Serhat Ünaldi

Modern Monarchs?
A Comparison of the Democratic Roles of Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej and Juan Carlos of Spain

A thesis submitted to
the Department of Southeast Asian Studies
at the Institute of Asian and African Studies
at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts
Modern Monarchs?
A Comparison of the Democratic Roles of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej and Juan Carlos of Spain

Serhat Gnaidi
Modern Monarchs?

A Comparison of the Democratic Roles of Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej and Juan Carlos of Spain

A thesis submitted to
the Department of Southeast Asian Studies
at the Institute of Asian and African Studies
at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts

Serhat Ünaldi
Rigaer Straße 102
10247 Berlin
Tel: 030 42805844
ueña@gmx.de

Monobachelor: Area Studies Asia/Africa, Minor: Social Sciences
6th semester
Matr.-No: 508253
1. July 2008
Contents

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 3

1. First Part: Introduction – Monarchy, democracy and authenticity .......................... 5
   1.1. Methods: Feeling kingship, reading history ................................................................. 7
   1.2. Reflections: Western, Eastern or global kingship? .................................................... 11

2. Main Part: Kings’ Quests ...................................................................................................... 14
   2.1. Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand: The “authentic” king .............................................. 14
   2.2. Juan Carlos of Spain: The “real” king ...................................................................... 19
   2.3. A Comparison: Citizen-King? .................................................................................. 25
   2.4. Factors: Personality and/or structure ....................................................................... 27
       2.4.1. Spain – Structures ...................................................................................... 27
       2.4.2. Thailand – Structures ................................................................................. 31
       2.4.3. Elite settlement – When man makes history .............................................. 32

3. Final Part
   3.1. Outlook ..................................................................................................................... 35
   3.2. Conclusion: Modern Monarchs? ............................................................................... 39

4. Appendix ............................................................................................................................. 40

5. Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 47

6. Zusammenfassung (Summary in German) .......................................................................... 53
Acknowledgements

Although this thesis is admittedly limited in scope and depth I wish to thank those people who supported my work and took their time to share thoughts, feelings and ideas.

As most of them live in Thailand and I do not want to endanger them I will refrain from disclosing their names. Most of them will know who they are, in any case. First and foremost I am obliged to two Thai students who kept me up to date in matters concerning Thai kingship and offered me their thoughts and, more importantly, lasting friendship. Through them I came to know other young Bangkokians who contributed to some of the thoughts expressed in this work.

The idea to write this thesis came to me during my semester at Thammasat in 2007 which was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) whom I wish to thank for accepting me as a scholarship holder. At Thammasat, I’m indebted to my teachers who – despite attempts at depoliticizing the university – try to keep alive the spirit of Thammasat and Pridi Banomyong. I wish to express my deeply felt gratitude for the debates they encouraged and some of their assistance.

There are Thai people who supported my research without knowledge of its content. Patient librarians and kind officials at universities and departments helped me a lot. During my time in Bangkok, lively discussions at the riverbank of the Chao Phraya with my fellow student, “Khun” Uta, proved to be an invaluable source of ideas. Although, or because, we hardly agreed on matters regarding Thai kingship, she helped me to order my thoughts and to elaborate my arguments.

I am grateful to Irene Stengs in Amsterdam for providing me with abstracts from her book which offers anthropological insights different from those so often read about Thailand.

Regarding the Spanish case, academic support came from Paul Preston who kindly granted me an audience at his house in London, at which he could not be present, but afterwards took the time to answer questions on Spanish monarchy via written correspondence. Thanks too to Paul Preston’s son for his hospitality and a good cup of Earl Grey while I was waiting in vain for his father in Camden.

Finally, many thanks to Nick for taking the time to read through the manuscript. Although this work has been informed by many people I take full responsibility for all potential errors and ideas expressed in it. The arguments are entirely the result of my own reflection on what I have heard and read.
1. First Part: Introduction – Monarchy, democracy and authenticity

Constitutional monarchy was not based on the opinion of the people; many thought that if public opinion were really to prevail [...] a communist republic would triumph in Spain.
Carlos Dardé

Spain gives the impression of a people that has received from outside political institutions alien to its customs and foreign to the mass of the nation.
Charles Seignobos, 1924

Reflecting on the nature of constitutional monarchy as it existed 100 years ago in Spain, historian Carlos Dardé could just as well have described the political discourses in today’s Thailand. During the Spanish Restoration which lasted from the end of the First Republic in 1875 to the establishment of a military dictatorship with royal backing in 1923 elitist arguments against an open, inclusive political system were uttered which bear a striking resemblance to current debates in Thailand.

The electoral arrangement of that time was dominated by caciquismo, a Spanish version of Thailand’s clientelistic system of chao pho (‘provincial godfathers’). The corrupt nature of politics in Spain served the old elites and was aimed at containing forces potentially threatening to the status quo. As Dardé points out by citing Richard Herr:

... [O]nce royal absolutism was replaced by parliamentary government, the elites of the country ... discovered that their power was better guaranteed by controlling the central authority [...]. In the process they developed the institution known as caciquismo. [...] [Caciquismo] became the effective network for enforcing the policies of those with social and economic power.

The exclusiveness of the Spanish Restoration era brought discredit to the constitutional system and eventually led to political annoyance on the part of the electorate, a revival of the political role of the military, and finally a coup backed by King Alfonso XIII who had been brought up in the “most hieratic court in Europe” and had become increasingly impatient with the constitutional system.

As can be discerned from Seignobos’ comment above, to analysts of that time Spain was in a mess without any prospect of ever getting on the right track. As in Thailand today, there was talk about exceptional cultural and historical determinants, about the Spanish psyche that stood in opposition to a supposedly “alien” system of democracy and liberalism. These ideas were exploited by the aristocracy and the military to extend their grip on power. Instead of seeing them as feudal remnants deliberately preserved, such views became artificially naturalized. It will be argued that the same tactic is today applied by the Thai elite with King Bhumibol Adulyadej at its apex.

2 cited in ibid, p. 209.
3 Herr cited in ibid, p. 211.
4 See Carr 2000, p. 235; for another account of the “Crisis of liberal Spain” see Barton 2004, pp. 202-06.
Regarding the Thai party system, McCargo once differentiated “real parties” and “authentic parties”, the former being rational mass parties based on ideologies and programs, the latter being driven by supposed Thai values with a focus on charismatic personalities.\(^5\) The terms “real” and “authentic” may similarly be applied to types of monarchies: A “real” and rational constitutional monarchy would be one where the king is truly above politics and serves as a neutral advisor without aiming at influencing political outcomes or manipulating the democratic system. In contrast, an “authentic” monarch uses his charisma upheld by cultural myths and pageantry to subtly influence the direction of politics in a paternalistic manner, with ‘above politics’ denoting what Thongchai termed “‘on top of’ or overseeing normal politics” in contrast to “beyond or out of politics”\(^6\).

However, the notion of “authenticity”, of unchangeable national traits such as Spanish- or Thai-ness, should be treated with caution. The case of Spain is a perfect example for the falsehood of self-serving cultural determinist assumptions since, after coming to power, another Spanish king – Juan Carlos – has decisively and successfully influenced the democratization of his country. Today, Spain ranks among the most liberal and successful democracies in Europe. Again, Dardé comments:

> Today in a country where, in less than a generation, radical changes have occurred in attitudes and behaviour that were previously considered constituent parts of the national character, explanations based on hypothetical psychological peculiarities of the Spanish people hold little or no water.\(^7\)

Presupposing that in transforming societies which retained a monarchical form of state, kings and queens play a decisive role for the success or failure of democratization, the question this thesis aims to answer is: Which factors have determined the different commitment to democratization of the two kings, Bhumibol and Juan Carlos?

It will be argued that there were structural factors at play that gave the respective kings incentives to resort to “forward legitimation” (Juan Carlos) or “backward legitimation” (Bhumibol), in the terms of Giuseppe di Palma.\(^8\) However, in his analysis of Juan Carlos, Bernecker pointed to “the dialectical problem of personality and structure”.\(^9\) Many analysts of the Spanish transition to democracy have emphasized that the personality, the values and morals of elite actors played decisive roles and may even have been more important than structural, international and temporal factors.\(^10\) To Linz, the Spanish transition poses once more the question whether “man makes the office, or the office makes the man”.\(^11\) Likewise, one could ask if kings make history or if history makes kings. This is one of the questions examined below.

---

\(^5\) McCargo 1997. His conclusion was that Thai parties are both, „real“ and „authentic“, to varying degrees.

\(^6\) Thongchai 2008, p. 20.

\(^7\) Dardé 1996, pp. 213-14.

\(^8\) di Palma 1980, p. 170.


\(^10\) See f.e. Gunther p. 42, 77-78; di Palma describes structural factors as “constraints or inducements, but upon which transitional actors [...] exercise various degrees of transformative inventiveness”, p. 165.

After a brief outline of the methods applied in this research and some reflections on the comparative approach, the two kings and the discourses that surround them will be discussed, especially with regards to their democratic commitment. A comparison will be followed by a discussion of the factors that influenced the kings’ actions, before a conclusion will be reached. It will be argued that history makes some outcomes more likely than others, but that actors and their values and ideologies exert the decisive influence on outcomes – especially when they hold huge reserve powers as kings in transforming societies. Thus, it will be hard to think of Juan Carlos as the mere enactor of a predetermined political fate, or as Bhumibol Adulyadej as the victim of history.

1.1. Methods: Feeling kingship, reading history

Although a discussion of the political implications of kingship does not necessarily depend on field work, it proved useful to get a feeling for the aura that surrounds the monarchies in both countries. Inevitably, the focus had to be on Thailand since Thai Studies is the field from which this work started and it is especially this field it tries to contribute to. Similarly to Paul Handley, whose acclaimed book on the Thai king has influenced this study a great deal, “I indulged myself in the royal culture when and how I could [...]”\(^ {12} \). In the second half of 2007, there were many opportunities to become a witness to the cult that surrounds the monarchy of Thailand.

In August, Bhumibol inaugurated the refurbished Sao Ching Cha, the Giant Swing, in front of Bangkok’s Wat Suthat, in a ceremony infused with Brahmanical ritual and stiff pomp.\(^ {13} \) Besides annual rites and celebrations, such as royal kathin ceremonies and Chulalongkorn Day, throughout the months the celebrations for Bhumibol’s 80\(^ {th} \) birthday anniversary were held, including the archaic and splendid Royal Barge Procession preceded by several rehearsals; tree-planting campaigns in the countryside; exhibitions; a royal fair at the Royal Plaza (Sanam Luang); all this culminating in the December celebrations for Bhumibol’s birthday.

In October the king was hospitalized for several weeks after suffering a stroke, followed by his sister, Princess Galyani. The grounds of Siriraj Hospital became the centre for well-wishers who prayed, sang and expressed their sympathy for the royal siblings by signing books with fixed phrases in royal language. In early 2008, Princess Galyani died, triggering a well-organized display of grief. People were advised to wear black, as they were supposed to wear yellow on Mondays to honour the king over the preceding months.\(^ {14} \) At the hospital, as well as later around the Royal Plaza and Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall where the princess then lay in state, the demonstration of affection and grief on the part of many royal subjects may have been spontaneous, as official


\(^ {13} \) After the king had left the scene, people ran to the tent the royal couple had occupied minutes before. They started to touch the cloth in the back and then rubbed their faces as if to wash themselves with royal aura. The observation of this deification of Bhumibol was one of the triggers for this study.

\(^ {14} \) As informants told me, there was a lot of peer pressure to succumb to the “yellow fever”. Many companies made it mandatory for their employees to wear yellow – the colour of Monday, the king’s birthday.
sources claimed, but there was too a great deal of logistic planning and incentives
behind these gatherings, with people being offered free transport, food,
commemorative photos and the enjoyable companionship of fellow Thais, creating
some kind of "event"-character, a happening many did not want to miss. But a more
decisive factor may have been that, as Stengs has noted, growing uncertainty around
the Thai monarchy contributed to the mobilisation of many Thais:

[T]he observed concern with the king’s failing health plus rising age [...] carries
an ominous charge: like the gossip around the royal family, it expresses the fear
of a failure of kingship. In this deep and general concern the veneration for King
Bhumibol reflects the Thai anxieties with modernity and globalisation [...].

