A HISTORY OF THAILAND
Third Edition

A History of Thailand offers a lively and accessible account of Thailand’s political, economic, social and cultural history, from the early settlements in the Chao Phraya basin to today.

Now in its third edition, this book explores how a world of mandarins and unfree peasants was transformed by colonialism, the expansion of the rice frontier and immigration of traders and labourers from southern China. It examines how the monarchy managed the foundation of a new nation-state at the turn of the 20th century.

Baker and Phongpaichit capture the clashes between various groups – urban nationalists, ambitious generals, communist rebels and business politicians – in their attempts to take control of the nation-state in the 20th century. They track Thailand’s economic changes through the highs and lows of an economic boom, globalization and the evolution of mass society.

This edition sheds light on Thailand’s recent political, social and economic developments, covering the coup of 2006, the violent street politics of May 2010, and the landmark election of 2011 and its aftermath. It shows how in Thailand today the monarchy, the military, business and new mass movements are players in a complex conflict over the nature and future of the country’s democracy.

Chris Baker taught Asian history at Cambridge University and has lived in Thailand for over 30 years. He is now an independent writer, researcher and translator.

Pasuk Phongpaichit is Professor in the Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. She has written widely in Thai and English on the Thai economy, sex industry, corruption, illegal economy and inequality.
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Preface

History was invented for the nation-state. It has a tendency to imagine ‘the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time’ (Prasenjit Duara). All too easily, the nation becomes something natural that always existed but was only properly realized in the nation-state. In reaction against this tendency, historians today prefer to write about people, things, ideas, localities, regions, or the globe – anything but the nation. Or else they write reflective histories about the interplay between the nation and the production of its own history.

The approach adopted here is to make the career of the nation-state the explicit focus of the story. One of the themes of this book is how the idea of the nation and the machinery of the nation-state were established in Thailand, and then how different social forces tried to make use of it – by reinterpreting what the nation meant, and by seeking to control or influence the use of state power. The second major theme is the evolution of the social forces involved. After the introductory chapter, the chapters alternate between these two themes, though the division is rough not rigid.

The publisher wants the books in this series to be accessible to a wide readership, not too long and not overloaded with academic referencing. Our policy has been to limit footnoting to the sources for direct quotations. The appendix of ‘Readings’ cites major published works in English, but rather little has been published in English on modern Thailand over the past generation. In Thai there has been a huge amount, and even more exists in unpublished theses in both Thai and English. Our dependence on these works should be easily recognizable by their authors and other experts. Some of the most important are: Srisak Vallibhotama, Geoff Wade, Phiset Jiajanphong, and Sratsawadi Ongsakun on early history; Nidhi Eoseewong and Saichon Sattayanurak on early Bangkok society;
Preface

Davisakdi Puaksom, Attachak Sattayanurak, and Rujaya Abhakorn on the Chulalongkorn reform era; Phimpraphai Phisanbut, Chammongsri Ruttin, and Panni Bualek on city society; Chatthip Nartsupa, David Johnston, and Atsushi Kitahara on rural society; Nakharin Mektrairat, Eiji Murashima, Thamrongksak Petchloetan, Chanida Phromphayak Puaksom, Saichon Sattayanurak, Chaloekim Phianuan, Morakot Jewachinda, Vichitvong na Pombejra, Phenphisut Intarthriphom, and Matt Copeland on nationalisms; Chalong Soonthravarnich, Somsak Jeanteerasak, Suthachai Yimprasot, and Charnvit Kasetsiri on the American era; Praphat Pintobtaeng, Thirayuth Boonmi, Anek Laothamatas, Ubonrat Siriyuvaksak, James Ockey, Kasian Tejapira, and Thongchai Winichakul on Thailand since 1975. We would like to record our appreciation and thanks, along with apologies for any shortcomings in our use of these works.

The book was written in Thailand but with indispensable help from forays to libraries and research centres elsewhere. We are especially grateful to the Center of Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University, the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen, Johns Hopkins SAIS in Washington, and the libraries of the Australian National University and Cambridge University.

