

photographs of many of the events it portrays, helping the reader to relive in imagination those happy, blessed events.

The book concludes with five pages of annexes containing lists detailing a chronology of Thai-Vatican relations in the twentieth century; the reigns of Thai monarchs and Supreme Pontiffs in the twentieth century; Thai envoys to the Holy See and the presentation of letters of credence; and Vatican envoys to Thailand. And the very last page after the annexes contains enlightening details of the lives of its two authors, Luigi Bressan and Michael Smithies.

Worth reading carefully. Worth preserving!

Sigmund J. Laschenski, S.J.

Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The politics of despotic paternalism*. Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2007, xxiii + 284 pp., pb, Bt 695.

Much value has been added to this new edition of an important book. In terms of quantity, I estimate an additional 30 per cent, if you include a new Foreword (13 pp.) and Postscript (30 pp.), an index and at least fifty photographs that were not in the first edition of 1979. The publisher Silkworm Books has to be congratulated once again. The new edition has better paper, binding, fonts and editing, though there are still a few avoidable errors.

Thak Chaloemtiarana is a senior Thai political scientist who has long been at Cornell University. He started his PhD research on the Thai military just a month or two before the November 1971 coup d'état which, in his new Foreword, he describes as 'a coup against the rising demands of civil society' and 'an attempt to rejuvenate and to maintain the political system that Sarit devised'. He turned his attention to Sarit himself – a 'paternalistic despot' (*phokhun uppatham baeb padetkan*). He asks the question whether in Thailand 'the legitimacy of a civil leader[ship] can ever be based solely on legal-rational institutions'.

The question is once again of contemporary relevance. Many people have a feeling that Thailand's political development has been, or is in danger of being, set back, maybe to the 1960s, or even to before 1932. Whether you have

read the first edition, as I did, or not, this book is of great interest and relevance to today's political debates. The fact that a Thai language edition was published in 2005 is also a great help.

The structure of the book is not quite what you might expect, and I guess this owes something to its origins as a PhD thesis. It is not a biography of Sarit, nor is it a detailed account of all the activities and process and stages of his period of rule (1957–1963). Nor is there any substantial treatment of the Thamom-Phrapas government (1963–1973), which tried to continue the Sarit system of government.

One-third of the book covers the period covering approximately 1943–1957, and this is very good. In the four main chapters (3–6) the emphasis is primarily on Sarit's style of leadership, his ideology of Thai-style political leadership and the way he developed a coherent system with ever-increasing power in his own hands. The ways in which he controlled the bureaucracy, the military, the monarchy and the development process are key elements in the Sarit story.

Sarit Thanarat, a north-easterner, graduated from the military academy in 1928. Unlike the leaders of the 1930s, who were strongly influenced by the West, Sarit and his henchmen were 'indigenous products'. He was already a colonel in the offensive in the Shan States in 1942. By 1957, as a Lieutenant-General in command of the 1st Division of the army, he was an (apparently reluctant) member of Phibun's coup

group. He was to play a leading role in forcefully suppressing the 'Palace coup' of 1949 and the 'Manhattan rebellion' of 1951.

Tak emphasises the importance of Sarit's notion of 'revolution' (*pathiwat*), which is how Sarit characterised his 20 October 1958 coup. Thak agrees that it was revolutionary in the sense given to it in a Revolutionary Council statement of 1965 (Thamom's period):

The revolution of October 20 1958 abolished democratic ideas borrowed from the West and suggested that it would build a democratic system that would be appropriate to the specific characteristics and realities of the Thai. It will build a democracy, a Thai way of democracy.

The statement continues:

The Thai people in general do not wish to have a part in national politics. They wish only for a leader who has *khuntam* (moral responsibility) and ability. A majority of Thai people feel that the power to rule belongs to the monarch ... and the *chao nai*. ... The social division between the ruler and the ruled is absolute ... and the two classes could never be equal in any way.

Sarit tended to equate statism (*ratthaniyom*), which he promoted, with *phraratchaniyom* (royalism), which he began to revive in a new form. According to Thak, Sarit believed that 'social mobilization should be minimised, for it caused the disintegration of traditional institutions and values.' Instead, the overriding principle was *samakhitham* (the moral principle of solidarity). This is a slogan issued from many quarters that has strong resonances today.

This was far from the populism of say, Peron in Argentina, or the mass mobilization in fascist Italy or national-socialist Germany. When I first arrived in Thailand in June 1962, I had just spent a few months in Franco's Spain, and from the first I felt strong echoes of that regime.

Let me rehearse a few 'facts' from Sarit's six-year regime. For someone opposed to Western political forms, Sarit was remarkably open to the West, and especially the USA. Urged by the World Bank, and listening to his civilian technocratic advisers, Sarit heralded the first National Economic Development Plan in 1961. By 1960, 5,000 US troops were stationed in Thailand; infrastructural work began on roads, airfields, harbours and so on. By 1964 the US had a massive military presence that was to grow. The extensive road-building programme was chiefly to improve access for military and officials in 'insecure areas'. In these areas army Mobile Development Units spearheaded crude community development schemes, causing 'increasing bitterness and resentment among villagers'. Thailand had thrown itself enthusiastically into the Cold War from the early 1950s. Sarit strengthened the Anti-Communist Activities Act of 1952 in 1958.

Internationally, Sarit made good use of highly talented civilian experts, such as Thanat Khoman, Phote Sarasin, Puey Ungphakorn and others. Sarit 'actively and consciously directed the activity of the monarchy.' This led to overseas state visits to twenty countries by the

King and Queen between June 1960 and Sarit's death in November 1963. According to Thak, this helped legitimise Sarit's leadership and 'minimise foreign criticism of the regime for being dictatorial'.