The “intensifying imaginations around Thai kingship” could be witnessed over the
previous years, although the prospect of collapse and overkill is always there. Hence,
Irene Stengs recently found that the Chulalongkorn cult, which was thriving in the
1990’s, is slowly fading; that, since her research, pictures of King Chulalongkorn have
become dusty; that devotionalia of Rama V are now almost exclusively sold for
Chulalongkorn Day. Moreover, contrary to common beliefs, Stengs discovered that
many people hang up calendars with royal images – which are frequently distributed as
free gifts – without much attachment.

As Stengs noted above, royal rumours circulating semi-publicly between individuals in
offices, homes and other places where chit-chat abounds, constitute another important
part of the discourse on the monarchy. The Thai rumour-network is globally organized,
examplified by one incident in July 2007 when false rumours about the death of Crown
Prince Vajiralongkorn spread rapidly around the globe.

The Crown Prince frequently becomes the focus of gossip. In 2007, VCD’s with
compromising footage from inside the Prince’s palace began to circulate in Bangkok.
The 23-minutes featured the Crown Prince with his consort, Princess Srirasmi,
obviously celebrating the latter’s birthday. A bear-breasted, almost naked, Srirasmi cut
the birthday cake and sang songs with her poodle, while palace servants fulfilled their

---

15 Handley observed a similar degree of organized and sponsored mourning in relation to the death of Princess
Mother Sangwal in 1995, see Handley 2006a, pp. 379-382.
16 Stengs 2003, p. 309. In her study of the Chulalongkorn cult, Stengs emphasizes that the cult is a middle-class
phenomenon with a special role for women and an appeal for the “lower strata of urban society” since participation in
royal cults “allows anybody to present himself as being part of the world of modernity and success. In this respect, I
regard the King Chulalongkorn cult as part of a Thai urban lifestyle, a lifestyle which overall is characterized by a
display of wealth and religiosity.” See p. 314 for this performative aspect of royal cults. From my observation it is
true that urban women, especially the elderly, are disproportionately represented among the spectators of royal
celebrations.
17 Stengs p. 315.
18 Personal communication and a speech given at the 10th International Conference on Thai Studies.
19 A Thai informant in Berlin told me how a Thai friend from Australia had called him to ask if rumours were true
that Vajiralongkorn had died in Berlin during his July trip to Europe. Bloggers rumoured he had passed away in
Scandinavia due to an alleged HIV infection. When at the end of July Thai media finally aired footage of the Crown
Prince at a university ceremony in Bangkok, I sat in a Thai-restaurant in Berlin where Thai people nearby were
urgently called in by the restaurant-owner. All gathered in front of the TV to assure themselves that the rumours were
false.
duties on their knees. Making this decadence public was aimed at confirming the image of Vajiralongkorn as an unacceptable heir. There was rumour about who first distributed the video, as it must be someone from inside the palace. The suspects ranged from Prem Tinsulanond, as an aid to the king who would prefer to see Princess Sirindhorn on the throne, to Princess Bhajaranakityabha, Vajiralongkorn’s firstborn child with his first wife, Princess Somsawali. To defame her father’s third wife, Sirirasmi, would enhance Princess Bhajaranakityabha’s chances to follow the next king (or queen) on the throne instead of her half-brother Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti, Vajiralongkorn’s son of Sirirasmi. Moreover, the VCD may be seen as part of a general plot that, “by laying [...] blame [...] with the queen and crown prince, the image of King Bhumibol [is] purified”.

As was seen, experiencing ritual and rumour was essential to grasp Thai kingship and its surrounding discourses beyond the official hagiography. Regarding the Spanish case, time and resources did not allow field work. However, a visit to Madrid during the wedding of Prince Felipe and Laetizia Ortiz for journalistic purposes in May 2004 retrospectively informed this study to a certain extent. Although the celebrations suffered from bad weather and a tense mood two months after the Madrid train bombings, making extensive security measures necessary, it could be felt that Spanish monarchy matters. Streets, facades and balconies were decorated with pink cloth and colourful flower arrangements, whereas Spaniards as well as tourists lined up along the Gran Via and the Paseo del Prado, standing in the pouring rain and waving little Spanish plastic flags bearing the smiling faces of the royal couple. However, not everyone was happy. Whereas thousands of people were waiting outside for the royal bride and groom, the salesperson at an internet café, being asked if he would later join the masses, frankly replied: “It’s taxpayer’s money they are wasting out there.” Just a few meters from the pomp, in the calles, life went on as usual. Compared to Thailand, it would have been easier to find people talking outright about their mixed feelings towards their monarchy to a stranger.

These experiences could then be measured against the background of an ever growing critical body of literature about the monarchies concerned.

After the September 2006 coup in Thailand, royal endorsement of a putsch against the elected and widely popular Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra led to a surge of critical debate on King Bhumibol and his democratic credentials. This was aided by the almost parallel publication of Handley’s The King Never Smiles, the first extensive, non-

---

20 An extract from the video was accessible on veoh.com, but then disappeared. A Dutch website still features the clip: http://www.revu.nl/6273. It was common knowledge among Bangkok’s middle class that the VCD exists. Colleagues watched it in offices, friends passed it on to friends, etc. However, because there were rumours circulating about police raids, many broke their VCDs into pieces after watching them, fearing persecution. An urban legend had it that “...a friend’s mother knows someone who got arrested and had to pay 300 000 Baht after getting caught with the VCD”.

21 For a further discussion over the next Chakri generation see Handley 2006a, pp. 445-446.

hagiographical biography of the Thai king. At that time, McCargo’s paper on “Network Monarchy”, in which he characterized the nature of Thai politics as being heavily influenced by a leading network centred on the palace, was already widely discussed. Years before, in 1997, Hewison wrote what may be seen as the first daring attempt to critically analyse The Monarchy and Democracy by an English-speaking academic. Connors’ work on Democracy and National Identity in Thailand also includes perceptions of the monarchy as an active political force, whereas Kobkua and Kershaw trace the historical role of the monarchy from a more sympathetic angle. The recent Special Issue of the Journal of Contemporary Asia (38/1) is maybe the most important post-coup publication on Thai politics and monarchy in English. Furthermore, works and papers written and circulated by Giles “Ji” Ungpakorn, as well as articles and posts on websites and academic blogs like the Bangkok Post, The Nation, Prachatai, New Mandala and Bangkok Pundit were important sources for day-to-day developments.

Unfortunately, Thai sources are absent from the bibliography due to constraints in time and proficiency. Yet, many important Thai language works have partially appeared in English journals or are being discussed on the internet. Furthermore, typical hagiographic sources, as they exist in abundance in Thai, are equally available in English. As these sources are repetitive in tone and content they won’t necessarily be cited. Regarding the lack of primary sources in the bibliography it should be noted that this work is not another attempt at an in-depth analysis of the functions of the Thai monarchy, since the scholars mentioned above have already done that. Based on these sources it will be taken as given that Bhumibol has manipulated Thai politics to a degree far beyond his constitutional power. As a traditional conservative force he ranks among those actors who delayed the democratic development of his country.

At New Mandala, Handley once complained about “the lack of discussion here and elsewhere over specific themes and content” of his book and that “[e]veryone still focuses on the book’s existence and my intentions”. Handley countered claims that the Thai monarchy is unique and incomparable to, for example, the Spanish monarchy:

I tried to write the book as an example of one contemporary monarchy, since they all operate in similar structures. I would like to see more broadly discussed how similar (or not) the Thai monarchy is to other monarchies in the world.

In agreement with this statement, the study at hand compares two monarchies while taking into account the respective political developments that influenced the actions taken by Bhumibol and Juan Carlos.

---

23 I read Handley’s book only after my field work in Thailand in order to avoid bias (however, I had read Hewison and McCargo before). In the field, watching rituals, reading Thai media, talking to informants, and collecting sources, a convergence occurred in which I developed a similar critical stance towards the Thai monarchy. Handley’s extensive work then complimented my ideas with invaluable detail.


26 ibid.
The works consulted for the Spanish case are generally unanimous in their treatment of Juan Carlos as a progressive democratic force. Hence, the authoritative and most extensive biography by Paul Preston, *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain From Dictatorship to Democracy*, was used as the main source, complemented by Bernecker’s more analytical article on Spanish *Monarchy and Democracy*. General works on Spanish history were consulted as well as analyses of the Spanish “elite settlement” of the mid-1970’s, the latter constituting the work’s main theoretical foundation. To prevent an all too positive judgement of Juan Carlos, the critical biography *Un Rey Golpe a Golpe* has partly been translated although it cannot be treated as a scientific source since its author, a male Basque journalist, wrote under the pseudonym “Patricia Sverlo” and does not mention his sources. However, the information appear well researched. As Paul Preston described the book: “It is interesting but clearly biased.”

Since all scientific work contains bias to a certain degree, before starting the discussion some reflections on the comparative approach should help to contextualize this paper.

1.2. Reflections: Western, Eastern or global kingship?

*My knowledge about the British system is as wide as watching the movie “The Queen”. [...] But I saw how the Queen transformed with [...] Tony Blair’s popularity. She adjusts. And that’s a good lesson.*

Jakrapob Penkair, August 29 2007 at the FCCT

In his speech about the Thai patronage system, Jakrapob Penkair, a previous spokesman for the toppled Thaksin administration, praised the adaptability of Queen Elizabeth which could be read as an implicit comparison with the Thai case, maybe hinting to the failure of Bhumibol to himself adjust to the rising popularity of Thaksin. Jakrapob’s speech brought about lèse majesté charges, forcing him to resign from his post as PM’s office minister in late May 2008.

Invoking other monarchies in the discourse on Thai kingship is a rare event in Thailand. Too often such attempts are countered with claims of Bhumibol as being unique and beyond any comparison. This alleged “authenticity” of the Thai monarchy has already been outlined above. Unfortunately, Western scholarship too readily accepted this view. Peter Jackson notes that

> Even today, no graduate student aspiring to an academic career, junior academic anxious about tenure, or established scholar concerned about their reputation [...] is likely to publish on the alternative truths about the Thai royal family [...]. Thai and *farang* alike are held in check by fear of the consequences of violating the codes of the Thai regime of images.

---

27 personal correspondence.

28 Jakrapob’s speech was an extensive critique of the Thai patronage system from which, he admitted, he himself profited. The pressure that forced Jakrapob to resign made it apparent that to criticise Thai paternalism means to criticize Bhumibol as its very embodiment. *The Nation* even defended the Thai patronage system, stating that “Thailand has a unique social system of its own. [...] When phuyai [learned and respected men] speak, we listen”. Online: http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2008/05/21/opinion/opinion_30073575.php. A transcript of Jakrapob’s speech can be found at http://media.thaigov.go.th/sitedirectory/471/1779/1779_67825_02.pdf.

29 Jackson 2004, p. 212.
Jackson argues that a poststructuralist analysis of power formation and its effects should be applied to “resist nationalist discourses of Thai uniqueness” as it provides instruments to understand how certain features of Thai society have come to be perceived as “an ‘essential Thai identity’”. Thai power has been influenced by, and responded to, global trends and did not develop in isolation. Hence, poststructuralist methods seem to offer promising approaches to the study of Thai society.

However, in the world of “posts” (postmodernism/postcolonialism/poststructuralism), in which ideology and universalities are watched with suspicion, excessive relativism often prevails. Hence, in the strong version of postmodernity, where it is defined as a rejection of, rather than mere skepticism towards, metaphysics, grand narratives, reason and universal truths, it ironically contributes to the consolidation of elitist myths of essential cultural traits in the form of “Asian values” or “Thai-style democracy”. In short: Postmodernism as a philosophy contributed to forms of excessive cultural relativism, sometimes nihilism, on the part of thinking minds. In a sarcastic comment on Said’s *Orientalism*, the neoconservative US-journalist David Frum remarked that

> Said allowed one escape from the grave charge of "orientalism": it was permissible to study a foreign culture provided that one fully embraced the political demands of the most radical and anti-western members of that culture.

