6

The American era and development, 1940s to 1960s

After the Second World War, the USA became a new foreign patron, more intrusive than anything Siam had experienced in the colonial era. While Britain had focused on its colonies and never taken more than peripheral interest in Siam, the USA seized on Thailand as an ally and base for opposing the spread of communism in Asia. To build Thailand's capability for this role, the USA helped to revive and strengthen the military rule, which had faltered at the close of the Second World War. To consolidate Thailand's membership of the 'free world' camp in the Cold War, the USA promoted 'development', meaning primarily economic growth through private capitalism. To achieve 'national security', US funding helped to push the mechanisms of the nation-state more deeply into society than before.

Under this regime, a new elite emerged consisting of ruling generals, senior bureaucrats, and the heads of new business conglomerates. Strengthened by the ideology of development and unconstrained by democracy, business was able to exploit both people and natural resources on a new scale. The countryside was transformed again, by driving the agrarian frontier through the upland forests and subjecting the smallholder decisively to the market. Against this backdrop, the old Thai social order faded into history.

FROM WAR TO CIVIL WAR

The aftermath of the war was a period of great economic disruption and political tumult. Phibun's fall in late 1944 propelled Pridi back into the limelight. He returned to his task of founding democracy through constitutional engineering, overseeing passage of a constitution in 1946, which finally created a fully elective legislature. Remnants of the civilian wing of the People's Party, and more recent recruits to the Seri Thai resistance, formed political parties in his support. He began to purge the army of

Phibun's militarists, and to restrict military involvement in politics by law. He recognized that urban labour had become important as a result of state-led industrialization, and supported legislation for labour rights and labour protection. He also gave support to anti-colonial struggles in neighbouring territories. In Pridi's vision, Thailand could play a special role as agent and exemplar in the creation of a new post-colonial, democratic Southeast Asia.

But other forces did not share this vision. The power that the military had built over the previous decade was not easily doused. The army that had invaded the Shan States in 1942 returned home full of resentment at the lack of support for its withdrawal and the sacrifice of its territorial gains. The generals looked with distaste and envy at some of the new businessmen and politicians who wanted to profit from the close nexus of power and profit established since 1932.

The royalists also returned to the scene. Ironically, it was Pridi, the anti-royalist ideologue of 1932, who paved the way. Kicked upstairs to be regent from 1942, he enjoyed good relations with some of the royal family, especially Prajadhipok's widow, Rambhai Bharni. As a key leader of Seri Thai, he moved closely with some royal kin who joined Seri Thai in Britain. From 1944, he brought back the royalists, possibly as a political counterweight to Phibun and the army. He granted amnesty to 61 political prisoners, mainly the royalists jailed by Phibun, and posthumously restored honours Phibun had stripped from Prajadhipok. In September 1945, he invited Seni Pramoj to return from the USA to become prime minister, and in December he encouraged King Ananda Mahidol to return temporarily to celebrate his twentieth birthday. Many other royalist exiles returned around the same time, and others emerged from self-imposed silence. One noted they were still 'frightened . . . because they think their property might be confiscated', and 'the extremists among them still hope against hope for a restoration of the Absolute Monarchy as a means of restoring their own lost privileges'.[1] Seni Pramoj and his businessman-aesthete brother Kukrit formed the Democrat Party, which opposed Pridi in the Assembly. As Seni noted, despite Pridi's pro-royalist tilt, 'We could never get over the suspicion that Pridi was a Communist'.[2]

The elite contest between militarists, royalists, and pro-Pridi liberals over control of the new nation-state was broadened by urban forces stirred up by the war and the economic dislocation. Japan's forced 'loans' from Thailand had undermined the currency and provoked inflation of over 1000 per cent since 1938. Many officials, whose salaries had not kept pace, were tempted to live off corruption, and many other people off crime. With the disruption of trade, everyday goods were in short supply. Political

organization among workers, built by both the Seri Thai resistance and the communists during the war, overflowed into a surge of mass politics with street demonstrations and unionization. In 1945, workers went on strike in rice mills, docks, cement works, oil refineries, and timber yards. The Association of United Workers of Thailand was founded in 1947 and had 60 000 members two years later. As a result of the Allied arms drops and the disarming of the occupying Japanese, the country was awash with arms and 'Buying arms in Thailand was as easy as buying beer'.[3]

The elite leaderships experimented with manipulating these new mass politics. Pridi's group supported labour organizations and used government funds to sponsor mass demonstrations. Militarists teamed up with fledgling bankers to hire communist intellectuals to run newspapers, which lambasted their opponents. This confused period climaxed on 6 June 1946, when the young King Ananda Mahidol was found dead in the palace from a gunshot wound. The case has never been properly explained. Royalist politicians, especially Kukrit and Seni Pramoj, tried to pin the blame on Pridi. Three palace aides, one of whom was an associate of Pridi, were arrested and eventually executed. The police chief who conducted the investigation was a brother-in-law of the Pramoj brothers. He was later found to have bribed witnesses to implicate Pridi. Ananda Mahidol's younger brother was elevated to the throne as King Bhumibol Adulyadej and returned to Switzerland to complete his education.

On 8 November 1947, the military seized power by coup. Phibun was the figurehead, but the coup was plotted among veterans of the 1942 Shan States campaign – especially the expedition head, General Phin Choonhavan, and his aide and son-in-law, Phao Siyanon – with firepower from Colonel Sarit Thanarat who controlled men and tanks in the capital. Phin claimed that Pridi's Seri Thai forces were about to launch a republican revolt. The coup group announced that they acted 'to uphold the honour of the army', to clarify the royal 'assassination plot', and to install a government 'which will respect the principles of Nation, Religion and King' – a conscious revival of Vajiravudh's royal-nationalist formula.[4] The British ambassador reported that the coup was 'a right-wing movement supported by the royal family'.[5] The regent (Prince Rangsit) endorsed the coup within 24 hours. Two weeks later the king sent from Switzerland a message stating that 'those who were involved in this operation do not desire power for their own good, but aim only to strengthen the new government which will administer for the prosperity of the nation'.[6]

For the next five years, the coup group and Pridi's supporters waged a low-key civil war. After the coup, Pridi and a few others narrowly escaped

overseas. The coup group purged the army of Seri Thai men, and replaced Pridi's men on the boards of state enterprises and banks. In 1948, several northeastern supporters of Pridi were arrested and accused of plotting a rebellion, but subsequently released. In February 1949, Pridi returned to Bangkok and attempted to seize power with the help of the Seri Thai arms cache. Sarit again showed the importance of the city garrisons, bombarding Pridi's forces inside the Grand Palace (hence, the 'Palace Rebellion'). Pridi fled once again, this time finally. A month later, three pro-Pridi MPs and one associate were shot while in police custody. Another pro-Pridi MP was shot a month later after surrendering to the police. In June 1951, some remaining Pridi supporters in the navy attempted a coup by seizing Phibun during the ceremony to accept a vessel donated by the USA (the 'Manhattan Coup'). Phibun's lieutenants bombed the navy's flagship to the bottom of the Chao Phraya River. The fact that Phibun was aboard and had to swim ashore emphasized that power now lay with Sarit and Phao, rather than the figurehead. They proceeded to dismember the navy. The Pridi group had lost to the gun.

