Ministry of Culture (1952) in order to improve the national culture.⁷⁹ The Ministry of Culture had the task of spreading Phibun's and mostly Wichit's idea of culture to the regions. Officials were sent into the villages who promoted the national culture with drama troupes, films, mobile libraries and health units. The declared aim was to get the people in the countryside interested in the national culture with the help of entertainment.⁸⁰

Wichit himself wrote several historical plays. All of them focussed on the creation of the Thai kingdom which had been the result of blood, life and sacrifice of the ancestors. Wichit emphasised in the plays that it was the duty of the people to protect the Thai kingdom and sovereignty against communist intrusion. In the play 'The Power of Phokhun Ramkhamhaeng' (*anuphap phokhunramkhamhaeng*), for example, Wichit depicted the king as sacrificing his own interests for the benefit of the kingdom. One of the characters declared:

⁷⁸ Thak, 1979, p.99.

⁷⁹ Phibun Songkhram, *Chompon Po Phibunsongkhram* [Field Marshal P. Phibun Songkhram], Bangkok no date, pp.303-306.

⁸⁰ Pra-ornart, 1985, p.124.

“Our Brothers and Sisters, in our life there is nothing more important than Thainess. Let all of us think of Thainess, restore Thainess and preserve Thainess and our beloved Thai nation.”⁸¹

Wichit followed the example of King Vajiravudh in his use of dramas to disseminate statist nationalism. He, however, did not put importance on the artistic value but stressed that in order to reach the masses any play had to be easy to understand. Most significant in this context were nationalistic songs which were part of the plays and achieved the longest lasting impact on the audience. An example was the song *Tontrakunthai* (The Thai Ancestors) which was originally part of the play ‘The Power of Phokhun Ramkhamhaeng’ and was taught in schools.⁸²

The choice of content and means to disseminate statist nationalism in Phibun’s second term in power contributed to its repeated failure. Although Phibun had dropped the fascist disguise of statist nationalism, he did not change the basic characteristics of it. Despite their aim to replace the monarchy with the state as the leader of the nation, Phibun and Wichit re-used many elements of monarchical nationalism. As a result, they unintentionally strengthened the monarchy instead of weakening it. This could be demonstrated in the case of their support for Buddhism, an institution closely linked to the monarchy. Phibun’s aim to be the patron of Buddhism turned out to be a mistake because people connected this function with a monarch and were displeased by his obvious attempt to sideline the king. History was another subject which added to the woes of statist nationalism. Both Phibun and Wichit intensively created and promoted their version of a history of the nation. However, their constant use of monarchs as heroes of the nation (for example, Ramkhamhaeng and Taksin) reinforced the images known from monarchical nationalism instead of replacing them with non-royal alternatives.

It could be said that Phibun’s efforts to lessen the importance of the monarchy resulted in a decline of his own popularity and a boost for the popularity of King Bhumibol. This was supported by the reaction of the King who increasingly sought direct contact with the people and avoided cooperation with the government. It could

⁸¹ Cited in Pra-ornart, 1985, 129.

⁸² Pra-ornart, 1985, p.261. This song proved to be so popular that it is still broadcast daily by the army-controlled TV stations.

be taken as early signs that King Bhumibol was not interested to act as a mere symbol of the nation but sought to actively shape Thai society. It is therefore an irony of history that in the Thai case statist nationalism with its anti-monarchic elements indirectly helped monarchical nationalism to celebrate a comeback a few decades later. Moreover, statist nationalism could neither prevent the ousting of Phibun and his departure into a life-long exile in Japan in 1957 nor the rise of a competing nationalism, namely royal nationalism, inside the ruling bureaucratic group.

Chapter 8

The Rise and Decline of Royal Nationalism (1950s-1980)

In the 1950s, it became evident that the nationalist ideology of the ruling group around Prime Minister Phibun was unable to bind the loyalty of the people to the state and its vision of the nation. Competing views of the nation emerged both inside and outside of the ruling elites. The focus of this chapter is on a new group inside the bureaucratic elite who re-directed Thai nationalism away from statist nationalism towards royal nationalism. As described in chapter four, I understand royal nationalism as being a kind of political nationalism which tries to achieve its goals with the help of the symbolic power of the monarchy. Royal nationalism requires a passive but cooperative role from the monarchy. During the 1950s and 1960s, royal nationalism flourished as all participants played along. However, a growing dissatisfaction with military rule amongst the population resulted in a loss of appeal of this version of royal nationalism. As Thai politics and nationalism headed for a crisis in the 1970s, King Bhumibol started to develop and offer an alternative view of the nation in order to heal the rift in society. An active role of the King automatically spelt the end of dominance for Thai political nationalism, both statist and royal. This development counters the argument of the revisionist school that King Bhumibol remained a passive and willing collaborator with the ruling military elites.

8.1. The Dominant Era of Royal Nationalism (1950s-1960s)

In the mid-1950s, Phibun increasingly lost his grip on power. After a visit to Europe and the United States in 1955, Phibun 'discovered' and promoted the ideal of democracy in an attempt to bolster his position. However, more freedom of expression led to a wave of criticism and protest against his government. The fact that these protests were mostly motivated by a new, anti-western political awareness in oppositional forces¹ showed that Phibun's interpretation of statist nationalism as an anti-communist ideology was not reaching some parts of the population. It also meant that

¹ British Foreign Office FO 371/129609/DS 1011/1. See also Ockey, Jim. "Civil Society and Street Politics: Lessons from the Fifties", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.1.

the state was faced with different views on the nation which were no longer under its control.

The biggest threat to Phibun's power, however, came from a rival faction within the bureaucratic elite which used the political situation to establish itself as an alternative to the Prime Minister. This group was under the leadership of General Sarit Thanarat, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, who had a different understanding of the Thai nation and politics. Sarit himself did not feel at home in the nation propagated by Phibun. In a newspaper interview in 1959, Sarit admitted that he was unhappy with the 24th of June [date of the revolution in 1932] as National Day because that day "creates the feeling that it is the day of 'them' [People's Party]."² This statement showed that the failure of statist nationalism gave space to a competing view of the nation. This competing view was heavily influenced by the personal background of people like Sarit who was educated in Thailand, spoke little English, harboured no resentment against the monarchy and continuously emphasised his upbringing in the countryside. This was in stark contrast to the international background of the 1932 coup promoters who were strongly influenced by western ideas.

The official split between Phibun and Sarit occurred in 1957. Sarit left the cabinet in protest against Phibun's Interior Minister Phao Sriyanond, who had allegedly suggested that the King should be taken into 'protective custody'.³ This move earned Sarit immense popularity within the population.⁴ On 16 September 1957, Sarit staged a coup against the Phibun government and forced the Prime Minister to flee abroad. Kobkua proposed that this coup was conducted 'first and foremost to bring an end to the Phibun-Phao clique and to ensure the political survival of Sarit's faction'.⁵ The ideal tool to legitimise the coup was to present an alternative view of the nation which saw the monarchy in a central role. There were reports that Sarit won the approval of the King for the coup in advance because he claimed that Phibun had committed acts of *lèse-majesté*.⁶ After the takeover, Sarit received official blessing with a royal decree

² Cited in Somsak Chiamthirasakun. "Prawattisat wanchat thai chak 24 mithuna-5 thanwa [The History of Thai National Day from 24 June to 5 December]", *Fadiaokan*, 2004, p.116. In 1960, it was decided that the birthday of King Bhumibol (5 December) should be National Day.

³ Phao commented on another occasion that he was not the real target: "The King does not like him [Phibun] and wishes for a change in the Premiership." British Colonial Office CO 1022/37.

⁴ British Foreign Office FO 371/136020/DS 1011/1 and The Times (London). "Political Crisis in Siam", 3 September 1957, p.8.

⁵ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, London 2003, p.10.

⁶ Anonymus. "National Socialism in Thailand", *Eastern World*, 1958, p.11. For more details about the reasons for the coup see Likhit Dhiravegin, *Demi-Democracy- The Evolution of the Thai Political System*, Singapore 1992, pp.156-158.

declaring martial law and by being appointed as the military custodian of Bangkok, including the right to countersign any royal decrees and proclamations.⁷ However, Sarit could not assume the position of Prime Minister for medical reasons. The close connection of Sarit to the King was mirrored in rumours that the favourite for the position was Phraya Siwisanwacha, an advisor of the King and a member of the Privy Council.⁸ In the end, Sarit installed his associate General Thanom Kitikachorn in the position after the election in December 1957. Sarit took up the position of Prime Minister himself in 1958, a move resulting in a major ideological change in Thai nationalism. Sarit's campaign to defend the monarchy could be seen as the beginning of royal nationalism in Thailand. The cooperation of the monarchy with the state was ensured because Sarit 'managed to earn his monarch's trust and clearly became the favoured Prime Minister of the King'.⁹

Royal nationalism served not only as legitimation for Sarit's government but was needed to strengthen the position of the Thai government in an intensifying volatile international environment. Sarit's time in power was marked by an increasing importance of world events for Thai politics. The political development in Indochina and the presence of the USA in the region had helped to alter the course of Thai nationalism. With funds from the US government, a huge programme for the development of the countryside began.¹⁰ Large infrastructure projects, like the 'Friendship Highway' into the North East, were constructed not only for military purposes but also for the expansion of the central bureaucracy to increase control over an area populated by ethnic Lao.¹¹ The situation dramatically changed with the surprising coup of Colonel Kong Le (with an anti-Thai and anti-US stance) against the Laotian government in August 1960.¹² Sarit and King Bhumibol were convinced that a

⁷ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian. "Thailand's Constitutional Monarchy, A Study of Concepts and Meanings of the Constitution, 1932-1957", Paper Presented at the 14th IAHA-Conference, Bangkok 1996, p.14.

⁸ The Times (London). "Marshal Phibul in Phnom Penh", 20 September 1957, p.8.

⁹ Kobkua, 2003, p.15.

¹⁰ Not only the USA but also the UK pushed the government to nationalism. In a report to Prime Minister Macmillan, Lord Selkirk (then Commissioner General for South East Asia) stressed the need to support nationalism in the region: "We must clearly do everything to promote nationalism as a counter to communism and avoid policies which may lead nationalists and communists to join forces against us." British Prime Minister's Office, PREM 11/3737.

¹¹ Even in the 1960s, observers reported that in villages in the North East, the photographs of the Lao king were displayed rather than the photographs of the Thai king. See Sanders, S., *A Sense of Asia*, 1969, p.46.

¹² Kanala Eksaengsri, *Political Change and Modernization: Northeast Thailand's Quest for Identity and Its Potential Threat to National Security*, Binghampton 1977, p.460.

communist take-over in Vientiane would have catastrophic consequences for Thailand.¹³ When the USA failed to give support to the old Lao government to restore its position, Sarit announced that Thailand ‘must look after itself’.¹⁴ The feeling of standing alone without reliable friends was reinforced in 1962, when the World Court ruled in favour of Cambodia in a long running legal dispute regarding the ownership of a Khmer temple which stood directly on the border of the two countries.¹⁵ Interior Minister Prapas announced in a speech on 5 September 1962 a policy of ‘Thai-ism’, which included a ‘disengagement from the closeness of the US embrace’.¹⁶

The combination of elements such as the emergence of a new ruling group out of an intra-elite power struggle, the social background of Sarit, the willingness of the King to cooperate and the external threat in Indochina, resulted in an era of dominance of royal nationalism. This nationalism was based in an indigenous interpretation of the nation which differed from monarchical nationalism in one decisive factor: the state and not the monarchy was the leader.

Sarit's Notion of the Nation

Sarit's ideas about the Thai nation were reflected in his policies. First, he regarded the Thai nation as a family: “A nation is like one big family. The ruler is none other than the head of the family who must regard all the people as his own children...He must be kind, compassionate and very mindful...I myself have made efforts to reach that level. I always try to be close to the people and take care of them as if they were my own family.”¹⁷ To comply with this image of the nation, Sarit developed his *phokhun*-style [father lord-style] of paternalistic rule modelled on the style of government during the Sukhothai period. Central was his role as a father who had to keep his children happy. For example, as a gesture of kindness and compassion, Sarit reduced train fares, school fees and the price of electricity. But he also insisted on

¹³ See King Bhumibol's statement in a private meeting with the British ambassador Sir Richard Whittington, 12 May 1961. British Prime Minister's Office, PREM 11/3531.

¹⁴ British Foreign Office FO 371/160069/DS 1011/1.

¹⁵ Anti-Cambodian feelings ran high in Thailand and the British Foreign Office excluded not even King Bhumibol from them. British Foreign Office FO 371/ 144293/DS 1011/1. See for the Phra Viharn dispute British Foreign Office FO 371/170016/DS 1011/1 and Singh, L. “The Thai-Cambodian Temple Dispute”, *AS*, 1962, pp.23-25.

¹⁶ British Foreign Office, FO 371/170016/DS 1011/1. ‘Thai-ism’ in Praphat's understanding was a ‘policy based on Thai history, Thai culture and Thai interests’. Cited in Wilson, David. “Thailand: Old Leaders and New Directions”, *AS*, 1963, p.86.

¹⁷ Cited in Kobkua, 2003, p.12.

keeping law and order by banning negative influences on Thai cultural values such as Rock and Roll music and dance.¹⁸

Sarit saw this style of government as suitable for Thailand as it was rooted in Thai culture, social and traditional values together with Buddhist teachings.¹⁹ Democracy, like all foreign ideologies, was categorised as not fitting for the Thai people.²⁰ The Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, gave an insight into the thinking of the ruling group when asked about the lack of democratisation: “The fundamental cause...lies in the sudden transplantation of alien institutions on to our own soil without careful preparation and particularly without proper regard to the nature and characteristics of our own people, in a word the genius of our race. My own view is that it is preferable to fall back on ourselves, to withdraw into our shells and think, think hard, and forget about those institutions for a while.”²¹ Applied to their understanding of the nation, this meant that it had to be based on state-defined Thai cultural elements and not on models from the West.

Second, this indigenised view of the nation resulted in a major difference in the interpretation of the role of the monarchy compared to the Phibun era. While Phibun attempted to lessen the importance of the monarchy, Sarit called it ‘the palladium of the nation’²² and the guarantee for its survival: “the Thai nation has survived up until today because we have a monarch who has been the pillar of unity and spiritual sanctuary who sacrifices his life and blood for the country. Therefore the name of His Majesty is the most sacred thing for the Thai nation; it serves as a unifier of the Thai people, inseparable by any means.”²³ This connection served as legitimation for his coup because he claimed that under the previous government the Thai king became separated from the Thai nation which was unacceptable.²⁴ Therefore, he called his new government ‘revolutionary’ because it would give full protection to the King and would do everything to keep the King and the royal family in utmost veneration. However, Sarit policies were not fully altruistic. He used the monarchy to gain support for his

¹⁸ Likhit, 1992, pp.161-163.

¹⁹ Kobkua, 2003, p.11.

²⁰ Chalermkiet Phiu-Nual, *Khwamkhit thang kanmueang khong thahan thai 2519-2535* [Political Thought of the Thai Army (1976-1992)], Bangkok 1992, pp.47-48.

²¹ Cited in British Cabinet Office CAB 21/4640/14/31/228.

²² Kobkua, 2003, p.14.

²³ Cited in Suchit Bunbongkarn. “Political Power of Thai Military Leaders: A Comparative Study of Field Marshal P. Phibulsongkram and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat”, *Social Science Review*, 1977, p.200.

²⁴ Sarit Thanarat. “Prakat khong khana patiwat 20 tulakhom 2501 [The Declaration of the Revolutionary Group 20 October 1958]”, Bangkok Reprint 1983, pp.597-598. Sarit involved for the first time the royal family, which traditionally played no significant role.

government. For all his cooperation with the King, Sarit did not intend to accept an inferior role, on the contrary, he saw himself as leading partner.²⁵ Sarit attempted to restore the glory of the monarchy without giving away his own political power. The monarchy was of great importance to Sarit as he was unable to make use of the Buddhist *sangha* in the same way he did the monarchy. Ishi argued that internal discord of the *sangha* and its inability to rectify this situation was intolerable for Sarit. He issued a high-handed statement in 1960 that the government was ready to intervene in its [the *sangha*'s] affairs.²⁶ The Buddhist Order Act of 1962 finally brought the *sangha* under the control of the government.²⁷ The *sangha* was centralised under a Supreme Patriarch with strong authority and it received the task of helping with national integration. However, at that time, Sarit had already successfully established the monarchy as the mainstay of his legitimation.

Third, Sarit opposed Phibun's attempt to 'Thai-ise' all people in all regions with a one-fits-all approach of a new Thai culture based on modernisation and civilisation and revived for himself a more trans-ethnic view on membership of the nation. Sarit regarded Phibun's policies as the cause for the emergence of regionalism which together with communist subversion was responsible for the crisis. Sarit adopted a hard-line against the communist threat which he linked to an external threat to the nation, religion and monarchy.²⁸ He argued that the struggle between the government and the communists was a struggle between patriots (*phurakchat*) and traitors (*phuthorayottoprathethai*).²⁹ Sarit's approach to integration was to link the anti-communist struggle with the preservation of Thainess and not with the preservation of

²⁵ British Foreign Office FO 371/144293/DS 1011/1.

²⁶ Ishii, Yoneo. "Church and State in Thailand", *AS*, 1968, p.869.

²⁷ Keyes, Charles. "Buddhism Fragmented: Thai Buddhism and Political Order since the 1970s", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.11. Sarit also secularised Islamic religious schools and placed them under government control. See Bin Wan Mahmood, Suria. "De-Radicalization of Minority Dissent", Quezon City 1999, p.135.

²⁸ Although the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) existed since 1941, it was not until the adoption of Maoist strategies in 1962 that activities started on a larger scale. Sarit, however, ordered mass arrests and executions for communist suspects since 1958. Chai-anan Samudavanija et al., *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive: Attitudinal Transformation of Thai Military Officers since 1976*, Bangkok 1990, p.50. See also Ladd, Thomas. "Communist Insurgency in Thailand: Factors Contributing to its Decline", *Asian Affairs*, 1986, p.17.

²⁹ Tamthai Dilokwityarat. "Phaplak khong kommiwnit nai kanmueang thai [Images of Communism in Thae against the regionalist Krong Chandawong, who was accused of planning to Politics]", *Ratthasatsan*, 2003, pp.185-188. This approach automatically excluded any communist from being 'Thai'. An example was the cas break away the North Eastern provinces and join Laos. Krong was found guilty of betrayal of the three pillars of the nation. See Marks, Thomas, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, London 1996, p.32. Marks called the execution of Krong on the 31st of May 1961 a key incident for the CPT to recruit many new members.

the Thai government and its leader as under Phibun. Drawing on the traditional trans-ethnic approach of the monarchy, Sarit opened Thai society to everybody as long as they assimilated and became Thai. However, he closed that opportunity for anybody who was a communist because in his opinion, a real Thai could not be a communist. In practical terms, Sarit stopped the governmental harassment of the Chinese and discontinued Phibun's uniform approach to Thai culture.³⁰ He propagated a new 'Thai national culture', allowing regional and religious identities to emerge officially (the Muslim South, however, remained a problematic topic).³¹ Born in the North East, Sarit was sensitive about regionalism and feared a potential communist revolt.³² For him, the underlying problems were economic deprivation and the adaptation of foreign ideology. Sarit intended to change these causes of unrest with economic progress in the countryside and his 'traditional' paternalistic leadership. He wanted to win the hearts and minds of the people by way of modernisation and development with a Thai face.

The fourth part of Sarit's view on the nation was the important role old traditions and customs were supposed to play despite modernisation and development. He vowed to protect them, as he aimed, in Sarit's own words, a 'Thai-isation' of Thai politics and society. He sought a 'new order' based on 'moral unity' (*samakkhitham*) and 'discipline' (*khwammirabiap*) and discussed his vision of a 're-generated Thailand' with experts from all fields in order to find ways to disseminate it.³³

³⁰ This decision was made easier by a change of politics in China. Chou En-lai announced in the mid 1950s that China was willing to accept the assimilation of Chinese in South East Asian countries. See Fessen, Helmut. "Auslandschinesen in Südostasien", *Deutsche Aussenpolitik*, 1978, p.97.

³¹ Surichai Wungaew. "The Making of Thai National Culture", Singapore 1996, p.236.

³² It seems that Sarit was more aware of his native region than other parts of Thailand. Even he started many projects in the South, especially in the educational sector, he managed to alienate many Muslims by insensitivity on his side. For example, he ordered that Friday must be a normal working day in every Muslim province. Another point was his decision to encourage many people from the North East to migrate into the southernmost provinces and to allocate land to them. For details see Piyanart Bunnag, *Nayobai kan pokkhong khong ratthaban thai to chao thai mutsalim nai changwat chaidan phak tai (pho so 2475-2516)* [Administrative Policies of Thai Governments Towards Muslims in the Southern Border Provinces (1892-1973)], Bangkok 1987, pp.124-126.

³³ British Foreign Office FO 371/144293/DS 1011/1.

Sarit's understanding of nationalism could be categorised as royal nationalism, therefore, the King was moved into the centre and was called the 'supreme head of Thailand and the Thai nation'.³⁴

The result of this approach was seen in many areas. Firstly, and the most obvious, was the changing role of the King. Anderson pointed out that Sarit began a systematic campaign to restore the monarchy. Part of these efforts was a World Tour of the royal couple which caused a wave of popularity in the USA and Europe. Sarit used the proud atmosphere back home to organise a hero's welcome in January 1961. Aware of the symbolic power, he arranged that the King and Queen drove directly from the airport to the Grand Palace to pay homage to the Emerald Buddha. To disseminate the news, Radio Thailand announced their safe arrival and monks chanted prayers while bells pealed throughout the land. The following day, Sarit said: "the people know well that the trip was not just a sightseeing tour for your personal enjoyment. It was a task to bring Thailand into the good understanding of the world, to strengthen friendly relations, and to increase the country's prestige. It was realised that Your Majesties were carrying a great burden. In all State Visits...official reception does not always guarantee popularity; it needs charm and wit judiciously expended. It is fortunate for our country to have such a marvellous monarch."³⁵

Sarit also encouraged the royal couple to travel in the countryside in order to make contact with the people and to strengthen their loyalty.³⁶ Concerned about the situation in South Thailand, Sarit also arranged an audience with the King for a large delegation of Thai Muslims in 1961.³⁷ In a speech to the King after his return from a visit to 71 provinces, Sarit stated: "It is clear to all both within the country and abroad that Your Majesty has followed the guidelines of *thotsaphitratchatham* [ten kingly virtues] in national affairs and has been the most exalted leader of the nation. Your visits to the countryside have swayed the hearts of your people towards unity within the

³⁴ Wacharin Mascharoen, *Baeprian sangkhom sueksa kap kan klomklao thang kanmueang nai samai chomphon sarit: sueksa karani khwammankhong khong sathaban chat satsana phramahakasat* [Social Studies Textbooks and Political Socialization during Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's Regime: A Case Study of the Security of the Nation, Religion, Monarchy], Bangkok 1990, p.139.