Surely, the political Right has its own questionable interests not to encourage cultural sensitivity but to impose their norms and morals on others. Hence, if postmodernism is defined as a school of thought that is “suspicious of authoritative definitions and singular narratives” there should be no problem to agree on its importance to counter hegemonic claims of conservatives and ultra-capitalists. But any complete rejection of normative ideals of universal rights and welfare makes democratic movements impossible, undermines the struggle for justice of the disempowered, and plays into the hands of feudal elites. An approach of tolerating intolerance is divisive as it emphasizes alleged irreconcilable differences between “the West” and “the East”. Just as moral absolutism in the 20th century unleashed fanaticism, an absolutization of moral relativism should not now lead to a legitimization of oppressive regimes around the world.

In his study of American scholarship on Thailand, Peter Bell highlighted how American Cold War interests fundamentally influenced perceptions of Thai society. He argues that, in the name of counter-insurgency, “American scholarship produced a set of paradigms of social life which fundamentally distorted the nature of Thai society”. An emphasis on respect for authority and absence of social conflict reflected “the view of Thai society held by the Thai ruling class” and what Americans “hoped to be the case”. The weakness of the paradigm that saw Thai society as “loosely structured”, and politically apathetic finally became apparent in the turbulent 1970’s.

---

30 ibid, p. 213
32 Frum 2003.
33 Bishop 1996, p. 993.
34 Bell 1982, p. 61.
35 ibid, p. 69.
Thus, the distortion of social realities in Thailand has some roots in ideological Cold War clashes and is today continued by some cultural relativists who enjoy themselves in the role of the understanding *farang*, while failing to look beyond the agendas that shaped the “authentic” Thai values they compliantly defend in the first place. Adding Jackson’s supposition that power and knowledge partly work through ‘performativity’ – “the fashioning of a subject by ritually repeated actions” – the endless repetition of statements and rituals which confirm Thai passivity and submissiveness may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Kershaw noted “that many of the people of South-East Asia did not ‘need’ a monarchy [...] until they were told that they did”. And, a decade after the introduction of Asian Values, he called for an investigation into whether monarchies survived “due to the persistence [...] of traditional political values, or whether their existence [...] is now manipulated by the elites”. He pointed out that:

The Thai syndrome is analysed commonly [...] in terms of a powerful ‘legacy’ of traditional values which favour the heirs to absolute monarchy, but such values would undoubtedly decline if those heirs were not actively appealing to them – appealing, not least, to “monarchy” itself, as a pillar of the Thai order which those heirs purport to defend! – in the course of sustaining their power in more modern guises.

Hence, one should heed the call of the socialist Thai academic “Ji” Ungpakorn:

Thailand actually has a long tradition of differing views concerning the Monarchy. Under feudalism the surfs made great efforts to avoid Royal conscripted labour and the ruling elites would often kill kings in order to take power themselves. Under the Absolute Monarchies of Rama 5-7, nobles, civil servants, workers and farmers often showed their displeasure at the centralisation of power or the inefficiency of the King’s rule. This ended with the 1932 Revolution. In the period when the Communist Party [...] had much influence, many Thais wanted a Republic. These are historical facts. So let us not believe the rubbish that all Thais have been Royalists throughout history.

Having cited that, it shall be hoped that this work will not be judged as one written by an Orientalist *farang* student who aims to expose Bhumibol as an “oriental despot”, in Wittfogel’s sense, by contrasting him with an “enlightened monarch”, Juan Carlos. Since historical, socio-political and other structural factors are taken into account, this shall not be an analysis in a vacuum. However, this author will not succumb to some philosophical traits of the “post”-era which make critical analysis almost impossible. Rather, he would count himself among the

---

36 Jackson 2003. paragraphs 77-81. He refers to theories first developed by Judith Butler.
38 ibid, p. 144.
39 Giles 2008. Among the growing body of revisionist works that highlight popular agency is Copeland (1993). In his analysis of historic press he points out that the 1932 revolution was preceded by a long period of intellectual movement for popular sovereignty and critique of Chakri rule and that the coup “had more popular support than has previously been acknowledged”, p. 7, 10. Copeland cites one writer as saying in 1924: [Foreigners] consider our country’s political system as being a museum piece [...] [...] It may well be true that every nation needs a heart ... but [...] our faltering heart [i.e. the king] has no real interest in the nation. Rather, it appears to be primarily concerned with its position and private purse [...]. See Copeland 1993, p. 60.
commentators who would not regard themselves as in any sense ‘postmodernists’, and who may in fact be very hostile to postmodernist versions of history, [but who] have nonetheless been very likely to approach ‘facts’ about the past (and present) as ‘constructs’ as distinct from ‘truths’.40

Yet, as self-reflexivity is a useful feature of postmodern scholarship, it shall be stated that this author is influenced by ideals of the Enlightenment, cosmopolitanism and welfare. But, as conversations with Thais have shown, these values are not exclusive.

2. Main Part: Kings’ Quests
When in late 1975 Spain’s dictator, „El Caudillo“ Francisco Franco, died, Thailand was heading for brutal clashes between rightists and students in the following year. Both kings, Juan Carlos and Bhumibol, had to face the toughest challenge of their lifetimes. As Franco’s successor and newly crowned king, Juan Carlos saw the need for political change, and yet he had been entrusted with the heritage of 36 years of dictatorship. King Bhumibol watched with anxiety the fall of the Lao monarchy and the increasing politicisation among his own subjects. In the midst of political transformation and popular calls for liberal change, both had to decide which paths their countries should take and which role they themselves would play in that undertaking. As will be shown, both monarchs acted on the basis of different historical, international and political factors. For neither Juan Carlos or Bhumibol were the circumstances easy and any outcome seemed possible. However, looking back, the values and worldviews of the monarchs as human beings as well as their personal histories that shaped their approaches to politics were decisive in resolving the respective crises of transformation.

2.1. Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand: The “authentic” king
Contrary to Juan Carlos, Bhumibol had not been prepared to become king. As will be seen below, from an early age Juan Carlos was used by his father, Don Juan, as a tool to restore the monarchy in Spain which had been abolished in 1931 – a throne to which Don Juan was the legitimate heir.
In contrast, Prince Mahidol, father of Bhumibol and his elder brother Ananda, did not care much about the Thai monarchy entrenched in old ritual and intrigues but preferred to stay overseas. Hence, as Handley writes: “When he fell direly ill in 1928, he implored Sayre [the throne’s American adviser] to prevent either boy from being placed on the throne if he died”.41 His wishes were ignored. At an age when Juan Carlos was left alone in Switzerland by his parents to attend a grim boarding school, Bhumibol and his brother Ananda, then the new King of Thailand, – equally residing in Switzerland – were kept away from the royalist struggles in Thailand by their mother Sangwal who “was determined that [Ananda] have a normal childhood”.42

42 ibid, p. 59.
In Thailand, after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, royalists did everything to undermine the new parliamentary system; threatening the People’s Party with the king’s abdication; lobbying for foreign support and against the coup’s intellectual leader Pridi Bhanomyong; spreading rumours; boycotting the establishment of political parties; revolting; inciting Chinese riots against the People’s Party and fostering discontent within the military which became the new center of power.⁴³

Although over the following years military Prime Minister Phibun Sonkhram successfully weakened the court, royals were still active in manipulating the course of Thai politics when in mid-1946 King Ananda was found shot in his room in the royal residence Borom Phiman – 10 years before Juan Carlos shot his brother Alfonsito.⁴⁴ Bhumibol succeeded his brother. He became an untrained king, in his youthful naivety vulnerable to the whispers from his power-hungry royal advisers. The absolute monarchy lay only 14 years behind, and as clever intriguers with a still vital memory of the days of noble rule, senior princes used the death of Ananda to discredit the liberal post-war government, to revive royal myths and rituals, and infused a weak Bhumibol with their version of Thai culture and history which was essentially anti-democratic and paternalist in nature. Holding that electoral democracy was not suitable for Thailand, that people were not educated enough to wisely cast their votes and arguing with a twisted logic that Thai kings are democratically elected by the consent of their people, they infused the young king with their reactionary world views.⁴⁵

With regard to the educational argument it should be noted that, whereas during the formative years of the constitutional system civic education may indeed have been necessary to make democracy work, the idea of a backward populace unable to self-govern became a convenient excuse for later regimes – starting with the palace’s strongman Sarit – to introduce Thai-style democracy, which actually meant authoritarianism. In his study of Thai democracy Connors coined the idea of “democrasubjection”, i.e. “the subjection of people to imaginary forms of their own rule”, referring to the “potential oppressive dimension of democracy”.⁴⁶

However, Bhumibol seemed to appreciate what he heard about the potential power he had inherited and proved to be exactly the mouldable character his royal advisers had hoped him to be. An image was propagated of the king as the “Father of the Nation” who knew best what was good for his subjects thereby promoting a paternalist version of Thai social order which reinforces mutual dependencies and unquestioned loyalty at

⁴³ Copeland 1993, pp. 207-211. Handley 2006a, pp. 49-53.
⁴⁴ Kobkua (2003) points to rumours which had it that a group of royalists were behind the regicide in order to capitalize on the death of Rama VIII to stage a coup against the government, p. 134. As Handley (2006a) points out, there was talk about Bhumibol having shot his brother by accident, pp. 77-78. In a 1980 BBC-documentary Bhumibol said: “It was proved that it was not an accident and not a suicide [...] [I]t was political [...] [Facts] were suppressed by influential people in this country and in international politics.” See Handley 2006a, pp. 273-74.
⁴⁵ Handley (2006a), for example, points to a lecture on kingship by Prince Dhani Nivat that was attended by the Mahidols, pp. 84-86. For the full speech see Dhani 1976.
⁴⁶ Connors 2007, p. 21, 22.
all levels, for example in Thai family life where children are supposed to obey their parents and not encouraged to develop an own, creative approach to life. Of course, in their endeavour to restore the old order the monarchists were joined by other forces from the military, the US and, later, the emerging business elites who capitalized on ideas of a hierarchical ordered society in which the haves exert control over the have-nots. When Phibun lost support from those conservative forces in the mid 1950’s and, in need of legitimacy, turned himself into a defender of democracy, Bhumibol began to “test his political muscle”47. Although winning the elections in 1957 with a comfortable majority, Phibun was ousted by a coup led by Sarit Thannarat and backed by the palace. Sarit’s ascendancy heralds the start of excessive royalism.48

To end this chronological account, it should suffice to cite Thongchai as one of the most eminent scholars of Thai studies who states that “the monarchy and the monarchists, despite their up and down political fortunes, have probably played the most significant role in shaping Thai democracy since 1932”49. He goes on to say that

[w]ith distaste for electoral politics, and in collaboration with the so-called people’s sector, activists and intellectuals, they have undermined electoral democracy in the name of “clean” politics versus the corruption of politicians.50

In hijacking democratic discourses for his own benefit, Bhumibol was willing to become the demi-god of dhammic righteousness, using other people’s donations and income from the enormous institutional wealth of the Thai monarchy, to present himself via loyal media, kept in check by the lèse majesté law, as the better, “authentic” ruler as compared to politicians whom the king readily chastised in his speeches.51 For example, when Bhumibol in one of his incoherent birthday speeches in 2005 seemed to imply that he was open to criticism – certainly aware that nobody would dare to follow up on that – many Thais thought that their king was in fact chiding Thaksin for not listening to his opponents on the streets. And yet, none of the authoritarian governments backed by the king was more tolerant or less corrupt than civilian administrations. Generally, Bhumibol diverts his people’s loyalty away from political institutions. These weak institutions then provide the basis for clientelism, as Baker notes about network politics: “This is a very practical fact in a society where institutions do not always work as they should and personal contacts are what get things done.”52

Royalist historiography placed the king at the center of democratic development, glossing over the achievements of the Thai people in their pursuit of freedom and participation and misrepresenting the events of 1973 and 1992 to present Bhumibol as

47 Handley 2006a, p. 134.
48 For an account of how, subsequently, royally initiated projects were promoted and “royal hegemony” created, see Chanida 2004, 2008.
49 Thongchai 2008, p. 11.
50 ibid, p. 11.
51 About the royal charities funded by donations, coined the “magic circle of merit” by Handley, see Handley 2006a, pp. 130-131. Pholphant Ouyyanont recently estimated the worth of the Crown Property Bureau, the monarchy’s investment arm, at 1.1 trillion Baht in 2005 (21 billion Euro or 33 billion US dollars, Pholphant 2008, p. 184) which makes the Thai monarchy the richest in the world (see Kate 2007).
52 Baker 2008.
the safeguard of liberalism. A recent example of appropriation of progressive movements may be seen in the promotion of the king’s “sufficiency economy”, calling for economic moderation and morality. Seeing the potential threat of an increased self-determination among rural Thais through economic integration, ending their dependency on patronage and royal generosity, royalists and conservatives “hijacked” ideas of sustainability and localism, brought forward by NGOs and international agencies, to secure royal hegemony. As Connors put it: “In effect, Thai-ness is pluralized but then re-centered by presenting the king as the champion of local wisdom.”