After the 1947 coup, the royalist Democrat Party dominated the Cabinet, while the generals held power in the background. But the royalists and generals shared no common platform beyond opposition to Pridi and political liberalization. The royalists wished to revive something of the old political and social order. Phibun saw himself as the custodian of a new, modern nation. For four years, the two groups fenced over appointments and positions. When the government rejected Phao's claims to become police chief, Phao challenged the Democrat interior minister to a duel. In 1951, the Democrats prepared a new constitution that greatly increased the king's formal powers: he appointed the Senate, directly controlled the armed forces, had the power to veto legislation, could dismiss any minister, issue decrees, and reform the constitution. The generals appealed to the young king completing his education in Europe to moderate these provisions. When these appeals failed, they took another course. On 26 November 1951, on the eve of the king's return to Thailand to reign, they executed another coup (the Silent or Radio Coup), pushed the Democrats aside, and scrapped this constitution. They brought back a slightly modified version of the 1932 constitution and formed a Cabinet with 19 of the total 25 from the military. The regent refused to approve the new charter but was simply ignored. Subsequent elections and appointments created a military-dominated parliament. The royalists had been demoted to junior partners in the ruling alliance. The military was in command for the next two decades.

The main justification given for the Silent Coup was that communists were infiltrating the parliament and Cabinet. This vocabulary signified a momentous change. The local battle over the control of the Thai state was being absorbed within a worldwide ideological struggle.

AMERICAN PATRONAGE, ANTI-COMMUNISM, AND MILITARISM

In the 1945–46 peace negotiations, the USA became Siam's protector, warding off any extension of British colonial influence. Initially, the USA was interested in Thailand as part of a regional plan for rebuilding Japan's economy. With the explosion of leftist anticolonialism in neighbouring countries in 1947–48, the 'loss' of China to communist revolution in 1949, and the commitment of US troops in Korea in 1950, the USA grew steadily more interested in Thailand as an ally and base for the prosecution of the Cold War to stem the spread of communism in Asia.

After the 1947 coup, Phibun asked the USA for arms and dollars to strengthen the army. But the USA still viewed Phibun as a wartime enemy. Over the next two years, however, the US need for friends increased, while Phibun and his allies became practised at espousing anti-communist and anti-Chinese sentiments to appeal for patronage. In September 1949, following Mao Zedong's revolution in China, the USA made US$75 million available for supporting allies in Asia, 'such as Thailand', and released £43.7 million, which Japan owed Thailand for wartime purchases. In March 1950, the Phibun government, under strong US urging, officially endorsed the French puppet, anti-communist emperor Bao Dai in Vietnam and was rewarded with US$15 million of the US funds. In July 1950, Thailand became the first Asian country to offer troops and supplies for the US campaign in Korea. Phibun told parliament that, 'by sending just a small number of troops as a token of our friendship, we will get various things in return'.[7] A month later, the USA provided another US$10 million in economic aid, the World Bank gave a US$25 million loan, and the arms supplies started arriving.

The USA was still concerned that the Phibun government's support for anti-communism was lukewarm and repeatedly urged an internal crackdown. The USA even tried to manufacture the evidence to justify fiercer action. Believing that the *Communist Manifesto* had not yet been translated into Thai, the American embassy provided a grant for an American linguist, William Gedney, and a rising Marxist poet and intellectual, Jit Phumisak, to remedy this defect; but the project was never completed.

The military rulers were not concerned about Thailand's left. Phibun told parliament in 1949 that 'there is now no communist unrest in Thailand'.[8] While the USA viewed Asia through the ideological spectacles of the Cold War, Phibun and other Thai leaders were more concerned with the longer-term complexity of their relationship to the big neighbour, China, and the existence of a large Chinese community in Thailand. Phibun was reluctant to provoke any retaliation from China. But he increasingly valued US support and saw the chance to use repression against other enemies, such as the Pridi remnants and opponents in the local Chinese community.

The unification of China in 1949 prompted another wave of nationalist feeling among Thailand's Chinese. The use of Chinese names came back into vogue. Enrolment in Chinese schools soared to 175 000, ten times the number before Phibun imposed restrictions in the late 1930s. Remittances to China increased. At the same time, conflict between the KMT and communists intermittently erupted in battles on Bangkok streets. As in the late 1930s, this surge of Chinese nationalism and disorder provoked government efforts at control. Since the Phibun government perceived communism as largely a Chinese problem, the crackdown on communism and suppression of the Chinese were interlocked.

From late 1950, the government began to harass the press, deport Chinese involved in political activity, smash labour organizations, and use the military and Sangha for anti-communist propaganda. On 10 November 1952, under heavy US pressure, the government moved decisively against the local left. It arrested members of a small remnant group of leftists and Pridi supporters suspected of plotting a coup. It struck at members of the Peace Movement, a Stockholm-based campaign against nuclear weapons, which Beijing patronized to bring international pressure against US military action in China and Korea. The local branch included not only some communist party members but also independent leftists, such as the writer Kulap Saipradit. Over 1000 people were arrested, mostly Chinese who were deported, but also sundry enemies of the regime including Thammasat student activists, and Pridi's wife and son.

A new anti-communist law, phrased widely enough to target any dissent, was rushed through three readings in one day. Thirty-seven Thai citizens were jailed, including Kulap and other journalists, the president of the leftist labour federation, and several members of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The main leftist newspapers and bookshops were closed down. In December 1952, another prominent pro-Pridi MP and four other

men were strangled, burnt, and buried by Phao's police. In March 1953, a leftist newspaper publisher was shot on his honeymoon. In 1954, another pro-Pridi MP was strangled and dumped in the Chao Phraya River, tied to a concrete post. Phao gave the police a motto: 'There is nothing under the sun that the Thai police cannot do'.

The government reimposed strict restrictions on Chinese schools, resulting in enrolment dropping by two-thirds. It also increased the alien tax a hundred times to 400 baht, curbed remittances, reintroduced laws reserving occupations for Thai nationals, changed the Nationality Law to impede naturalization, and banned Chinese opera shows in Bangkok.

The USA was now impressed. In July 1953, the US National Security Council proposed developing Thailand as an 'anti-communist bastion' in order to 'extend US influence – and local acceptance of it – throughout the whole of Southeast Asia'.[9] After the French defeat in Indochina in 1954, the USA organized the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and committed itself to defending Thailand. The USA began to build strategic roads through the northeast, upgrade ports and airfields for military use, and launch a programme of psychological warfare aimed at both peasants and officials.

Thailand had become a US client-state under military rule. But the result was a severe division within Thailand's ruling junta – between army and police.

Beginning in January 1951, the USA sent 28 arms shipments with enough equipment for nine army battalions. By 1953, US military aid was equivalent to two-and-a-half times the Thai military budget. With command of this patronage, Sarit Thanarat was able to strengthen his grip on the army. He brought all the troops in Bangkok under his old unit, the First Division of the First Army, staffed with his loyal subordinates. In 1954, he became army chief.