Sarit arrested a great many politicians, journalists, writers and others who were 'suspected of communist activities'. Many spent long periods in prison, some disappeared. He had four such suspects publicly executed. Sarit also authorised the public execution of five arsonists, one heroin producer, and one millenarian religious leader. I have no way of knowing whether this was all. Nor do I know of the extent of extra-judicial killings in the Sarit period, of the sort that became widespread after his death. It is noteworthy, however, that these executions, without due process and in any case barely legal under a clause in the constitution, were all public and Sarit emphasised his personal responsibility for them. This is in marked contrast to the later style of denials, disclaimers, distancing etc. They were not massacres.

As a young British Council officer in Thailand from 1962–64, I felt the same sort of stifling intellectual atmosphere I had experienced in Madrid. There were some rare exceptions that I knew of, a few of which I had the pleasure to be slightly involved with. One was the setting up of the Social Science Association Press by Sulak Sivarak, and later the journal *Sangkhomsat Parithat*. This was an exceptional beacon of civil liberty and freedom of expression that

may have had consequences not anticipated by its sponsors. Cit Phumisak and Tongbai Thongpao and many others were in prison. Tak reminds us that 'a whole generation of intellectuals who expressed a deep social consciousness, was eliminated.' The Buddhist Sangha was 'reformed' to 'facilitate political control and penetration.'

Sarit apparently had 'an obsession with cleanliness, purity and discipline'. I suspect that, on the back of some of Phibun's cultural regulations, Sarit may have influenced much of what still passes for standard Thai public etiquette in schools and official settings.

He declared opium use illegal from 1 January 1959. He banned pedicabs from Bangkok in 1959. He cleared the streets of beggars, hooligans, and stray dogs, and punished people for littering. He stressed the importance of external beautification of villages as a sign of 'development'.

He banned rock-and-roll from official parties and dancing 'the twist' in public places. (It was certainly the rave in private places!) A few initiatives were blatantly populist and truly popular, such as reducing the price of iced black coffee (*oliang*), a common and especially working class beverage (though traders cheated). This was in part a sign of bias against Thai-Chinese people.

Thak's research yields some fine details. Some of my favourite passages concern the Lao crisis of 1957–62; the influence of Luang Wichit on Sarit's ideological thinking, 'Socialising of the bureaucracy', drawing on data from par-

ticipation in the National Defense College 1956–79; 'Harnessing the military', drawing on contributions to the army journal *Yuttakhot* 1947–1969; and 'The role of the monarchy', drawing on daily records of royal activities 1963–71.

This latter source lists the amount and purpose of charitable donations received by the monarchy, which contributed to the expansion and justification of an independent base for the monarchy to intervene in social and political agendas, and for its increasing independence from government control and direction.

Thak's approach is suited to his subject. He is quite rightly concerned, from the outset, to investigate 'the importance of historical and cultural constraints on the nature of [Thai politics]', which had hitherto been given insufficient attention by the mainly American scholars whom he quotes frequently (Riggs, Jacobs, Wilson, Yano et al.). He discusses most perceptively Sarit's 'popularity' despite his 'distasteful and tight-fisted [iron fisted, heavy handed?] rule'. His study could be seen as more of a hermeneutics than a critique. Almost completely absent in the footnotes (there is no bibliography) are references to Thai or Western critical or theoretical sources. The prevailing approach is empirical and culturalist (he agrees that Sarit's style was 'quite Thai in character'). He also agrees with what he identifies as a consensus among commentators at the time, that Sarit's regime was 'successful', though this begs many questions. He asserts that Thai democracy 'is still young and finding its way' (it is, though,

already older than the entire Soviet communist regime). He asserts that 'Thai democracy has made great progress since 1932.' The September 2006 coup was a setback.

So we might conclude, and some would applaud while others reserve judgement, that this eminent scholar is cautious and even rather conservative in his judgements, and on the whole optimistic about the future direction of Thai political culture and institutions. I would count myself among those who might welcome a more critical, certainly sceptical, and theoretically informed analysis. Even within the remit of the first edition, greater attention might have been given to the role of the USA, and more extensive treatment given to the Thamom-Phrapas years. But this is probably asking for a different book.

I much enjoyed this book. It is readable and well written. I think Thak's approach to Sarit's style of political leadership is pertinent for a contemporary understanding not only of the Sarit years, but of the Sarit legacy that reaches beyond 1973 into the present; I am sure this book will and should remain a classic.

Andrew Turton

Pasuk Pongpaichit and Chris Baker, eds, *Thai Capital after the 1997 Crisis*. Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2008, xv +309 pp., paperback.

The aim of this book is to analyze how Thai domestic capital has fared since the watershed crisis of 1997. The aim is a worthy one. In the boom decade before 1997 domestic capital played a notable part in economic growth. High rates of domestic savings, cheap labour, government encouragement and liberal bank lending policies all fuelled growth rates which were among the highest in the world. Foreign capital flowed in too, often in joint ventures with Thai partners, and often in conjunction with advanced technology and skilled foreign management. Given the depth of the 1997 crisis, the shock to established patterns of business behaviour, the subsequent rise (and fall) of Thaksin and his TRT party, and the changed domestic and international economic environment, it is, indeed, appropriate that a study should be made of the way the Thai economy has been able to adapt. The question is, though, does the present book succeed in its aim?

*Thai Capital...* is the product of a research project funded by the Thailand Research Fund. Fourteen researchers, most of them from Thai academia, contributed to an original study published in Thai in two volumes in 2006. Now we have an English version, pruned and updated, with eight substantive papers (instead of the original thirteen), twelve contributors (ten from the earlier pub-