When “goodness” becomes the prerogative and powerbase of the king, he will not permit other actors to undermine that base in doing good, too. That is why the king continually allowed his network to hijack or manipulate political or social developments that could have led to an institutionalized, less paternalistic system, independent from him. Hence, Bhumibol’s hostile stance towards social welfare, stating that the “individual on welfare will be a useless person for the community and even for himself”

[w]e would be squandering our national budget by giving charity from the money earned by hard working people [...]. Thailand is not like that. Everybody works, some more, some less, but everybody works.

When the state neglects welfare, as Bhumibol explicitly calls for, the king gains ground. Then his subjects will resort to his benevolence and ask for his help. This happened in November 2007 when Chatree, an impoverished 12-year old boy from Phichit Province, sent a letter to “the Father of the Nation [...] as the last hope” to ask for a house and education. The king sent help. A week later, a follow-up of the story was published in the Bangkok Post, praising that “His Majesty is there to help his subjects and his great generosity is for anyone, without discrimination – no matter how small a person is” while at the same time putting blame on the politicians, warning that

[...] state officials can no longer afford to ignore the problem [of poverty]. They should realise that by turning their backs to poor people's plights, they have failed to perform their duty as good state officials. They have also failed His Majesty who for decades has demonstrated how deeply he cares for his subjects' well-being. All the royally initiated projects are aimed at improving people's livelihoods and alleviating poverty under the self-sufficiency principle.

And yet, it is His Majesty, arguably the richest monarch in the world, who called for a neglect of welfare in the first place and who, with his sufficiency economy, provides “an ideological reference for conservative Thais working to prevent any diminution of their political and economic power”, as Hewison puts it.

57 Hewison 2008, p. 214. He notes that in the UNDP-report, “the provinces that generally do best on HD [Human Development] indicators are the ones most enmeshed with the world of capitalist economy”. See also Walker’s post on this issue: http://rspas.anu.edu.au/rmap/newmandala/2007/01/10/sufficiency-economy-poverty/
The palace undermines another pillar of democracy – the rule of law. Besides showing a general distaste for constitutional principles, it was the “network monarchy”, the “leading [political] network of the period 1973–2001 [...] centred on the palace”\textsuperscript{59}, that helped Thaksin Shinawatra come to power.\textsuperscript{60} And it was the king who praised Thaksin’s war on drugs – with more than 2000 extrajudicial killings – in his 2003 birthday speech. Hence, the palace-backed 2006 coup against Thaksin had nothing to do with enhancing democracy or good governance, something many protestors – apart from the protest’s leaders and those middle-class participants who merely wanted to take revenge on Thaksin and the countryside – were rightfully calling for. Their voices were drowned out by the coup-plotters who appealed to national unity, an appeal which called[s] to identify with the imaginary goodness of Thai-ness, embodied in the monarchy [...]. In short, [such appeals] lead to an infantilization of public life, as complex issues are glossed over in a sanctimonious show of unity.\textsuperscript{61}

Eventually, the military Council for National Security neither initiated a debate over the reasons for Thaksin’s popularity in the countryside – which would have exposed the failure of the royally initiated projects – nor did their government do better in answering middle-class demands for incorruptable leaders. Instead, they inserted an Internal Security Act into the 2007 constitution which gives the military special power in times of crises – obviously aiming at military control over the royal succession. Besides toppling Thaksin as a rival kingmaker\textsuperscript{62}, the coup tried to restore the palace’s hegemony, especially over Thaksin’s strong rural constituency and, moreover, was part of the established pattern of royal political intervention summarized by Hewison:

\[\text{T]he king apparently gives his support to democratisation, but then comes to see political activity as corrupt, disorderly and messy [one might add “inauthentic”], and supports a military intervention. This cyclical pattern could be seen again in 1973.}\textsuperscript{63}

Back then, Bhumibol consented to a democratic transition after the massacre of 14 Tula (14. October 1973) which had eventually been ended by the professional-minded General Krit, and only later in collaboration with the king.\textsuperscript{64} Yet, eventually Bhumibol became ever more uncomfortable with people’s power, demonstrations and student activism which were rising after being released from military domination. Bhumibol again chose to side with rightist hardliners, building up his private army and thus effectively contributing to the polarization within his realm.\textsuperscript{65} Instead of supporting an institutionalization of rural development by the government to discourage peasants

\textsuperscript{59} McCargo 2005, p. 499. The features of “network monarchy” are: the monarch as ultimate arbiter of political decisions in times of crisis; the monarch as primary source of national legitimacy; the king as commentator helping to set the national agenda; active intervention in political developments through proxies; the main proxy being Prem Tinsulanond; network monarchy is inherently illiberal. See p. 501.

\textsuperscript{60} McCargo 2005, p. 513. Prem was believed to have intervened in Thaksin’s Constitution Court case in his favour to keep Thaksin loyal to the network. See also Handley 2006a, p. 425-426.

\textsuperscript{61} Connors 2005, p. 526.


\textsuperscript{63} Hewison 2008, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{64} Handley 2006a, pp. 211-12. He notes that “the king’s first settlement supported the government […]”

\textsuperscript{65} For the notion of the “Village Scouts” as Bhumibol’s private army see Handley 2006, p. 223.
from joining highly exaggerated communist insurgencies, he supported rightist monks, soldiers and politicians, all this culminating in the brutal events of 6 Tula (6. October 1976) on the ground of Thammasat University. Handley says: “As in 1932, the palace misread the rise of native Thai reformism as a radical revolutionary movement with foreign roots.”

And, as McCargo notes, even in the aftermath “[t]he royal family continued to display an excessive partiality for the military, rather than promoting reconciliation and unity.” Furthermore, the brutal attack by the Thai state contributed to the disillusionment among student activists leading to “extreme reluctance to reestablish political parties of the left”, according to Ji Ungpakorn.

However, things may change. Even the harshest critics of Thaksin suspect a potentially positive impact of his so-called “populist policies” which Ji saw as “an indication of social pressure from below and the reentry of class struggle into parliamentary politics”. Connors remarks that recent debates about the monarchy have “greatly affected its standing, especially among supporters of Thaksin’s social and economic policies” and that this “offers the possibility of the emergence of a more widespread egalitarian sentiment to challenge the hierarchical […] sentiment that surrounds the monarchy”. If not now, this challenge might become acute at the death of Bhumibol.

2.2. Juan Carlos of Spain: The “real” king

The King of Spain rarely smiles. Preston explains the “perpetually sad look” of Juan Carlos as compared to his cheerful nature as a boy in terms of the tensions within his life as a member of the Borbón dynasty and as a human being. This interpretation resembles the common view of Bhumibol as being burdened with the duty of kingship.

Despite the similarities of facial expressions, i.e. the stiff looks of Bhumibol and Juan Carlos in public, many other parallels are to be found. Both were born in foreign countries, they spent their early years in the royal sanctuary of Lausanne and, later, lost their brothers to gunshots, both were raised or influenced by conservative reactionaries and had to lend authority to military dictatorships.

However, the main difference between the two kings is also the the central myth of the life of Juan Carlos and has been summarized by Preston:

[H]ow [could] a prince emanating from a family with considerable authoritarian traditions, obliged to function within ‘rules’ invented by General Franco, and brought up to be the keystone of a complex plan for the continuity of the dictatorship should have commited himself to democracy.

To explore this mystery, one has to start in 1931 when the Spanish monarchy was abolished, a republic declared, and King Alfonso XIII – who, in 1923, had backed the

---

66 Handley 2006a, p. 239.
67 McCargo 2005, p. 505.
68 Giles 2001, p. 10.
69 ibid, p. 15.
72 ibid, p. 1.
coup by Primo de Rivera against a liberal constitutional regime – sent into exile, deprived of his citizenship and possessions. Alfonso went not without calling on his supporters to undermine the new republic in order for people to beg for his return.\textsuperscript{73} Over the following years, monarchists in Spain funded emerging fascist groups, catered to middle-class insecurity, “opted for violent extremism”, thereby anticipating working class extremism and, in doing so, making "the first deliberate attempt to undermine the [new] democratic system".\textsuperscript{74} The striking parallels to royalist activities in Thailand after 1932 and between 1973 and 1976 are obvious.

Growing polarization between and within the Right and the Left, encouraged by Alfonsists and other so-called “catastrophists”, fuelled by overall developments in Europe, made civil war inevitable. In January 1938, Juan Carlos was born to Don Juan, son of Alfonso and heir to the vanished Spanish throne, and his wife Doña Maria, while the Spanish Civil War was still raging but eventually won by rightist General Francisco Franco in 1939. Contrary to hopes of the exiled Borbóns, the monarchy was not restored but a fascist dictatorship with a strong anti-monarchical wing established.

In 1941, Alfonso XIII died in Rome, disappointed by his one-time favourite Franco who did not allow the king’s body to return to Spain. Like Phibun whose government did not provide for Prajadhipok’s cremation in Thailand,\textsuperscript{75} Franco captured monarchical traditions himself, assuming the headship of state, dispensing titles of nobility, naming bishops, issuing decrees, letting the royal march be played on public appearances, in short he assumed “power of a kind previously enjoyed only by the kings of medieval Spain”.\textsuperscript{76} In his endeavour to “seek a way out of centuries of decadence”\textsuperscript{77} he linked “the greatness of imperial Spain with modern Fascism”\textsuperscript{78}, with a totalitarian monarchy modeled after the 15-16th century Catholic Monarchs as the only one acceptable. In contrast, Phibun, who has likewise been labeled a fascist dictator, rejected the totalitarian kingship of Ayutthaya in favour of a supposedly more egalitarian Sukhothai kingship, using history to undermine royal absolutism and promoting an approachable and democratic leadership.\textsuperscript{79} In ideologically modernizing kingship, Phibun made it somewhat easier for Bhumibol to smoothly link himself with the past, whereas the medieval version of monarchy Franco promoted made it necessary for Juan Carlos to refashion Spanish kingship himself if he would or could not continue Francoism.

After moving to Switzerland in 1942, Don Juan chose the first mentor for his son: the ultra-conservative Eugenio Vegas Latapié, a staunch royalist who had been active in the ideological fight against the republic and comparable to the conservative Thai Princes Dhani and Rangsit. With his rejection of democracy, his nostalgia for the Spanish Empire and a vision of military kingship in mind, "he laid the basis for the boy's

\textsuperscript{73} ibid, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{74} Preston 1972, pp. 89-90; 100-101.
\textsuperscript{75} Handley 2006a, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{76} Preston 2005, pp. 14-15, 39.
\textsuperscript{77} ibid, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{78} ibid, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{79} Beemer 1999, chapter six.
later conservatism". Yet, Don Juan became a regulating force in Juan Carlos’ life. He was the stern but farsighted father Bhumibol never had. When his son refused to learn English because Latapié had painted the British as Spain’s archenemy, Don Juan asked Queen Elizabeth on one occasion to sit next to Juan Carlos at the lunch table “so that he feels ashamed at being unable to answer your questions”. After lunch, Juan Carlos swallowed his patriotism and started to learn English.

Contrary to Juan Carlos’ brother Alfonso, who spent much time with his parents, Don Juan tried to toughen his eldest son up for later tasks, leaving him alone at a boarding school in Switzerland when the rest of the family moved to Estoril, Portugal, in 1946. Don Juan pointed to the advantages of life in exile as compared to life in a palace where “the atmosphere of adulation so often clouded the vision of the powerful”.