³⁵ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, pp.390-391.

³⁶ Anderson, Benedict, *The Spectre of Comparisons- Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, London 1998, p.164.

³⁷ Thak Chaloentiarana. "The Evolution of the Monarchy and Government: Institutional Conflicts and Change", *Asia*, 1976, p.51.

nation. Regardless of race or creed, your subjects are happy with your interest, which has reduced divisive thoughts and unified the country. Your activities are comparable to those of King Chulalongkorn.”³⁸ In comparing Bhumibol with King Chulalongkorn, who was perceived as one of the greatest Thai monarchs ever, Sarit exalted the King’s position and increased his own legitimation tremendously. King Bhumibol profited from his rising popularity as well. He was able to attract vast sums of donations for charity such as the Red Cross Society (headed by Queen Sirikit) and started a series of royal projects for education and agriculture which raised his profile even more.³⁹

The core of royal nationalism, namely Bhumibol’s symbolic role as unifier of the nation, was strengthened by a series of revived of royal ceremonies. Tambiah, for example, called the ceremonies around the Emerald Buddha (when the King bathed and changed the clothes of the statue three times a year) a ‘vital cult’.⁴⁰ It represented for Thailand not only part of the regalia of kingship but, more importantly, national sovereignty itself combined with the protection and practice of Buddhism. In 1960 the Royal River *Kathin* [monksrobe] ceremony was revived. The government refurbished the royal barges in which King Bhumibol in grand style was escorted down the river to Wat Arun [Temple of Dawn]. The fact that the King’s barge was not accompanied by vessels of the royal family but by the barges of the police, the military and government ministries is worth noting. Gray interpreted this event as a demonstration for the renewed importance of the three pillars- nation, religion and king.⁴¹ State ceremonies were also directed towards involving King Bhumibol in order to bring the monarchy closer to the nation. For example, the government introduced the King’s New Year Address as a part of an official marking of the occasion in 1961 or marked the Army’s Say with a spectacular *Trooping of the Colours* ceremony.⁴²

An example from a monument of this period was the statue of the war hero King Naresuan who restored the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya which had been lost to the Burmese in the sixteenth century. His monument (*phraboromrachanusawari somdetphranaresuanmaharat*), unveiled in Suphanburi province in 1959, is located on the battlefield between this Ayutthayan king and the Crown prince of Burma. Naresuan was depicted as riding on a war elephant in an attacking pose with the weapon ready to

³⁸ Cited in Thak, 1976, p.50.

³⁹ Thak, 1976, pp.52-53.

⁴⁰ Tambiah, Stanley, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge 1976, p.501.

⁴¹ Gray, Christine, *Thailand- The Soteriological State in the 1970s*, Chicago 1986, p.443.

⁴² Kobkua, 2003, p.157.

strike. The statue faces the Burmese border in the West.⁴³ In the anti-communist atmosphere of the late 1950s, the message of this monument was that the Thai kings would always defend the country and so guarantee the freedom of the Thai. It also aimed to inflame patriotism against an outer enemy, using a royal hero to remind Thais of their obligation to the ancestors to fight for the nation.

Another aspect that was different in Sarit's nationalism in comparison with his predecessor was the abandonment of economic nationalism and the opening of the country to foreign investment. This included the abolition of the Investment Act of 1954, which was seen as a major obstacle for foreign engagement, and the introduction of the Promotion of Industrial Investment Act (1960).⁴⁴ The turn in the economic policy resulted in rapid economic expansion in the 1960s with annual growth rates of 7-8%. This generated massive enticement for people in the countryside to come to work in Bangkok. The majority of these migrant workers were from the North East and together with people from other parts of the country, they rapidly populated the capital. Many were for the first time confronted with different regional identities that created a sense of regional identity within the migrants themselves.⁴⁵ However, Anderson pointed out that the 'royal revival' coincided with the start of this economic boom which 'confirmed the legitimacy of the throne and the throne gave moral lustre to the development'.⁴⁶ In other words, King Bhumibol's support for modernisation and development of the country enabled the government to push ahead because it meant that to be Thai was to embrace progress.

Although Sarit seemed to have considerable success with the propagation of royal nationalism, his vision of the Thai nation was to be challenged soon after his death. There were several factors responsible for the short life span of his achievements. First, Sarit's vision of the nation had no plan to integrate the masses into the political process or to politicise the masses. Thak argued that Sarit's policy and programs were aimed at maintaining the boundaries between hierarchical sectors while promoting

⁴³ Kromsinlapakon, *Anusawari nai prathet thai* [Monuments in Thailand], Bangkok 1998, pp.25-29

⁴⁴ Ayal, Eliezier. "Thailand", Ithaca 1969, pp.333-334. For an overview see Hussey, Anthonia. "Rapid Industrialization in Thailand, 1986-1991", *The Geographical Review*, 1993, pp.14-15.

⁴⁵ Tambiah, 1976, p. 511. To give an idea about the size of the temporary migration to Bangkok during the dry season, the Far Eastern Economic Review estimated a number of around one million migrant workers in the early 1990s. Far Eastern Economic Review. "Separate and Unequal", 14 April 1994, p.22.

⁴⁶ Anderson, 1998, p.164.

economic development.⁴⁷ Second, as a result of development projects, the bureaucratic state interfered, in many areas for the first time, directly in the life of the majority of the population. Rapid modernisation led “to a sense of ‘homelessness’ including the rejection of state authority.”⁴⁸ This situation, stated Smith, can cause anarchic terrorism/insurgency or an anti-bureaucratic nationalism. Both would occur in Thailand later on. Third, a new generation of intelligentsia emerged. Economic growth helped to create a considerable number of well-to-do citizens (mostly of Chinese origin) in urban areas. These entrepreneurs were content that the government stopped their anti-Chinese policies. The generation of their children, however, had different expectations. The modernisation of state and economy required a huge number of professionals, opening up new educational opportunities for them. This generation of intelligentsia demanded participation in politics.

8.2. Times of turmoil: Royal Nationalism in Crisis (1963-1979)

The Thanom Government (1963-1973)

After Sarit died in 1963, General Thanom Kittikachorn as Prime Minister and his close associate Interior Minister Prapas Charusathian were in charge of the government until 1973. Several factors would contribute to the weakening of royal nationalism.

First, Sarit’s personal power, vision and close relationship with King Bhumibol were crucial for the image of royal nationalism. His successor(s) tried to follow his policies but neither developed their own distinctive vision of the nation nor did they have the same good relationship with the king as he was increasingly unwilling to cooperate with the military dictators.

The era of Sarit marked an important development for King Bhumibol himself. He displayed rising self-confidence and independence of mind.⁴⁹ This translated into more political involvement as the appointment of his personal candidate Thanom showed.⁵⁰ In 1965, the British Foreign Office commented that the King became the fixed point of the population: “He and his elegant consort [the Queen] are meticulous in

⁴⁷ Thak, 1979, p.xxvi.

⁴⁸ Smith, Anthony, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1979, pp.173-176.

⁴⁹ British Foreign Office FO 371/175346/DS 1011/1.

⁵⁰ See Nuechterlein, Donald. “Thailand After Sarit”, *AS*, 1964, p.845.

the performance of their duties, religious and secular, and it is the King for whom the average Thai, whether in Bangkok or in the provinces, reserves such allegiances as he possesses.”⁵¹ The new confidence of King Bhumibol could be seen in activities which went beyond his royal projects started under Sarit. The bigger role of the King also changed the face of royal nationalism. While the state was still perceived to be in the driver seat, the independence of Bhumibol rose. Although it is impossible to say whether this was intended or not, the higher profile and active leadership of the King did strengthen the competing monarchical nationalism. For example, King Bhumibol and those who were ‘royalist’ started to disseminate nationalistic songs. The majority of these songs focussed on the monarchy as the centre of the Thai nation. Interestingly, the lyrics and music of most of these songs originated in the palace with the support of the King.⁵²

Second, the state bureaucracy lost the trust of many people when it interfered in the everyday life of those people whose living conditions deteriorated through economic hardship. Sarit’s strategy of modernisation and development aimed to ensure the security of the country but the rapid changes created problems in many areas of the country and Thanom had to confront them. The central bureaucracy expanded in all corners of the country with an apparatus whose sheer size was impressive. Mulder reported that in 1928 the ratio between one civil servant and citizen was 1:147, in 1961 1:115 and in 1975 1:48 (excluding 400,000 employees of the state enterprises and the armed forces).⁵³ New institutions and laws alienated people in the villages, whose traditional mechanisms to solve conflicts were overtaken by the state. This was aggregated even further by arrogant behaviour of civil servants from Bangkok, who looked down on villagers as uneducated people. The rapid modernisation was centrally planned and left no room for local opinions. Local cultures were disrespected and resistance crushed with military force.⁵⁴ The observing British Ministry of Defence judged the result in a devastating way: ‘little if any implementation anywhere of the

⁵¹ British Foreign Office FO 371/186150/DS 1011/1.

⁵² Sirinthorn Kiratibutr, *Phlengplukchai thai (pho so 2475-2525): kanwikhro thang kanmueang* [Thai Nationalistic Songs (1932-1982): A Political Analysis], Bangkok 1985, pp.78-79 and 155.

⁵³ Mulder, N. “Structure and Process, Ideas and Change: Dynamics and Conflicting Values in the Modern Thai Order”, *Journal of Social Science Review*, 1978, p.24.

⁵⁴ There are many examples where ignorance by central bureaucrats caused massive unrest. See Tugby, E. “Inter-Cultural Mediation in South Thailand”, Canberra 1973, p.281 and 285 and Thaxton, R. “Modernization and Counter-revolution in Thailand”, *BCAS*, 1977, p. 35. For the army strategy see Chai-anan et al., 1990, pp.56-59.

feeling that the Thai government is the benevolent protector to whom loyalty is due'.⁵⁵ The political discontent was reinforced by the closure of the 'land frontier' in this period. For the first time in Thai history, the population growth outweighed the available land. An increase in the number of land tenants was also met with a corresponding increase in social problems caused by money lending and high rents. Consequently, this led to an economic situation which worsened with the global oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s.⁵⁶

Third, the international situation put more pressure on the Thai government. In 1965, Thailand deployed soldiers to South Vietnam.⁵⁷ However, the decision to provide the US with military bases (mostly in the North-East) had more influence on Thailand itself. The country became both home to 50,000 US-troops with their western way of living and home for a massive extension of infrastructure.⁵⁸ The US government financed new highways not only to gain easier access to its bases but also to enable the Thai government to develop the countryside even faster. Rural development together with military strength was seen as the key strategy to fight communist rebels. The involvement in Vietnam and the close connection with the USA created the environment for protests against the government.

Fourth, these protests marked a shift in the political environment. A new, competing nationalism from 'below' attempted to fill a vacuum left by a declining royal nationalism. When the economy plunged into troubles in 1971, the protests grew louder.⁵⁹ However, the focus was in the beginning mainly on the disapproval of the Japanese and the USA, making nationalism an important aspect.⁶⁰ On the forefront of the protest were students.⁶¹ The strong presence of the students on the political scene was a result of Sarit's decision to expand the university sector. The number of students

⁵⁵ British Ministry of Defence, 19/03/1965, DEFE 11/590.

⁵⁶ The population density grew from 34 people per km² in 1947 to 67 people per km² in 1970. Falcus, Malcolm. "The Economic History of Thailand", *AEHR*, 1991, p.63.

⁵⁷ This decision was defended by Thanom with the argument that it is better to fight communism in Vietnam before communism has a chance to come to Thailand. Somphop Chantharaprapha, *Chiwit lae ngan khong chomphon Thanom Kittikachorn* [Life and Work of Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn], Bangkok 1972, p.232 and see also p.234.

⁵⁸ Reinhard observed 'an astonishing presence of the Americans in the North East'. Soldiers, peace corps volunteers, engineers etc had contact with locals in practically every town and most villages. See Reinhard, Christian. "Programme gegen die Subversion in Nordost-Thailand", *Aussenpolitik*, 1967, p.123.

⁵⁹ Allman, T.D. "No Rocking the Boat", *FEER*, 10 July 1971, p.13.

⁶⁰ Chalirm Vudhikosit. "Thailand and the Balance of Trade Problem", *Pacific Community*, 1971, p.388. For an analysis of the anti-Japanese feelings in Thailand see Yano, Toru. "Behind Southeast Asia's Anti-Japanese Sentiment", Honolulu 1975, pp.2-7.

⁶¹ The Nation, *30 Years of the Nation*, 2001, p.27 and Prizzia, Ross/Narong Sinsawasdi, *Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change*, Bangkok 1974, p.33.

grew rapidly in the 1960s: from 15,000 at five universities in 1961 up to 100,000 students at 17 universities in 1971.⁶² The students used their position in the limelight to challenge the government with the help of their vision of the nation. This nation was seen as being independent from the influence from the USA.⁶³ Anti-Americanism was not limited to the left leaning opposition but could be found in conservative circles as well. In 1967, Kukrit Pramoj, a member of the royal family, gave vent to an outburst of anti-Americanism in his daily column in the highly influential newspaper 'Siam Rath'.⁶⁴ For the time being, anti-Americanism was connected to a strong display of nationalism on both sides of the political spectrum.

The weakening of royal nationalism happened faster by the fact that Thanom lacked a clear vision of the nation. Thanom stressed the word 'unity' as the most important prerogative for development in his speeches. Sources of conflict had to be eliminated and the government would do everything to achieve this. His main target was the war against communism.⁶⁵ In 1968, he said: "This kind of [guerrilla] war destroys not only Thai sovereignty but also the life and soul of all Thais throughout the whole nation."⁶⁶ It should be noted that Thanom did not refer to the slogan 'nation, religion and king'. This difference with Sarit can also be found in his anti-communist book *Rao pen thai* (We are Thai/free) from 1966, where he defined Thai patriotism as

⁶² Anderson, 1998, p.149.

⁶³ Anderson argued that a group called 'Progressive Students' was crucial in the expansion of demands. They published the book 'The White Danger' in 1971, introducing the new feature of anti-Americanism into the Thai opposition. However, the communists started to disseminate their anti-Americanism since 1968 when they accused the USA of neo-colonialism. Anderson, 1998, p.168 and Alpern, Stephen. "Insurgency in Northeast Thailand: A New Cause for Alarm", *AS*, 1975, p.687. For the relationship between the students and the communists see Pornpirom I. "The Student-Led Democratic Movement After the 14 October 1973 Incident and Its Relations With the Communist Party of Thailand", *Asian Review*, 1987, pp.9-11.

⁶⁴ Kukrit Pramoj. "Daily Problem Column", *Siam Rath*, 1967. Just like in the 1950s, Kukrit's work gave an insight into the mood of the elites at the time. In 1970, he wrote in length about the crisis of Thai culture: "It must be admitted that the Thai culture today is in a state of utter confusion and probably it has reached the highest degree of confusion ever known in our history." The reason for this situation was in Kukrit's view the influx of foreign, especially western culture, partly caused by a western educational system. He proposed a new kind of education and culture 'which inspires the consciousness of being Thai, which determines our Thai way of living, which makes us appreciative of Thai values, draws its strength from our ancestors, from the environment we live in, from our fellow countrymen in all walks of life'. It represented a clear statement against the policies of the military and an early indicator for the return of monarchical nationalism ten years later. Kukrit Pramoj. "Education and Culture", Bangkok 1970, pp.38 and 52. Negative for the image of the USA were comments by US president Nixon who called the governance of the two dictators Thanom and Praphat an 'ideal model for an Asian country.' Opponents almost automatically became anti-American. Allman, T.D. "The Liabilities That Kintner Faces", *Bangkok Post*, 20 January 1974, p.13.

⁶⁵ Chulla Ngonrot, *Kamnoet lae khwampenma khong latthichatniyom nai prathethai* [The Origin and Development of Nationalism in Thailand], Bangkok 1970, p.106.

⁶⁶ Cited in Chulla, 1970, p.108.

'to love every Thai because we are brothers and sisters'.⁶⁷ An important intellectual in the Thai military, General Saiyut Kerdphol, the head of the Thai counter-insurgency campaign (since 1966), used a similar approach to the nation. He argued that only with unity between the citizens, police and military the danger could be averted. Saiyut warned the Thais not to believe in "the mask of self-declared 'nationalists' who want to liberate the people." The first thing to do for every Thai was to conserve the nation in being 'Thai'.⁶⁸ Like Thanom, Saiyuth placed in his publications no special emphasis on the role of the king. It could be that both, as members of the military, had a rather technocratic attitude to nationalism as a tool against communism. In any case, it showed that the vacuum of nationalism was becoming even bigger with a lack of promotion by the state representatives.

The Breakdown of Royal Nationalism (1973-1980)

After the effectiveness of royal nationalism to procure the loyalty of the people was weakened during the Thanom government, the period between 1973 and 1980 witnessed the final breakdown.

This thesis proposes that the most important underlying factor for this breakdown was a reaction of society against the policy of rapid modernisation and development, together with the increasing contact with foreigners and the failure of the state to meet these processes with adequate political and social policies. Dahm argued in this context that societies in South East Asia answered sudden confrontations, for example with modernity, with a mobilisation of the defensive parts of the cultural tradition, a cultural revival.⁶⁹ I argue that in the case of Thailand in the 1960s and 1970s this meant a loss of confidence in the state with its government and at the same time an increasing veneration for the King. This was empirically recorded in one survey, conducted in the North East in 1966, when 87.9% of the questioned persons denied that Thailand could survive without the King. In another survey in 1971, 74.31% of students showed their displeasure with the political and government institutions. However, 93.66% of the students answered that they were very proud of the monarchical

⁶⁷ Chulla, 1970, p.117.

⁶⁸ Saiyut Kerdphol, *Anakot khong thai* [The Future of Thailand], Bangkok 1975, pp.204, 210 and 214.

⁶⁹ Dahm, Bernhard. "Kulturelle Identität und Modernisierung in Südostasien", Tübingen 1993, pp.34-38.

institutions, another number of students [2.96%] were fairly proud.⁷⁰ This confidence of the masses in the monarchy became a problem for Thanom when King Bhumibol began to withdraw his support for his government. He also criticised the Prime Minister several times in public.⁷¹

A decisive moment in the modern history of Thai nationalism occurred on 14 October 1973. On that day, students asked King Bhumibol to help to remove the military dictators. When the King intervened and Thanom had to leave his position, it meant that the passive role of the monarchy was transformed into an active one. It had a tremendous impact on the influence and popularity of the King who in the words of Allman, became a personal hero to the majority of his people.⁷² For example, the student movement, underlining their loyalty to the nation, praised the monarch by displaying the picture of the King during demonstrations. Yuk argued that the students were 'motivated by love to the nation'.⁷³ Some Thai academics called this the birth of a new nationalism.⁷⁴ It was a proof of the emergence of a nationalism from below which could also legitimise its love for the nation with its love for the monarchy.

This alternative nationalism was soon to be challenged by a 'counter-nationalism' which sought to prevent the increasing left-leaning student and democracy movement from taking control of the country. The conservatives mobilised mass organizations, all supported by leading members of the military and police, with a powerful nationalistic message to save the monarchy, Buddhism and the nation. The three main groups, the *Navapon* (New Force), the *Krathing Daeng* (Red Gaurs) and the *Luksua Chaoban* (Village Scouts) claimed a membership in the millions at the end of 1975.⁷⁵ For example, *Navapon* found most of its members among low-level government

⁷⁰ Marks, Thomas. "The Status of the Monarchy in Thailand", *Issues and Studies*, 1977, p.53 and Thinpan Nakata. "Political Legitimacy in Thailand: Problems and Prospects", *JSSR*, 1976, pp.103-105.

⁷¹ See Darling, Frank. "Thailand: Stability and Escalation", *AS*, 1968, p.121 and *The Times* (London). "Thai Revolt Warning by King", 18 March 1969, p.7.

⁷² Allman, T. "King Who is Hero to the Rebels", *The Guardian*, 5 December 1973, p.3. Bhumibol appointed a National Convention consisting of people from all walks of life to elect the new National Assembly, which was opened by him in December 1973. Morell, David/ Chai-anan Samudavanija. "Thailand since October 1973: Dissolution of a Revolution", *Pacific Community*, 1975, p.587.

⁷³ Yuk Sri-ariya. "Awasan ratchat kap wikrit arayatham thai [The End of Nation-state and the Crisis of the Thai Civilisation]", Bangkok 1997, p.90. See more in detail Nidhi Aeusrivongse. "Chatniyom nai khabuankan prachatipatai [Nationalism in the Democratic Movement]", Bangkok 1992, pp.182-189.

⁷⁴ For example Suthachai Yimprasert, "Latthi chatniyom kap kan totan chakkraphatniyom amerika nai samai 14 tulakhom poso 2516 thueng 6 tulakhom poso 2519 [Nationalism and Anti-American Imperialism from 14 October 1973 to 6 October 1976]", Bangkok 2000, p.58 and 68.

⁷⁵ Bradley et al., *Thailand- Domino by Default?*, Athens 1978, pp.10-13.

functionaries, urban middle-class and rural village headmen.⁷⁶ One of its most important leaders was the Buddhist monk Kittivuddho, who joined the group after the events in Indochina in April 1975.⁷⁷ He saw a threat to Buddhism and monarchy if the communist would succeed in Thailand and went on to develop a form of militant Buddhism for the first time. In July 1976, he said: "I would like to point out that it is understood that this *Navapon* is not a political party. *Navapon* is the principle of nationalism. It is only a name of a philosophy whereby we take the middle way of Buddhism as the way to act in order to solve all the problems of government, economics and society." For him, *Navapon* was the only ideology which a true Thai nationalist (who also must be a Buddhist) could take. Anyone who opposed *Navapon* was therefore an enemy of the nation, the religion and the monarchy. Such an enemy was in his view not a complete person, and for that reason, stated Kittivuddho, it would be not de-meritorious to kill a communist.