Simultaneously, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began to arm the police. These efforts began from a covert and failed attempt in 1950–51 to sponsor a counter-revolutionary expedition from the northern Thai hills into southern China. The CIA formed close links with the police chief, Phao, and subsequently provided him with tanks, armoured cars, aircraft, helicopters, speedboats, and training by 200 CIA advisers. The police became virtually a rival army. Sarit and Phao were soon locked in competition. Their manpower was roughly equal: 48 000 police and 45 000 in the army. They vied to take over the lucrative monopolies and business patronage originally developed by the Pridi group. They both visited the USA in 1954 and returned with aid commitments of US$25 million (Sarit)

and US$37 million (Phao). They competed to control the opium trade, and in 1950 came close to fighting a battle over the crop. They jockeyed with one another for political succession. In 1955, Phao asked the USA to back him in a coup against Phibun but was declined. Phibun survived by mediating these conflicts. The USA increasingly supported him.

Phibun returned to the 1932 group's mission of building the nation-state as the caretaker of the people's welfare and the focus of their loyalty. But the project was no longer pursued by edicts designed to change people's behaviour, but rather through the state's adoption of traditional forms of rule. The government became a public patron of Buddhism. It restored 5535 *wat* and built some new ones. Phibun visited major *wat* during his provincial tours, and presented them with donations and Buddha images. The government also sponsored dance troupes and undertook restoration of major historical sites, beginning with Phimai, Ayutthaya, and Chiang Saen. A National Culture Council was formed in 1948 and converted to a ministry in 1952. Wichit Wathakan produced a string of plays on the theme 'Power and Glory', celebrating Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai and other figures in Thai history. Dreams of a Thai empire were quietly dropped. 'If we can build nationalism in people's hearts', wrote Wichit, 'in the same way that communists make people believe in communism like a religion, we don't need to worry that the country will fall to communism'.[10]

Phibun wished to limit the expansion of royalism. He banned the king from touring outside the capital. The palace resented the obvious attempt to extend state patronage into cultural areas formerly monopolized by royalty. In 1957, Phibun oversaw a grandiose celebration of the 2500th anniversary of the Buddhist era. The king ducked his allotted role on grounds of illness.

In 1955, Phibun announced that he would 'restore democracy' to counter the growing financial and military power of Sarit and Phao. He lifted the ban on political parties, eased press censorship, promised to release political prisoners, cancelled many restrictions on the Chinese, allowed a public 'Hyde Park' for speechifying, passed a labour Act legalizing unions, and scheduled elections for 1957. In the face of opposition from the palace, he passed a law imposing a 50-rai ceiling on landholdings. He also (less successfully) launched a campaign to suppress opium and demanded that ministers drop their business involvements. On the pattern of his wartime diplomacy, he tried to gain some independence from the US patrons by reopening links with China. A secret mission went to meet Mao in Beijing and agreed to 'normalize relations in the long run'. Restrictions on trade and travel were eased, and several leftists and leaders of Bangkok's Chinese community visited Beijing.

The USA initially welcomed Phibun's support for democracy. But the US need for a client-state and its support for Thai democracy were at cross-purposes. Once press controls were relaxed, the Bangkok newspapers voiced strong resentment of the growing US role in Thailand and enthusiastic support for the resurgence of China. Left-wing parties reappeared. In the approach to the 1957 elections, the parties and papers representing both Phao-Phibun (now allied) and Sarit opportunistically espoused these anti-American and pro-Chinese sentiments. The launch of the film *The King and I* in the USA attracted a barrage of press ridicule.[11] Phao and Phibun won at the 1957 polls, but Sarit accused them of chicanery and suggested the USA was complicit. On 18 September 1957, showing yet again the strategic importance of the First Army, Sarit executed a coup, sending Phibun and Phao into exile. The USA feared its decade of investment in Thailand might be forfeit. They had long written off Sarit as a corrupt and drunken libertine. In the 1957 election campaign, his press had been the most virulently anti-American. During the coup, his troops came close to attacking the CIA office because of its association with his rival, Phao.

But Sarit needed continued US patronage to retain control over the army. As an olive branch, he appointed as prime minister Pote Sarasin who was US-educated, a former ambassador to the USA, and currently secretary-general of SEATO. Elections in December created a parliament with many leftists that Sarit found difficult to control, even with generous use of bribes. In early 1958, Sarit went to the USA for medical treatment and held consultations with President Eisenhower. On 20 October 1958, he carried out a second coup, declared martial law, annulled parliament, discarded the constitution, banned political parties, and arrested hundreds of politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and activists. The US cheered and granted US$20 million in economic aid. The State Department memorialized that this was not a coup but 'an orderly attempt by the present ruling group to solidify its position'.[12] Sarit called it a 'revolution'.

Sarit now unified the armed forces. Units and hardware were removed from the police and placed under the army. Sarit's old subordinates in the First Division moved into the command of the army and into the Cabinet. Future American funding was channelled through the army.

Sarit's consolidation of power and crackdown on left and liberal dissent in 1958 made the USA more confident about Thailand as a base. The outbreak of civil war in Laos in 1960 made Thailand a frontline state in US thinking. In 1962, the USA committed to defending it against communist attack, stationed the Seventh Fleet in the Gulf of Thailand, and moved 10 000 troops to Thailand. These were shortly removed, but returned in

1964, and were steadily augmented until Thailand was host to 45 000 US army and airforce personnel by 1969. The first air strike on North Vietnam was flown from Thailand in December 1964. Three-quarters of the bomb tonnage dropped on North Vietnam and Laos during 1965–68 was flown out of seven US bases in eastern Thailand. Thai troops were secretly hired as virtual mercenaries to fight in Laos from 1960. Some 11 000 Thai troops went to fight alongside the US in South Vietnam in 1967.

From 1962, the US poured money into the Border Patrol Police and counter-insurgency operations inside Thailand. US military aid quadrupled over the 1960s and peaked in 1972 at US$123 million. Economic aid grew in parallel to peak at the same level, with much of it channelled to the police and military programmes. With US backing and with state power, the Thai military budget increased even faster, from around US$20 million a year in the 1950s to around US$250 million a year in the early 1970s. Dollars consolidated Thailand's militarized state.

The USA built an imposing new embassy in Bangkok and sent a prominent Second World War soldier, 'Wild Bill' Donovan, to serve as ambassador. After the US located the SEATO headquarters in Bangkok, several UN bodies, international organizations, and American foundations followed this lead. Bangkok's *farang* population increased rapidly. Unlike in the colonial period, when this population was very varied, now it was distinctly American. Bangkok was chosen for the GIs' R&R ('rest and recreation') tours, with 45 000 visiting by 1967 (Figure 13). New Phetchaburi Road became an 'American strip' lined with bars, nightclubs, brothels, and massage parlours. Similar clusters mushroomed around the US air bases. The sex industry was not new; the public garishness was.