However, the restoration of the Spanish throne remained his main objective. Hence, in 1948 he met with Franco and consented to send Juan Carlos to Spain for education since he understood that Franco was the key to the return of the monarchy. With the vivid memory of the turbulent Second Republic in mind, royalists in Spain as well as Western powers abroad preferred Francoist stability to the uncertainties of a restoration. Franco, in turn, had come to the conclusion that Spain must return to a monarchy after his death since the alternative, a republic, had proved to be disastrous in his eyes. Hence, aged ten, Juan Carlos was “sold into slavery” to be educated in the spirit of Francoism. Yet, Don Juan was left a relative free hand to pick his son’s tutors at the school outside of Madrid, its liberal minded headmaster José Garrido Casanova being the fatherly confidant the boy now needed. Another important mentor was Torcuato Fernández-Miranda, who was entrusted with Juan Carlos’ political education when he took up his university studies in 1960. Though handpicked by the Franco regime and deeply conservative, he taught Juan Carlos patience, the value of debate, not to trust appearances and to think independently since, one day, he would be on his own.

Occasionally, Franco presented Juan Carlos with his version of history, advising him to avoid aristocrats and courtiers. Contrary to Bhumibol, Juan Carlos came to intimately know the country he would be ruling over and its major players from an early age.

Yet, it was not at all certain whether Juan Carlos would follow Franco as king and Head of State. The Ley de Sucesión (Law of Succession) of 1947 institutionalized Spain as a monarchy, thus making it easier for Western powers to accept the dictatorship. But, until his death, Franco remained Head of State and kept the prerogative of naming his royal successor, playing potential pretenders off against each other. Don Juan, although the rightful claimant to the throne, was an unlikely candidate with an English mother and an

---

80 Preston 2005, p. 17. Don Juan had been warned: “Sir, be careful that Eugenio Vegas Latapié doesn’t turn the Prince into a new Philip II.” See Preston 2005, p. 34. Philip II (r. 1556-98) has been nicknamed “Devil of the South” and was reputed as “a ruthless tyrant bent on world domination” in Elizabethan England. Barton 2004, p. 118.
81 ibid, p. 23.
82 ibid, p. 1.
83 ibid, pp. 151-152.
84 ibid, p. 90.
all too liberal education. Franco wanted to install his own monarchy, preferring Juan Carlos over other pretenders. Yet, to strengthen his position vis-à-vis Don Juan and his son, Franco promoted other candidates: Alfonso de Borbón y Dampierre, son of Don Juan’s elder brother Don Jaime who had renounced his rights to the throne in 1933; Don Jaime himself; the Carlist pretender Don Javier; or even Franco’s own grandson.
The Spanish Crown went through a long period of uncertainty never experienced by the Thai monarchy. Traditional sources of royal legitimacy were constantly undermined. Considering that the Thai coup plotters of 1932 even in their most direct criticism of the monarchy could not free themselves from using court language⁸⁶, Franco’s reply in 1943 to a call by Don Juan for national reconciliation and royal restoration was telling:

> Others might speak to you in the submissive tone imposed by their dynastic fervour or their ambitions as courtiers; but I, when I write to you, can do so only as the Head of State […] addressing the Pretender to the throne.⁸⁷

In 1958, Franco – who considered himself a modern Christopher Columbus – unsuccessfully tried to prevent and to play down Don Juan’s crossing of the Atlantic in his yacht.⁸⁸ In contrast, Bhumibol’s 14 hour sailing trip across the Gulf of Thailand in 1966 was presented as a great accomplishment proving royal virtue.⁸⁹ Don Juan crossed the Atlantic to get over the death of his youngest son, Alfonsito, who had died of a gunshot two years earlier in Estoril while being alone in a room with his brother, Juan Carlos. It is generally accepted that it was Juan Carlos who accidently pulled the trigger of the revolver since this version of the story has never been denied by the royal family, although an official enquiry was not conducted. The critical Basque author Sverlo seems to imply possible ulterior motives when he argues that Alfonsito was more intelligent than his brother and Don Juan’s favourite son. Sverlo mentions rumours that Alfonsito might have been chosen by Don Juan to succeed him if he would be restored on the throne, whereas Franco favoured Juan Carlos who was “more manageable, just in line with what was needed to continue the [Francoist] regime under the direction of [Franco’s] followers”⁹⁰.

Contrary to Ananda’s death, Alfonsito did not posthumously become a political tool given the indisputable involvement of Juan Carlos, the passive confirmation of this version by monarchists, the sincere affection and respect the parents had for their deceased son, and Don Juan’s dependence on Franco who, for his part, wanted to keep the death low-key since “people do not like princes who are out of luck”⁹¹.

Back in Spain, Juan Carlos already had to strive for affection. During his time at the military academy in Zaragoza starting from 1955, he had to defend the name of his father from attacks stimulated by the anti-monarchical Falange press, the Falange

---

⁸⁸ ibid, p. 124, 126-27.
⁸⁹ Handley 2006a, p. 158.
⁹⁰ Sverlo (n.d.), p. 35. Yet, Sverlo does not specifically mention that Juan Carlos was jealous of his brother or that he considered Alfonsito as being a rival for the throne, which would have given Juan Carlos a motive.
being the regime’s fascist core. Compared to Bhumibol, it could never come to Juan Carlos’ mind that his position in the Spanish state was secure, let alone divine. With broad anti-monarchical movements on the political right and, needless to say, among communists and socialists and a dictator gambling with royal figures on a chessboard, Juan Carlos decided to court sympathy, taking part in initiation tests at the academy, preventing others from treating him deferentially, using his status to the benefit of his comrades and letting people address him informally.92 Thus, the foundations were laid for his “real” constitutional kingship.

After the total failure of a self-sufficiency economy in the mid 1950’s as it was pursued by Franco and the Falange, technocrats of the Catholic lay organization Opus Dei took over the regime’s administration, introducing a gradual economic liberalization which eventually led to an economic boom in the 1960’s – just like in Thailand. An increase in anti-government protests which were, at times, brutally suppressed, the liberalization of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) and a growing desire to join Europe came along with the fading health of Franco who, in 1969, officially declared Juan Carlos as his successor, thereby severely worsening the relationship between an embittered Don Juan and his son. On 20 January 1975 *El Caudillo* died, believing that the institutions he had established would keep Juan Carlos on the regime’s track. As Paul Preston puts it:

> By excluding the monarchy from Spain for 40 years and by his arrogance in nominating his own royal successor, Franco seemed to have destroyed any political neutrality Juan Carlos might have enjoyed, just as he had undermined the monarchy’s other two central attributes of continuity and legitimacy.93

As heir to Franco, Juan Carlos was considered a weak puppet. To prove his critics wrong and to prevent the monarchy from becoming a mere rubber-stamp for the continuation of the ancien régime, Juan Carlos had to decide whether he wanted to exert his extensive constitutional and executive powers to link himself with Spain’s authoritarian past or if he gave Spanish kingship a new legitimacy in connecting it with modernization as a catalyst and, later, as a mediator of democracy. His stern and comparably down-to-earth upbringing and historical as well as political consciousness made him choose the latter option.94 Contrary to Bhumibol, who in times of crisis could disappear behind the walls of Chitralada palace since he had no constitutional responsibility to intervene in politics, Juan Carlos had been entrusted with a great deal of authority. As Bernecker puts it: “[…] Juan Carlos did not assume all the powers enjoyed by Franco; but he was far more powerful than any other monarch in Europe.”95 Hence, in close collaboration with his advisors and former mentors he assigned posts to pragmatic politicians and managed

---

92 ibid, pp. 95-100.
94 Additionally, Don Juan consented to renounce his right to the throne only if his son implemented full democratic reforms. ibid, p. 321-322.
to sidestep the stubborn old guard. Choosing the able 43-year old Adolfo Suárez as Prime Minister proved the political instincts of the newly crowned king. Juan Carlos toured the country to gain popular support for the transition. Through his personal military friendships and his position as Franco’s successor he could keep most generals in check, whereas it became clear to him – not least by the example of his father who was close to the democratic opposition – that negotiations and an eventual legalization and inclusion of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) was decisive for a consolidation of the coming constitutional system. The conciliatory stance by most elite actors made the introduction of the Political Reform Act in 1976, the first elections for a constituent parliament the next year and the drafting of a liberal constitution and its public approval in 1978 by referendum possible. Despite an economic downturn, rising ETA terrorism, unemployment, droughts and the first government crisis under Suárez, the majority of Spaniards and their king remained committed to democratic institutions.

Inevitably, the military resisted the dismantling of the old regime. Two planned coups, Operación Galaxia in 1978 and the October plot of 1979, could be averted, in part because the government limited the supply of munitions and fuel. Repeatedly calling on soldiers to respect the rule of law and constitutional norms, Juan Carlos made it clear that a coup would not have his backing. However, rumours were abound that generals were lobbying for a government of national salvation under the leadership of General Alfonso Armada who had been on good terms with the king. When, at the beginning of 1981, Suárez resigned as PM, Juan Carlos did not give in to Armada but, on 10 February, invited Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo, member of the ruling UCD, to form a government. Yet, giving his co-conspirators the impression that the king would back a coup, Armada went on with his plans. On 23 February, Colonel Antonio Tejero stormed the Spanish parliament, the Cortes, accompanied by 320 Civil Guards and took the parliamentarians hostage. Over the next hours, Juan Carlos and his Secretary of the Royal Household, Sabino Fernández Campo, rang various strategic players to undermine the coup-makers’ claim that the putsch was carried out in the name of the king. “[O]nly he stood between Spanish democracy and its destruction”, Preston writes. At 1.15 a.m. Juan Carlos appeared on TV, ending his brief speech with the statement:

The crown, symbol of the permanence and unity of the Fatherland, cannot tolerate any actions or attitudes by those who aim to interrupt by force the democratic process determined by the popularly ratified Constitution.

Even if one wants to believe that Juan Carlos was involved in an unsuccessful “constitutional” or “smooth” coup, it remains that he did not agree to a tearing up of

---

96 Preston 2005, p. 475.
97 ibid, pp. 481-482. In a later telex Juan Carlos stated that “any coup d’etat cannot hide behind the King, it is against the King”, p. 482.
98 Sverlo (n.d.), chapt. 12, argues that Juan Carlos was involved in the coup since he was the one who most benefited, his intervention made him indispensable in the eyes of his people. Besides an overall disaffection with Suárez in Spain, Sverlo states that the USA exerted pressure on Juan Carlos to initiate a change of policy direction in order for Spain to join the NATO, a move Suárez was not fond of. Accordingly, Juan Carlos and Armada planned a “smooth coup” within the constitutional framework, leaving Tejero in the dark to sacrifice him. Tejero was made to believe
the constitution to whose realisation he had dedicated the past years. Contrary to Bhumibol who did nothing to intervene when he became the ideological base for reactionary forces to advance their agendas, the King of Spain had successfully fused his image with modernity, democracy and constitutionalism, thus becoming acceptable even to his one-time sceptics from the political Left. Finally, in 1982, the Socialist PSOE won the general elections, fulfilling an old prediction by Don Juan to his son that “the monarchy would not be fully consolidated until it had coexisted with a Socialist government”.99 The Spanish democracy matured, believing Franco’s assertion that “the Spanish temperament made liberal experiments disastrous”100, reasoning that a democratic system would unleash “Spain’s family demons” amongst which he classified a “lack of cooperative endeavour”101. History proved him wrong.

2.3. A Comparison: Citizen-King?

It’s not true what they say about comparisons being invidious: they’re invidious for those who come out worse. And, frankly, our lot are much better.