We would like to thank Kevin Hewison, Craig Reynolds, Malcom Falkus, Grant Evans, Andrew Brown, and John Funston who commented on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

For help in finding the illustrations, thanks to the Thailand National Archives, Thammasat University Archives, Bangkok Post, The Nation, the Siam Society, Anake Nawikamune, Charnvit Kasetsiri, Chatchawan Chatsuritchai, Daoruang Naewthong, Ekkarin Latthasaksiri, Kane Sarika, Kovit Sanandaeng, Krairoek Nana, Matichon, Nantiya Tangwisutitijit, Nick Nositiz, Pana Janviroj, Piriya Krainiksh, Sa-ard Angkunwat, Sakdina Chattrakul na Ayudhya, Sanga Luchapatthanakon, Sharon O’Toole, Somsuda Leyavanija, Steve Van Beek, Subhatra Bhumiprabhas, Thamrongksak Petchloetan, and Warunee Osatharam.


We have updated the account up to early 2014, including the coup of 2006, the troubles of May 2010, and the landmark election of 2011. In a few other places, we have made small changes incorporating newly published research.
Preface

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND NAMES

Official spellings are used for kings and places, and conventional forms for some well-known names. Otherwise, Thai is translated using the Royal Institute system, with the exception of using ‘j’ for jo jan.
Abbreviations

ASEAN  Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BAAC  Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
CDA  Constitution Drafting Assembly
CEO  chief executive officer
CIA  Central Intelligence Agency
CP  Charoen Pokphand group of companies
CPD  Campaign for Popular Democracy
CPT  Communist Party of Thailand
GDP  gross domestic product
IMF  International Monetary Fund
ISOC  Internal Security Operations Command
ITV  Independent Television
KMT  Kuomintang
MP  member of parliament
NESDB  National Economic and Social Development Board, the planning agency
NGO  non-governmental organization
NIO  National Identity Office
NPKC  National Peacekeeping Council
OECD  Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAD  People's Alliance for Democracy
PFT  Peasants Federation of Thailand
PPB  Privy Purse Bureau
PPE  Philosophy, Politics and Economics
PPP  People Power Party
SEATO  Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TRT  Thai Rak Thai Party (Thais love Thais)
UDD  United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship
UN  United Nations
USAID  US Agency for International Development
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angryi</td>
<td>a Chinese secret society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baht</td>
<td>a unit of currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barami</td>
<td>charisma; innate authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodhisatta</td>
<td>a future Buddha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cakkavatin</td>
<td>the universal emperor in Buddhist cosmology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chataphum</td>
<td>'victorious emplacement'; the science of siting a city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakri</td>
<td>the name of the Bangkok dynasty; adapted from King Rama I's former title as a minister of the military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chaophraya</td>
<td>one of the highest non-royal titles in the traditional ranking system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chat</td>
<td>birth; race; nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chatprathet</td>
<td>nation-state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chedi</td>
<td>a stupa; a reliquary temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choduek</td>
<td>the traditional title for the head of the Chinese community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compradore</td>
<td>an agent of a colonial firm, liaising with local partners or customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corvée</td>
<td>labour exacted by a feudal lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ekkanat</td>
<td>a unified and independent kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farang</td>
<td>a westerner; a European; a foreigner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isan</td>
<td>the northeast region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itthiphon</td>
<td>influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jao</td>
<td>a lord; a ruler; a member of the royal family/clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jao pho</td>
<td>a godfather; the mafia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jao sua</td>
<td>a merchant prince, especially Chinese (Thai adaptation of a Chinese phrase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jap jong</td>
<td>the process of staking a claim to unused land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary

jataka  a collection of tales of the former lives of the Buddha; often used for preaching, or as the subjects of temple murals
jek  a pejorative term for Chinese in Thailand
kalaborom  a minister and ministry in charge of the southern region in the traditional form of government, and overseeing defence in the modern form
kamnan  the head of a group of villages
kanmueang ning  quiet or calm politics
kathin  the ceremony of presenting new robes to Buddhist monks
kha ratchakan  a bureaucrat; originally, the servant of the king
khon samai mai  modern people
khwaen  a confederation of mueang
lak ratchakan  the principle of service to the king
lak wicha  the principle of law and rationality
luk thung  ‘child of the field’, a music style
lukjin  ‘child of China’, a term for Thai-born descendants of a Chinese immigrant
mahanakhon  ‘great cities’
mankhong  security
manutsayatham  humanitarianism, or a belief in people
muang fai  weir-and-channel irrigation system
mueang  a political unit; originally a city-state, but also applicable to countries
munnai  an overseer
naga  a mythological serpent
nai  a boss; an overseer
nakleng  a tough guy
nibbana  nirvana; release from worldly existence in Buddhist teaching
nirat  a poetic form combining travel, remembrance of loved one(s), and observation of nature
phattana  development
phleng phua chiwit  songs for life
pho khun  a paternal ruler in the legendary mode of the Sukhothai kings
pho liang  patron
pho yu pho kin  ‘enough to live and eat’; sufficiency
Glossary