Estimates of the number of prostitutes in Bangkok ranged up to 300 000. The interior minister, General Praphat Charusathian, wanted even more because they attracted tourists and boosted the economy. Until the late 1950s, Thailand had no organized tourism industry, only 871 tourist-standard rooms, and only 40 000 foreign visitors a year. In 1959, a tourist authority was formed as part of development planning. In the early 1960s, a new runway was built at Don Mueang airport to accommodate jets. Total foreign visitors grew rapidly to over 600 000 by 1970, when tourism was ranked as the fifth-largest earner of foreign exchange. The largest group of visitors was American. The mid-1960s saw a frenzy of hotel building, which added over 7000 rooms.

The city changed in shape, style, and tastes. New suburbs clustered around the schools, shops, cinemas, and clubs catering for westerners. Elite Thai families were attracted to the same areas because of their perceived

Figure 13: American servicemen on R&R leap ashore into the arms of Pattaya's 'Hawaiians'.

status and their rising property values. Foreign goods – and especially American brand names – acquired new status value. The American era redefined what was modern and aspirational, especially for the urban middle class.

DEVELOPMENT AND CAPITAL

The US set out to develop a free-market economy to cement Thailand into the US camp of the Cold War.

President Truman introduced the word 'development' in his inaugural speech in 1947. Sarit understood its role as a key concept of the US global mission, and as a new and powerful justification for the power of the nation-state – 'progress' translated for the American era. His regime converted the new Thai coining, *phatthana*, into its watchword: 'Our important task in this revolutionary era is development, which includes economic development, educational development, administrative development, and everything else'. Sarit popularized slogans such as: 'Work is money. Money is work. This brings happiness.'[13]

Sarit welcomed a World Bank mission to Thailand after his first coup. Its report was transformed into Thailand's first five-year development plan,

launched in 1961. The plan condemned the state-led development policies pursued since the late 1930s and announced: 'The key note of the public development programme is, therefore, the encouragement of economic growth in the private sector'.[14]

The US helped to set up a new bureaucratic infrastructure for promoting development – a planning board, a budget bureau, investment promotion machinery, and a restructured central bank. US advisers arrived to help run them. Sarit also scrapped Phibun's labour legislation and initially suppressed labour politics completely. But US advisers counselled a more subtle approach. Sarit's government instituted many new regulations governing urban labour, and established a labour bureaucracy to administer them.

The first Thai recruits to the new technocracy had often been educated in the old world. But the USA began to create a new generation of technocrats who shared an American viewpoint. Several senior officials were taken to the USA for training. Around 1500 went on Fulbright or similar grants between 1951 and 1985. The numbers attending US higher education rose from a few hundred in the 1950s to 7000 by the early 1980s.

The early economic plans had three aims: intensify exploitation of Thailand's natural resources to deliver growth; transfer some of the resulting surplus for investment in the urban economy; and facilitate foreign investment to acquire technology. US firms were allowed 100 per cent ownership, while other foreign investors were limited to a minority share. US firms began to set up in Thailand from the late 1950s, but the volume of US investment was modest – confined mostly to mining and petroleum firms, a few consumer businesses, such as Coca-Cola, and projects directly connected to the war in Indochina. For most US capital, Thailand was too remote, unknown, and risky. The main beneficiaries of this capital-friendly development strategy were the Thai–Chinese entrepreneurial groups, which had risen since the 1930s.

The emergence of new business groups had begun tentatively before the Second World War. The 'Big Five' rice traders built integrated trading businesses, and a handful of long-settled Chinese families ventured into manufacturing. These groups developed relationships with the new post-1932 politicians that enabled them to survive and strengthen through the turmoil of the war and its aftermath.

The process of accumulation quickened from the war years. Many businesses suffered in the war economy, but a few profited spectacularly. Some Chinese entrepreneurs refused to cooperate with the Japanese because of their invasion of China, but others were tempted by the profits and grateful for the relaxation of Phibun's anti-Chinese constraints. The Japanese

military worked directly through the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to secure wartime supplies. Some firms did very well. A handful of shophouse scrap-metal dealers, for example, were boosted by the extraordinary demand for scarce metal. After the war, one of them (Phonprapha) progressed to importing and then manufacturing Japanese cars; another (Sahaviriya) became Thailand's largest steel maker; and a third (Asdathon) developed expertise in making sugar-crushing machinery and became a major sugar miller. In 1945, one prominent businessman was shot dead in the street, probably due to resentment against wartime profiteering.

The forced withdrawal of European firms provided another source of opportunity, especially in banking. Chin Sophonpanich was a shophouse trader who shuttled between Bangkok and China. During 1944–45, he was part of a syndicate that had suddenly found the capital funds for a whole range of new ventures, including gold trading, liquor, cinemas, match manufacture, and banking. He helped to set up systems of currency exchange and remittance to replace the services of the departed European banks. In 1944, Chin's group founded the Bangkok Bank, one of seven banks formed around the armistice.

The economic pace slowed in the post-war disorder, but then quickened with the pan-Asian Korean War boom of 1950–52 and the growing US economic patronage of Thailand. The new banks became central to an emerging business class. After the Chinese revolution in 1949, their main remittance business dwindled and they refocused on the domestic economy. Through the 1950s, they formed upcountry branch networks that collected the savings of farmers and local traders. They used the proceeds to invest directly in new business opportunities, and also to loan to associated families. They developed Asian regional networks, which collected trading information. Along with other entrepreneurs, they made friends with the generals who came to power in 1947, and hence gained protection and also access to profitable business opportunities. Bangkok Bank took off after the generals found government funds to help it over a liquidity crisis. The Phonprapha car import business prospered after the government bought its buses and ordained that all taxis should be Nissan. The Techaphaibun family built a liquor empire from distilleries, which the government sold off cheap.

The banking families and their associates took the lion's share of the succession of new opportunities that appeared in the era of US-directed 'development'. The policy to develop agricultural exports and drive the agrarian frontier through the uplands (see below) created new opportunities in crop processing and export. The Wanglee rice-trading family became

one of the biggest exporters of upland crops. The Chiaravanon family, which had begun importing Chinese seeds in the pre-war period, built mills to convert the new crops into animal feed, and then developed an integrated chicken farming business, which became the country's largest business empire, the Charoen Pokphand (CP) group.

By the 1960s, demand from the growing urban economy, and government policy to replace imports with domestic manufacture, created a new range of manufacturing opportunities. Families that had once been importers now invited their foreign partners to invest in local factories to overcome import barriers. In 1962, the Phonprapha family persuaded Nissan to set up a car assembly plant, followed by another for Yamaha motorcycles two years later. The Sahaviriya, former scrap-metal dealers, started making nails and barbed wire, expanded to construction steel in the late 1960s, and then took a Japanese partner for more complex products. In 1960, the Chokewatana family, which had begun importing Japanese products during the war, persuaded the Japanese Lion group to join in production of toothpaste and detergent, and added other similar ventures to its Sahapat consumer goods empire through the 1960s.