The political situation and the stand off between the two ideological groups was further complicated by a series of weak coalition-governments which were unable to curb political violence, a steady guerrilla warfare from communist rebels and a sluggish economy. In addition, the year 1975 witnessed a situation that can be best described as a nightmare for Thai conservatives. The international circumstances turned for them from bad to worse. The Americans failed not only to win the war but also to implement the terms of the Paris agreement. The swift collapse of the Thieu regime in South Vietnam and the success of the communist movements in Cambodia and Laos frightened many Thais.⁷⁸ The unexpected diplomatic 'opening' to Communist China even further aggregated this fear and caused the feeling of abandonment and loneliness in the people while facing communist armies at their borders.

The political violence of right-wing groups increased dramatically in the years 1975 and 1976. Together with the activities of the communists and the inability of Thai politicians to form a long lasting cabinet, Thais got the impression of an unstable country.⁷⁹ Worried about their safety, many Thais were now willing to stop the democratic experiment and blamed the political left for its failure, which was reflected

⁷⁶ Keyes, Charles. "Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand", Chambersburg 1978, p.151.

⁷⁷ This part about Kittivuddho is based on Keyes, 1978, pp.153-158.

⁷⁸ Trager, F./Scully, W. "Domestic Instability in Southeast Asia", *ORBIS*, 1975, pp.973-979. King Bhumibol was shocked by the abolishment of the Lao monarchy.

⁷⁹ There is a long list of incidents. One of the most dramatic is a wave of assassinations of peasant leaders in 1975 and 1976. See for details Bradley et al., 1978, p.13.

in the election in April 1976 when leftist parties suffered a humiliating defeat.⁸⁰ The end of the democratic period came in 1976 when the students increasingly adopted strategies of the Chinese communists. For example by shouting the slogan 'Burn all classical literature' they became even more alienated from the conservatives, who saw this as an attack on Thai culture and the monarchy.⁸¹ Public unrest was caused by the return of the former Prime Minister Thanom to Bangkok and his ordination as a monk at Wat Bowonniwet (near Thammasat University). When the King openly showed his support for Thanom, the students organised new rallies.⁸² The chance for right wing groups and the police to crush the student movement came with a demonstration at Thammasat University on 6th October.⁸³ The reason given was an alleged mock hanging of the crown prince by student actors. A group of navy officers used the events as pretext to stage a coup d'etat. This time, the King did not interfere on the side of the students like in 1973 but showed public support for wounded or killed policemen.⁸⁴

Bhumibol, however, was neither a close ally of the military nor did he support the ideas of *Navapon's* militant Buddhism as the future direction for the country. He himself handpicked the new Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichian, a Supreme Court judge who was an outsider in the political arena but was renowned for his honesty and strong anti-communist stand.⁸⁵ Thanin supported the idea of a strong state and his policies reflected the style of Sarit. However, the social and political environment had changed and most Thais were not willing to accept another dictator.⁸⁶ Several thousand students joined the CPT in the forests.⁸⁷ Thanin's campaigns against corruption resulted in widespread dissatisfaction within the bureaucracy and the crackdowns on press and other political freedoms within the population.

⁸⁰ Chai-anan Samudavanija. "Thailand: A Stable Semi-Democracy", Boulder 1989a, p.315. The two socialist parties dropped from 25 seats to three seats in the new parliament.

⁸¹ Cited in Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Watthanatham kap kansang sangkhom kanmueang prachathipatai* [Culture and the Building of a Democratic Society], Bangkok 1994, p.12.

⁸² Thongchai Winichakul. "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past: The Ambivalence Narratives of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok", Paper Presented at the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies, Chiang Mai 1996, p.4.

⁸³ For a detailed account see Puey U. "Violence and the Military Coup in Thailand", *BCAS*, 1977, pp.4-12.

⁸⁴ Bhumibol said in an interview with the BBC regarding this incident later: "If you don't defuse a bomb and it will blow up, if it will blow up, it will be a very good fire work, but for the one who looks afar." BBC Written Archives, *Soul of A Nation*, LCA T854K, 7 January 1980, p.33.

⁸⁵ Anderson, 1998, p.187.

⁸⁶ Likhit D. "The Emergence of a New Political Conscious Middle Class", *Thailand Business*, 1985, p.45.

⁸⁷ Kershaw, Roger. "Students and the Revolution: Thoughts on the Return of a Thai Son", 1982, p.56 and Chantima O. "The Communist Party of Thailand", Singapore 1982, p.362.

Thanin's ideas about the Thai nation can be found in his book entitled *Latthi lae withikan khong khommionit* (Doctrine and Way of Communism) which was published in 1973 and later widely used in schools. Aiming at explaining communism for schoolchildren, he dealt at length with the communist ideology. Thanin explicitly warned of the danger for religion and monarchy and emphasised that the Thai nation was always independent. Central to this nation was the monarchy: "In terms of the king, the Thais are very fortunate that we have the King who is the precious tiered umbrella to cover our head. The King maintains the ten royal virtues and he is the refuge of all Thai people. The Thai king stays not only in the royal palace but he travels all over Thailand in order to be the soul of his people."⁸⁸ Thanin employed a doomsday scenario for the case of a communist take over: 'the age that demons rule the country (*yuk asun krong mueang*)'.⁸⁹ Thanin also tried to revive the 'ageing' royal nationalism. Critics and protesters were being accused as being a group 'who are not Thai and who want to destroy the monarchy'.⁹⁰ For Thanin, the king represented the head of the nation, the symbol of Thainess and goodness and his most important task was to protect the monarchy.

Despite Thanin's efforts to govern with a strong hand and with steady support from the King, the situation in Thailand worsened. The CPT became bigger and more active in many parts of the nation.⁹¹ It also became more aggressive in its attitude against the monarchy and Bhumibol himself, who was now vigorously attacked in the propaganda. The CPT argued that Bhumibol was responsible for the October 1976 massacre and that he was afraid of his own people. Marks interpreted this move as an attempt to drive a wedge between the monarchy and its base of support, the Thai people themselves.⁹² In any case, the CIA station Chief in Bangkok must have been concerned because he predicted in early 1977 that Thailand would be the next domino to fall.⁹³ The 'old' concept of nationalism of the state increasingly lost its appeal to especially those people, who thought of themselves as living on the fringes of Thai society. A competing nationalism from below promised a fair society for all while the connection with the dictatorship lowered the attractiveness of the old vision of a nation. Thanin's political

⁸⁸ Thanin Kraiwichian, *Latthi lae withikan khong khommionit* [Doctrine and Way of Communism], Bangkok 1977, p.83.

⁸⁹ Thanin, 1977, p.85.

⁹⁰ Chalermkiet, 1992, p.66.

⁹¹ See Chai-anan et al., 1990, p.63.

⁹² Marks, 1977, p.51. The CPT openly denounced the monarchy in 1978. Tarr, Shane. "The Nature of Military Intervention in the Countryside of Surat Thani, Southern Thailand", *BCAS*, 1991, p.38.

⁹³ Anderson, 1998, p.290.

fate was sealed when he announced a ten-year plan to return to democracy.⁹⁴ The same naval officers who conducted the coup in October 1976 repeated it in October 1977 being worried about the potential consequences of a prolonged period without democracy. Keyes speculated that without the coup Thailand 'could well have plunged into bloody civil war'.⁹⁵ The coup, however, was done without the knowledge and approval of the King and worsened the relationship between him and the military even further.⁹⁶ Marks commented that this was an important split in the political history of Thailand.⁹⁷ Indeed, this split could be seen as the end of royal nationalism because the monarch was no longer willing to cooperate. On the contrary, the monarchy offered now not only a viable but basically the only alternative towards which to dedicate the loyalty for Thailand for those who were not willing to support the CPT or the military-dominated political framework. Bhumibol himself made his vision of future politics clear in a speech in June 1977: "An idea exists among certain groups of people that it is necessary to destroy and uproot existing things before progress or prosperity can be accomplished. This idea must be scrutinised to find out whether it is correct and worth thinking about or implementing. Existing things constitute foundations and models, whose strength and weaknesses should be studied to eliminate the weaknesses and achieve more developed new things. Already existing things are thus essential factors contributing to proper advancement. How can progress be made, if the foundation for it is destroyed."⁹⁸ However, in 1977 the time was not right for Bhumibol to lead the intelligentsia with his vision of a monarchical nation. The rift between the ruling military elite and the King was still too wide and the Thai people were still too much fragmented because of the political turmoil.⁹⁹

The Dissemination of Royal Nationalism (1960s-70s)

The Thai governments of the 1960s and 1970s kept on disseminating royal nationalism in order to legitimise the state in the fight against communism. One of the most common means was the use of banknotes.

⁹⁴ Chai-anan, 1989, p.316.

⁹⁵ Keyes, 1999, p.16.

⁹⁶ The Times (London). "Thai King Kept in Dark on Coup", 22 October 1977, p.4.

⁹⁷ Marks, 1977, p.70.

⁹⁸ Cited in Marks, 1977, p.69.

⁹⁹ Bhumibol and the members of the royal families were even personally targeted by assassins. The Times (London). "Royal Escape", 23 September 1977, p.8 and The Times (London). "King's Ivory Stolen", 10 July 1976, p.5.

A banknote series issued in 1969 showed on the front a portrait of King Bhumibol in full regalia. To give the banknotes a Thai character, the designers added traditional elements and symbols. On the back, examples of architecture and works of art were displayed in the centre of the note. This included the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the Royal Barge and the ordination hall of the Marble temple.¹⁰⁰ This series echoed the idea of royal nationalism where the monarchy functioned as a symbol of the Thai nation and Thainess. The next series of banknotes was designed in the late 1970s. Although the banknotes emphasised the monarchy more, its role was portrayed as to be the leader of the nation in times of crisis. The banknotes depicted King Bhumibol no longer wearing a royal uniform but the uniform of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The backside of the notes changed totally. Under the topic 'Great Kings', monuments of the Kings Chulalongkorn, Taksin and Naresuan were shown.¹⁰¹ Especially the last two statues mirrored the spirit of the time as they depicted the monarchs as warriors fighting against the invading enemies. It was an analogy of the fight against the communists.

Another means was official ceremonies with a good example being the celebration for the 25th throne anniversary in 1971. At the Democracy Monument, the government organised the biggest military parade ever. King Bhumibol attended the show wearing a Marshall uniform, clearly signalling that he supported the state in its war against internal and external threats. The parade was watched by a huge crowd which remained otherwise passive. Interestingly, the only elements of ancient pageantry during the show were the King's four personal bodyguards dressed in silk pantaloons and gold embroidered gold caps.¹⁰² The whole ceremony was a display of loyalty from the state or the military to the monarchy which in return legitimated the state by the king's attending the parade and wearing the military uniform.

However, using the monarchy to promote royal nationalism can have the side effect of strengthening the monarchy when a competing view such as monarchical nationalism exists. This can be shown in the 'Consecration of the Colours of Military units'-ceremony (*phraratchaphithi truengmut thongchaichaloemphon samrap phraratchatan nuaitahan*). The monarch transforms flags of military units (colours) into sacred objects 'to show his trust in their [the soldiers] honesty and bravery, it is the

¹⁰⁰ Bank of Thailand, *Centenary of Thai Banknotes*, Bangkok 2002, p.242.

¹⁰¹ Bank of Thailand, 2002, p. 258.

¹⁰² Foreign Correspondent Club of Thailand, *The King of Thailand in World Focus*, Bangkok 1988, p.55.

honour and the centre of their soul when they go to war'. This ceremony was first introduced by King Chulalongkorn and was continued in the political nation. While statist and royal nationalisms sought legitimation for the state as leader, they also, unintentionally, supported the monarchical nation. During the ceremony, the monarch places some of his hair and a Buddha image into a small box on the flag (*thongchutathuchathipatai*). In addition, the King marks every flag post with 15 golden tacks. The top tack shows the map image of Thailand, the second is an image of the wheel of *dharma* (symbol of Buddhism), the third are his royal initials, the fourth the image of the constitution, followed by military symbols. After that, the flags are sprinkled with holy water and presented to the troops.¹⁰³ The representatives of the political nation did not recognise that this ceremony strengthened the connection between the nation and the monarchy rather than only legitimising the state and its troops. It was the King who gives the flag, it was the King for whom the soldiers go to war and it was the King who added a sacred dimension with the use of his hair. The 'nation' represented by the flag is reduced to a symbol of the King and is sacred only because of the King. The design of the flags changed over time according to the initials of the Kings.

Monuments continued to play a role in the dissemination of the idea of royal nationalism. One of the most unusual monuments in Thailand was erected in Singburi province in 1976, the *Monument of the Bangrachan Heroes (anusawari wirachonkhaibangrachan)*. Depicting a group of villagers with water buffalo and all kinds of homemade weapons screaming and attacking the Burmese, this monument was to commemorate the heroic struggle of villagers during the Burmese invasion in 1767.¹⁰⁴ It is a national myth that the villagers, although only very small in numbers, fought the foreigners to the last man. The aim of the monument was to re-create the spirit of the battle of Bangrachan and to motivate the Thai population to help the government to fight against the 'intruder' instead of joining the communists.

One memorial for the war dead in the northern province of Nan was another striking example in the struggle against foreign invaders. The *Monument for the Heroic Deeds of Civilians, Policemen and Soldiers (anusawari wirakamphonlaruen tamruat*

¹⁰³ Kromsinlapakon, *Phraratchaphithi nai ratchakan phrabatsomdetphra paramintaramaha phumiphonadunyadet sayamintharathirat borommanatbophit* [Royal Ceremonies during the Reign of King Bhumibol], Bangkok 2000, pp. 247-248. For the symbolism of hair see Firth, Raymond, *Symbols-Public and Private*, London 1973, p.294.

¹⁰⁴ Kromsinlapakon, 1998, pp.424-429.

tahan), unveiled in 1976 as well, was located in one of the most embattled areas between communist and government forces and depicts one soldier, one policeman and one civilian erecting a flagpole with the Thai national flag on it.¹⁰⁵ The government aimed to show that the province was Thai territory and all Thais were working together to defend the land even if they have to sacrifice their lives. The monument was intended to propagate that communism was un-Thai, an idea originating from the reign of King Vajiravudh but was especially emphasised under Phibun.

Other monuments of this period represented quite frequently the brother of King Rama I, Prince Mahasurasinghanat, a famous General who was crucial in the defeat of the Burmese and the unification of the country in the reign of King Taksin (r. ca.1767-1782). The main statue was erected at Mahathat temple, facing the royal plaza in Bangkok in 1979. The statue (*phraboronrachanusawari somdetphraboronraratchao mahasurasinghanat*) depicted the General standing with folded hands while offering his sword.¹⁰⁶ This could be interpreted that he swears to protect Buddhism or, in this context, the land of Buddhism, while his direction to the royal plaza indicates a dedication to the monarchy and nation. Its erection was executed on the initiative of Admiral Sa-ngad Chaloryu who led two coup d'états in 1976 and 1977 and could be seen as a personal justification for his actions and also to prove his loyalty to the King. This monument aimed to re-ignite the spirit of the fighting ancestors which was now so desperately needed in the fight against the communists.

The period of royal nationalism ended in the late 1970s. The elite group in the military and bureaucracy representing this form of nationalism was discredited. Before a new interpretation of the nation could emerge, a new ruling elite group had to establish itself first. This group rose to power in 1979 and followed in their interpretation of the nation one man- King Bhumibol.

¹⁰⁵ Kromsinlapakon, 1998, pp.419-423.

¹⁰⁶ Kromsinlapakon, 1998, pp.291-294.

Chapter 9

The Revival of Monarchical Nationalism since 1980

The political, social and economical events of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a breakdown of the dominance of the old interpretation of the nation. A new reform-orientated military power group took control of the state and was willing to provide a new vision of the nation. This thesis proposes that this vision was based on the ideas of King Bhumibol (r.1946-) who adapted the concept of the monarchical nation to the system of constitutional monarchy. The King, unlike his predecessors freed from the political elements and constraints of the state, envisioned a monarchical nation with three main dimensions: a trans-ethnic community, a self-sufficient community and a moral community. Firmly based on the traditional concept of kingship in Thai culture, the King sees his own duty as monarch to practice *dharma* and to ensure happiness and prosperity to the people in the monarchical nation. For that, the King has to provide the basic requirements (i.e. materially, theoretically, religiously, ceremonially and emotionally) to the functioning of this monarchical nation under his leadership (in intellectual terms and as a role model). King Bhumibol is actively disseminating and promoting his view of the nation with the help of ceremonies, symbols, legends and traditions. In contrast to the view of the revisionist school, I propose to see this period of Thai history clearly distinguished from the period of royal nationalism.

This chapter consists of three main parts. The first part deals with the factors causing the revival of monarchical nationalism, namely the crisis of Thai society in the late 1970s, a government providing a platform for the King to develop his monarchical nationalism and the collapse of the Thai economy in 1997. The second part looks into the activities of the King himself. The focus is on his vision of the nation and the means to disseminate his ideas, namely via royal projects, ceremonies, literature and monuments. The third part analyses the influence of King Bhumibol's monarchical nationalism on state and society. This includes state policies, the promotion of monarchical nationalism by the state, art and literature and how the general population responds to monarchical nationalism.

9.1. *The Reasons for the Revival of Monarchical Nationalism*

The Nation in Crisis

This thesis argues that the revival of monarchical nationalism in the 1980s was made possible by the fact that Thai society was experiencing a serious identity crisis combined with political and economical troubles.

The political crisis was caused by both internal and external factors. Domestically, the turmoil in the 1970s resulted in a country rife with conflicts. First, there was a ideological standoff between left and right wing-groups within the population. Second, the military was split between different factions representing conservative and progressive ideas. Third, the relationship between the King and the military was problematic with the monarch rather unwilling to cooperate. Fourth, the fight between government troops and the Communist Party (CPT) became fiercer and caused panic among many Thais. For example, a big battle raged in Petchabun province in 1980/81. The Thai army, deploying thousands of troops, struggled to win control over the mountainous area and sustained a high casualty rate.¹ In 1981, a commentator portrayed a situation of panic: “All Thais independent of their age or wealth asked themselves: ‘When will we be communists?’”² The fear was increased by the external situation in Indochina. Vietnam maintained a significant military presence in Laos and Cambodia and armed border clashes between Thai and Vietnamese troops became a daily occurrence. The Thai government perceived the Vietnamese idea of an ‘Indochinese special relationship’ as a threat to the North Eastern part of Thailand.³ Widespread fear among the political elites as well as ordinary Thais was described as ‘obsessive’.⁴ A flood of refugees from Indochina into Thailand worsened the situation.⁵

¹ McBeth, John. “The Bulldozer Invasion”, *FEER*, 8 Mai 1981, pp.26-28.

² Thak Chaloeontiarana. “Ko o. ro mo no. botkhwa phuea klom phi commionit hai lap [Ko o. ro mo no An Article to Lull the Communist Ghosts]”, *Warasan thammasat*, 1981, pp.107-109.

³ See Khien Theeravit. “The Conflict in Indochina- A Thai Perspective”, Tokyo 1988, pp.116-136. Another security hotspot was the South. See Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand*, Bangkok 1985, pp.223-251.

⁴ Girling, John. “Southeast Asia and the Great Powers”, *PC*, 1978, p.200 and Suntaree Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, Bangkok 1990, p.140.

⁵ Warren, William, *Prem Tinsulanonda: Soldier and Statesman*, Bangkok 1997, p.127. See also Funston, J. “Indochina Refugees: The Malaysian and Thai Response”, *Asian Thought and Society*, 1980, pp.221-223. A destabilising factor for the Thai state was not only the huge number of refugees (an estimated number of 550,000 between 1975 and 1979) but also 200,000 displaced Thais in the border region.

It is easy to imagine that the wish for stability and emotional assurance must have been high on the agenda of many Thais.

On the economic front, the Thai economy was performing poorly. The wide income gap between the rural and urban areas and a high inflation rate of 15-20% put a significant burden on all Thais.⁶ The economic situation continued to worsen when low foreign investment and a high account deficit caused the Thai government to ask the World Bank for aid packages in the early 1980s.⁷ The old system of state dominance of the economic sector was clearly failing and reform demands accelerated the need for a new approach to economic policy by the state.

What turned this into an identity crisis was the fact that it coincided with an expansion of the urban middle class with a strong consumption-orientation. In this context, Mulder proposed that when people are united by the market, they have little to identify with and appear cynical and non-committal about political affairs.⁸ The elections in April 1979 confirmed this view when 80% of the voters in Bangkok abstained from the election.⁹ It was a result of unattractive political alternatives: opposition intellectuals were discredited by their ultra-left leaning tendencies since the mid 1970s, no 'centrist' movement existed and the ruling military elite was still too closely connected with dictatorship.¹⁰ The political frustration of the urban population which consisted largely of ethnic Chinese was reinforced by a recurring racial discrimination against this ethnic group. The 1978 constitution and the April 1979 election, seen as undemocratic and discriminatory against Thais with alien parents, required from ethnic Chinese citizens a document-proof for their service in the armed forces in order to be entitled to vote or to run for parliament.¹¹ These election laws were later abolished but not before causing a crisis of Thai national identity among the people. A good example can be seen in a presentation in 1980 entitled "How shall we

⁶ Scalapino, Robert, "Asia at the End of the 1970s", *Foreign Affairs*, 1980, p.727.

⁷ Bowie, Alasdair/Unger, Danny, *The Politics of Open Economies*, Cambridge 1997, p.142 and Ho Kwon Ping. "Thailand Faces A Hard Choice", *FEER*, 13 February 1981, p.40.

⁸ Mulder, Niels. "The Rise and Wane of (the Ideas of) Nationalism and Citizenship in Southeast Asia. An Essay in Cultural History", Münster 1994, p.27. See also Turton, Andrew. "Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Social Consciousness", Osaka 1984, p.40.

⁹ Kershaw, Roger. "Thailand's Return to Limited Democracy", *Asian Affairs*, 1979, p.310.

¹⁰ See about the political views of the middle class in Hong, Lysa. "Twenty Years of Sinlapa Watthanatham: Cultural Politics in Thailand in the 1980s and 1990s", *JSEAS*, 2000, pp.29-30.

¹¹ Kramol commented that this discrimination was caused by the disapproval of native Thais to the rise to political power of some uneducated and wealthy Thais of Chinese origin following the 1975 and 1976 elections. Kramol Tongdhamachart. "The April 1979 Elections and Post-Election Politics in Thailand", Singapore 1979, pp.213-215. See also Prizzia, Ross. "Thailand: Elections 1979 and the 'New' Constitutions", *Asia Quarterly*, 1980, pp.111-113.

love Thailand?'. Unable to describe what this love would be, the speaker thought that it was not enough to just sing patriotic songs but she would need the feeling of being the owner of the country. Her wish to leave the citizenry [sic] when being angry with the government was caused by love and not hate.¹² As can be seen in this example, most of the frustration was connected with the political system which neither allowed real political participation nor provided an 'emotional' home.