Spanish weekly Tribuna, 14. December 1992

When the Queen of England experienced her annus horribilis in 1992, the Spanish press blamed British anachronism for the Windsor’s problems, portraying its own royal family as beacon of modernity. The Spanish royals are being deliberately defined as decent against an antiquated, feudal and wasteful British monarchy, with journalists proudly stating that “this monarchy has nothing to do with those of the past, due to its purely parliamentary and constitutional character”102. As Blain and O’Donnell point out:

The symbolic political functioning of the Spanish royal family was not [...] to provide continuity with the past, but specifically to legitimise a break with the past, in concrete terms with the Franco regime. In general terms the Spanish media were not at all dewy-eyed about this: it was widely accepted as part of the legitimising function of the Spanish Royal Family.103

As Blain and O’Donnell have further argued: “[...] [T]he main power of monarchies lies in their symbolic functioning [...]”105 And it is within the specific manifestation of this

---

100 ibid, p. 196.
101 ibid, p. 203.
102 cited in Blain, O’Donnell 2003, p. 90. Their discussion of the British monarchy reveals many parallels with the Thai case. Hence, their work will provide the foundation for this part of the discussion.
103 cited in ibid, p. 85.
104 ibid, p. 86.
105 Blain, O’Donnell, p. 43.
functioning which provides the biggest differences between Europe’s continental monarchies and, for example, the British – or, in our case – the Thai monarchy. Although Juan Carlos was by no means the only actor who steered Spain from dictatorship, he has successfully been constructed (and partly invented) as a constitutional pillar of Spanish democracy. Even if he had wished so, he would have found it more difficult to seek a legitimation based on tradition and thus chose to prove himself by contributing to the democratisation as will be shown in the next section. In contrast, Queen Elizabeth or King Bhumibol derive their strength out of centuries of (invented) tradition. In the latter cases, the deliberate promotion of royalism serves the interests of the royals themselves, but also, as has already been suggested, of other elite sectors of British or Thai society. If, as Blain/O’Donnell state, “Britain is in the new century now more unequal than at any time since the Industrial Revolution”, one reason is that new elites “tend to cultivate, and be cultivated by, existing elites, in alliances offering mutual support for their disproportionate enjoyment of material benefit”. Hence, commentators have argued that “the British monarchy is politically [and discursively] very significant and that its most important feature is the way that it helps maintain Britain in a backward, only partly modernized condition”. The same is true for Thailand. Even if, in contrast, modernity is the main asset of the Spanish monarchy, an anti-democratic potential is implicit if the monarch is constructed as more modern than elected politicians. This was the case in the press coverage of the royal wedding of Elena, Juan Carlos’ eldest daughter, which coincided with growing political conflicts over the PSOE government in 1995. Journalists juxtaposed royals and politicians on that occasion and the “general thrust of the contrast between government and monarchy was […] one which very much favoured the monarchy at the expense of the politicians”. However, Spaniards are called Juancarlistas, not monarchists. A Spain without monarchy is feasible, considering its history. It is thus unlikely that the monarchic discourse will ever again dominate over the political discourse in Spain – most importantly, since Juan Carlos seems to know fully well that the monarchy is best served when it is kept above politics and as far away from ideological bull fighting as possible. Yet, herein lies a potential source of weakness as compared to Thailand. When the king does not serve elites, and the general public grows old and forgets about the king’s contribution to democracy, then its raison d’être will be questioned. Hence, first attempts have been made in Spain to revive royal history and fill the “missing links”. This problem will further be discussed in the Outlook section. It has been argued that Juan Carlos’ willingness to depoliticize the monarchy made Spanish citizenship possible, contrary to the British case – and here Thailand must be added – which perpetuated British, and on a much larger scale, Thai subjecthood.109

---

106 ibid, p. 59.
107 ibid, p. 40. For a critique of the “lack of empowerment” in Britain see also pp. 6-7.
108 ibid, p. 101.
109 ibid, chapter 10.
2.4. Factors: Personality and/or structure

If democracy is most generally defined as a system in which the

most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and
periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which
virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote [...]¹¹⁰

then Thailand already fails the requirements since, as was shown, the most powerful
decision makers are not necessarily elected. And if the definition is extended to a
substantive conception of democracy, including an equality of wealth distribution,
inclusion of all political groupings, social justice and freedom from corruption and
coercive practices, Spain would be considered much more democratic than Thailand. It
has become clear that the democratic role of the respective kings has been decisive for
the unequal development of these two “Third Wave” democracies. Why is that?
As mentioned in the introduction, an explanation that considers structural factors, but
emphasises personal choice is favoured here. Generally, Thai conditions favoured a
“backward legitimated” kingship, whereas Juan Carlos was more likely to adopt a
“forward legitimation”.

2.4.1. Spain – Structures: The most obvious difference between Spain and Thailand is
the longer history of humanist and enlightened ideas. Yet, Spain has long been treated
as an exceptional case. The Iberian Peninsula of the 19th century was regarded by
romantics as a harmonious backward country which had deliberately preserved old
human values as compared to Northern Europe. This state was explained with the
Spanish Inquisition which, for centuries, had worked against Northern Intellectualism,
and with the preservation of localism and morality in Spanish villages, studied by
Anglo-Saxon anthropologists.¹¹¹ However, the history of struggle for liberalism in Spain
is long and shall be summarized here as a basis for the discussion.

With the Habsburg Succession in 1516 – Charles I (r. 1516-56) ruled simultaneously as
Holy Roman Emperor Charles V – the works of Erasmus and humanist culture were
first introduced to Spanish intellectuals.¹¹² The Bourbon succession in 1700 was
followed by centralising measures and a growing spirit of Enlightenment under Charles
III (r. 1759-88). When, after the invasion by Napoleonic troops in 1808, the king had to
abdicate, parts of the Spanish populace rebelled against the foreign rule of Napoleon’s
brother Joseph who, as an enlightened reformer, gave the Spaniards a constitution.
Using nationalist rhetoric, the Spanish rebels reacted by reviving the ancient institution
of the Cortes, local parliaments composed of magnates, prelates and representatives
of the towns, dating back to the early thirteenth century and later modified to
incorporate representatives from the entire Spanish kingdom in the Cortes of Castile.¹¹³

¹¹¹ For a short discussion of conventional historiography and today’s revisionism see Carr 2000, p. 1-9. Carr believes
that the old Francoist slogan “Spain is different” no longer holds ground, p. 9.
¹¹² Kamen 2000, p. 154-55; Barton 2004, pp. 159-60.
Though not genuinely representative, since the north and centre of the country were absent, the Cortes summoned in Cadiz in 1810 proved important for Spain's future:

Since legitimacy could only derive from society [as the kings were absent], the representation of society was becoming an urgent necessity. [...] It was in this key period that the foundations of modern politics in the Hispanic world were laid and political practices emerged that promised a good future.\footnote{Demélas-Bohy, Guerry 1996, p. 34.}

In 1812 the Cortes proclaimed a constitution which established a liberal parliamentary monarchy. However, after his return to Spain in 1814, the popular Spanish king Ferdinand VII abrogated the constitution as he saw no need for constitutional restraints on his power. In 1820 a revolution was led by disaffected military officers who had been denied promotion – similarities to Thailand in 1932 are apparent. They joined the liberals of 1812 and “proclaimed” the 1812 Constitution, whereupon Ferdinand had to agree to become a constitutional monarch. With this first pronunciamento, as the Spanish coups came to be called, the foundations for a turbulent political future were laid.\footnote{See Bartion 2004, pp. 164-67, 169-171; Herr 2000, pp.197-201.} In 1823 the authoritarian powers took revenge and killed the liberal leaders of the 1820 revolution with the consent of large parts of the people who, as Herr puts it, “still largely devout, would not defend a constitution that gave them the vote but, as their preachers told them, threatened their salvation”\footnote{Herr 2000, p. 203.}.

However, to fanatical Catholics Ferdinand was still too enlightened and not absolute enough, making it neccessary for the king to ally himself with moderate liberals. When Ferdinand died in 1833, the throne fell to his daughter Isabella II, to the outrage of radical hard-line royalists who wanted to see Ferdinand’s brother, Don Carlos, on the throne. Carlism was born. At this point, the Spanish royal line was split up into the more liberal branch of Ferdinand and Isabella II, her son Alfonso XII whose successor, Alfonso XIII, is the grandfather of Juan Carlos, and the ultra conservative Carlist line. From now on, to distinguish themselves from Carlists, Ferdinand’s dynastic line took on a slightly more liberal guise. Yet, liberalism did not take firm root among the elite. The following decades were dominated by pronunciamentos, formalized coups, executed by generals on behalf of the Moderate or the Progressive Party which were alternating in power. The system partly resembled Thailand’s 20\textsuperscript{th} century experience:

Both the Progressives and the Moderates were parties of notables struggling for power and patronage, managing an [...] electorate by extensive corruption. Lacking an independent power base, the politicians appealed to the generals as their “swords” to install them in power [...]. The major politicians were the generals [...] [Their] pronunciamentos becoming formalized affairs [...] This military mechanism for political change is characteristic of underdeveloped countries with a weak civil society.\footnote{Carr 2000, p. 207.}

What remained of 1812 was economic liberalism and modernized political institutions, whereas social reforms were abandoned. An urban Bourgeoisie teamed up with the
traditional land-owning aristocracy and – as in Thailand – “political power, based on wealth and fitness to rule, was to become a particular preserve of an ‘enlightened’ middle class”118. Spain in the 19th century had her own Phibuns, Sarits and Prems. As Lambert put it, “The Iberian Peninsula [...] [was] the ‘Third World’ of that period” in which modern political structures clashed with traditional societies119.

The result was a series of chaotic changes in government, complicated by the constant interventions of the Court and Isabella II, whose addiction to camarillas [courtiers] and clericalism made responsible government impossible.120 In the 1860s, Isabella lost patience with the constitutional system and appointed reactionary governments to office.121 Wide sections of the Spanish populace on their part became increasingly impatient with their Queen who had earned a bad reputation. The leaders of another pronunciamiento in 1868 sent Isabella into exile and, in the aftermaths of this “Glorious Revolution”, proclaimed a progressive constitution. In 1873 a short-lived republic was established which dissolved into chaos the following year. Alfonso XII, son of Isabella, was restored to the throne and the Restoration System, as described in the Introduction, installed. The monarchy was weakened until Alfonso XIII reached majority and reasserted his prerogatives.122

The constitutional monarchy in Spain collapsed because it “could not accommodate new forces”123. In the 1910s, the established political party system broke down, according to Lambert “at a moment when oligarchy was dying and a broader political system was born”124, leading Alfonso XIII to back the establishment of a military dictatorship in 1923 – recent developments in Thailand show similarities. The unresolved problem of political factionalism led to the Second Republic (1931-36) and the Spanish Civil War. Hence, when Juan Carlos became king he was able to understand that he could not repeat the mistakes of his ancestors Isabella and Alfonso XIII. The only solution was a definite elite settlement. As Preston states:

I think that his advisers made it clear to him that there could be no long-term future if he did what Franco and other right-wingers had wanted. The problem wasn’t a choice between traditional values and democratic ideas but between brutal authoritarianism and democratic ideas.125

After 150 years of liberal struggles, the Spanish public could only be kept under authoritarian control or be given a voice in a democratic system. Yet, as Bernecker has noted, of the three Weberian types of legitimate domination, i.e. rational-legal, charismatic and traditional – “Juan Carlos then had at his disposal [...] only one: the legal”126.

118 Barton 2004, p. 185.
121 Barton 2004, p. 190.
122 Lambert 1982, p. 18. In a footnote Lambert notes that earlier Alfonso XIII was forced to read Bagehot, that royal mistresses were removed from Madrid and spies were set on the King. p. 22.
123 ibid, p. 19.
124 ibid, p. 19.
125 personal correspondence.
This legality had its roots in the Francoist state, thus giving the king at first a “backward legitimacy” in the words of Giuseppe diPalma:

The king and his government were in a position to use, and used laws and institutions of the old regime – which, being typically authoritarian, were polyvalent, – to seek a ‘backward’ legitimation of an incipient democracy. That is, as inheritors of a divisive past they could ill-afford [...] to arrest or distort the surge of new parties on the other side of the political spectrum; but they were also in a better position to promote it, thus at the same time legitimizing themselves ‘forward’.127

When, in 1977, Don Juan finally renounced his rights to the throne, Juan Carlos could finally start to build on the traditional source of legitimacy since the dynastic harmony had been restored. Yet, Bernecker points out that the most decisive source of legitimacy of Juan Carlos was neither legal nor traditional but the “legitimacy deriving from the democratic charisma”128 of the monarchy. “Therefore, given the various options of legitimizing his rule, Juan Carlos and his advisors chose the democratic-charismatic”, notes Bernecker and goes on to argue that

[…] the legal rationale and traditional legitimizing based on historic grounds were not considered. This was due to the structural weakness of the Spanish monarchy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [and] the dynastic disputes in the royal palace [...].129

Likewise, Gunther notes that in Spain, with all its historic breaks, “there has been no continuous flow of tradition, no continuous transmission of cultural heritage, no continuous process of selection of the past”130. Spain had experienced two republics in which kings were absent and a fascist dictatorship which constantly devalued the monarchy. Religion – an important feature of Thai kingship – was not available to provide a source of traditional power, either. Preston explains that there might have been a connection between monarchy and Catholicism before 1931, “but not now, other than cordial relations of protocol. Juan Carlos is not head of the Church in the way that the Queen of England is”. 131 The liberalization of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council contributed to this state of affairs. Thus, the links to the past were thin. Juan Carlos saw the need to move forward, presenting himself as “pilot of change”.