Demand for services soon followed. The Chirathiwat family had pioneered modern retail development since the late 1940s, but took off after opening its Silom Central department store in 1968, catering for a new enthusiasm for western goods in the era of American patronage. The Omphut family, which had earlier owned liquor shops and agencies, invested in a string of massage parlours, cinemas, hotels, and restaurants to cater for a new demand for entertainment among American visitors and local patrons. The family later transferred the proceeds into retail (the Mall group) and banking (Bank of Asia).

A few of these rising entrepreneurial families (for example, Lamsam and Wanglee) had roots back in the late 19th-century boom in rice, timber, and regional trading. Most, however, had arrived, usually with nothing more than the proverbial 'one pillow and one mat', in the inter-war period when immigration surged as China's economic and political crisis deepened. After the 1949 Chinese revolution, the route back to the mainland home was closed. Families concentrated on building their family and business futures in Thailand. They prospered by exploiting their own family labour, saving hard, reinvesting heavily in their businesses, prioritizing their children's education, developing family networks, and drawing on political contacts.

Around 30 family groups dominated this era through their privileged access to capital and political favours. They became business conglomerates by diversifying into property, hotels, hospitals, finance, insurance, and

other ventures to provide occupations for sons (and sometimes daughters). Leading lights of these families took prominent roles in speech-group and welfare associations. They exchanged marriage partners, crossing old boundaries of clan and dialect. They invested in one another's ventures to share profit and risk. The 13 banks, which persuaded the government to ban new entries and exclude foreign competition, towered above them all. Their deposits grew at an average 20 per cent a year for 20 years (the 1960s and 1970s). The four largest accounted for most of this growth, and each had hundreds of subsidiary companies, many accommodating the ruling generals on their boards. Below this elite sprawled a mass of smaller shophouse family enterprises with similar origins and aspirations.

In 1966, the American scholar Fred Riggs described the new Thai–Chinese business elite as 'pariah entrepreneurs',[15] condemned by their ethnic origins to low social status and political subordination to the bureaucrats and generals. In fact, the situation was more complex and less rigid than this judgement suggests. The legal framework for incorporation into the nation-state was now fixed. Children born in Thailand (that is, second generation) qualified for nationality, and their children (third generation) gained full civic rights, including voting, entry to parliament, and service in the armed forces. Some distinguished, long-settled Chinese families who had roots in the 19th century or earlier, were by now firmly embedded in the 'traditional' elite. They intermarried with royal-related families, and supplied some of the most prominent civilian and military officials, professionals, educators, and technocrats. They also sometimes acted as brokers for the new men of the Chinese community. The Sarasin family, for example, had become one of the most prominent bureaucratic families in the post-war era. Yet Pote Sarasin also acted as patron of one of the most remarkable new entrepreneurs, Charoen Siriwattanapakdi, who rose from humble origins to dominate the liquor business. Pote invested in Charoen's businesses, guaranteed his loans, and helped him to acquire the status equal to his rising wealth. Similarly, Anand Panyarachun, who was descended from one of the great Hokkien families of the late 19th century via an alliance with a prominent Mon family, started his career on a classic pattern of European education and the foreign service, but then joined one of the major conglomerates and became an important figure in the diplomacy between government and big business.

The new business elite families overcame all difficulties through money and political connections. For the mass of recent immigrants, the nationality issue was more vexed. Although the route back to China was closed in 1949, hopes that this might be temporary faded slowly. Families naturally

retained pride in their culture, and attachment to the language and customs they knew. The protagonist of a 1969 novel on Bangkok's Thai–Chinese said: 'We shall remain Chinese wherever we find ourselves'.[16] The language of everyday business, especially in the vast mass of shophouse family firms, remained Chinese, especially Teochiu.

The state's insistence that the immigrant Chinese merge themselves into the nation, particularly by adopting the Thai language and displaying political loyalty, was rooted in the ideology of a unified, imagined 'Thai culture'. In the short term, the delay in granting full civic rights, and the occasional public attacks on the Chinese, helped bureaucrats and generals to extract gatekeeping fees and to resist pressure for political participation. The post-1949 identification of 'China' with 'communism' added another dimension, which the US patrons encouraged. But this situation could only be temporary. As a result of inter-war immigration, the Chinese and their *lukjin* descendants dominated the urban population. Promotion of urban-biased economic development made them wealthy. Eventually, numbers and money would have political impact.

THE UPLANDS FRONTIER

In 1961, Headman Li banged the drum, and the villagers came to the meeting.

> 'I Headman Li will now inform you what this meeting is all about;
> The authorities have ordered all villagers to raise ducks and *sukon*'.
> Grandpa Si with the shaky head asked: 'What's this *sukon*?'
> Headman Li answered like a shot,
> 'A *sukon*, yes, it's just an ordinary puppy, a puppy, an ordinary puppy'.

The joke in this hugely popular song turned around the word *sukon*. It means 'pig', but is a fancy Sanskritized word found mainly in official reports and dictionaries. The song satirized the 1960s' passion for 'development' under which officials from a remote, urban culture began telling villagers what to do.

The second transformation of Thailand's rural landscape and society began after the Second World War. After a century of the rice frontier, land in the Chao Phraya delta and other smaller rice-bowls was fully occupied. Moreover, with better food, no warfare, and some control of epidemic diseases, population growth had spurted up to 3 per cent a year by the 1950s. Under these pressures, the frontier moved beyond the rivers and coastal areas into the upland plains.

Most of the area beyond the river valleys was still covered by forest. Malaria and other diseases were still a deterrent to settlement. Most of those who died building the Japanese railway in the western forests during the Second World War were taken by fever. The upper slopes of the hills were inhabited by hill peoples, including Karen, Hmong, Yao, Muser, and Akha. More trickled in, particularly in flight from the turmoil in southern China. From the Second World War onwards, these areas were connected to the international drug trade, enabling hill communities to obtain a cash income from opium cultivation. Loggers trawled the forests for valuable timber.

Between the highlands and the floodplains were large areas of undulating upland plains. The largest expanse was in the northeast, the Khorat Plateau, covering almost a third of the country's territory. Other areas were found on the fringes of the river systems. Three changes begun in the 1950s pushed the frontier out of the lowlands and into the upland forests. First, the Malaria Eradication Programme reduced malaria deaths from 206 per 100 000 in 1949 to 2 per 100 000 in 1987. Second, the USA sponsored the construction of highways as part of its war campaign in Indochina, beginning with the Mitraphap (Friendship) highway, cut from Bangkok into the northeast during 1955–57. Third, the new development strategy prioritized more intensive use of Thailand's natural resources. Dams were built for power and irrigation. Mines and agribusinesses were granted government promotion subsidies. Restrictions on logging were removed to supply match, paper, construction, and other industries.

In the Chao Phraya delta, the spearhead of the frontier had been the canal-digger's hoe. In the uplands, it was the logger's saw. Trees were felled for roads, dams, mines, US air bases, or just for the timber itself. Some of the large numbers of workers hired on these projects settled on their outskirts and cleared further areas for cultivation. Over a decade or so, many places went through three waves of settlement. First came the loggers, along with early settlers who practised shifting cultivation and then moved on, following the logging parties. Next came lowland farmers, sometimes commuting between their lowland paddy-farm and an upland plot, which could be worked in a different season. The third wave brought the landless poor, squeezed out of the valleys by population pressure. Often they were trucked in by a new breed of agrarian entrepreneurs who hired them tractors to plough the land, lent them money to plant the crop, and took away the produce. These entrepreneurs worked in turn for export agents, sugar mills, tobacco-curing yards, oil pressers, rubber packers, feedmills, and canneries which sprang up in boom towns throughout the uplands zone.