What enhanced the crisis further was the failure of the traditional Buddhist order (*sangha*) to provide spiritual guidance to the emerging middle class. Keyes proposed that after the trauma of the political crisis of the mid-1970s, Buddhism fragmented into a diverse number of forms and this undermined the position of the established Buddhist church as the sole embodiment of religion as a pillar of the Thai nation.¹³ A series of scandals in the traditional *sangha* and increasing commercialisation of Buddhism (*phutthaphanit*)¹⁴ contributed to, at least temporary, emotional insecurity of many Thais.¹⁵

Not only the religious sphere but also the nation needed new interpretations. The long dominant visions of Thailand as a political nation could not offer a coherent ideology or provide satisfying answers about identity or loyalty. The numerous conflicts in Thai society, the identity crisis in many parts of the population and the lack of solutions motivated King Bhumibol to get involved by offering emotional reassurance and moral leadership to his people. This led to his efforts to revive monarchical nationalism at the beginning of the 1980s.

¹² Chintana Yotsunthorn. "Rao cha rak mueangthai kan yangrai [How Shall We Love Thailand?]", *Warasanwatthanathamthai*, 1980, p.10.

¹³ Keyes, Charles. "Buddhism- Fragmented: Thai Buddhism and Political Order since the 1970s", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.1.

¹⁴ This term was coined by Jackson. Jackson, Peter. "Thailand's Culture War: Economic Crisis, Resurgent Doctrinarism and Critiques of Religious of Prosperity", Paper Presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam 1999, p.1.

¹⁵ In the religious sphere, this disenchantment with the *sangha* increased the popularity of alternative interpretations of Buddhism. Most prominent was Buddhadasa, a popular monk from the South, and 'his doctrine of faith in the ethical teachings of the Buddha as well as in science, reason, modernity and democracy which has been profoundly attractive to many educated Thais and his view of Buddhism has become the dominant view among the Thai intelligentsia'. Not only Buddhadasa but also other Buddhist movements attracted followers in the hundreds of thousands. This showed a clear need for spiritual guidance which was no longer being provided by the *sangha*. Jackson, 1999, p.16.

Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda- Catalyst for Change

The influence of a king in a constitutional monarchy depends very much on the space given by the state and its representatives. Any vision of a society developed by a king would be useless unless the leaders of the state allowed him a voice, adopted his ideas and helped to disseminate them within the population. In the Thai case, the facilitating leader was General Prem Tinsulanonda who became Prime Minister in early 1980 (until 1988). He was central in the realignment of the Thai nation and nationalism away from royal towards monarchical nationalism. In the end, this move was successful because he managed to connect the desire of the majority of the people for emotional assurance, intellectual leadership and political participation with the visions of King Bhumibol. In contrast to his predecessors, Prem acknowledged the diversity of the Thai nation and the need for a new approach: “We have to accept and consider the fact that Thailand is a vast country. The people are not the same, they differ in geographical conditions, development stages, custom, economy and social conditions.”¹⁶ Prem created during his time in government the bureaucratic and legal framework necessary for the realisation of King Bhumibol’s vision of the monarchical nation.

The Background for Prem’s Policies

Prem recognised several threats which needed an urgent answer: the existing identity crisis, the threat from radical forces on both sides of the political spectrum¹⁷, the strength of the CPT and a lack of state ideology. He saw the solution in ideas of a new generation of soldiers who questioned the role of the military after the events of 1976. The two most important groups were the *khana thahan num* (Young Turks) and the *thahan prachatipatai* (Democratic Soldiers).¹⁸

The members of the Young Turks were mostly experienced frontline commanders stationed in the provinces. In their opinion, change would only occur when the state accepts and understands the existence of the problems of the people and starts

¹⁶ Sunprasankanpatthanahaengchat. “Rabop borihan kanpatthana chonnabot naew mai: hetphon lae khwamchampen [The New Administrative System of Rural Development: Reason and Necessity]”, Bangkok 1982, pp.11-12.

¹⁷ Prem attempted to incorporate right-wing leaders into his administration, for example the leader of the Red Gaur-movement, Sudsai Hasdin, who was partly responsible for the massacre in October 1976. Jenkins, David. “The Three Faces of Sudsai”, *FEER*, 9 January 1981, p.31.

¹⁸ For details of both groups see Chalermkiet Phiu-Nual, *Khwamkhitthangkanmueang khong thahan thai 2519-2535* [Political Thought of the Thai Army (1976-1992)], Bangkok 1992, pp.73-83.

to tackle the unfairness in social and economic areas.¹⁹ The second group was the Democratic Soldiers whose members consisted of military men in strategic and command positions.²⁰ They strongly disapproved Thanin's policies, which, in their view, nurtured the communist movement. Political extremism, whether represented by communism or dictatorship, meant danger for the national security. They proposed a democratic revolution (*patiwat prachatiptai*) which aimed to rebuild democracy and to create a new approach to cultural policy. The Democratic Soldiers envisioned an active role for the monarchy and not the passive role as symbol. They also saw a close connection between the cultural and the social-economic crises. If cultural problems could be solved, social and economic difficulties would be easier to tackle. Existing 'bad' foreign culture should be removed and any new foreign elements should only be accepted if there was no contradiction with Thai culture. The Democratic Soldiers demanded respect and support for Thai culture because of its status as a long existing high culture. In order to fully develop this, democracy would be needed as a base. This would include 'support for the freedom of the minorities to develop their own way of life.'²¹ The basic ideas of the Democratic Soldiers supported monarchical nationalism, an important aspect in the revival of the latter.

Prime Minister Prem, a loyal supporter of King Bhumibol, chose to break with the hard-line military solutions to tackle the problems of the country. He followed the ideas of the progressive officers because he was not only close to their group but also because of his own experience on the battlefield. During his time as Commander-in-Chief of the Second Army Region in the North East (1973-79), he emphasised the need for a political solution to the problems of the local population. In a speech in 1995, Prem gave insight into his motivation to break with the old approach: "On my second day in command, I lost 23 soldiers. I was plunged in the depths of sadness- lost for an answer."²² He recognised that communist infiltration was deep-rooted in the local population, making it impossible to distinguish friends from foes. Originally, Prem perceived the CPT as an invading enemy from outside and could not understand the local mistrust against the state authorities. Later, however, he realised that the villagers

¹⁹ Pasuk Phongpaichit/Baker, Chris, *Thailand- Economy and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur 1995, p.326.

²⁰ This part is based on Chalermkiet, 1992, pp.230-246.

²¹ Chalermkiet, 1992, p.245.

²² Prem Tinsulanonda. "Thai Experience in Combating Insurgency", <http://www.generalprem.com/Speech4.html> (accessed 16 February 2004), p.1.

felt harassed and exploited by the officials.²³ Prem decided that the first step was to win the trust of the people: “These are Thais. We can meet without fighting because we are all Thais.”²⁴ As next step, Prem envisioned the elimination of poverty by helping the villagers to help themselves. The state had the duty to support development with a good infrastructure.²⁵ When Prem joined the cabinet as Defence Minister in 1979, he attempted to expand this political approach nationwide. Together with two leading members of the Democratic Soldiers, Chavalit Yongchaiyuth and Harn Leenanond, he outlined a strategy to attack the communists by political means. After he became Prime Minister, this strategy was made government policy in April 1980. The success of the so-called Order 66/2523 was astonishing. Over the next few years, 26,000 members of the CPT defected and contributed heavily to its dissolution in the latter half of the 1980s.²⁶ This order was just the beginning as Prem’s government provided a platform for the development of monarchical nationalism and supported its revival. Prem’s policies basically continued during the following governments, especially under the Prime Ministers Chatichai Choonhavan (1988-1991) and Chuan Likpai (1992-1995 and 1997-2000). Both were former ministers in the Prem government and loyal to the monarchy.

An interesting aspect in the analysis of King Bhumibol’s role in this period is that his position in the political sphere was much stronger than in the first half of his reign despite being limited by a constitution which defined a passive position of the monarchy. Political crises in 1973 and later in 1992 transformed the King into the ultimate authority of the country when he helped to solve political stalemates. Although he was restricted by the constitution, he was able to interfere in political events after he was asked ‘by the people’ to do so. However, his biggest influence on state and society occurred during and after the financial crisis of 1997, an incident outside the political restrictions of the constitutions. As a reaction to the variety of problems caused by the financial meltdown of the Thai economy, the King became active on his own and proposed ideas of solutions. In a famous speech in December 1997, he said: “Being an [economic] tiger is not important. What is important is to have enough to eat and to live; and to have an economy which provides enough to eat and live...We have to move

²³ Prem, 1995, p.2.

²⁴ Cited in Mongkol Umpornpisit. “General Prem and National Security”, Bangkok 1998, p.36.

²⁵ Prem, 1995, pp.2-3.

²⁶ Sawang Wongsuwanlert, *Phon-ek Prem Tinsulanon: Ratthaburut khu phaendin* [General Prem Tinsulanonda: the Statesman of the Land], Bangkok 2002, p.115.

backwards in order to move forwards.”²⁷ His advice was readily accepted by a insecure population wondering which path the nation should follow to a brighter future. The post-crisis period until 2001 could be considered as the peak of monarchical nationalism under King Bhumibol.²⁸

9.2. King Bhumibol's Vision of the Nation

During his coronation in 1950, King Bhumibol made an oath of accession that is commonly translated into English as: “We shall reign with righteousness for the benefit and happiness of the Siamese people.”²⁹ While this translation is correct, it does not reflect the whole depth of the meaning of this vow. By using the term *dharma* (righteousness) King Bhumibol invoked the traditional concept of kingship. This part of the chapter will show how the King has re-interpreted the monarchical nation with the help of this concept since the 1980s. In his monarchical nation, the monarch has the duty to practice *dharma* which will bring happiness, stability and prosperity to the people. The oath also showed that King Bhumibol intended to follow the ten kingly virtues which implies an active role for the monarch beyond a pure symbolical role normally reserved for a constitutional monarch. What were the causes for such an unusual attitude towards his role?

Formative Influences

I will suggest four factors as decisive in forming King Bhumibol's world-view, his interpretation of the Thai nation and his approach to nationalism.

First, his personal background resulted in a unpretentious mind-set. His father, Prince Mahidol, dropped out of a navy career to become a doctor. After studying in the USA, United Kingdom and Germany, he worked in a hospital in Chiang Mai. His non-royal mother was trained as a midwife. After the early death of Bhumibol's father, she provided a rather 'normal' environment for Bhumibol to grow up in Switzerland. This

²⁷ Cited in Pasuk Phongpaichit/Baker, Chris, *Thailand's Crisis*, Chiang Mai 2000, p.193.

²⁸ The election of Thaksin Shinawatra as Prime Minister in 2001 lessened the influence of the King on the state significantly. Thaksin was seen a progressive and charismatic leader who could deal with the IMF on an equal basis and who promised to strengthen Thailand. Pasuk/Baker called his rise to power 'a gift from the Asian financial crisis' because the people were yearning for strong political leadership. Pasuk Phongpaichit/Baker, Chris, *Thailand's Thaksin: New Populism or Old Cronyism?*, Bangkok 2001, p.6.

²⁹ National Identity Board, *King Bhumibol- Strength of the Land*, Bangkok 2000, preface.

included attending a regular school without any privileges and the learning of several languages. The influence of his parents on King Bhumibol cannot be overestimated. His father's favourite slogan that 'the benefit of fellow human beings comes first, the benefit of our own comes second' had a tremendous impact on the King.³⁰ The result was a down-to-earth attitude which enables him to communicate directly with the people and connect with them on an emotional level. For example, he once joined a hill tribe village head in his bamboo hut for a glass of moonshine liquor.³¹ Connected with this attitude was his practical orientation. Since childhood he was interested in science and enjoyed practical work which resulted in the construction of ship models and later on of sailing boats. The King emphasised in this context a Buddhist teaching which was a guideline for him: 'happiness goes to those who do things for themselves'.³² He showed this practical side in his work as well. For example, during a long period of flooding in Bangkok, the King went on an inspection tour and 'waded over one kilometre through floodwater to observe the pumping operations, much to the surprise of the residents.'³³ I propose that this attitude was the result of the fact that he was never supposed to be King. Bhumibol was not trained in court matters and had to study for himself the court traditions and traditional concepts of kingship. He did this not only thoroughly but also interpreted the role of the monarch and therefore the duties and responsibilities of kingship in a practical way.

Second, the disregard of the ruling political elite led by Phibun towards the monarchy showed that Bhumibol had to carve out a niche for himself ("I became King when I was quite young. I was 18, and very suddenly, I learned that politics is a filthy business").³⁴ In an interview in 1982, he used the palace building as a metaphor for the dreadful condition of the monarchy caused by the neglect of the state: "The palace was crumbling down. It was just after the war and nobody had taken care of things. I had to reconstruct. I don't demolish. I put things together piece by piece."³⁵ The renovation of the palace became a symbol for the reconstruction of the monarchy itself. While the political establishment showed him the cold shoulder, Bhumibol received early on a very positive response from the people who not only gave a warm welcome to him but

³⁰ National Identity Board, 2000, pp.19-23 and Thongto Kluaimai na Ayutthaya, *Yen sira phra phra boriban* [Under the Cooling Shade of His Majesty's Protection], Bangkok 2002, p.68.

³¹ Bangkok Post. "Light Moments with His Majesty the King", Outlook, 4 December 2003, p.1.

³² Thongto, 2002, p.71.

³³ National Identity Board, 2000, p.267.

³⁴ Cited in Foreign Correspondent Club of Thailand (hereafter FCCT), *The King of Thailand in World Focus*, Bangkok 1988, p.53.

³⁵ Printed in FCCT, 1988, p.132.

also expressed their hope for a functioning and protective monarchy. In May 1946, he had his first encounter with an enthusiastic crowd when he visited Chinatown as a Prince together with his brother shortly before he died. King Ananda sought close contact with the people through royal visits. Bhumibol commented on the influence of his brother on his own style of work in 1982: “The eighth reign, my brother [Ananda], had no time to do many things. But he set up, perhaps without knowing, the new kingship. The people had somebody to look on as a symbol.”³⁶ A well-known anecdote from 1946 left a long lasting impression on Bhumibol that the people were in clear need of the emotional reassurance provided by the monarchy. After the sudden death of his brother, Bhumibol flew back to Switzerland in order to finish his studies. On his way to the airport one man was screaming: “Don’t forsake the people, Your Majesty!” King Bhumibol answered: “If the people do not forsake me, how can I forsake them?”³⁷ This dialogue is not only proof for the desire of the people to be protected by the monarchy but also a plea by the King himself that the people should not stop to support the monarchy. He saw the relationship between the monarchy and the people as symbiotic in the face of a dominant state.

Third, King Bhumibol strongly believed in the importance of the monarchy for Thailand. He saw himself in line with former monarchs who played in his eyes the central role in nation-building. To emphasise this point, the King regularly conducted ceremonies to pay respect to his ancestors. An example was a ceremony at the beginning of the bicentennial celebration of Bangkok on the 2nd April 1982. In this ceremony, Buddha-statues belonging to the royal ancestors were positioned on the barge-like throne underneath the nine-tired Great White Umbrella of State. The urns containing the ashes of the royal ancestors (the eight kings of the Chakri dynasty, five queens and other princes such as his father) were placed on the Royal Throne. During the ceremony, the King kneeled down and prayed to his ancestors.³⁸ With this ritual, King Bhumibol connected his rule with the past reigns. He reminded the living to be grateful to the efforts of the ancestors who he saw as role models. His conviction of the legitimacy of monarchy also motivated him to study traditional concepts of kingship which he aimed to uphold according to suitability. Therefore, it was logical that King Bhumibol was a staunch anti-communist in the period between the 1960s and 1980s. He

³⁶ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, p.53.

³⁷ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, p.39.

³⁸ Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, *Royal Ceremonies for the Rattanakosin Bicentennial*, Bangkok 1982, p.2.

was convinced that ‘the enemy invades with an intention to destroy everything we have, including the Thai nation’.³⁹ Despite different opinions on how to deal with the insurgency, he supported the military in its fight against the CPT by visiting troops in the battlefield and wounded soldiers in hospitals. He presided over and sponsored the cremations of fallen soldiers and policemen, mostly wearing an army uniform.⁴⁰

Fourth, King Bhumibol believed in the value of culture and saw traditions as the source of strength of the Thai nation. He was, however, aware that a strict upholding of traditions could have a negative effect on the people. In order to maximise the benefit for his vision of the monarchical nation, he did adapt them to modern requirements: “I think that the Thai people understand the use of tradition. Traditional doesn’t mean old-fashioned. Even the most modern people have tradition... Slowly. Evolution- looking at the good things of the past. Traditions perpetuated and transformed. That is the lesson: We take old traditions and reconstruct them to be used in the present time and in the future.”⁴¹ With this background, King Bhumibol increasingly disapproved of the development strategy of successive Thai governments favouring rapid modernisation. An example was his statement in 1976 that a strategic road without any other benefits would be a waste of time and money. In his opinion, military objects had to be combined with social, economic and political programmes. Only that would result in a permanent solution to the communist threat to the nation.⁴² The King also saw the development strategy as the cause for an increasing decay of values in Thai society. After the communist threat eased in the 1980s, his focus shifted to the dangers of becoming dependent through unsuitable development: “The publicised danger is communism. But the greed of our own people is more dangerous. If we clash too much among ourselves it will destroy us and we will become the slaves of what I call the ‘new imperialism’, be it communist or dictatorship or whatever.”⁴³

These four factors constituted the frame for King Bhumibol’s way of thinking. He adapted the traditional duty of the monarch to modern times. This can be seen in an interview from 1980, where all traditional elements of the duty of a king are mentioned. It could be seen as a blueprint for his vision of a nation: “The first thing is security, that is the security of the people, the Thai people have to fight for their freedom, for their

³⁹ Samnakngan khanakammakan wathanatham haeng chat, *Phraratchadamrat nueangnai okat wankhuenpimai* [The Royal Speeches on the New Year Occasion], Bangkok 1995, p.2.

⁴⁰ The Nation. “Majesties Preside Over Cremation Ceremony”, 26 March 1982, p.1.

⁴¹ Cited in FCCT, 1988, pp.131-132.

⁴² The Nation. “Communist Incursions and Govt’s Counter Strategy”, 4 February 1982, p.5.

⁴³ Cited in FCCT, 1988, p.108.

independence, so the main thing is to be a good general, and then after that, when the country is more settled is to have law and order, law and administration, and after that we must have enough food to eat, enough facilities to have a good home, to have shelter. And then we must have the social order and more things of the heart, that means we must be good people, so that we won't have disorder because people who are good don't create much trouble. So we must have religion. But the king is the leader of the religion also."⁴⁴ The fight against communism was clearly at the focus of his interest at that time. However, after this conflict was over, the next step was to expand the administration and rule of law to all corners of the country (e.g. in areas controlled by the CPT) and development could begin in earnest to create prosperity. The last step was to create a moral community which would ensure a peaceful and stable society.

The 'official' beginning of the revival of the monarchical nationalism can be dated to 31 December 1981 when the King held his New Year speech: "Every Thai should think of how our ancestors have founded the country which is now Thailand. Facing difficulties and great dangers for many periods, they have accumulated progress and goodness and maintained it until today. That the Thai have been able to keep our freedom and stability until today, because we have a strong conscience that we are of the same race and the same country and we enjoyed freedom throughout history. This resulted in the strong unity to fight for the freedom and Thainess...If we want to maintain the country and this progress for the future, we must have the same mind as our ancestors. We have to be aware of our nation and Thai race first and then set up a righteous and strong mind to think only of the benefit of the country...Anyone who has duties must hurry to fulfil them with responsibility until achieving success. We must preserve the stability of the Thai [society] by cooperating like relatives who mean good to each other. When the Thai people can do all this in unison, the work of everyone will combine successfully to produce the enduring progress of the country that we wish."⁴⁵ The elements of this speech became the guideline for many government policies and were reflected in many official declarations and speeches. The best proof for the revival of monarchical nationalism, however, was the number of royal projects which skyrocketed after 1980. While in the period between the 1950s and late 1970s only

⁴⁴ BBC Written Archives, 5 January 1980, p.18.

⁴⁵ Samnakngan khanakammakan wathanatham haeng chat, 1995, pp.29-30.

around 100 royal projects were started, the number of projects reached the 3,000 mark in 2000, a clear indicator that the state actively promoted King Bhumibol's ideals.⁴⁶

An analysis of his activities and speeches showed that King Bhumibol interpreted the monarchical nation within three main dimensions which ensure that the nation is stable, peaceful, happy and prosperous: the nation as a trans-ethnic, self-sufficient and moral community.

The Monarchical Nation as a Trans-ethnic Community

The proponents of the political nation and the state associates citizenship with legal documents such as birth certificates and membership in the nation with the acceptance of the dominant Thai culture. However, the advocates of the monarchical nation historically interpreted Thai identity in a trans-ethnic way which meant that Thainess was not seen as a closed cultural system but open to minority cultures as well. King Bhumibol, well studied in history, took up this concept for his interpretation of the monarchical nation in order to propagate unity within the nation-state and therefore to stabilise Thai society as a whole. Thailand as nation-state is home to several ethnic groups, however, King Bhumibol's ideas are most evident in his attitude towards two ethnic groups which are generally regarded as living on the fringes of Thai society: the hill tribes of the North and the Malay-Muslims in the far South.

Until the 1950s, hill tribes lived in virtually non-administered areas where there was no taxation, conscription, education, registration or even a definition of their legal status.⁴⁷ However, visits of King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn to some villages demonstrated that the monarchical nation did include them although the nation-state could not reach most of them. This 'white area' of the nation-state was filled when the government banned opium production and enforced this policy at the end of the 1950s. This inclusion was solely motivated to counter problems the hill tribe people 'created' for the nation-state. This resulted in a negative attitude to the hill tribes by the state, a feeling shared by many ordinary Thais.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The projects fall in to following categories: education, environment, public health and welfare, soil, water resources and irrigation. National Identity Board, 2000, p.198.

⁴⁷ Manndorf, Hans, *The Hill Tribe Program of the Public Welfare Department*, Bangkok 1965, pp.2-5.