**phrai**
in the traditional order, a freeman commoner bound to corvée

**phrai mangmi**
a rich commoner

**phrakhlang**
the royal treasury (and its minister) in traditional government

**phramahakasat**
a great king

**phu di**
‘good people’; the aristocracy

**phu noi**
little (ordinary) people

**phu yai**
big (powerful) people

**phueng ton eng**
self-reliance

**phumibun**
a ‘man of merit’; a person of special or supernatural power, sometimes a leader of millenarian revolt

**prathet**
country

**prathetchat**
nation-state

**protége**
someone under the protection of a colonial power (such as Britain or France) in accordance with the extraterritorial provisions of colonial treaties

**rachasap**
‘royal language’; a specialized vocabulary for addressing kings

**rai**
a unit of area, = 0.16 hectare

**ratchathani**
abode of kings; the inner, core kingdom

**rattibhanyom**
a cultural mandate; a state edict

**saë**
a Chinese clan name

**sakdina**
‘power over fields’; a traditional system of numerical ranks; sometimes used as a referent for the Thai equivalent of feudalism

**samakhom lap**
a secret society

**samakkhi(tham)**
unity

**sanchat thai**
of Thai nationality

**sawatdi**
greeting

Serì Thai
Free Thai, a resistance movement against the Japanese during the Second World War

**siwilai**
Thai adaptation of the word ‘civilized’, encapsulating aspirations for ‘progress’

**sukhaphiban**
sanitary district

**thamma**
dharma, the teachings of the Buddha; righteous conduct

**thammaracha**
dharmaraja, a ruler adhering to Buddhist morality

**thammathut**
an ambassador of *thamma*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>a slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thesaphiban</td>
<td>‘control over territory’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thotsaphit ratchatham</td>
<td>the 10 laws of royal conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thudong</td>
<td>pilgrimage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traiphum</td>
<td>‘Three Worlds’; an early Buddhist cosmology, perhaps written in the 14th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wat</td>
<td>a Buddhist temple; a monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wihan</td>
<td>an assembly hall in a Buddhist temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winaya</td>
<td>the code of discipline for Buddhist monks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1351</td>
<td>Legendary foundation of Ayutthaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1569</td>
<td>First fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>Second fall of Ayutthaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>New capital established at Bangkok; King Yotfa, Rama I, accedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>First trade treaty with Britain signed, negotiated by John Crawfurd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>King Mongkut, Rama IV, accedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Bowring treaty signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>French protectorate of Cambodia established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, accedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Chulalongkorn visits India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Front Palace Incident takes place; Anglo-Siamese Treaty over Chiang Mai signed; edict abolishing slavery issued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Prince Prisdang’s memorial on a constitution prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Privy Purse Bureau established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Ministerial council formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>French gunboats threaten Bangkok (Paknam Incident); Ministry of Interior founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Chulalongkorn makes first visit to Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Ubon phumibun revolt takes place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Revolts break out in Phrae and the southern states revolt; Sangha Act passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Conscription edict issued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Sun Yat-Sen visits Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Anglo-Siamese Treaty finalizes Siam’s boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>King Vajiravudh, Rama VI, accedes; Chinese strike in Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Plot uncovered in military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Nationality Act passed; Surname Act passed; Vajiravudh’s The Jews of the East published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Chulalongkorn University founded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Chronology

1917  Siamese contingent established to fight on Allied side in Europe; first ‘political newspaper’ published
1920  Prince Damrong’s Our Wars with the Burmese first published
1923  Press Act passed; W. C. Dodd’s The Tai Race published
1925  King Prajadhipok, Rama VII, accedes
1927  People’s Party founded in Paris
1928  Kulap Saipradit’s Luk phu chai (A Real Man) published; Khun Wichitmatra’s Lak Thai (Origins of the Thai) published; Wichit Wathakan’s Mahaburut (Great Men) published; Japanese goods boycotted
1930  Ho Chi Minh (intermittently in Siam since 1928 organizing Vietnamese émigrés) forms Communist Party of Siam
1932  Revolution converts absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy (24 June)
1933  Boworadet Revolt takes place
1934  Thammasat University founded; Phibun becomes minister of defence and army chief
1935  King Prajadhipok abdicates
1936  Wichit Wathakan’s play Luat Suphan (Blood of Suphanburi) first performed
1937  Japanese imports boycotted second time
1938  Phibun becomes prime minister; Thai Rice Company formed
1939  Siam renamed Thailand; series of state edicts starts; Constitution Monument completed
1941  Japanese army enters Thailand; Thailand declares war on Allies; battle with French takes place
1942  Phibun’s Sangha Act passed; Communist Party of Thailand refounded
1944  Seri Thai network established; Phibun ousted as prime minister; Bangkok Bank founded
1945  Seni Pramoj recalled from USA to front peace negotiations
1946  Pridi’s constitution passed; King Ananda Mahidol, Rama VIII, dies; King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, accedes; First May Day rally is held
1947  First national labour federation formed; coup returns Phibun to power
1948  Troubles in Muslim south after Haji Sulong’s arrest; Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) adopts Maoist strategy
1949  Palace Rebellion occurs; Pridi flees
1950  Phibun makes a sweep against Peace Movement
Chronology