Borne along by these powerful forces, the frontier moved through the upland forests like a firestorm. In 40 years, Thailand's cultivated area tripled. Almost all the additional area was in the uplands. About half was planted to rice and the rest to a wide range of cash crops. Sugar plantations again appeared on the raised areas around the rim of the Chao Phraya delta. Rubber trees and oil palms were planted on the slopes of the hills running down the peninsula. Pineapple fields nibbled into the western forests. Cattle ranches spread along the escarpment between the central plain and the Khorat Plateau. Tobacco fields appeared around the northern valleys.

But some land soon proved unsuitable for such crops. The virgin fertility was quickly lost. Rainfall was too unreliable. Soil eroded from the slopes and subsoil moisture disappeared once too many trees were removed. Underground saline deposits were leached upwards by irrigation. Over large areas, only maize and cassava could survive in these harsh conditions. These two crops came to occupy half the total area of this upland cash-crop expansion. They were sold to feedmills and other starch producers. The typical farmer on the uplands frontier owned a 25-rai rolling plot, growing rain-fed rice in the hollows and maize or cassava on the slopes. Between the 1950s and 1970s, another 70 000 such farms, occupying an additional 2 million rai, appeared each year.

These farms were hacked out of the forest, which had covered two-thirds of the country at the time of the Second World War but only one-third just 30 years later. The government tacitly encouraged this destruction because the export of these new crops drove the expansion in the national economy. When communist rebellion began to spread through the forests in the mid-1960s, the government encouraged clearing even more to deny cover to the rebels. It built military roads into the forests and shepherded pioneer settlements along them. It burnt areas around the rebel bases. It handed out concessions to loggers who were supposed to clear areas and then reforest them. By 1986, these concessions covered half the country. In the mid-1970s, forest was disappearing at the rate of almost 600 000 rai a year.

At first, this frontier ran ahead of any government control. Force rather than law decided possession of land or settlement of disputes. But, by the 1960s, the government had become concerned about the spread of communist bases, and suspected that the lawlessness not only facilitated the rebels' activities but also encouraged settler communities to support them. Backed by US aid funds, government offices moved into the uplands zone. In the vanguard were the special police and army units engaged in counter-insurgency. They were followed by schools, and then a range of

offices set up to dispense aid funds in an attempt to win the 'hearts and minds' of the peasants. They built village roads, sank wells, connected up electricity, and provided disaster relief.

The society that developed in these upland conditions was very different from that of the paddy tracts where communities were oriented to subsistence, sold a surplus, and were gradually drawn deeper into the market economy. While some of the new upland villages were settled by kin groups, most were a mix of people coming from all directions. In the early stages of the upland expansion, many moved out from the old paddy tracts, especially into the northeast. Later, many northeasterners moved south to open up new tracts in the coastal basins down the peninsula. Some evolved communal institutions to cope with the harsh environment, but most did not.

Few upland farmers were self-reliant. For cash-crop cultivation they needed to buy seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, and perhaps hire equipment for land preparation and harvesting. Many producing vegetables, sugar, or poultry were tied into contract farming schemes where they supplied little more than the labour. Those growing tobacco, rubber, or oil palms were often obliged to sell to a sole local purchaser. Maize and cassava farmers worked on annual advances from the local trader. Only a minority of the households had enough paddy land for subsistence, and the unreliability of the rainfall meant that subsistence was never assured. Upland households were bound to the market to sell their produce and buy their staple. The local economy was geared around flows of inputs, credit, and government patronage into the village from outside, and flows of cash crops outwards.

Upland areas developed a distinct elite of people who straddled these inward and outward flows. These included the crop trader who often doubled as a moneylender and was likely to be someone of Chinese origin with connections to the local town and beyond. It might also include loggers with links to nearby sawmills, and owners of the trucks and buses that connected the locality to the outside world. It also included the local police chief, army commander, and district officer who wielded the government's power and dispensed the government's patronage. The post of *kamnan*, the head of a group of villages, became central to these networks of commerce and officialdom, and rivalry for the post was often fierce. This local elite was usually overwhelmingly male and ritually bound together by a drinking circle. By pooling their commercial and official power, they could further profit from illegal businesses and official chicanery: illegal logging would go unnoticed, land titles be generated in the paperwork, and smuggling proceed unimpeded.

Most settlers arrived poor and remained so. The nation's first count in 1962–63 found over three-quarters of rural households in the northeast living below a poverty line. By 1988, the proportion had fallen, but only to around a half. Few had a full land title. The government failed to extend the titling system into the upland tracts, so most had only an occupancy certificate. In 1964, the government resolved to preserve 40 per cent of the country as forest and began mapping areas in which people would not be allowed to settle. This mapping exercise ran in parallel with the rapid destruction and settlement of these same forest areas. By 1974, perhaps 5–6 million people were living inside the official 'forest' and were considered 'squatters' who did not qualify for any land deed at all. By the early 1990s, the number had risen to 10–12 million, over a third of the whole rural population.

PEASANTS INTO THE MARKET

Development also transformed the old paddy tracts. After 1945, international agencies were interested in expanding Thailand's rice surplus to help feed the war-torn countries of Asia immediately, and the growing population of Asia in the longer term. Van der Heide's 1902 plan to regularize the water supply of the whole Chao Phraya delta was revived and updated with international expertise and sponsorship. The Chainat dam at the head of the delta was completed in 1957, and two more dams on the upper tributaries were added over the next decade. These dams lessened the risk of seasonal flooding or scarcity. The rivers and an extended canal network spread the flow from the dams more evenly across the whole delta zone.

The initial impact of this big investment was disappointing. But the 1960s' 'Green Revolution', sparked by research on rice technology in the Philippines, combined with greater water security to bring major changes. New paddy seeds adapted to Thai conditions were developed and distributed in the 1960s. Fertilizer and pesticide use rapidly increased. Two-wheeled tractors, developed in China and known as 'iron buffalo', were locally produced and rapidly replaced their four-legged counterpart. The dams spread the water supply over a long period, the new seeds ripened more quickly, and the iron buffaloes shortened the time for land preparation. Favoured areas, especially around the top and sides of the Chao Phraya delta, could now grow two or three crops of rice a year.

On a lesser scale, government water projects brought the same benefits to other established paddy tracts. The Mae Teng project extended the same principle of stable water supply to the Chiang Mai valley. Dams on the

upper tributaries of the Chao Phraya created more secure water supplies along valleys that had been highly prone to seasonal flooding. Barrages improved the usability of the water along the Mun-Chi river system of the northeast. Smaller projects were built in the rice-bowls down the peninsula coasts.