⁴⁸ See for example the comments of Interior Minister Prapas Charusathien in 1966. Prapas portrayed the mountainous area as a dangerous zone and called the government 'tolerant' as long as the hill tribes would be loyal to the King and law abiding. Prapas Charusathien, *Thailand's Hill Tribes*, Bangkok 1966, pp.3-8. See also Renard, Ronald. "The Monk, the Hmong, the Forest, the Cabbage, Fire and Water:

Contrary to the government, King Bhumibol accepted the hill tribe people as his subjects and thus they became member of the monarchical nation: “The hill tribe maintains its own standard of behaviour and culture which is not less refined than ours... Our findings confirm those of distinguished anthropologists and sociologists that the hill tribe villagers had been found perfectly human, that as a result, they are subjected to covetousness, anger and ignorance no less than we are.” The King went on to give his ultimate approval to the hill tribes: “These qualifications are enough for us to accept them and for them to contribute- or to be allowed to contribute- to the improvement of the community.”⁴⁹

The King visited the hill tribe areas and started royal projects just like he did in other parts of the country. For example, he proposed not an immediate destruction of poppy fields in the fight against opium but a gradual one to ensure the survival of the hill tribes. King Bhumibol also opposed the use of force against villagers. In a speech in 1969, he criticised the government openly and made it indirectly responsible for the strength of the communists: “We do not wish to have communist terrorists in Thailand. But we are creating them when we point at self-governing villagers who are orderly and democratic, charging them with having trespassed on reserved forestland and driving them out. How should they know that those areas are in a conservation category, since there have been no governmental officials in the area to tell them so?”⁵⁰ The King and his family chose to go a different way in dealing with the hill tribes. Since the mid-1960s, Royal Projects in that area were financed by the King’s own funds. Keyes called the royal family the ‘patrons of the hill tribes’ because they visited many villages, opened schools, sponsored rice banks and gave assistance to people in need.⁵¹

Besides being successful in reducing opium production, the King was praised in the media in the 1970s ‘for his efforts to overcome discrimination they [the hill tribes] face from many Thais’.⁵² The development efforts of King Bhumibol were aimed not only at the economic livelihood of the hill tribes but also to give them a sense of belonging.

Incongruities in Northern Thailand Opium Replacement”, *Law and Society Review*, 28, 1994, pp. 662-663.

⁴⁹ Cited in Bangkok Post. “In Honour of His Majesty the King’s Accession to the Throne, June 9 1946”, Supplement, 9 June 1971, p.14.

⁵⁰ Cited in Morell, David/Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand*, Cambridge 1981, p.68.

⁵¹ Keyes, Charles. “Cultural Diversity and National Identity in Thailand”, Cambridge 1997, p.219.

⁵² The Nation. “King’s Role Paramount in Reducing Opium Crop”, 2 March 1974, p.1.

Even after decades of royal patronage and a generally improved image of the hill tribes, the competing views of the nation still affect their standing in Thai society. It is mainly the state bureaucracy which has problems in accepting the idea of a transethnic Thai identity. In 2000, state officials sanctioned the destruction of hill tribe plantations by lowlanders arguing that forests were under threat from hill tribe people. A local Thai leader did not count the hill tribes as Thais: “This land is ours. We were here before. Hill people are not our people. If they would be Thai they would live down here in the lowlands.”⁵³ Despite these problems, the royal family continues to protect the hill tribes and clearly shows a different understanding of membership of the Thai nation than political nationalists. A recent case involved a Karen [hill tribe] man who was arrested as a suspect in connection with a deadly attack on a school bus in 2002. After one and a half years in prison, he was acquitted but still faced deportation to Burma because he had no documents to prove that he was born in Thailand as he claimed. His serious illness while in prison prompted Queen Sirikit to take him under Royal patronage and to pay for his medical treatment. The immigration authorities then offered him a registration as alien worker. He refused the offer until witnesses finally certified his birth in Thailand.⁵⁴

As for the Muslims, although the recent (since 2004) upsurge of violence in the southern provinces falls outside the timeframe of this thesis, it shows the importance of monarchical nationalism for the stability of the country. When the influence of the monarchical nation is lessened (as happened under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra), divisions in Thai society can begin to show themselves. In the monarchical nation, the monarch has the duty to act as patron of all religions not only Buddhism. King Bhumibol followed in this regard the examples of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn and aimed to gain the trust of the Muslims over time. Besides visiting many mosques and talking to community leaders, he asked the Education Ministry to include Islamic Studies in the curriculum, supported translations and interpretations of his speeches into the local language when in the South and encouraged his children to learn Malay. One Member of Parliament of that region described the trust to the King as follows: “50 years ago, the people had the pictures of [Malay] sultans at home because they regarded Thailand as a foreign country. This changed through the *barami* of the

⁵³ Chang Noi. “Peoples, Trees and Nationalism”, 18 September 2000, <http://www.geocities.com/changnoi2/chanthong.htm> (accessed 29 June 2003).

⁵⁴ Sanitsuda Ekachai. “Waiting for Another Miracle”, Bangkok Post, Outlook, 11 August 2004, p.1 and 8.

King, especially after the construction of the [Southern] palace in 1973 and the yearly visits of the royal family. Attitudes of the people changed and the pictures of sultans were replaced by pictures of the King. They felt it was ‘their King’.”⁵⁵ The personal interpreter of the royal family in the South, Dilok Siriwanlop, explained that the King emphasised that when one works with people, the first thing is to understand them, the second thing is to reach them and the last thing is to develop them. It also would take time to build a good relationship and trust between each other.⁵⁶

This approach differs from the government as can be seen from this statement of the then Defence minister Thammarak Israngura who was angry about the refusal of Muslim leaders to cooperate in 2004: “Are they in Thailand, or not? Did they separate from the country already, or not? If it is not separated yet, they are still Thais. When they refuse to cooperate then we have to bring them to cooperate with us. Vice-Premier Chaovalit [Yongchaiyuth] went there already and spoke pleasantly. I am good in suppressing but not good in communicating with them.”⁵⁷ It can be stated that King Bhumibol is able to reach and integrate ethnic minorities better than proponents of the political nation who prefer a uniform culture. In February 2004, Thai Muslim leaders urged all Muslims to uphold the monarchy as the highest institution in the Kingdom. The highest Islamic representative criticised Prime Minister Thaksin for threatening punishment on Islamic schools for not flying the Thai flag and therefore committing treason and went on: “Our nation has more than 63 million people with different languages and different cultures. There is no need to talk about separatism because of these differences...His Majesty the King should be the centre of our heart and soul...[he] wanted to be close to us, his Muslim brothers and sisters.”⁵⁸ It is obvious that the Muslim representative pledged loyalty to the King and not to the government. Muslims do feel they are members of the monarchical nation but decline, at least partly, membership in the Thai political nation.

These case studies confirm the trans-ethnic nature of the monarchical nation. In a speech in April 1987, the King emphasised the ability of integration and tolerance as the strength of the Thai nation: “In the past 40-50 years the whole world pointed out

⁵⁵ Chumsak Nararatwong, *Saifon nuea paknam bangnara* [Rainfall over the Mouth of the Bangnara River], Bangkok 2003, pp.29-30 and 159.

⁵⁶ Matichon. “Khon chaidantai ‘rak nailuang-ratchini’ [The People of the Southern Border Region Love the King and Queen]”, 4 January 2006, p.33.

⁵⁷ Cited in Sorakon Adunlayanon. “Thaksin Shinawatra bin baeb yiao thi phaktai input phitphlat output bitbiao [Thaksin Shinawatra Going to the South, Wrong Input and Deviated Output]”, *Matichonsutsapda*, 2004, p.12.

⁵⁸ The Nation. “Muslims Pledge Loyalty to the King”, 17 February 2004, p.1 and 4.

that Thailand shouldn't be able to survive. Thailand is in a dangerous place and weak. I have told the foreigners that Thailand will be fine, mostly because of our spirit of generosity. No matter in what occupation or status, the Thais have the spirit of generosity which is the quality of the land. When talking about Thais it means Thais. The people who come to live in this land which is Thailand, no matter where they are from, Middle East, America, Europe, China or India, when they come to Thailand, they become Thais. This [generosity of the Thais to accept foreigners] is what we call the quality or the wealth of the land which enable us to survive."⁵⁹ The monarchical nation is a trans-ethnic community where ethnicity has no meaning because it is the individual and not group who does his duty and contributes to the prosperity and stability of the nation.

The Monarchical Nation as a Self-sufficient Community

The economic sector generally plays a significant role in nationalism. Nakano gave as reason that not only the state as political system but also the nation as a cultural phenomenon influences the modes of the economic system. He went on to argue that economic nationalists prefer to mobilise the resources of the nation as a whole and spread the benefits beyond the boundaries of class. In other words, they avoid economic policies which would undermine the unity of the nation. The goal is not autarky but national unity, autonomy and the augmentation of national power. Special attention is paid to the agricultural sector because technological progress itself is not seen as the ultimate goal of economic nationalism.⁶⁰

From this perspective King Bhumibol is an economic nationalist. He sees the monarchical nation as a self-sufficient community. In the centre of this self-sufficient community is the agricultural sector with the farmer, in King Bhumibol words, as 'the backbone of Thailand'.⁶¹ If the backbone is in crisis, the whole country will be affected. This would result in instability, conflict and unhappiness for the people. To avoid this situation, the King has continuously worked to improve the livelihood of the rural population. There is no better description of King Bhumibol's economic nationalism

⁵⁹ Bhumibol Adulyadej, Phrabatsomdetphraparamintharamaha, *Pramuan phraratchadamrat lae phraboromrachawat thi phraratchathan nai okat thang thang pi pho so 2530* [Collections of Royal Speeches Given on Several Occasions in 1987], Bangkok 1988, p.149.

⁶⁰ Nakano, Takeshi. "Theorising Economic Nationalism", *Nations and Nationalism*, 2004, pp. 220-226.

⁶¹ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, p.104.

than Smith's observation that 'nationalism is a philosophy of collective self-help for those who share the same history, and its critique of society is a critique of social and political dependence'.⁶² The King does not favour industrial development because this would increase Thailand's dependence from the outside world and would affect the moral character of the people. He also offers self-sufficiency as the suitable direction for the Thai economy⁶³: "Producers should emphasise continuous agricultural production and should not engage in large industrial business, because a business at this scale usually depends on imported materials and technology from abroad to use in production. Instead we should consider using what we have in our country first. This way, we do not have to rely on foreign countries like at present. Achieving a self-sufficient economy will help to reduce the import of raw materials and parts, and the practice of dependency that has grown for almost 20 years and been ignored by the people. This external influence has implanted the impression of materialism in Thai people, who absorb foreign products so unconsciously and rapidly that it has become a stimulus for the Thai economic downturn."⁶⁴

Self-sufficiency, therefore, would make Thai society less vulnerable to world market developments and stabilise the country: "What others may say does not matter, whether they say that Thailand is old-fashioned or that we are outdated. Anyhow, we have enough to live on and to live for, and this should be the wish and determination of all of us to see self-sufficiency in this country...Other countries are in turmoil because they are looking for the most power, the most progress in economy, industry or ideology."⁶⁵

It is the strong belief of King Bhumibol that Thailand can progress and make its people happy because of its inner strength and knowledge which would provide the necessary foundation for self-sufficiency to succeed. He warns against the tendency of state officials to regard traditional know-how of the people as inferior against modern, western technology: "It is the people who have knowledge. They have done it for many generations and they did it well. They have intelligence. They know in what place they

⁶² Smith, Anthony, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1979, p.29.

⁶³ The King acknowledged that his economic ideas are not entirely suitable for modern times but aims to transform a quarter of the Thai economy into a self-sufficient one. Nidhi Watiwutthipong, "Phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua kap sethtakit thai [The King and the Thai Economy]", Bangkok 2002, p.138.

⁶⁴ Cited in Munnithichai Pattana. "Self-Sufficient Economy", 1999, p.58.

⁶⁵ Somporn Thepsitha, *Kandoen tam roiphayakonlabat sethakitpopiang chuay kae panha khwamyakchon lae kanthucharit* [Following the Royal Footsteps: Sufficiency Economy Helps to Solve the Problems of Poverty and Corruption], Bangkok 2003, p.27.

should practice agriculture and in what areas they should preserve. What is lost is due to those who have no knowledge and no experience in this field. Then they forget that, life is possible by practicing agriculture in the correct way.”⁶⁶ In a speech in 1986, the King emphasised the important role of Thai culture as source for inner strength: “We should continue to help ourselves with our own strength and our own wealth. For a long time, we Thais have helped create stability and progress in every aspect by our own strength therefore we should continue to help ourselves with our own strength and our own wealth because nowadays Thailand is still full of resources, both natural and human which is very useful for the prosperity and stability of the country.”⁶⁷

Following the ideal that the monarch in the self-sufficient nation is leader, teacher and advisor to his people, King Bhumibol emphasises that he only shows a way to solve problems and provides the basic requirements but that the people themselves must work to make change real: “Better give them a rod and teach them how to fish but don’t give them fish...You must give them the minimum which includes water to drink and water to irrigate the fields. These basics are still lacking in the villages and that is why we must give them.”⁶⁸ His approach to development is therefore twofold. First, he initiated a vast network of royal projects which aim to provide basic needs such as knowledge or water in order to develop the rural society on a local level. Second, he developed an agrarian theory of self-sufficiency, called ‘New Theory’, to be applied by the individual farmer.⁶⁹

Dahm argued that the mobilisation of the masses is not achieved by concepts imported from outside but by a revival of norms and values, which people considered as a part of their identity in particular times of crisis.⁷⁰ Accordingly, King Bhumibol was successful in motivating the people to accept his projects and to feel as members of the monarchical nation because he allowed the participation of the people in the process of

⁶⁶ Cited in Samnakngan khanakammakan kansueksahaengchat, *Naewthang songsoem phumpanyathai nai kanchatkansueksa* [Guidelines for the Promotion of Thai Wisdom in Education], Bangkok 1999, p.1.

⁶⁷ Bhumibol Adulyadej, Phrabatsomdetphraparamintharamaha, *Pramuan phraratchadamrat lae phraboromrachat thi phraratchathan nai okat thang thang pi pho so 2529* [Collections of Royal Speeches Given on Several Occasions in 1986], Bangkok 1987, p.475.

⁶⁸ Cited in Davies, Derek. “A Right Royal Example”, *FEER*, 23 January 1986, p.23.

⁶⁹ In 1995, King Bhumibol formulated the New Theory and was based on his opinion that conventional farming of the Green Revolution was not only unsustainable but also caused environmental degradation. The reason was that conventional agriculture was developed in the West taking into account western resources and infrastructure availability. The King saw the New Theory as a detailed guideline for sustainable agriculture for small plot holders in a Thai environment. National Identity Board, 2000, pp.333-352. For the application of the New Theory in practice see Jitpol Sittipraneed. “The New Theory at Wat Mongkol Chaipattana: Illustration of the Thai Path”, *Munithichai Pattana*, 2003, pp.25-31

⁷⁰ Dahm, Bernhard. “Cultural Traditions and the Struggle for Nationhood in Asia”, Kota Kinabalu 2001, p.9.

decision making and implementation of activities. The King acknowledged the need to understand differences and to respect local cultures. He reckoned that “development must take account of the local environment in terms of the physical environment, the sociological environment and the cultural environment. By the sociological environment, we mean certain characteristics and ways of thinking which we cannot force people to change. We can only suggest.”⁷¹ The King, believing in the inner strength of Thai culture, argued that “all people, whether city folk or rural folk, with much or little education have a free will. Their thoughts and satisfaction are their own. People do not like to be forced. In addition, they have their own ways and customs and act in their own unique way.” He saw himself therefore in the role of an advisor who presents his ideas to the villagers: “If they like it they will do it, but if not then never mind.”⁷² King Bhumibol wanted development to follow his slogan ‘explosion from within’. Public hearings on a local level have to discuss proposals and only when a unanimous agreement of all people concerned (village and state agencies) is reached, then the King acts and implements the project.⁷³

Why does the King choose such a local approach? In 1972, he said: “When local areas prosper, the country will thrive and progress as everybody works together and helps each other. When opinions are voiced, they are listened to with reason, which is the way to live together as a nation.”⁷⁴ In 1991, he combined his motivation in the slogan ‘Our Loss is Our Gain’: “We are willing to put money and effort which may seem useless, but in the end we may be able to reap the fruits directly or indirectly. This is the very duty of the government. If we want the people to be prosperous, we have to invest in development projects, which will involve budgets of hundreds or many thousand of millions. This means a loss of money; however, if the project is a good one, the people will very soon gain benefit from it.”⁷⁵

The following example shows that an investment into a royal project on grassroots level does not only benefit the local people but also pays dividends in political terms for contributing to the stability of the nation: a village in the North East was under communist control since 1965 when a series of development projects, including a royal project for food processing, were started in 1981. The life of the

⁷¹ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, p.201.

⁷² Cited in Royal Development Projects Board, *Concepts and Theories of His Majesty the King on Development*, Bangkok 1997, pp.253-254.

⁷³ Cited in Royal Development Projects Board 1997, p.34.

⁷⁴ Cited in Royal Development Projects Board, 1997, p.90.

⁷⁵ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, p.191.

villagers began to improve because a can factory provided double income by buying vegetables and fruits from the farmers. Phongsatorn stated that the behaviour of officials also changed, especially the ones connected to the royal projects which gave the villagers a feeling of belonging. The improvement was seen immediately when in the election of 1983 98 % of the villagers decided to vote and express therefore their acceptance of the Thai state.⁷⁶

The Monarchical Nation as a Moral Community

King Bhumibol repeatedly stressed the importance of moral aspects of being a nation as for example in this speech from 1987: "...all that you have done for this special occasion [his 60th birthday celebration], not only show your good intention to create beneficial things for the country and the people as a whole but also shows that the Thai still have a full unity which is one of the important moral principles (*khunatham*) that the people who live together must practice constantly...All Thais should understand the real meaning and value of unity and have a strong intention to do their duty in cooperation with others with honesty, diligence and sincerity, so that every success that each of you has created will combine into the progress, stability, happiness and prosperity of our country."⁷⁷ The key word in this passage is *khunatham* or moral principle. It is important to point out that moral principles or moral has to be understood in its Thai context. Accordingly, this chapter understands *moral* as a direct translation of *khunatham*. This term consists of the word *khun* (good, virtue, benefit) and *tham* (*dharma*, righteousness). A moral community is therefore to be understood as a community which has *dharma* resulting in benefits. For the individual, King Bhumibol adapted this definition accordingly to different kind of professions and situations. For example, everybody should follow five elements during work: 'five moral attitudes which help you to succeed in work: belief, perseverance, consciousness, determination and wisdom'.⁷⁸ The emphasis on perseverance in the context of work is important because it is one of the key aspects of self-sufficiency. King Bhumibol does not only

⁷⁶ Phongsatorn Satchachonlapan. "Muban sidaeng nai adit yuk khamsang samnaknayokratthamontri thi 66/2523 [A Former Red Village in the 66/2523 Era: Political Trust and Political Efficacy?]", *Warasansangkomsat*, 1987, pp.91-101.

⁷⁷ Cited in Khanakammakan amnuai kan chatngan chalemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua, 1989, p.(9).

⁷⁸ Cited in Kanok Wongtra-ngan, Naeo phraratchadamri dan kanmueang kanpokkhong khong phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua [King Bhumibol's Concept of Politics and Government], Bangkok 1988, p.234-235.

connect his ideas to create a coherent vision of the nation but also stresses the responsibility of the individual to follow the ideals in order to create a moral community as a whole.

9.3. *The Dissemination of Monarchical Nationalism*

Even as late as 2003, an official report showed the obvious limitations of print media as disseminators of nationalistic views. Only 61.2% of the population read books while 66% read newspapers. However, these figures were misleading because an analysis of the occupations reveals that parts of the population, namely farmers and labourer did not read regularly (65.6% of male farmers, 70.7% of female farmers and 57.9% of labourers).⁷⁹ Therefore the attempt to use print media to reach large parts of the population and to disseminate ideas of nationalism could not be very successful. King Bhumibol followed his ancestors in employing ceremonies, literature and monuments for their richness of symbolism and his use of tradition appealed to the emotions and beliefs while connecting the present with the past. One pre-eminent means, however, was the use of royal projects.

Royal Projects

From his personal contact with the people during his frequent visits to the countryside, the King initiated royal development projects which were not only his way of directly helping the people but also an effective means to spread his concept of the monarchical nation.

The royal family supported the development of a moral community directly. For example, any village visit of King Bhumibol or Queen Sirikit included a trip to the local temple where they donated medicines and books about *dharma*. One project in the Northern province of Chiang Mai is especially worth mentioning. This project, started by the Queen in 1982, aimed to promote values and to develop that community in material and moral terms. The Queen donated temple murals that depicted a moral lifestyle according to *dharma*. When the murals were finished, she visited the temple and invited the whole community to the temple to pray with her. She set as targets for

⁷⁹ Samnakngansathithaengchat, *Rai-ngan kansamruat kanannangsue khong prachakon PhoSo 2546* [Survey Report On Reading Habits Of the Population, 2003], Bangkok 2003, pp. 5-7.

this project that the villagers should live their lives ethically, should live together in peace, should strengthen Buddhism and should serve as role models for the development of the nation. The values propagated were unity, patience, diligence, order, prudence, sufficiency-mindedness, to know what one should do and what not and to know what is right and what is wrong. Transferred to a national level, this would result in a 'nation having a people full of morality, benevolence, diligence and unity'.⁸⁰ The King himself set up another 'moral' royal project, namely the *Phra Dabot School*, in 1975. This school accepted crippled war veterans and poor students who could not afford to attend occupational schools. The name *Phra Dabot* referred to a legendary hermit who taught people skills to earn a living. Students had to repay the lessons by looking after the teacher. King Bhumibol intended to use this concept to create morally sound human beings: "The main aim of this project is not only to provide an education but also to prevent the poor from becoming hooligans by learning morality from their teacher at the same time."⁸¹

A good example of the nation as self-sufficient community could be found in one of Bhumibol's earliest royal projects. The *Thai-Israel Rural Development Project* started in Phetchaburi province in 1964. It comprised of a land development project in which 120 families were given a plot of land each with a cooperative owning the land jointly. King Bhumibol's idea was to establish a self-help philosophy that would be undisturbed should individuals be forced into selling the land. Therefore, farmers could not sell the land but were allowed to pass it to their children. The King commented: 'it is highly important to encourage and help people in earning their living and supporting themselves by adequate means, because those who are gainfully employed and self-supporting are capable of contributing positively towards higher levels of development'.⁸²

Royal projects representing the ideal of a trans-ethnic community had started already in 1952. In the beginning, projects such as the opium-replacement scheme and the introduction of schools in distant villages concerned mostly the hill tribe people in the North and aimed 'to provide a permanent and sustainable lifestyle for the hill tribes'.⁸³ Later on, royal projects also included Muslim communities in the South.