1951  King Rama IX returns to Thailand; Silent or Radio Coup occurs; first US military aid arrives
1954  Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) formed
1955  Phibun’s democracy interlude occurs
1957  Sarit Thanarat takes power by coup; Mitraphap highway completed
1958  Sarit’s second coup and repression takes place
1960  Thai troops fight in Laos
1961  Khrong Chandawong executed; CPT forms first rural base in Phuphan
1962  Sarit’s Sangha Act passed; Rusk-Khoman agreement confirms US security alliance
1963  Sarit dies, succeeded by Thanom Kittikhachon; Social Science Review founded
1964  First air strike on Vietnam flown from Thailand
1965  ‘First shot’ of communist insurgency
1966  Jit Phumisak shot dead in Phuphan
1967  Thai troops fight in South Vietnam; Hmong rebellion takes place in northern hills
1968  Constitution restored
1971  Thanom makes a coup against his own government and abrogates the constitution; Village Scouts formed
1972  Students protest against Japanese goods, and for restoration of constitution
1973  Student uprising fells Thanom (14 October)
1974  Peasants Federation of Thailand (PFT) formed; workers strike at Dusit Thani Hotel
1975  Elected governments headed by Kukrit and Seni Pramoj; Nawaphon and Red Gaurs formed; US troops start to depart
1976  Massacre at Thammasat University and military coup occurs (6 October)
1979  Elections and parliament restored
1980  Prem Tinsulanond becomes prime minister; political policy to end insurgency launched
1981  Failed April Fool’s Day Coup occurs
1984  Baht devalued
1985  A coup fails; Chamlong Srimuang elected mayor of Bangkok
1986  Nidhi Eoseewong’s study of King Taksin published
1987  Remnants of CPT arrested; Sujit Wongthet's Jek pon Lao (Chinese Mixed with Lao) published
Chronology

1988  Chatichai Choonhavan becomes first elected prime minister since 1976; Nam Choan dam project cancelled
1991  Military coup by National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC) takes place; Anand Panyarachun becomes prime minister
1992  NPKC prime minister Suchinda Kraprayun forced out by street demonstrations of 'Black May'; Khao Jo Ko protest against forest resettlement takes place; Phumpruang Duangjan dies; Chuan Leekpai becomes prime minister
1994  Thai Culture Promotion Year celebrated; King Bhumibol's sufficiency farming scheme instigated; Pak Mun dam completed
1995  Constitution Drafting Assembly established; Assembly of the Poor founded
1996  Banharn Silpa-archa ousted after no-confidence debate
1997  Assembly of the Poor 99-day protest takes place; 'People's Constitution' passed; economic crisis begins
1998  Thai Rak Thai Party founded by Thaksin Shinawatra
2001  Thaksin Shinawatra becomes prime minister
2003  ‘War on drugs’ claims over 2500 lives
2004  Militancy in the far south revived with Narathiwat armoury raid, Krue-se and Tak Bai incidents take place
2006  Thaksin government overthrown by coup
2007  New constitution accepted in national referendum; December elections usher in coalition headed by People Power Party (PPP) with Samak Sundaravej as prime minister
2008  After Yellow Shirt demonstration closes Bangkok airport, PPP government removed by courts; Abhisit Vejjajiva of the Democrat Party becomes prime minister
2009  Large military operation clears Red Shirt demonstration at Thai New Year
2010  Massive Red Shirt demonstrations end in May 2010 with around a hundred deaths
2011  Pheu Thai wins absolute majority at July election; Yingluck Shinawatra becomes Thailand’s first female prime minister
2013  Amnesty bill designed to allow Thaksin to return fails after massive urban protest