Other structural factors which contributed to a successful elite settlement in Spain shall be briefly mentioned, among them the demands of Spanish capitalism, the strength of the movements of dissent132, less ideological polarization after the economic boom of the 60s, a gradual extrication of the Spanish military from domestic politics and a limited liberalization of the political system in advance of Franco’s death, European integration with its incentives and a generational change among politicians which,

129 ibid, p. 78-79.
130 Gunther 1992, p. 44.
131 personal correspondence.
however, was facilitated by Juan Carlos’ appointments. It is still important to note again that many circumstances did not favour the eventual outcome. As Gunther has noted:

The new regime's worst political crisis [...] coincided with a severe drought, a disastrous decline of several key industrial sectors, and rates of unemployment that eventually reached 22 percent of the labor force [...] And yet, support for the system among the general public, key national elites, secondary organizations, and political parties remained solid.133

2.4.2. Thailand – Structures: Unlike Spain, Thailand enjoyed a longer historical continuity. However, this continuity might be more a retrospective construct than an actual fact. Hence, the focus should be on Thailand’s “institutional continuity spanning centuries and thus transmitting ‘Indianized’ forms, with their accompanying political culture, in a very direct way down to the twentieth century”134. Whereas Thai kingship became, over the centuries, ever more elaborate, combining ideas of righteous kingship with magical divinity, the Spanish monarchy – even in its heyday – did not have a thaumaturgic or magical appeal to reach across society, but practiced a personalized kingship, receiving petitioners and touring the country.135 Contrary to the brief “Napoleonic” colonization of Spain at the beginning of the 19th century which limitedly empowered certain strata of the Spanish people in the absence of the king, the project of self-colonization triggered by the arrival of Western colonial powers to Thailand was an elite project to perpetuate royal power. And, as already mentioned, the absorption and adaption of the monarchical discourse to modernity by the Phibun regime did not radically undermine the ideological strength of monarchy but made it all the easier for the Thai nobility to stage a comeback after the fall of the post-revolutionary regime. It might be true for Phibun what Connors analysed for the case of Thaksin: “Thaksin’s fatal weakness was that while in power he did nothing to challenge royal ideology at an ideological level”.136 In 1946, the Thai royalty was simply not yet insecure enough to realize the necessity of a “forward legitimation”. To look backward by reviving royal rituals and presenting Bhumibol as a modern dhammaraja was all too easy. Applying Weber’s three sources of legitimacy to the Thai case, first and foremost traditional means were used to construct a divine charisma around Bhumibol – in contrast to the democratic charisma of Juan Carlos – which eventually could be applied to connect him with a more modern discourse of rational, or democratic, leadership, the latter effectively glossing the underlying and pervading traditionalism, or – in terms of the direction of legitimation – backwardness.

Kershaw, who believes that the Thai king truly aims to lead his people to a self-reliant future neither dominated by the military nor by royal charisma, points to the

134 Kershaw, 2001, p. 11. italics added.
135 Fernández-Armesto 2000, pp. 122-123.
136 Connors 2007, p. 271.
King’s dilemma that in order to liberate Thai society from the thrall of its history he in effect exploits the historical charisma of his position, whose roots could be traced [...] back beyond the Chakri dynasty to Ayut’ia, with its much depreciated ideology of the absolutist God-king.\textsuperscript{137}

Shifting the focus from factors of legitimacy to history one has to stress that the centralization of the Thai state at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century had a century before already been accomplished in Spain. Hence, a revolution against the centralized absolute monarchy in Spain preceded the Thai revolution of 1932 by almost a century. The unconciliatory attempts by Spanish monarchists to regain their power after 1820 took more than a century until a civil war and a fascist dictatorship made up the conservatives mind to proceed to a liberal and inclusive system. The struggle of monarchists, nobility, military, economic elites and the middle class against a full-scale democratization which was fought in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Spain is now shattering Thailand. Bhumibol’s impatience with, and intervention in, the constitutional system bears more resemblance to the conduct of Isabella II in the 1860’s and Alfonso XIII in 1923 than to Juan Carlos, as the former monarchs were much closer to tradition than the latter. It needed a civil war in Spain for the royalists to acknowledge that change was necessary. It shall be hoped that the often praised pragmatism of the Thais will prevent such a course of history.

Finally, comparing other structural factors in the crucial phase of the 1970’s in Spain and Thailand, commonalities are to be found such as risings against the government or communist (in Thailand) and regionalist (in Spain) rebellions. Yet, the differences are more important, i.e. the Spanish experience of civil war and the resulting historical consciousness and political caution among the elite, and, crucially, international developments. Whereas Europe was integrating and exerting pressure on Spain to move forward, Southeast Asia was in the grip of Cold War clashes. The fall of the Lao monarchy in 1975 made it all the easier for Bhumibol to feel his power threatened.

\textbf{2.4.3. Elite settlements – When man makes history:}

\textit{[A] leader who cannot become an autocrat has an incentive to cooperate with others in establishing a nonautocratic government.}\newline\textit{Mancur Olson}\textsuperscript{138}

The above quotation by American economist Olson seems to imply that it is simply the circumstances that prevent leaders from becoming autocrats. However, elsewhere Olson points out that “[h]istorical outcomes surely depend not only on the incentives and self-interest of those with power but also on their morals and temperaments”\textsuperscript{139}. The discussion of the two monarchs’ personal background within this paper was meant to stress this aspect of Spanish and Thai democritisation. The respective upbringing and mentors – or lack of them – of Juan Carlos and Bhumibol were decisive for the decisions they made. Their morals and intellectual grasp influenced the kings’ attitudes

\textsuperscript{137} Kershaw 2001, p. 153.\textsuperscript{138} Olson 2000, p. 33.\textsuperscript{139} ibid, p. 3.
to democracy which, through their extensive legal or traditional powers, they were able if not to impose on their countries, then at least to partly realise in their negotiations with other elite actors. In this process, their temperaments became important. Gunther stresses that earlier discussions of the Spanish transition concluded that although mass-level, social structural, international, and temporal factors all contributed to the consolidation of Spanish democracy in the 1970s and early 1980s, they were less decisive than were the actions of political elites.\textsuperscript{140}

Later, he repeats that a proper understanding of successful efforts to achieve elite consensus cannot ignore the basic values, historical memories, and behavioral styles of individual members of the political elite.\textsuperscript{141}

According to Gunther, for a democratic consolidation to be successful, pragmatic leaders were to be preferred over dogmatic individuals, historically conscious actors would be more likely to foster democratic consolidation than those who did not learn from the past. Consequently, he asserts that a different series of events would have transpired [...] if it had been Juan Carlos who had been accidently killed by his brother [...] or if King Juan Carlos had behaved like his grandfather, Alfonso XIII.\textsuperscript{142}

Regarding the Thai case, the question could be asked what would have become of Thai democracy if, in 1939, Pridi-admirer and then-regent Prince Aditya had been elevated to the throne by Phibun.\textsuperscript{143} Or if, on the abdication of Prajadhipok, the last surviving celestial son of Chulalongkorn, Prince Paripatra, had been chosen as Rama XIII instead of being kept in exile after the 1932 revolution. Paripatra’s grandchild, Sukhumbhand Paripatra, is today member of the Democrat Party and – for a time – ranked among the harshest critics of the present Chakri reign.\textsuperscript{144}

And yet, history made Bhumibol the longest reigning monarch in the world. Over six decades he successfully established royal hegemony since he thought that he knew best what was good for his people – and his power. He was fatherless, grew up abroad, was unprepared for kingship and certainly insecure as a young man grown up in posh Lausanne and suddenly put under an ancient crown. He became putty in the hands of his courtiers. Over his long reign he contributed to the ideological synchronization of the political discourse in eliminating leftist ideas instead of mediating between conservatives and progressives like Juan Carlos. An elite settlement as it happened in Spain has become almost impossible in Bhumibol’s Thailand where royal ideology is used to suppress dissent and the king does nothing to intervene in the Maoist-like cult that has

\textsuperscript{140} Gunther 1992, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, pp. 77-78.
\textsuperscript{143} See e.g., Kobkua 2003 pp. 130-31; Handley 2006, pp. 60-61.
\textsuperscript{144} In 1983, Sukhumbhand criticized Bhumibol’s alignment with the military: “[...] The monarchy is attempting to act as both a symbol of national unity and a power seeker, without realizing that the two roles may be inherently and fatally contradictory. ... Gone is the pragmatism and flexibility which had been the hallmark of the Chakris.” See Handley, p. 298.
grown around him. But a pluralistic environment is fundamental for an elite settlement, as Gunther has noted for the Spanish case: “An ideologically unified elite [...] might well have had no intention of democratizing [...]”. Hence, instead of taking advantage of his authority to become a mediator, with his constant intervention into processes which could have led to the emergence of rival ideologies, such as his support for the 1976 massacre or the 2006 coup, Bhumibol has done a disservance to his country.

Instead of accepting that for a vital democracy in Thailand the emergence of a leftist political spectrum should be, if not encouraged, then at least not prevented, Bhumibol again and again repeats that Thailand is different – an idea he had been infused with by his royal uncles. Hence, he whitewashes the current state of Thai politics in blaming foreigners for a lack of understanding of the Southeast Asian soul, an attitude farang critics are confronted with if they dare to question the role of the king in front of royalist Thais: “You don’t know anything about Thai people.” Only days ahead of the cyclone Nargis catastrophe, Burmese media cited Bhumibol as having told a delegation of visiting Burmese generals that “the examples of some western powers stood witness to the fact that too much democracy was not good.” Weeks later he said to a group of Thai diplomats: “We are Thais. Foreigners might look at us as satpralad (strange monster). But we’re still Thai.”

An individual who makes use of his vast symbolic powers to enforce such exclusive ideas of Thai politics is certainly a hindrance to the consolidation of Thai democracy. As Lambert has noted for the case of Spain:

The right has always regarded democracy as in some way ‘inauthentic’: Franco, in particular, was scathing in his attacks on “the liberal institutions which have poisoned our people.”

Of course, the Spanish monarchy is certainly not without faults, either. Like most monarchs, Juan Carlos is constitutionally placed above his fellow citizens. According to article 56, section 3 “[t]he person of the King is inviolable and shall not be held accountable”. A lèse majesté law does exist in Spain – the articles 490 and 491 of the Spanish Criminal Law provide for a maximum jail term of two years. Over and above Juan Carlos’ fondness for yachts, cars, women and hunting, rumours persist of “obscure financial operations making him vulnerable to be blackmailed”. As one commentator recently noted: “[I]n 1975, Don Juan Carlos was one of the poorest kings on the planet and today he has a fortune according to his position.”

Yet, the fact remains that Spanish Juancarlistas with good reason recognize their king as a democrat and not as the devine embodiment of a tradition which effectively hinders the progression of the nation. Bernecker is right when he states that

145 Gunther 1992, p. 70.
149 Campmany 2007.
150 ibid.
Democratizing, as the Spanish example shows, is by no means the only conceivable “logical” result of a crisis of authoritarian powers. Only the decision of authoritative political operatives favouring certain strategies leads in a specific context to a preference for democratic institutions [...]. The appropriate strategy and the result in the democratizing process finally legitimized and stabilized the entire system.151

3.1. Outlook

In summer 2007, the heirs to the Thai and the Spanish throne simultaneously became the subject of mockery. Whereas in Bangkok, VCD’s of the naked royal consort Srirasmi circulated, the Spanish satirical magazine *El Jueves* (The Thursday) printed a caricature of the Spanish heir to the throne, Don Felipe, and his wife Letizia during sexual intercourse on its front page.152 Although the judiciary in both countries intervened in the distribution of the respective media it became clear that times have changed for the world’s royalty.