⁸⁰ Samnakngansoemsangkalakkhongchat, *Chak fa...su din* [From Sky..To Earth], Bangkok 1983, pp.171-177.

⁸¹ Cited in Thongto, 2002, pp.109-110.

⁸² Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, pp.132-134.

⁸³ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, pp.139 and 208.

It is interesting to note that King Bhumibol repeatedly emphasised the role of the individual and his part to ensure the functioning of the nation as a moral, trans-ethnic and self-sufficient community.

Ceremonies and Festivities

King Bhumibol was well aware of the effects of ceremonies on the general population. In an interview in 1967, he stressed his seriousness about ceremonies and indicated that he would not hesitate to adapt traditional ceremonies to spread his ideas: “If I am bored at any time with ceremonies and ritualistic functions, then it is my fault. I want to do the things which are good for Thailand, to build within the people the will to study and work for Thailand. Now, about eight years ago [1959], I decided to do something about our Buddhist customs. Three times a year, I go to the temple of the Emerald Buddha, and I bathe the Buddha and change his raiment. I used to take the water and sprinkle it on the officials who accompanied me to the temple- it becomes holy water. It was an honour for those officials. Then I decided that the people outside, the ordinary people, would believe that the water would bring them goodness, and they would look upon the ceremony as more than an honour. For if you believe the water will do good for you, it will do good.”⁸⁴

Another example for his adaptation of ceremonies is the revival of *Phraratchaphiti charotphranangkhan raeknakhwan* (the First Ploughing Ceremony). First recorded in the Sukhothai period, this ceremony aimed to ask for a good harvest and to predict it. It was abolished in 1935 and reintroduced partly in 1940 but limited to Buddhist chanting while the ploughing ritual itself was not included. In the ceremony, fully revived by King Bhumibol in 1960, a ‘ploughing lord’ appointed by the monarch ploughed the field and sowed rice seeds blessed by the Buddhist chanting. After the ceremony, people were allowed entry to the field to collect the seeds which are believed to guarantee a good harvest. Apart from presiding at the ceremony himself, the King added a new element in 1962 when the rice seeds used were produced on his experimental farm at the palace. With the help of this ceremony, he was able to distribute new varieties of rice (for example high yielding varieties) to farmers without having to fear resistance to new technology. To ensure a broad distribution, he went on

⁸⁴ FCCT, 1988, p.52.

to send this rice to every province where the governor supplied his farmers with the King's rice 'to bring happiness and welfare to them'.⁸⁵ With the help of this traditional ceremony, King Bhumibol was able to reassure the farmers with a good harvest⁸⁶ and spread new technology at the same time. By receiving the rice, every farmer from all corners of the country was directly connected with the monarchy and all other farmers in the realm. They become part of the monarchical nation under the leadership of the King.

The Use of Literature

Literature was employed to disseminate monarchical nationalism. King Bhumibol wrote several books in order to propagate moral values. In 1994, he published a translation of *A Man Called Intrepid* by William Stevenson, a spy book set in the Second World War. He gave as reason for his choice of the book that it 'shows the power of unity and the self-sacrifice of individuals to create that unity'.⁸⁷ Another famous book was *The Story of Thongdaeng* where he demonstrated the value of gratitude and loyalty on the example of his own dog. Probably the most important work of the King was *The Story of Mahajanaka*.

Based on a Buddhist story, *The Story of Mahajanaka* was translated from Pali into English first and later published in the form of a Thai-English book in 1996. The first, hardcover edition with a selling price of 50,000 Baht (ca 1,250 US-Dollar) per copy was targeted at the more affluent people in the kingdom. A paperback edition in 1997 still failed to reach the masses because, in the King's own words, it was 'difficult to read due to the sophisticated language used and the surreal illustrations led to various interpretations'. It also had a rather high selling price of 250 Baht. The King decided to publish in 1999 an easy-to-read and economically priced cartoon version which 'a nine-year-old said that this version could be understood'. The King stressed his intention in the preface that 'everybody should be able to own a copy'.⁸⁸ Indeed, the book sold

⁸⁵ Kromsinlapakon, *Phraratchaphithi nai ratchakan phrabatsomdetphraparamintaramahaphumiphonadunyadet sayamintharathirat borommanatbophit* [Royal Ceremonies during the Reign of King Bhumibol], Bangkok 2000, p.31.

⁸⁶ About the importance of the ceremony for farmers see Van Esterik, Penelope. "Royal Style in Village Context", Leiden 1980, pp.104-105.

⁸⁷ Cited in National Identity Board, 2000, p.64.

⁸⁸ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, *The Story of Mahajanaka- Cartoon Edition*, Bangkok 1999, p.(4).

600,000 copies in a few weeks, an unparalleled success in a country where most books achieve only a few thousand copies per edition.⁸⁹

The Story of Mahajanaka is based on one of the *jatakas*, the 547 stories about the previous incarnations of Buddha. As a traditional form of Buddhist literature used by monks to teach religion, the *jataka* was diffused both through written and oral tradition and thus flexible to be adapted to suit different situations and times. The most important of the *jatakas* are the last ten incarnations before Buddhahood which reflect the ten perfections (*barami*), each of the ten associated with one particular perfection. The *Mahajanaka jataka* is the second of the ten and focuses on the perfection of perseverance.⁹⁰

The fact that King Bhumibol had chosen this *jataka* is interesting in several aspects. First, King Bhumibol fulfilled the traditional role of a king to support Buddhism through literature. Almost all monarchs of the Chakri dynasty wrote by themselves or ordered court poets to compose Buddhist texts and *jatakas*. Second, with his aim 'to help everybody to have an idea for a noble way of life'⁹¹, King Bhumibol used the *jataka* in a didactic function and so followed the traditional way of teachings by monks. The openness to interpretation of the *jatakas* allowed him to adapt them to his needs. Although King Bhumibol was telling a modern story, he put much effort in disguising it as traditional. Even in the English translation (made by himself), he tried to keep the traditional spirit of a *jataka* by mixing old and new language. This can be interpreted that he wanted to keep the sacredness of the literary form.⁹² Third, the choice of this specific *jataka* was unusual. The most popular *jataka* in Thailand is *Vetsandon jataka* which depicts the last life before Buddhahood and is therefore regarded as the most important *jataka* of all.⁹³ The topic of perseverance must personally be of utmost importance to King Bhumibol. The analysis of this story can give an explanation to this importance.

The story of *Mahajanaka* goes as follow: *Mahajanaka* is the only son of King Ariththanaka whose younger brother, Polajanaka, is viceroy. One day, a courtier

⁸⁹ Asiaweek. "A Very Special Monarch", 3 December 1999, pp.44-53.

⁹⁰ Santikaro Bhikku. "Retelling 'The Mahajanaka Jataka' for a Society in Crisis: His Majesty the King's Creative Adaptation of a Traditional Buddhist Form", *Thoughts*, 1999, pp.46-49.

⁹¹ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1999, p.(4).

⁹² Bhumibol succeeded in this goal, as can be seen in the comment of a newspaper that the King gives *dharma* to the people. Thai Rath, "Phramahajanaka [Prince Mahajanaka]", 8 June 1996, p.7.

⁹³ This does not imply that the *Mahajanaka jataka* is unknown in Thailand. Kingshill reported a sermon on 'perseverance' in a village near Chiang Mai in 1953. Kingshill, Konrad, *Kudaeng*, Bangkok 1960, pp.251-252.

convinces the king that his brother is plotting against him. Polajanaka is imprisoned but the chains fall from his hands and feet to confirm his innocence. His popularity allows him to raise an army against the king and to seize the throne for himself.⁹⁴ After the king dies, his queen, pregnant with the protagonist, flees. When Mahajanaka turns 16, he aims to regain the throne for himself and goes on a trading trip to Suwarnaphum to finance his coup. When his ship capsizes in a storm, Mahajanaka is the only passenger to survive because he prepares for the disaster while other passengers just pray to the gods for help. Swimming in the water for seven days without seeing a coastline, the goddess Mani Mekhala who is impressed by his perseverance, rescues him and brings him to the capital of his native kingdom where in the meantime King Polajanaka is dying. He ordered that the throne should be given to the one who can please his daughter, solve several riddles, string the heaviest bow and discover the Sixteen Great Treasures. Unable to find a candidate to meet these requirements, the courtiers send out the Grand Chariot which only a king can ride on. The chariot finds Mahajanaka who can ride it immediately and passes all other tests. Mahajanaka is crowned and marries the princess. From that time on he follows the ten kingly virtues and reigns with righteousness for 7,000 years.⁹⁵

King Bhumibol composed *The Story of Mahajanaka* strictly along the plot of *Mahajanaka jataka* but he made slight adjustments to some characters, dialogues and episodes to suit his aim to promote a monarchical nation as a moral community with the king as leader. For the King, the theme of ‘perseverance’ is not only a Buddhist and kingly virtue but also an essential foundation for the progress of the individual and the nation as a whole: “when anybody practises perseverance physically or morally, with the aim that he wants to go there, he wants to learn this and that, these actions are sure to be crowned with success; it follows that the practice of pure perseverance is an absolute necessity.”⁹⁶

In the scene where the goddess Mani Mekhala notices Mahajanaka in the midst of the ocean and wonders why he keeps on swimming for so long, he explained his struggle for survival with the concept of perseverance. Perseverance would make the individual strong and independent: ‘any individual who practices perseverance, even in

⁹⁴ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, *The Story of Mahajanaka*, 2nd edition, Bangkok 1997, pp.6-15.

⁹⁵ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, pp.70-117.

⁹⁶ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.90.

the face of death, will not be in any debt to relatives or gods or father or mother'.⁹⁷ The reward for such an individual 'who does his duty like a man' would be 'the Ultimate Peace in the future'.⁹⁸ The explanation goes on: "anyone who knows for sure that his activities will not meet with success, will be doomed; *if that one desists from perseverance in that way, he will surely receive the consequence of his indolence* [the emphasised part is an addition to the original by King Bhumibol]. Some people in this world strive to get results for their endeavours even if they don't succeed. You do see clearly the results of actions, don't you? All the others have drowned in the ocean, we alone, are still swimming and have seen you hovering near us. As for us, we are going to endeavour further to the utmost of our ability; we are going to strive like a man should to reach the shores of the ocean."⁹⁹ In this scene, perseverance as one of the moral principles is presented as the basis for progress. Everybody has to do his duty to the fullest though unable to see an immediate result because in the long term he individually will be rewarded and the community will benefit from it as well.

King Bhumipol's idea of a moral nation is further revealed in his comments on King Mahajanaka's trip to the royal park. At the entrance, Mahajanaka sees two mango trees. One is fruitless while another is fully loaded with extremely sweet fruits. After tasting the fruits, the king planned to take some home on his way back. However, when he leaves the tree, people come and pick all the fruits: "The others, from the viceroy to the elephant mahouts and the horse handlers, seeing that the King had already eaten the tasty fruit, all picked some and had their fill. Still others who came later, used sticks to break down branches; the tree was stripped of leaves; the tree was uprooted."¹⁰⁰ On his return, Mahajanaka is very sad about what happened. While the original *jataka* ends with Mahajanaka's decision to leave his throne in search of nirvana, King Bhumibol let the king realise that 'he had to fulfil his worldly duties first to be able to achieve supreme tranquillity more readily'.¹⁰¹ King Bhumibol commented: "Mahajanaka should not leave the city on a quest for supreme tranquillity as in the original version... Mithila's [the city] prosperity had not yet reached an appropriate peak, because everyone 'from the Viceroy down to the elephant mahouts ...all live in the state of ignorance. They lack wisdom as well as knowledge in technology; they do not see the

⁹⁷ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.70.

⁹⁸ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.80.

⁹⁹ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.89.

¹⁰⁰ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.125.

¹⁰¹ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.(10).

essence of what is beneficial, even for their own good. Therefore, an institution of universal learning must be established.”¹⁰² King Bhumibol ends his altered story with the establishment of that institute.¹⁰³

Some observations should be made on King Bhumibol’s version of *The Story of Mahajanaka*. First, there are parallels between Mahajanaka and King Bhumibol himself. The name *Mahajanaka* can be translated as ‘Great Father’. This ‘name’ together with his story mirror the ideal role of a Thai king as seen by King Bhumibol himself. The monarch as father has to fulfil his duty to work for the benefit of his people to be a Great King in this life before he can realise nirvana. Further, Mahajanaka was born outside his kingdom and a son of a widow, both situations King Bhumibol knew well from his own life.

Second, King Bhumibol made many detailed changes in order to help the reader of this Buddhist legend identify the protagonist and the setting with real persons and environment. For example, the King drew a map of the sea journey Mahajanaka undertakes.¹⁰⁴ His destination, *Suwarnaphum* [Golden Land] is located on the place of Thailand. Its capital was named by King Bhumibol as *Devamarajanagara* which translates into the Thai name for Bangkok: *Krung Thep* or City of Angels. Another example is the name of the institute for learning which King Bhumibol named it *Bodhiyalaya*.¹⁰⁵ This is a reference to Wat Pho temple in Bangkok which is regarded since the period of King Rama III as ‘the home’ of Thai knowledge and wisdom. By keeping the original Buddhist locations and original sounding names but transferring them to Thailand, King Bhumibol achieved a sense of authenticity of the story without losing the possibility for the reader to connect the story with modern Thailand.

Third, a rather odd scene was added by King Bhumibol in order to warn against the incautious use of modern technology. In this scene, the owner of a new automatic fruit harvester apologises to Mahajanaka for accidentally uprooting the tree. Mahajanaka is not angry but teaches nine methods to revive the tree instead. What followed is a detailed description of these methods.¹⁰⁶ King Bhumibol not only made this episode as a warning against the belief that modern machines are always the best thing but also used the lesson of Mahajanaka as a way to disseminate agricultural

¹⁰² King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.(10).

¹⁰³ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.141.

¹⁰⁴ Printed in King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.54.

¹⁰⁵ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.141.

¹⁰⁶ King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1997, p.133.

knowledge to the readers and to teach them about sustainable economy and the preservation of natural resources.

In *The Story of Mahajanaka*, King Bhumibol acknowledged a strong sense of Thai individualism which is rooted in Theravada Buddhism. It teaches that everybody has to strive for himself to achieve nirvana. In regard to nationalism, this individualism results in a very loose sense of belonging to a political mass nation. As the King is interested in the development of a stable and sustainable nation, he appeals to everybody to fulfil his duty individually in order to help the nation. In doing so, he did not directly bind the individuals together in a mass nation. His idea promoted in *The Story of Mahajanaka* is that of a moral community which consists of the sum of all individuals but one which is not horizontally but vertically connected. This gives the king utmost importance because his duty is to safeguard and provide the basic conditions for this moral community. His efficiency and ability to fulfil this duty depends on his *barami*. However, he also depends on the individual to do their duty as well. If the individual fails to do so, the king himself is also not able to maintain the moral community. Therefore, there is a symbiotic relationship between the monarch and the individual. This moral community is not imagined but is emotionally felt through the effects of the *barami* and physically embodied by the king.

In reference to Mahajanaka's explanation of perseverance, it could be proposed that each person to fulfil the duty to the nation must realise his individual duty. Only then can the nation prevail and persist eternally, analogous to the Ultimate Peace of the individual in the Buddhist context. King Bhumibol also pays tribute to individualism in the economic sphere as well. As in the moral community, the King considers the economically sustainable community as the sum of self-sufficient people. King Bhumibol provides all necessary basic requirements for the individual to become self-sufficient. Besides his theoretical guideline of the 'New Theory' and his practical help through the Royal Projects, he also fulfils his duty religiously and ceremonially (*Raeknakwan*, for example).

Monarchical Nationalism As Reflected in Monuments

Since the 1990s, the biggest change came with the revival of monuments directly connected with the image of the monarchy as a benevolent father who cares for the well-being of his children.

One of the most outstanding examples of the modern monarchical monuments is the King Rama VIII Bridge (*saphan phraram 8*) over the Chaophraya River in Bangkok. The bridge was opened with a state ceremony in presence of the King himself on Chulalongkorn Day [23 October] in 2002.¹⁰⁷ The whole idea of the bridge and its design mirrored the direction of national identity towards the monarchical nation. In 1993, King Bhumibol initiated the construction of a new bridge to tackle the city's notorious traffic problems. He set out not only the routing but also named the bridge after his elder brother, King Ananda Mahidol. It was decided in the initial design concept that the whole project was to be a 'royal memorial' and a 'royal gift', thus resulted in a technical feat with a span of 300 metres and became a showcase for Thai art. The theme of the bridge was taken from the royal seal of King Ananda, symbolising his name. In this seal, *Phra Phothisat* [a future Buddha] sits on a lotus blossom with the right foot on a small lotus blossom (symbolising 'land') and the left hand holding an unopened lotus flower. The crystal palace in the background symbolises radiating light. The lotus flower in the seal is presented in a glass observation deck with metal frames in the shape of an ornamental closed lotus. The 165 meter high pylon has its shape based upon the crystal palace of *Phra Phothisat*. The anchor span for the stay cables is decorated in the lotus blossom motif using four different materials to stand for the unity of the populace from all four regions of Thailand.

Further design features are traditional *bai sri* ceremonial trays at the foot of the bridge as a symbol of the high reverence for the monarchical institution. Part of the bridge project is also a park and museums, one to commemorate the King and one for regional arts and crafts.¹⁰⁸ The bridge can be interpreted as a symbol of the King's ideal of Thai national identity, representing the monarchy and Thai culture in a modern world. On the occasion of the opening of the bridge, the Thai Post Office issued a special series of stamps featuring four 'royal' bridges. This ensured that the meaning of the bridge as a monarchical monument was disseminated all over the country.¹⁰⁹

Very popular as monuments of the monarchical nation are public parks. One example is 'The Princess Mother Memorial Park' (*Uthayan Chaloemphrakiat Somdechphrasrinakarintharaboromratchonnani*) located on the other side of the

¹⁰⁷ Sayamrat, 26 September 2001, p.12.

¹⁰⁸ Manas Kowanich, *Saphan phraram 8 – an nueng ma chak phraratchadamri* [Rama VIII Bridge under the Royal Initiatives], Bangkok 2002, pp.47-118.

¹⁰⁹ "Maihet stamp thai [Remarks on Thai Stamps]", *Warasan Trapraisaniyakon*, 2004, p.21.

Chaophraya River in Thonburi.¹¹⁰ It was built on King Bhumibol's initiative in 1993 to restore an old building in the area where his mother lived in her childhood. The park is in the middle of a densely populated area and aims to give the visitor a respite from the heat and noise of the surrounding city. Besides being a recreational zone, the park also functions as a place for carrying out rituals and activities.¹¹¹

The park was opened to the public a few years ago and includes two exhibition halls. The first one is about the life of the Princess Mother and shows the history of the local community which is depicted by the official brochure as a 'multi-racial and multi-religious society living together in perfect harmony'.¹¹² The second hall focuses on the Princess Mother's activities and conduct. Further, a full-scale model house of the Princess Mother, very simply furnished, gives the visitor the impression that she was a modest person living like an ordinary Thai. Central in this park, however, are two elements that elevated the whole area to become an important monument of monarchical nationalism. A big bas-relief in sandstone portrays on one side the development and welfare activities of the Princess Mother, including her 'flying-doctor' service to remote parts of the country. On the other side, the relief shows a traditional procession of Northern people to celebrate and honour the Princess Mother. The second element is a central plaza, regularly used for concerts with free admission, overlooked by an octagonal pavilion with a life-size statue of the Princess Mother. The statue shows the Princess Mother in a benevolent pose, looking at the people whom she gave this park to enjoy and relax. In return, almost every visitor pays respect to her statue. Generally, the park management organizes activities which are aimed to provide useful knowledge, including occupational training and cultural and traditional handicraft.¹¹³ The royal *Chaipattana* foundation commented: "This park should be considered a historical park, so that future generations will be able to reminisce about the 'Princess Mother of the Thai people' who performed her activities for the benefit of the people. It will also be a symbol of His Majesty the King's most devoted kindness to provide a place where everyone can come and relax."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ A similar project but on a much larger scale was finalised recently in the east of Bangkok: 'The Royal Park of King Rama IX' (*Suan Luang Ro 9*).

¹¹¹ Munnithichaipattana. "The Park in Commemoration of Her Royal Highness the Princess Mother", *Munnithichaipattana*, 1996, p.57.

¹¹² The Princess Mother Memorial Park, Bangkok no date, p.6.

¹¹³ The Princess Mother Memorial Park, no date, p.14.

¹¹⁴ Munnithichaipattana, 1996, p.61.

King Bhumibol's use of monuments to promote monarchical nationalism followed the example of his royal ancestors such as King Chulalongkorn who built hospitals and King Vajiravudh who founded a university.

9.4. Influences of the Monarchical Nationalism on State and Society

This monarchical nationalism was highly successful in penetrating not only the Thai state but also the society. The following part will have a look into state policies, art and literature in order to demonstrate the position of the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia towards monarchical nationalism. At the end, proof for the popularity of monarchical nationalism within the general population will be presented.

Monarchical Nationalism As Reflected in State Policies

The acceptance of the ideals of King Bhumibol's interpretation of monarchical nationalism by the state was best reflected in these three examples: The *phaendintham/phaendinthong* national development guideline from 1985, the National Education Plan from 1999 and the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006).