With these innovations, paddy yields per rai in the central plain doubled in 30 years. Rice exports surged again, making Thailand the world's largest rice exporter. People benefited. The proportion of households below the poverty line in the central region fell from two-fifths in 1962–63 to just one-eighth only 13 years later.

In the mid-1970s, a Japanese anthropologist returned to a village in the upper delta that he had first studied a decade earlier. Then, it had been a recent frontier settlement of smallholder farms using exchange labour and traditional technology. He was amazed by the change over the intervening handful of years. Bullocks had disappeared, replaced by small tractors. Exchange labour had collapsed and professional agents now managed people in labour gangs. Traditional rice varieties had been replaced by the new Green Revolution seeds, nourished with fertilizer and chemicals. Most of all, the anthropologist noted the mental change. Villagers who had described the local rituals to him only a decade ago now exclaimed that 'the rice spirit is no match for chemical fertilizer'.[17]

This anthropologist, along with many others, feared that this rapid commercialization, combined with the pressure on land, would break the society apart. In other countries, the Green Revolution favoured the big farmers and many predicted a similar result in Thailand. But the Chao Phraya delta's experience was subtly different.

There were no scale barriers preventing the Chao Phraya delta smallholders from gaining access to the new technology. With land pressure, farms became smaller – the old 25-rai average was reduced to around 19 rai. But smallholders could compensate by investing in more productive technology or tapping a growing market for rented land. There was another spurt of mobility as families shifted around the delta in search of new opportunities, now framed not by access to land but by access to inputs, water, and markets. The smallholders did not disappear. Indeed, their numbers increased markedly. But they were now more conclusively transformed into market-oriented farmers, supplementing their family resources of knowledge and labour with purchased technology, wage labour, and rented land.

A few entrepreneurial farmers played the market to amass large landholdings. But at the same time, some of the old noble landlords took the

opportunity of rising land prices to liquidate their holdings. The concentration of landholding increased only marginally and the large proportion of land worked by owner-occupiers barely changed.

At the social base, the number of households with no land or too little land slowly increased. By the 1970s, about a fifth of households in the central plain and in the northern valleys were landless, and around another tenth were land-poor. Many, particularly in the north, survived by sharecropping. The rest worked mainly as wage labour.

The big change was that smallholder households now dealt with and depended on commercial markets much more than before. They hired tractors to level or raise their land to take best advantage of the secure water supply. They bought high-yielding seeds, fertilizer, and chemicals. They invested in iron buffaloes and water pumps. Some switched from rice to fruit, vegetables, and other higher-value crops. Many now grew high-yielding varieties of rice, which did not suit local tastes. More households bought their staple food from the market. Weaving and other crafts withered away, and the number of shops and occasional markets increased. To increase rural credit, in 1966 the government created an agricultural bank, the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC), which by 1979 was advancing 19 billion baht a year. In 1975, the government forced the commercial banks to direct at least 5 per cent of their lending to agriculture.

Smallholders also dealt more with the government. As in the uplands, schools, police, and district offices spread into the countryside. Unlike in the uplands, the government opened land offices and began to give full land titles. Water had earlier been a gift of nature, but, as the saying came to be, 'nowadays water has a master'. Farmers often had to negotiate with officials to get their share.

Also as in the uplands, an elite appeared that handled these relations with the commercial and official worlds beyond the village. As a popular song joked, a few seemed to monopolize a whole range of new business opportunities:

> Talking of riches, none equals me.
> All over Suphan I'm known as the big millionaire.
> Even my thousands of cattle have their teeth capped with gold.
> I've a rice mill, a construction store, a pottery, an ice factory, a brewery.
> I've just built an iron works, gambling joint, upholstery, and several funeral parlours.
> But I stay clear of the police station.[18]

The subject of this song was female – quite common in the delta where the traders and rice barge-owners had often been women. But generally within rural society, the position of women had declined over the past century. After corvée ended and settled agriculture spread, men took the leading role in agricultural work. As contacts with the (male) merchant and (male) official increased, men displaced women from their roles in trade. Local spirit worship, often led by female experts, gradually but incompletely ceded space to Buddhism with its exclusively male monkhood.

Almost everywhere, communal practices of exchange labour faded away. Villagers might still cooperate strongly for managing irrigation, festivals, and the local *wat*, but increasingly they dealt with state and market as individuals.

VILLAGE AND CITY

The era of development prompted rural migration into the city. For over a century, the open land frontier had drawn people away from the city. Most labour for the rice mills, sawmills, port, and other enterprises that boomed in the colonial era came from Chinese migration. Because of high natural productivity and expanding supplies of land, rural wages were high, creating little incentive to look for work in the city.

From the 1920s, some villagers were pushed to the city by bad seasons and periodic slumps in the international rice trade. In 1949, immigration from China was effectively stopped. Over the next two decades, urban growth on the one hand, and growing demographic pressure and exhaustion of land in the Chao Phraya delta on the other, widened the gap between urban and rural wages. More rural people were drawn to work in the city. Road construction and new bus services made such moves easier. In the 1960s, Bangkok's population spurted from 1.8 to 3 million people. The growth of the city not only created factory work but also jobs as drivers, house servants, shop and restaurant workers, and construction labourers. The arrival of US troops and the use of Thailand for 'rest and recreation' from the Vietnam war boosted the sex industry. From the early 1970s, labour contractors conveyed people to work overseas, especially in the Middle East.

A complex pattern of migration was established that continued over the decades to come. Teenagers left the village to complete their education, to make some money, or just to have some fun and broaden their experience. Some stayed in the city only a few years, but others remained permanently or returned to the village only at retirement. Meanwhile there were also

many shorter-term moves. Most farming depended on the monsoon rains and hence lasted only half the year. Some people sought work elsewhere for the other half. Others shuttled back and forth between planting and harvest. By the late 1970s, 1.5 million people were moving between village and city in these seasonal flows. At first, most of the migrants came from the central plain because of proximity and because of the land crisis. By the 1970s, northeasterners had also begun to join the flow, particularly on a seasonal basis. The migration stream contained almost as many women as men.

This passage from village to city was reflected in *luk thung* (literally, 'child of the field') music, which boomed in the 1960s and 1970s. The music was rooted in folk styles from the central region where most of the migrants originated. But the boom was created by the development of a national radio network in the 1960s, the construction of roads that conveyed touring roadshows around the villages, and the development of audiotapes. To succeed, singers had to have an authentic rural background. The female star Phumphuang Duangjan had been a child labourer on sugar plantations. The male star Sayan Sanya had been a rice farmer:

> I studied only to fourth grade.
> I travelled from Don Chedi, Suphanburi, in the forest.
> Singer Sayan Sanya, a rural lad,
> I gambled my life with my songs.

The songs convey the excitement and the heartache of leaving the village for the city. Many songs described new urban lives as truck drivers, waitresses, bus conductors, factory hands, and sex workers. They lamented the crop failures, natural disasters, and general poverty that had forced them to migrate. They warned other migrants that city people would look down on them with comments like 'the poor are smelly'. They cautioned migrant girls about predatory urban men. Several songs emphasized that the city sojourn was a temporary life-stage, and that the singer intended to return as soon as possible to the village. The singer of 'I won't forget Isan' explained to his girlfriend left behind:

> I have to go though I miss you all the time.
> If I save enough I would ask for your hand.
> I'm poor and that's why I have to leave you
> To find money in Bangkok.
> Please wait until I save enough.