A declaration regarding the guiding ideology for Thai politics was issued on 5 May 1985 and could be seen as Prime Minister Prem's description of the revived monarchical nationalism: "The fact that Thailand has a king 'who rules the land with *dharma*' is indeed the *bun* (merit) of the people because your *barami* has protected our heads so that the Thai people can live with happiness...For 39 years, Your Majesty [King Bhumibol] always followed your oath [at the coronation], your ideology is a valuable ideal; it is like a light that leads the way to develop the country to prosperity. Therefore, the government asks for your permission to make your oath as an ideology to create Thailand as land of *dharma*, the Golden land. We are confident this will be an excellent way to follow because we have you as the leader of our nation who has led us the way already."¹¹⁵ Prem declared the country as *phaendintham* (the land of people who have *dharma* and good culture) and *phaendinthong* (a land full of resources and

¹¹⁵ Khanakammakan chatphim nangsue pramuan sunthoraphot (eds), *Pramuan sunthoraphot phanathan phon-ek prem tinsulanon nayokratthamontri 2528* [Collected Speeches of Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda, 1985], Bangkok 1986, pp.18-19.

economically prosperous). Combined, stated Prem, it meant this land of Thai was a land of moral, social and economic prosperity.¹¹⁶

The National Identity Board (NIB) published extensively about this new 'national ideal: the royal intention'. In its explanation, the NIB argued that Bhumibol's oath was most important. The King intended to build Thailand into a happy and prosperous country, to make Thailand the 'Land of Dharma' and the 'Golden Land' for the Thai people. The King was also a role model and intellectual leader whom all Thais should follow. Accordingly, the government introduced the program 'Ideal of Land of Dharma and Golden Land' in order to develop the people, the villages, communities and nation. This program aimed to create the 'Land of Dharma and Golden Land' as a present to King Bhumibol for his two celebrations, the first one being the anniversary of 40 years on the throne (1986) and the second one his 60th birthday (1987). This ideal land would only be possible when the people develop not only materially but also spiritually, especially regarding morality, happiness, peacefulness, order, and economic security. In order to achieve this, the people must follow the ideals of King Bhumibol: honesty, discipline, thrift and diligence. In addition, the people should know how to sacrifice themselves for others, to have a sense of unity, responsibility, be aware of health issues and be open minded for development.¹¹⁷

The other two plans regarding education and self-sufficiency express and directly refer to King Bhumibol's stress on traditional values and their reflection in a self-sufficient economy. Central to the two plans is the emphasis on 'local wisdom' (*phumpanya*) which is defined as 'knowledge, ability and skill of the Thai which comes out of their experience in the process of selecting, learning adjusting and teaching in order to use it to solve problems and develop the way of life of the Thai to be in balance with the environment and suitable to each period of time'.¹¹⁸ Local wisdom is the 'root of original knowledge of the region and Thai society and therefore is the foundation for the development of necessary knowledge to make Thai society international with dignity'.¹¹⁹

The Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan was most explicit in reflecting the ideas of King Bhumibol who was directly involved in the writing of the

¹¹⁶ Khanakammakan chatphim nangsue pramuan sunthoraphot, 1986, p.18.

¹¹⁷ Khanakammakanekkalakkhongchat, "Udomkan sangsan phaendin thai hai klaipen phaendintham phaendinthong [The Ideology to Transform Thailand into the Land of Dharma and the Golden Land]", Bangkok Bangkok 1987, pp.30-33.

¹¹⁸ Samnakngan khanakammakan kansueksahaengchat, 1999, p.19.

¹¹⁹ Samnakngan khanakammakan kansueksahaengchat, 1999, p.3.

plan and granted royal approval. The plan stated: “The 9th Plan adopts the philosophy of economic sufficiency bestowed by His Majesty the King to his subjects as the guiding principle of national development and management.”¹²⁰ It included a strong nationalistic message: “At the national level, the philosophy is consistent with a balanced development strategy that would reduce the vulnerability of the nation to shocks and excesses that may arise as a result of globalisation. ‘Sufficiency’ means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, and incorporates the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks.” The values propagated by the monarchical nation were directly implanted: “It is essential to strengthen the moral fibre of the nation so that everyone, particularly public officials, academics, business people, and financiers adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. A balanced approach combining patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence is indispensable to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socio-economic, environmental, and cultural change occurring as a result of globalisation.” The plan also criticises the current behaviour of many Thais who ‘have not been sufficiently selective and prudent about adopting or adapting to foreign cultures’.¹²¹ This led to ‘cultural domination by western countries’ and ‘the adoption of superficial and materialistic lifestyles which caused a decline in morality and other social problems’.¹²² However, with the return to the inner strength of Thai society and the acceptance of a sufficient economy, Thai society will be “developed, economically, socially and politically, based on self-support and self-reliance: highly resilient even when exposed to the forces and risks of globalisation. Society will be caring and united, and proud of its cultural heritage.”¹²³

These examples of state plans show that the era between 1980 and 2000 was- at least ideologically- the era of monarchical nationalism. King Bhumibol was the intellectual leader and the state cooperated by implementing some ideas of the monarch in its policies. An example for a direct impact of the King’s concept on state policy was the royally initiated development projects. Contrary to the royal projects, these projects were only proposed by the King but financed and implemented by the state bureaucracy. In 1981, the Royal Development Projects Board (RDPB) was introduced by Prem. This

¹²⁰ National Economic and Social Development Board (hereafter NESDB), *The Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006)*, Bangkok 2001, p.i.

¹²¹ NESDB, 2001, p.i.

¹²² NESDB, 2001, p.10.

¹²³ NESDB, 2001, p.iv.

department in the Prime Minister's office was directly responsible for work concerning royal development projects which were coordinated from design to completion. Thousands of these projects were implemented and dealt mostly with agriculture, animal husbandry, irrigation, soil management, fishery, occupational training to rice banks and buffalo banks.¹²⁴ The King emphasised that these projects were the result of co-operation between him and the state: "To solve many problems, for example the traffic problem, I thought about it myself but the others helped thinking and implemented it. In other words, I think 10%, the others think 90%."¹²⁵ An example for such a royal initiated project was the 'Waste Water Treatment Project' in Sakonnakhon province where the King proposed to treat waste water by natural processes with inexpensive technology. This project was implemented by the RDPB using the King's ideas as a guideline.¹²⁶ Even Prime Minister Thaksin whose version of the Thai nation was different from the King adopted some ideas of Bhumibol for his own government. For example, Thaksin started a 'War on Drugs' in 2003 after the King called for a drug-free nation.¹²⁷

The Promotion of Monarchical Nationalism by the State

Ceremonies and Festivals

With the full revival of monarchical nationalism in the 1980s, state-orientated ceremonies lost their importance while celebrations focussing on the monarchy became larger. Activities connected to royal events were conducted across the whole country. Highlights of these celebrations were normally ceremonies around the important date. This policy began in 1982 with the Bangkok bicentennial celebration. Heading the organisational committee, Prime Minister Prem stated the underlying purpose of the celebrations was 'to glorify the achievements of the Chakri dynasty and the Thai nation'.¹²⁸ Following this credo, the preface of the official publication wrote:

¹²⁴ National Identity Board, 2000, p.150 and pp.165-168.

¹²⁵ Speech December 1996. Source: <http://kanchanapisek.or.th/speeches/1996/1204.th.html> (accessed on 7 August 2004).

¹²⁶ Royal Development Projects Board, 1997, pp.122-130.

¹²⁷ Pasuk P./Baker, Chris, *The Business of Politics in Thailand*, Chiang Mai 2004, p.254.

¹²⁸ The Nation. "Bicentennial Blues", 28 March 1982, p.11. In addition, the government saw the festival as an opportunity 'to revive and promote Thai culture'. The Nation. "Interior Ministry Sets Cultural Revival Days", 26 March 1982, p.6 and The Nation. "Cultural Offensive Gets Into Full Swing", 30 March 1982, p.4.

“Throughout the 200 years of the Bangkok period, the kingdom has been consolidated and steered through adverse circumstances by members of the Chakri dynasty. In an attempt to express and demonstrate public gratitude to the Chakri kings, HM Government, joined by all Thai people, has organised the Rattanakosin Bicentennial Celebration on a nationwide basis...The highlights of these celebrations are the royal ceremonies between 4th and 21st April 1982. They were held in accordance with ancient court traditions, which, with only slight modifications in keeping with times, were consequently revived and preserved in the process.”¹²⁹ The celebrations were a firework of court rituals and pageantry. Buddhist and Brahmin rituals were attended by the King and his family and in many cases connected with the nation via the participation of the people. For example, King Bhumibol paid homage to the official founder of Bangkok, King Rama I, at a monument on the 6th of April. At exactly the same time, monks in every temple in the country chanted prayers, connecting every part of the kingdom with Bangkok and his monarchical ruler.¹³⁰ On the next day, King Bhumibol paid tribute to *Phra Sayam Thewathirat*, the guardian spirit of the monarchical nation introduced by King Mongkut, which was put on public display. The official publication commented: “King Bhumibol granted the rare opportunity to the general public to personally pay tribute to the Lord Protector of Siam, for although the deity is universally worshipped, his image had almost never been seen by the general public.” The statue was on display for public viewing for almost one month but the period had to be extended because ‘people from all walks of life and all corners of the kingdom flocked to the Grand Palace to pay homage to this most sacred guardian of the nation and ask for his blessing’.¹³¹

Other ceremonies included trans-ethnic elements such as the blessing of the King by Chinese and Vietnamese monks and a visit of the Crown Prince to Chinatown, where the Chinese community organised a project called ‘Peace and Happiness Under the Sovereign’s Protection’. The highlight of the activities in Chinatown was a procession of portraits of all eight former kings in order to reflect ‘the loyalty and

¹²⁹ Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, *Royal Ceremonies for the Rattanakosin Bicentennial*, Bangkok 1982, p.i.

¹³⁰ Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, 1982, p.124.

¹³¹ Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, 1982, p.136.

appreciation for the Chakri kings, past and present, for having granted them shelter and protection throughout the two hundred years'.¹³²

Another grand ceremony to promote monarchical nationalism happened in 1987, when the state organised the 60th birthday anniversary of King Bhumibol. On his birthday (5th of December), the same prayer was chanted all over the country at exactly the same time: "He rules the land with righteousness for the progress of the country, the people and the religion. He never thinks about the obstacles, dangers and troubles for him. He has strong intention to perform the royal duty with perseverance and the strength of his endurance and benevolence. He loves the people like a father loves his children...When it is cold he gives warmth and when it is warm he gives water...When he goes to places with suffering, the suffering is gone because of his power, like the rain in the hot summer...He is firmly in *dharma*...He is the foremost Buddhist...Because of his power, kindness and grace, the unity, happiness, peace and progress happen to all the Thai people in every place in Thailand forever..."¹³³

This prayer combined almost all elements of monarchical nationalism, depicting the king as leader who has *barami* from being righteous, caring, protective and supportive. The *barami* of the king was also stressed by Prime Minister Prem who explained that this *barami* was the cause of the love of the people for their king: "...You [King Bhumibol] closely share the suffering and the happiness with the people in order to extend your *barami* over them and to get rid of their suffering and create peace and happiness for the people...His [the King's] development project result in progress of the countryside and prosperity of the land...This causes the real love and a sense of belonging towards their birthplace...the world has accepted that Thailand under your *barami* is a land of peace, progress and prosperity...We feel proud that we have a King who is highly in *dharma* and therefore we would like to give the title 'the Great' to you while you are still on the throne just as 80 years before, the people gave this title to King Chulalongkorn while also on the throne."¹³⁴ By comparing King Bhumibol with King Chulalongkorn, Prem exalted not only King Bhumibol's position on par with the most beloved and respected king in modern Thai history but also

¹³² Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary, 1982, p.182.

¹³³ Cited in Khanakammakan amnuai kan chatngan chalemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua, *Raingan kantittam lae pramoenphon kanchatngan chaloemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphraparamintaramahaphumiphonadunyadetmaharat nueangnai warokatmahamongkon chaloemphrachonmaphansa 5 rop* [Report on the Evaluation of the Organisation of the Ceremonies on the Occasion of the 60th Birthday of His Majesty King Bhumibol], Bangkok 1989, p.(7).

¹³⁴ Cited in Khanakammakan amnuai kan chatngan chalemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua, 1989, pp. (11), (28) and (33).

confirmed the revival of the monarchical nation. The King was once again the real leader of the nation.

The celebrations aimed to disseminate the glory of Thailand which has long prospered, the glory and great merit of the King, to persuade the Thais to feel gratitude for his kindness and follow in his footsteps, and to construct public sites beneficial for the nation, religion and the people.¹³⁵ Besides the activities on the birthday itself, a whole series of royal, secular, religious and other activities were organised. Special attention was given to the possibility of the people to participate in events such as public appearances of the King 'to give the masses the chances to pay respect' or mass ordinations.¹³⁶

For this study, the celebrations in 1987 are especially interesting because the government ordered a poll afterwards to receive a feedback of the organisation. Although the numbers might not reflect the exact sentiments of people asked about a criticism-sensitive issue like the monarchy, they still give a clear trend. 83% of the population were aware that their villages, districts or provinces had activities connected with the celebrations. 91% of the population said that they participated in one way or another in projects or activities, mostly by Buddhist merit making for the King, giving donations or attending exhibitions. The poll found out that 97% of the population agreed that the celebrations would have a positive impact on their intention to be a good and moral person. 96% would try to abandon social vices and 97% saw a positive impact on the revival of arts and culture. The same number said that they had an increased awareness about the preservation of Thai identity and patriotism, even 99% saw increased unity within the people. The final question about their love and sense of belonging to the glory of the nation answered 98% positively.¹³⁷

Banknotes and Stamps

The state promotion of monarchical nationalism can also be seen in banknotes and stamps.

¹³⁵ Khanakammakan amnuai kan chatngan chalemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua, 1989, p.1.

¹³⁶ Khanakammakan amnuai kan chatngan chalemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua, 1989, p.1-3.

¹³⁷ Poll results in Khanakammakan amnuai kan chatngan chalemphrakiat phrabatsomdetphrachaoyuhua, 1989, pp.83-87.

A banknote series issued in the 1990s was designed to ‘make the activities of the Chakri dynasty kings known’.¹³⁸ Monuments of kings were used to transmit certain messages. For example, the back of the 100-Baht-banknote featured the monument of the Kings Rama V and VI at Chulalongkorn University ‘for their activities in the promotion of education’.¹³⁹ The 1000-Baht-banknote showed King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit ‘performing their activities for the benefit of their people, with the Krungchin Waterfall, Nan Fon Saen Ha and the Bhumibol dam as supplementary elements’.¹⁴⁰ Next to the picture is the oath of coronation by Bhumibol, reminding the observer that the king vowed to rule with righteousness. This motif was changed slightly in a new issue in the mid-1990s, when the King was shown with the royally-initiated Pa Sak Chonlasit Dam in Saraburi province and a scene of agricultural activities under the royal New Theory.¹⁴¹ Instead of his oath, an extract from a royal speech in 1994 about the dam was printed: “The problem of drought, water shortage and floods will be much lessened. I understand that the problem will be probably reduced by 80 percent. People numbering in the hundreds of thousands will be happier resulting from the Pa Sak and Nakhon Nayok projects.”¹⁴²

As for stamps, the motifs represented Thainess and the Thai nation in the 1980s.¹⁴³ For example, the stamp for Children’s Day in 1988 showed two schoolchildren in a *wai khru* (pay respect to the teacher) ceremony while the background was filled by a Buddha statue with two national flags beside it.¹⁴⁴ The same year also saw a special stamp to commemorate a century of *Siriraj* hospital and King Chulalongkorn, a model case for monarchical nationalism. An extensive coverage of the longest reign celebration of King Bhumibol also came out in 1988. Twelve special stamps featured Bhumibol in full dress, the royal regalia and the different thrones.¹⁴⁵ By 1998, the monarchy was the most frequently featured motif on Thai stamps. The stamp for the Red Cross Society depicted Queen Sirikit for the first time. On the Thai Heritage Conservative Day, a series of stamps were issued showing ancient sites. Another stamp commemorated the state visit to Europe by Chulalongkorn. Bhumibol’s work was honoured by a stamp with the *Bhumibol Dam* to celebrate the anniversary of irrigation.

¹³⁸ Bank of Thailand, *Centenary of Thai Banknote, 1902-2002*, Bangkok 2002, p. 280.

¹³⁹ Bank of Thailand, 2002, p. 282.

¹⁴⁰ Bank of Thailand, 2002, p. 282.

¹⁴¹ Bank of Thailand, 2002, p. 302.

¹⁴² Bank of Thailand, 2002, p. 312.

¹⁴³ Vichit Ewitwong, *Handbook of Thai Stamps and Postal History*, Bangkok 2001, p.49.

¹⁴⁴ Vichit Ewitwong, 2001, p.72.

¹⁴⁵ Vichit Ewitwong, 2001, p.72.

The effects of state policies would have been limited, if other sectors of the intelligentsia, for example artists and writers, had not been supportive for the vision of Thailand as a monarchical nationalism.

Monarchical Nationalism As Reflected in Art and Literature

Leoussi proposed that the visual arts, especially painting and sculpture, are crucial vehicles of cultural nationalism, affirming the ethno-cultural roots of human existence. Works of art do become visual symbols of the nation, agents of national integration and regulations. She argued further that national art is not an invention of elites bent on creating new forms of human association and orientation which they call 'national', in the sense of all embracing, homogenous and integrative of a whole society. Rather national art is the work of cultural elites whose aim is to organise, streamline and standardise and, in this way, 'modernise' pre-existing ethnic identities and solidarities. The aim of nationalising cultural elites is not to invent but to revive, express and develop. Leoussi, therefore, defined *national art* as art made by artists consciously inspired by their own, ethno-cultural heritage of symbols, memories, myths, values, traditions and national environment, either in the form of their art, or in its content, or in both aspects of their work.¹⁴⁶ Although the impact of the works of many Thai artists on the masses can hardly be estimated, the analysis showed that there was a broad movement among intellectuals to support the ideas of the monarchical nation which should create a significant influence on the population.

The development of a crisis in Thai society was a process which started decades earlier but only came to the forefront in the late 1970s. Interestingly, artists were among the first ones who reflected on the growing tensions and began asking questions about Thai identity as early as the 1950s. The push by Thai governments for modernisation began in earnest when Phibun allied himself with the USA in the Korean War. The influx of US funding for projects such as the construction of highways accelerated not only the expansion of the central government to become a daily reality even in remote corners of the kingdom but also induced cultural change more directly and rapidly than in the traditional process of selective adaptation. In this context, Meyer put the argument forward that modernisation in a society becomes more and more universal. It

¹⁴⁶ Leoussi, Athena. "The Ethno-Cultural Roots of National Art", *Nations and Nationalism*, 2004, pp.144-145.

dissolves traditions and undermines the original source of identification and orientation. Identity is then created mostly with the help of distinction from the 'Other', with the result that cultural identity becomes politically defined.¹⁴⁷

The first Thais to reflect on modernisation and to reject westernisation were artists. They sought a return to 'Thainess' which had to be newly defined. The vanguard of this movement was Angkarn Kalayanapong (b.1926), a poet and painter, who was influenced in his work by a lengthy stay in Ayutthaya where he copied murals and made architectural designs. In 1957, he wrote the poem 'The Art of Ayutthaya' in which the fallen heroes were resurrected to re-enact their heroic deeds. Angkarn saw in the fall of Ayutthaya the occasion to reflect on both the greatness and the weakness of the Thai nation. He concluded that the present-day Thais had an inferiority complex because they did not have the experience of physically living with the past in modern cities. Angkarn blamed this situation on modernisation which was nothing else than westernisation. He accused the Thai leaders and their technocrats to be 'Westerner scum'.¹⁴⁸ Longing for an idyllic 'Thai' past, Angkarn dismissed the modern city as rotten and was sure that authentic Thainess could only be found in the countryside:

“'Thailand' applies only to Bangkok.

The country belongs to the forgotten Siam

Which simply does not count any more,

So steeped are the city people in their filthy pursuits.”¹⁴⁹

In a period when Thai art was very much influenced by Western styles and techniques, Angkarn was the first artist to experiment with traditional Thai elements in his paintings.¹⁵⁰ He used characters from Thai mythology and mystical plants, symbols such as the Bodhi tree, demi-gods and Buddha. They were placed in the context of a contemporary vision of the Buddhist cosmos. An analyst, J. Hoskens, praised the work of Angkarn with following words: “No other painter of his generation has expressed so brilliantly and so clearly a quality that is Thai and timeless.”¹⁵¹ However, in the 1950s,

¹⁴⁷ Meyer, Thomas, *Identitäts-Wahn*, Berlin 1997, p. 67.

¹⁴⁸ Chettana Nagavajara. “The Sense of the Past in the Poetry of Angkarn Kalayanapong”, Bangkok 1986, pp.18-26.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Chettana, 1986, p.25.

¹⁵⁰ Most artists studied with an Italian professor at the only art university in Bangkok and then went on to Europe to further their studies. National Committee for Organizing the Celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne, *Rattanakosin Art: The Reign of King Rama IX*, Bangkok 1996, p.99.

¹⁵¹ Hoskens, John, *Ten Contemporary Artists*, Bangkok 1984, p.12.

'Thainess' was a term in flux and Hoskens comment must be categorised as retrospective and projecting a later definition on to the past.

In the 1960s, the subject of culture received a more prominent position in debates. Magazines such as the *Warasan Wattanathamthai* (Thai Culture Journal), published by the Culture Department (*krom watthanatham*), stressed the importance of 'Thai' culture. Unlike in the definition of culture during the period of statist nationalism, culture was now connected with tradition. In 1963, for example, a letter with the question on how one could identify a real patriot was sent to the magazine. Although it is not known if the author was an actual person or not, the editor's answer reflected the new orientation towards Thai culture. Besides including platitudes like 'patriotism is given from birth', the answer pointed out that a patriot should follow the laws of the nation, order and customs. He also should promote or participate in national traditions such as Songkhran [Thai New Year] festival, weddings or ordinations. A patriot was supposed to maintain the honour of the nation, too. This would include proper dress (especially appropriate traditional dress) or civilised behaviour. Finally, the natural resources of the nation, including old buildings, were to be maintained.¹⁵²

The complaints about the demise of Thai identity or culture by intellectuals grew louder during that time. The most prominent social critic Sulak Sivaraksa, for example, complained about a lack of knowledge regarding Thai values in 1965. He demanded that Thais stop following foreign cultures and proposed as a solution to the problems a shift in the value system from materialism.¹⁵³ Athat argued similarly that young Thais had no knowledge about Thai culture. He criticised the acceptance of 'bad' foreign culture ('dancing like being sick'). Only the promotion and support for Thai culture would maintain the Thai nation.¹⁵⁴ Plaek Santirak saw even more dramatically 'nation, religion and king' as the last pieces of Thai culture. He complained that most Thais, in contrast to foreigners, would not acknowledge the good life in Thailand ('Thai culture is not inferior to the culture of other nations'). He praised Buddhism and the monarchy, with the first as good precondition for freedom and democracy and the latter as defender

¹⁵² Warasan Wattanathamthai. "Top panha watthanatham [Answering Cultural Problems]", 1963, p.65.

¹⁵³ Sulak Sivaraksa. "Khaniyom khong sangkom [Values of the Society]", *The Social Science Review*, 1965, p.4.

¹⁵⁴ Athat. "Kitchakam thi kuan songsoem [Activities Which Should Be Supported]", *Warasanwattanathamthai*, 1966, p.68.

of the freedom of the nation. Plaek proposed to promote Thai culture through the media.¹⁵⁵

Some intellectuals did not want to wait until the state did something and started their own initiative to stop the loss of Thai culture. A good example was Kukrit Pramoj, a member of the royal family and prominent politician. He founded the Thammasat [University] Mask Dance Group (*khon thammasat*) in 1966. Kukrit gave as his reason not only the preservation of, in his opinion, the highest form of the performing arts but also the need to instil Thai identity in the younger generation: “After a certain period of training, I noticed that the *khon* [mask dance] students began to show Thai etiquette and think and feel like a Thai.” Kukrit went on to connect this Thainess with the monarchy when he argued that ‘this quality of Thainess was clearly brought out when the *khon* students were presented to His Majesty the King [Bhumibol]’.¹⁵⁶

Besides academics, other parts of the intelligentsia also started to deal with the question of Thai identity. One example is the development of a movement among architects and other professionals which sought to protect old areas of the city from destruction through commercial development.¹⁵⁷ Painters under the leadership of Tawan Duchanee (who produced Buddhist-based works) were another group that increased its efforts to find answers in the quest to find Thai identity after the events in October 1976.¹⁵⁸ The result was a mix of social criticism and traditional symbols to mirror the decaying state of Thai society and culture. An example of this new direction was the painting ‘World Crisis’ by Panya Vijnthanasarn from 1979. Panya combined his view of social conditions to traditional Thai painting style and themes. In this painting, Panya depicted a chariot in front of the mouth of a giant demon who ‘eats’ the world. The chariot itself is under attack by two snakes, both sent by the chief of snakes on top of the demon, which try to drive the chariot into the mouth of the demon. This could be interpreted as a criticism of modernisation which lures Thai society (the royal chariot as a symbol for the traditional kingdom) into the abyss.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Plaek Sonthirak. “Sanyalak khong thai [Thai Symbols]”, *Warasawatthanathamthai*, 1966, pp.9-12.

¹⁵⁶ Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool. “Thai Middle-Class Practice and Consumption of Traditional Dance: ‘Thai-ness’ and High Art”, Singapore 2002, pp. 225-229.

¹⁵⁷ Two groups were founded, namely ‘Conservation Group of the Association of Siamese Architects’ and ‘Arts and Environment Protection Association’. Askew, Marc. “Bangkok: Transformation of the Thai City”, Geelong 1994, p. 94.

¹⁵⁸ Henderson, Virginia, *The Social Production of Art in Thailand: Patronage and Commodisation, 1980-1998*, Bangkok 1998, p.74.

¹⁵⁹ Painting printed in National Committee for Organizing the Celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of His Majesty’s Accession to the Throne (hereafter NCO), *Rattanakosin Art: The Reign of King Rama IX*, Bangkok 1996, p. 152.

Another example of the ongoing identity crisis was the painting 'Past No. 2' by Praiwan Dakliang from 1981. This painting shows a temple building falling into ruins, abandoned by the monks whose clothes look like they were hastily thrown away. The painter uses the traditional idea of the temple as centre for culture, art and morality to demonstrate the decay of these elements in a rapidly modernising Thai society. With the monks gone, the age of Buddhism came to an end with the result of a rotten culture. Criticism was no longer directed at the political circumstances as in the 1970s but at the state of society itself.¹⁶⁰ The last example of an identity crisis reflected in Thai art is the painting 'Searching' by Naiyana Chotisuk from 1983. The painting- in dark, sombre colours- depicts two children lost in a joyless, unnatural environment. Ladders reaching for the sky but leading to nowhere can be seen as a condemnation of the credo of economic growth.¹⁶¹

The 1982 Bangkok bicentennial celebrations and the accompanying art competition did work as a kind of catalyst for Thai artists. In times of an identity crisis, it was an emotional defence to fall back on Thai traditional arts and the institutions most connected with Thai identity: the monarchy and Buddhism. An example is the painting 'Royal Visit to Bangkok' by Sathit Thimvattanabunthoeng in 1982.¹⁶² This painting depicts a famous visit of King Ananda Mahidol and his brother Bhumibol to Sampaeng, the Chinatown of Bangkok. The cheerful atmosphere and the bright colours of the picture stand in deep contrast to the gloomy and sad atmosphere of the picture 'Searching'. The picture also reflected an important aspect of the monarchical nation, namely the transethnic approach to Thainess symbolised by the dominance of the Thai and Chinese flags. The real visit by the royal brothers happened at a time when expressing ones Chineseness was officially discouraged.

Another example of the revived image of the monarchy as the caring institution of the nation and so for the revival of the monarchical nation was the painting 'In Praise of the Royal Activities' by Jamnan Sarasak in 1990.¹⁶³ It depicts the wall of the atelier of the artist himself. It shows a canvas just being painted with some activities of the Princess Mother. The wall besides the canvas has pictures of the Princess Mother, depicting her in the role of mother not only for her son, King Bhumibol, but also for the nation in general. The atmosphere of this painting is that of a family affair so that the

¹⁶⁰ Painting printed in NCO, 1996, p. 170.

¹⁶¹ Painting printed in NCO, 1996, p.164.

¹⁶² Painting printed in NCO, 1996, p.297.

¹⁶³ Painting printed in NCO, 1996, p.298.

observer feels at ease. Thus this painting is not only emphasising the active role of the monarchy but also focuses on the idea of the nation as a family with the royal family at its head.

The last example for the new direction of art in praise of the monarchical nation is the bronze figure 'Under His Majesty's Shelter' of Wijit Apichatkriengkrai from 1995.¹⁶⁴ This umbrella-shaped sculpture depicted a variety of King Bhumibol's activities and showed him beloved and respected by all. The centre scene is made from his coronation when the King vowed to rule with righteousness over the kingdom. The top of the sculpture is made out of his royal seal, symbolising his role as being the apex of society.

Monarchical Nationalism as Reflected in the General Population

Besides the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia, monarchical nationalism also found support within a wider population. Decisive for this overwhelming success was his reputation of a monarch with outstanding charisma and *barami*.

To demonstrate the importance of *barami*, it is helpful to refer to a description of King Bhumibol visits in the provinces in the 1950s. The accounts of occurring 'miracles', although written by a member of the royal family and therefore maybe biased, indicated that beliefs and traditional views of kingship were not affected by the change of government in 1932 and the following period of political nationalism.¹⁶⁵ The observer reported that the rain would stop when the King stepped outside to plant a tree in Phrae province and started again when he returned to the house. In another story, the writer described the scene when the King left the helicopter in Petchabun province and normally shy vultures started to circle around his head 'like an umbrella'.¹⁶⁶ These 'observations' (with supposedly hundreds of witnesses) followed the traditional view of a king with *barami* and his subsequent power over nature. Although in more recent times, people do not directly refer to a 'healing touch' of the King any longer, they still connect his deeds with a sacred dimension such as in the case of a farmer whose eye operation was paid for by the King: 'The King gave me sight'.¹⁶⁷ However, not only

¹⁶⁴ Painting printed in NCO, 1996, p.299.

¹⁶⁵ This was despite a general lack of information about the activities of the monarchy up to the early 1950s. Kingshill, Konrad, *Ku Daeng- Thirty Years Later*, DeKalb 1991, p.246.

¹⁶⁶ Kukrit Pramoj. "Sathaban phramahakasat thai [The Thai Monarchical Institution]", *Sayamrat sapdawichan*, 1987, p.23.

¹⁶⁷ Cited in FCCT, 1988, p.108. See in general Bloch, Maurice, *The Royal Touch*, London 1973, p.30.

nature but also human beings were attracted by his charisma. In another story, a hill tribe villager was described during a visit by the King: “He bent down to prostrate himself at the King’s feet, then he put his head in front of them and declared to the people around with a loud voice full of confidence and with the face full of tears: ‘From now on, I become Thai’.”¹⁶⁸

An example of the attractiveness of the monarchical nation, especially its trans-ethnic approach, was a monument erected by the Chinese community. To honour ‘their’ King, the Chinese constructed a gate in commemoration of the King’s 72nd birthday in 1999. Located at the beginning of Yaowarat Road, the main traffic artery through Chinatown in Bangkok, it can not be overlooked. It was designed in a distinctive, Northern Chinese style combined with symbols of the Thai monarchy. In the official leaflet of the Chinese community for this gate we find the description that it ‘represents the loyalty and gratefulness of Chinese immigrants to Thailand, who have taken refuge under His Majesty’s supreme protection’. Between ceramic dragon figurines was the elevated Royal Crest which letters were made of pure gold. According to the Chinese myth, the dragon is a mythical deity possessing magical powers, who is capable of transformation and bestowing rain. It was also the symbol of the monarch in China. As usual for Chinese buildings and monuments, the gate followed *feng shui* principles and included many auspicious numbers like nine stones in the rear which stand for Rama IX. The number nine also represented ‘eternal solidness’. The Chinese Text in the centre of the gate is especially interesting: It is the handwriting of Crown Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and reads: ‘Long Live the King!’.¹⁶⁹

King Bhumibol received also strong support from the people for his development projects. In 1975, His Majesty’s Personal Affairs Division set up a new section to deal exclusively with the King’s projects. Its main task was to coordinate the placement of various types of donation made directly to the King. Besides cash and cheques, donors offer to the King land and property they wish to be utilized for the benefit of royal development work or projects.¹⁷⁰ Large part of these donations go to the several royal foundations established from the King’s own funds. For example, Ratchaprachasamasai Foundation which promotes research and development for the

¹⁶⁸ Kukrit Pramoj, “Phom pai rap sadet phrachaoyuhua thi ubon (16 prueksachikayon 2498) [When I Went to Welcome His Majesty the King at Ubol (16 November 1955)]”, *Chunlasan thaikhadi sueksa*, 14 Reprint 1998, p.5.

¹⁶⁹ Based on Prayudhi Mahagitsiri, *The Commemoration Gate Project Honouring His Majesty the King’s Sixth-Cycle Birthday*, Bangkok 2000.

¹⁷⁰ National Identity Board, 2000, p.167.

relief of leprosy and provides accommodation and advice for lepers who have problems in society, caring for their children and providing medical treatment, education and employment.¹⁷¹ The Ratchaprachanukhro Foundation was established to relieve victims of natural or mass disasters, such as storms, floods, fires or major accidents.¹⁷² The Saichaitai Foundation aimed to provide emergency funds to civilian, military and police officials and volunteers who were maimed or wounded in action while conducting internal security operations.¹⁷³ Apart from individuals who donate directly to the King, the private sector arranged many kinds of activities to raise funds to donate to the King to support these royal foundations such as marathon competitions or concerts.

A further example that King Bhumibol was able to create loyalty to the monarchical nation was the recent release of a CD. An independent group of retired civil servants and artists joined together for a project called 'Songs for the Father' in order to conduct a campaign against all that 'poison' the nation such as drugs and internal instability. They stated that their inspiration was from the gratitude they have for the king who continually provides ways to solve problems of the nation and the people. The CD contains 16 songs which all its lyrics taken from the King's concepts, theories, works as well as from the royal projects and the royal speeches. The songs 'Love the King and Care for Your Children', 'Beloved Thailand' and 'Wars against Drugs' talk about the King's concern of drugs problem, 'Self Sufficient Economy' talks about the King's theory, 'Royal Rain' is taken from one of his projects, 'Thai Rice' and 'Thai Elephant' are taken from royal speeches. 'The Heart of Thai Dogs' is from the King's book *The Story of Thongdaeng*. This CD was made to commemorate the 60th anniversary of being on the throne but it also aimed to promote unity and solidarity. The profits gained are earmarked to be presented to the King to support his royal Chaipattana Foundation.¹⁷⁴ It is important to note that the songs do not praise the King directly but use his ideas and concepts to promote a vision of a happy, peaceful and prosperous nation- the King's nation.

To sum up, King Bhumibol orientates his interpretation on earlier forms of the monarchical nation during the monarchical rule. Although many basic ideas and the

¹⁷¹ National Identity Board, 2000, pp.227-228.

¹⁷² National Identity Board, 2000, p.231.

¹⁷³ National Identity Board, 2000, p.234.

¹⁷⁴ Wiphani Chilan, "Pleng phuea po pleng thi khonthai khuan fang [Songs for the Father, Songs that Thais Should Listen]", *Matichon*, 21 March 2006, p.33.

ways of dissemination with the help of symbols, legends and traditions are similar, his vision of the nation is not a direct continuation but an adaptation to the system of constitutional monarchy. Monarchical nationalism under King Bhumibol is no longer directly connected to the political realm. However, his monarchical nationalism indirectly has a political agenda. It seeks to stabilise Thai society by making the people happy and prosperous. Encouraging the use of 'local wisdom' or traditional knowledge, it aims to strengthen Thai society and culture from within. The King emphasises the participation of the people in the process in order to enable them to feel part of the monarchical nation. By following the traditional concept of kingship, especially his practising of the ten kingly virtues and *barami*, the King turns himself into a moral role model which attracts the people in times of rapid modernisation, change or even political turmoil. It is not the constitution which makes King Bhumibol powerful but it his vision of a monarchical nation which aims to be home to everyone within the borders of the nation-state of Thailand. His personal charisma and embodiment of tradition, his activities to benefit the population, his belief in the strength of their own culture and his moral behaviour is re-assuring for the people and gives them hope that the Thai nation is strong enough to compete with other nations in an age of globalisation.

Conclusion

Monarchy, this thesis has demonstrated, can play the central role in the forming of nations and nationalism. In the case of Thailand, its importance goes far beyond the commonly acknowledged role of being a symbol of the nation. In the past, the Thai kings linked the nation firmly with the monarchy and actively guided the loyalty of the people towards this monarchical or 'king's' nation. This meant that the monarch was inseparably embedded in the nation which he defined and led. The people were not the 'owner' of the nation but entered a social contract with the ruler and so became part of it. The king had the duty to provide material prosperity and emotional re-assurance to create happiness. In return, the people should be loyal to the monarchy and therefore to the nation. From this point of view, there was no need for a democratic element as long as the ruler was able to fulfil his role and delivered on his promises. Although the monarchical rule ended, monarchical nationalism was attractive enough to stage a comeback during the reign of the current incumbent King Bhumibol.

How was the monarchy able to successfully create, maintain and lead this nation over such a long period of time? Following the analysis in this thesis, I might suggest that the answer lies- in the case of Thailand- in a combination of several factors.

First, the Thai nation was the result of a long process. This process started with the development of an *ethnie* and a system of cultural cores between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, features of a pre-modern nation emerged in the late Kingdom of Ayutthaya, while elements of a modern nation appeared after the foundation of the Kingdom of Bangkok in 1782. It is important to note that this process was neither linear nor continuous. However, the fact that elements of the Thai nation were rooted in the past, made it possible for the kings to base the modern Thai nation on a long existing symbol-myth complex centred on a Thai interpretation of monarchy and Buddhism. This connection of the nation with widely recognised cultural elements made it difficult for competing interpretations of the nation to convince the people to switch loyalties.

Second, Thai nationalism as an ideology was a product of an intra-elite power struggle between the monarchs and the nobility in the nineteenth century. King Mongkut created monarchical nationalism in order to bypass the powerful nobles and to get direct access to the people. Therefore, this nationalism was not a reaction to pressure

from 'below'. The monarchs actively shaped nationalism with the help of the existing symbol-myth complex in their favour, occupying the main symbols, myth and traditions and using existing national sentiments. In the twentieth century, other nationalisms were unable to evoke these symbols without reinforcing the monarchical connection. As history has shown, monarchical nationalism (re-)appeared when the monarchy was under pressure from competing power groups. This was not only the case during the reign of King Bhumibol who had to defend the institution against the efforts of Phibun to sideline him but also in the reigns of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn who were 'under attack' by the Bunnag family.

Third, Thai nationalism was never a fixed ideology and changed according to competing views of the nation within different ruling power groups and the intelligentsia. This resulted in a contest between *monarchical*, *statist* and *royal* nationalism. Failures of the various nationalisms were closely connected to the inability to create an emotional bond with the monarchy or the nation. King Vajiravudh, for example, caused the demise of monarchical nationalism because of his changes to essential parts of it and his poor choice of dissemination. The governments of Phibun and Thanom were not able to create loyalty to their version of a political nation because they stuck to symbols connected with the monarchy and because of their dictatorial rule. It should be noted that no liberal-democratic nationalism developed because the monarchical nationalism of King Bhumibol offered an alternative to the political nationalisms of the military regimes.

Fourth, this thesis also has shown that an analysis of the development of the Thai nation and nationalism cannot be conducted without looking into the contributions of individual monarchs. The traditional ideal for rulers to produce intellectual works such as literature resulted in an ongoing process of shaping the ideas of Thai society and culture which were reflected in the different stages of the Thai nation. With the arrival of monarchical nationalism in the nineteenth century, the activities of the monarchs and their ideas were increasingly publicly displayed with the help of traditions, festivals and ceremonies. This public appearance of the monarchy increased not only its popularity but also turned the concepts of charisma and *barami* into crucial factors for the efficiency of monarchical nationalism. Both concepts required an even more active role of the king who could not rely on divinity alone but had the duty to 'perform'. This put the monarchs in a position where they could form the nation for their own benefit without being dependent on the state. The best example is the current incumbent, King

Bhumibol. He emphasised righteousness as the basis of his work which provided him with the image of having an exceptional high degree of *barami*. He adapted monarchical nationalism successfully to the limits and circumstances of a constitutional monarchy. The extensive use of symbols, myth and traditions by the king, together with his *barami* gained through his work, are the main reasons for the revived popularity of monarchical nationalism.

In general terms, the analysis has shown that the conventional modernist interpretation of the formation of the Thai nation and nationalism can be inadequate because the importance of a historical dimension is neglected. Furthermore, this thesis identified a topic which does not get enough attention in the field of nationalism studies: the role of the monarchy in the formation of the nation and nationalism. Although the Thai case is exceptional because the country was never colonised and therefore the monarchy was available to be part of an indigenous nationalism, more research about the role of the monarchy in other countries should be done as well. Based on the findings of this thesis, what are some possible avenues for future research in the Thai case? This thesis suggests two subjects which would deserve further examination in the near future. First, the ongoing competition between the different visions of the nations deserves a closer look. This struggle again became evident in the clash between oppositional forces and the government under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in the beginning of 2006. While the demonstrators demanded a return to the ideals of the monarchical nation, Thaksin insisted on the state leadership of the nation. Since his first government in 2001, Thaksin attempted a re-definition of Thai nationalism. His business nationalism gave utmost importance to the state which was controlled by parts of the business elite such as himself. Nationalism became a tool for promoting economic growth at all costs. King Bhumibol's ideas of self-sufficiency and moral conduct were seen as obstacle. Thaksin, therefore, aimed to lessen the role of the monarchy as much as possible in order to strengthen his influence on nationalism. As for the past, the intra-elite competition was so crucial in forming the different faces of Thai nationalism, there is more need to know about the views of the various elite groups. While this thesis has focussed on the key thinkers and proponents, it would be helpful to identify more influential persons in the promotion and dissemination of each nationalism. The aim should be to gain insight into the intellectual debates behind the policies which were not always lone decisions by the leaders. In this context, the ideas

of people like Prince Naris during the reign of Chulalongkorn and General Harn Leenanond during the Prem government could give valuable background information.

Second, as this thesis focussed on nationalism of elite groups, it would be an important step to analyse in detail the reaction of the masses to each of the dominant nationalisms. This must take into consideration the impact of secularisation and democratisation on the view of the nation but also the emergence of alternative nationalisms as a counter reaction to the elitist nationalisms. Little systematic and theoretical work has been undertaken on these alternative nationalisms (with the exception of the oppositional nationalism of the 1920s). For example, only a few objective and independent theoretical studies about the left-leaning nationalisms of the 1950s and 1970s exist.

This case study of Thailand has confirmed the common perception that nation and nationalism are concepts marked by variety and therefore unlikely ever to be narrowed down to a single theoretical definition. Therefore, as this thesis has indicated, it is necessary to further the study of nationalism from different perspectives. I do not claim that the Thai nation and nationalism is solely the product of the monarchs or that their emergence and the development was inevitable because of their actions. However, I identified the monarchy as the central institution in regard to the Thai nation and nationalism. Part of the success of the kings was their willingness to adapt the concept of a monarchical nation to changing circumstances without losing the ability to rely on symbols, myth and traditions in order to create loyalty to the monarchy and the nation. Hopefully, this thesis can contribute to a better understanding of the Thai nation and nationalism.

Bibliography

Note: Thai authors have been alphabetised by first name.

Abbreviations:

AEHR Australian Economic History Review
AS Asian Survey
BCAS Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars
BJS The British Journal of Sociology
FEER Far Eastern Economic Review
JAS Journal of Asian Studies
JSEAS Journal of Southeast Asian Studies
JSS Journal of the Siam Society
JSSR Journal of Social Science Review
MJIS Millenium: Journal of International Studies
PC Pacific Community
TMPR Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions

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Matichon

Sayamrat

Sawasdee

Thairat

The Guardian (London)

The Nation (Bangkok)

The Times (London)

The Princess Mother Memorial Park, official folder, no date.

Tokyo Gazette

Glossary of Frequently Used Terms

<i>Baht</i>	Thai currency
<i>bap</i>	an offense against moral law, sins, guilt, vice, de-merit
<i>barami</i>	the Ten Perfections, prestige, influence, grandeur, charisma
<i>bun</i>	merit, good deeds which according to Buddhism will bring rewards to the doer in a future life
<i>chakra</i>	a discus, the chakra is used as a weapon by Vishnu and becomes the symbol of the Chakri dynasty
<i>chakravathin</i>	wheel-turning monarch, Great King
<i>Chakri</i>	current royal dynasty
<i>chat</i>	nation
<i>dharma</i>	the teachings of the Buddha, truth, righteousness,
<i>dharmaracha</i>	king who rules by the <i>dharma</i> , righteous king
<i>jataka</i>	stories about former incarnations of the Buddha
<i>kathin</i>	offerings presented to monks at the end of the rainy season, particularly yellow robes; the annual congregation of the laity at a temple to present the robes to all the monks in the temple
<i>linga</i>	phallic symbol of god Siva
<i>mueang</i>	town, city, land
<i>Pali language</i>	the language of Buddhism
<i>phokhun</i>	father lord, Sukhothai-style ruler
<i>phothisat</i>	<i>Bodhisattva</i> , the one destined for Buddhahood
<i>phrai</i>	free commoners
<i>phuttharacha</i>	Buddha-king
<i>ramakian</i>	the Thai version of the Indian epic <i>Ramayana</i>
<i>sakdina</i>	hierarchical organisation of society
<i>sangha</i>	Buddhist order
<i>thewaracha</i>	God-king
<i>thotsapitratchatham</i>	the Ten Kingly Virtues
<i>traiphum</i>	'Three Worlds', a Buddhist cosmology
<i>wat</i>	temple

Map of Modern Thailand



Source: Baker, Chris/Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 200.