The sheer energy of *luk thung* celebrated the excitement of experiencing the city. But the content of the songs emphasized the difficulties and the

desire to retain contact with the village. Many songs returned to the theme of remembering the peace of the village, the warmth of the family, and the boyfriend or girlfriend left behind. Phumphuang sang:

> Mum and dad, help me, or else I'm dead this time.
> My youth and beauty ruined because of a city slicker's sweet talk.
> Mum and dad, help me to go back home.

THE PASSING OF SAKDINA

The old elite of great households was not destroyed after 1932, but its role and significance changed. For 16 years there was no resident king to serve as the ritual focus of the old order. Many royal family members were purged from the top ranks of military and civilian officialdom. The Ayutthayan-era ranks and job names were discontinued from 1932 and banned in 1941 (though some, including Phibun and Wichit, converted the latter into a personal name). People in the bureaucracy were now known by a name that recognized their individuality and their family, rather than their rank and position as granted by the king. The education of new officials, especially at Thammasat University, stressed service to the state rather than to the monarchy. The great inflation of the Second World War decimated the real value of official salaries, eroding the overall cachet of bureaucratic office. Yet this transformation was far from complete. The conventional term for bureaucrat remained *kha ratchakan*, the servant of the king.

The great households that had been the foundations of the old elite changed in character. Chulalongkorn was the last king to practise and hence endorse polygamy. Vajiravudh had only one wife and one daughter at the very end of his reign. King Prajadhipok had only one wife, Queen Rambhai Bharni, and no children. The 1935 legal code recognized only one marital partner. Many elite men still practised polygamy but increasingly by taking minor wives in serial sequence or in separate domiciles. Many elite children rebelled against parental control over their choice of marriage partners. Great households could no longer build influence through strategic webs of polygamous marriage connections. Once the great households lost this ability, and their privileged grip on high office, they began to disintegrate. Kukrit Pramoj's hugely popular novel *Si phaendin* (Four Reigns, 1950) traced the fragmentation of one fictional aristocratic family as the members of its new generation are drawn off to varied careers, rival political ideas, and diverse marriage partners (*farang*, Chinese). The bombing of the family house in 1944 symbolizes the household's final disintegration.

The state ceased to act as a mechanism for the old elite's financial support and accumulation. Allowances to the sprawling royal clan ended in 1932. Other great households lost sinecures. The crown's landed property and investments, mostly accumulated in the Fifth Reign, were managed by the Crown Property Bureau, rather like a foundation. Other great families fell back on the land and other assets they had been able to accumulate over the previous half century. Urban land, in particular, inflated in value and sustained many families. But other assets lost value because of changing fashions and the great wartime inflation. And the culture of polygamy, which had once built the great households, now divided and dissipated their assets by inheritance. A popular memoir described how Queen Rambhai Bharni and a chance co-inheritor divided up Prajadhipok's personal assets by drawing lots over the land deeds, then sharing out the movables in the grounds of Sukhothai Palace, with many items auctioned immediately to Chinese dealers or pilfered later because of neglect.[19]

Education was a more secure support for the descendants of the old households. Chulalongkorn had encouraged his kin and other aristocrats to invest in education so their sons could contribute to progress. The culture of sending sons overseas for education, preferably to Europe, had taken strong root among the elite. In the post-1945 era, many descendants of the royal clan and great households had outstanding careers as professionals, educators, technocrats, scientists, and artists.

A handful with royal or noble blood were drawn to the People's Party from conviction and had political careers after 1932, especially Wan Waithayakon who became an envoy and virtual foreign minister. Even after many exiles returned at the end of the Second World War, very few gained political prominence. The Pramoj brothers, Seni and Kukrit, were the outstanding exceptions. The revival of the monarchy in the post-war era (see next chapter) focused very much on the immediate royal family. Personal titles that indicated royal family membership (prince, Mom Chao, Mom Ratchawong, Mom Luang) remained in use and carried social cachet. But the driving forces of society and politics were now the new generals, businesspeople, and technocrats.

CONCLUSION

The Second World War proved to be a boundary between eras. The memory of an absolute monarchy faded. The great households disintegrated. The old colonial powers retreated. The liberal nationalist ideas of the 1920s and 1930s were first pushed aside by the militaristic nationalism of the

wartime era, then crushed by the anti-communist fervour in the aftermath.

After the war, the USA recruited Thailand as ally and base for prosecuting the Cold War in Asia. The colonial concept of 'progress' and its local interpretation as the cultivation of a new national citizen was replaced by the concept of 'development' and its more precise focus on economic development through private enterprise. 'Development' released the potential of the urban society imported from southern China over the past century – and especially the large chunk that had arrived in the last surge of immigration in the inter-war period. Entrepreneur families grabbed opportunities created by the collapse of the old colonial economy in wartime, and were then boosted by the money flows, ideological commitment, bureaucratic infrastructure, and political links of the era of US patronage. From the late 1950s, the Thai economy grew at a sustained average of 7 per cent a year, one of the fastest rates in the developing world.

This growth came from more intensive exploitation of natural resources and people. Another surge of the agrarian frontier completed the transformation of the natural landscape of forest into a zone of intensive agricultural exploitation. Peasant smallholders were bound much more firmly into the market, and subject more to governmental instruction and patronage. Increasing numbers were squeezed out of the villages to work in the factories and service establishments of the expanding neocolonial city.

In the American era, Thailand became a subject of academic study. By avoiding colonial rule, it had not had such full attention earlier. American academics portrayed a society where passivity and paternalism were traditional. Sociologists discovered that Thai society was 'loosely structured', meaning it lacked institutions and traditions for collective action. Anthropologists explained that Theravada Buddhism concentrated people's minds on merit in future lives, not the present day. Riggs argued that the 'bureaucratic polity', meaning the absence of democratic politics, resulted in large part because Chinese businesspeople had to depend on bureaucratic patronage. Historians reproduced Damrong's story of a singular and dominant monarchical tradition stretching back through Ayutthaya to a Sukhothai 'golden age'. There were also dissenters who examined the diverse cultures of outlying regions, the little traditions of resistance and revolt, and the rise of militarism. But the mainstream of American scholarship provided reassurance that the current military dictatorship, perched over a passive society and legitimized by monarchy, was a natural outcome of Thailand's history, sociology, and culture, and was unlikely to be threatened.

Yet the results of Thailand's insertion into the ideological contest of the Cold War were complex. In Thailand, the USA underwrote dictatorship, but at home it exemplified ideals of liberalism and republicanism, which were experienced by more and more Thai visiting the USA as students or absorbing its cultural output in literature, song, and film. Opposition to neocolonialism, military dictatorship, and rapid capitalist exploitation also looked for inspiration both backwards into Thailand's pre-American past and outwards to America's Cold War rivals. The crucible for this conflicting mix of new ideas was a new generation of students.