Whereas their fathers steered their countries through the ideologically divisive 20th century and thereby earned the respect of their people, the role the next generation will play in a media-saturated, postmodern age is not at all certain. Maybe Thais turn out to be Bhumibolistas and not monarchists, just like Spaniards consider themselves Juancarlistas. And yet, the prospects for change in Thailand after the death of Bhumibol are not too rosy. If, as some have argued, the military takes charge of the succession and delays the definite nomination of a successor for several years, leaving the regency first to Queen Sirikit and then to Princess Sirindhorn, a collapse of royal ideology will be prevented.153 The cremation of the dead Bhumibol will be postponed for months if not years and a cult will be established around Rama IX that outlives many generations to come. Yet, Sirikit might want to see her favourite, Prince Vajiralongkorn, on the throne. Even that would not necessarily shatter the kingdom.

King Bhumibol has led Thailand through the modern age without modernizing the country. Now, in the postmodern age when ideologies disappear and consumerism takes over, Thai kingship may already have overcome the greatest obstacles. What Blain and O’Donnell have analysed for the British case, is also true for Thailand:

[[In a postmodern perspective, it might be argued that failings in political modernization, specifically, lasted so long that modernization in politics was overtaken by postmodernization, the British moving directly from subjecthood under a broad ruling elite headed by the monarchy – skipping European-style citizenship along the way – to a new form of unempowerment and consumer subjection in the 1980s and beyond.154

A short summary of Blain’s and O’Donnell’s theses might illuminate what Thailand awaits in future. As already mentioned, Blain/O’Donnell regard the British monarchy with its surrounding traditionalism as an ideological tool which has been successfully

used to prevent the modernization of the political and social system. If poor working-class Britons are made by the press to sympathise with the plight of the Queen of England, one of the wealthiest women in the world, old hierarchical structures are not questioned but reinforced. The frequent discussion of royalty in the British press does not, as widely believed, lead to a profanation of the British monarchy. To the contrary, the sheer quantity of coverage means: „[H]ere is a topic which is of more importance to you/us than any other.‖ Yet, to prevent the notion of an absolute subjecthood leads to a superficial critique of the Royal Family. Good royals are constructed versus bad royals, yet the loyalties are fluid. Thus it is possible for Camilla to transform from a “Rottweiler“ into an acceptable future Queen. Blain/O’Donnell explain what happens if any member of the royal family comes under press fire:

In this case another member of the Family will be invoked to preserve the propriety of monarchy as an institution, so that the institution is always greater than the sum of its parts. If necessary, previous monarchs can be invoked, or future monarchs [...], so that even if all the current constituent human elements of the British monarchy were portrayed as thoroughly unsuitable, the future would be bright anyway – were it so wished by the conservative British media.

Blain/O’Donnell conclude that “[i]n the UK [...] we are only released from our feudal role as subjects of the British monarchy insofar as we are prepared to constitute ourselves as consumers of our monarchy.” Seen from this angle, the postmodernization, i.e. the commodification of the British monarchy by a media which ceaselessly construct a need among their consumers for royal news in order to sell products, thus perpetuates pre-modern power relations.

In Thailand, the postmodernization of kingship has long been in the making. At and around Siam Square, the commercial heart of Bangkok, royal symbolism appears at every corner – not least because the area and its glimmering malls belong to the Crown Property Bureau. It might be that the abolition of the lèse majesté law in Thailand would do more good than harm to the Thai monarchy since it could lead to a more rapid postmodernization of the monarchy in the British sense. An extensive coverage of the intrigues behind the walls of Chitralada could, as in England, perpetuate the feeling among the public that “monarchy matters”, without being necessarily dependent on a divine incumbent on the throne since “previous monarchs can be invoked”. Hence, Connors’ following speculation might be wrong:

Thai cultural politics are at the beginning of [...] sustained bourgeoisification or popularization of official culture that may result in a reduced role for the monarchical elements that have so far crowned national ideology.

155 Blain, O’Donnell, p. 40-41, 43.
156 ibid, p. 30.
157 ibid, p. 33.
158 ibid, p. 186.
159 See appendix for two examples of the postmodernization of Thai kingship at Siam Square.
160 Connors 2005, pp. 531.
Hope for a change in the monarchical discourse in Thailand then lies not with an abolition of lèse majesté or an unpopular King Vajiralongkorn. What is more important is an increase in dissent, the formation of alternative political groupings which do not carry the king’s pictures as a shield but would increase the pressure for an elite settlement since, as Burton, Hunther and Higley noted:

A key to the democratic stability and survival of democratic regimes is [...] the establishment of substantial consensus among elites concerning rules of the democratic political game and the worth of democratic institutions.\(^{161}\)

Hence, new political groupings need to contain representatives of the elite who are able to negotiate with their more conservative counterparts if the future of Thai politics shall not be decided on the streets. Of course, in a postmodern/postideological age the formation of fresh and broad-based ideological movements containing far-sighted elite actors might be wishful thinking. Thus, it would be unfortunate for leftists to dismiss the recent struggle of Jakrapob Penkair against the patronage system as merely self-serving. Finally, here is somebody with a “crusading spirit”, as Crispin put it, who seems to be willing to initiate a broader debate among his fellow citizens.\(^{162}\)

Crispin recently summarized three options for Thailand’s future:

[[I]t's not beyond the realm of possibility that the ‘great transformation’ Thaksin's allies speak of will indeed one day be pursued. But clearly not without a struggle, which if not settled in the courts or through a behind-the-scenes elite settlement, could very well spill into the streets.\(^{163}\)

Given that, after the 2006 coup and the trend towards "judicialization"\(^{164}\), the courts are now in the hands of reactionary powers who got out of touch with changing realities, the only alternatives left for a New Thailand to emerge are the thanons or the political backrooms. If Thailand took the former option it would risk to follow down the fatal path of Spanish history, where the memory of a civil war had to make up the minds of the elite to come to terms with the reality that, to offer political alternatives to voters of all spectrums is a necessity to build a vital democracy and not to be dismissed as divisive. In any case, for now the Thai monarchy will survive one way or another. This is not at all certain for the Spanish case. In 2007, Juan Carlos experienced his own annus horribilis: the publication of various El Jueves caricatures, followed by street demonstrations in Catalonia burning photos of the Royal Family, calls from a conservative radio commentator for Juan Carlos to abdicate and the announcement of Infanta Elena’s divorce lead Juan Carlos to publicly defend himself and his monarchy as having provided the “longest period of stability and prosperity under democracy in Spain”. In reaction, the king adopted a more political role in the second half of 2007 to

\(^{161}\) Burton, Gunther, Higley 1992, p. 3.
\(^{162}\) Crispin 2008b.
\(^{163}\) Crispin 2008a.
\(^{164}\) ibid. Crispin relates to McCargo when he defines “judicialization” as an anti-Thaksin policy, „a supposedly royally-promoted view that complex political problems could not be solved through electoral politics or by elected officials, but were best left to the judiciary.” Only recently, Bhumibol declared the constitution as “a vital factor for the country”, but only after his network had altered the rules of the game through a military charter to favour royalists. The Nation, 11.06.08. Online: http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2008/06/11/headlines/headlines_30075317.php.
please his conservative critics. For the first time he visited the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla on the African coast, risking a diplomatic row with Morocco. His verbal attack "por qué no te callas" (why don’t you shut up?) against Venezuelan president Chávez at the 2007 Ibero-American Summit became famous around the world.

According to Preston, the Catalonian protests have been mere “student pranks exaggerated by a hostile right-wing press”. Right-wingers have long watched with suspicion the king’s silence over Socialist Prime Minister Zapatero’s negotiations with Spain’s autonomous regions, lamenting that Juan Carlos, as the symbol of unity, accepts the dismantling of precisely this unity. As one conservative critic puts it: “He did not stop flattering the [regional] nationalists, convinced that the more threatened the unity of Spain was, the more necessary his presence would be to preserve it.”

Given some rightists notion that the monarchy might be of little use in future, and given that the Left is traditionally not a defender of royalty, the future of the Spanish monarchy is certainly more insecure than that of Thailand. Preston confirms that there is a greater republican movement in Spain as compared, for example, to Britain and that a Spain without monarchy is imaginable.

Yet, beyond these ideological clashes hope lies with Prince Felipe. When he married the divorced TV-journalist Letizia Ortiz in May 2004, the wedding heralded the start of the postmodernization of the Spanish monarchy. As Blain and O’Donnell put it: "In much the same way as the current king has been consistently constructed in Spain as the architect of the previous transition (in some sense from the pre-modern to the modern), his son is now being constructed as the key from a new transition from the modern to the postmodern."

At the same time, the historical depth of the monarchy is re-established through royal weddings, the burial of Don Juan in El Escorial – the traditional burial place of Spanish kings – after his death in 1993 to reestablish the semblance of dynastic continuity, attempts to rehabilitate Alfonso XIII and the introduction at the end of 2007 of a "Changing of the Guard" in front of the Palacio Real in Madrid on Wednesdays. But despite all these attempts, uncertainty remains. Asked how Felipe could survive the death of his father, Preston’s answer seems to be valid for any modern monarchy: “Felipe’s best chance is by stressing the greatest thing that the monarchy can offer democracy and particularly Spanish democracy – an entirely neutral headship of state.”

---

165 personal correspondence.
166 Campany 2007. Later, he adds that the suspicion has arisen that the king has not [restrained Zapatero’s generosity with the nationalists] […] because if he does, he runs the risk that the leftist government would filter compromising details about his financial activities to the press. For that reason, the boldest have dared to suggest that the best way to solve the problem is that Don Juan Carlos abdicates in favour of his son, Felipe, who is untarnished and cannot be blackmailed, and therefore meets all the requirements to present an effective resistance to the policies threatening to fracture Spain”.

167 personal correspondence.
169 ibid. On March 28 2008, the Bangkok Post published a lengthy news item under the headline “Juan Carlos coaches Prince Felipe how to rule”. Extracts taken from letters Juan Carlos sent to his son in the mid-1980s contained advice such as “Royals can no longer expect ‘rights and privileges’ only by right of birth […]”. The British Telegraph cited further advice from the documents such as: “If in this life it is as important to form and strengthen character enough to permit us to lead, it is not any less to know how to obey.” Quite a few observers thought these comments to be valuable for Thailand. Bangkok Post 28.03.08. http://www.bangkokpost.net/News/28Mar2008_news20.php [accessed 28.03.2008]. Daily Telegraph 29.03.08 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/i-news/worldnews/1583175/King-Juan-Carlos-of-Spain%27s-letters-to-his-son.html [29.03.2008].
3.2. Conclusion: Modern Monarchs?

*Europes modern sovereigns have overseen great efforts to develop other institutions and the rule of law to avoid such tragedies [as Thailand’s Black May] and to sidestep interventions that put at risk the throne’s prestige. Bhumibol to the contrary had consistently undermined the development of other permanent institutions. He saw them as competitors to his prestige, and not as shields to protect it.*

Paul Handley

This paper has taken Handley’s above quotation as true and took it as a foundation for a comparison of the Thai monarchy with one European royal house which is often presented as the perfect example of modern kingship. This approach was meant to counter claims that the Thai monarchy is too unique to be compared. It is not. As was shown, many parallels can be discerned within an inter-cultural comparison of kingship. At the same time, the comparison tried to reveal differences to contribute to an understanding of the dissimilar developments in Spain and Thailand.

Structural and procedural factors for the two king’s different commitment to democracy were analysed and it was argued that the Spanish conditions in the 1970’s favoured a political moderation among elite sectors more than the Cold War polarisation in Thailand. However, this polarisation has been fueled by the Thai king whose personality thus became an important factor in itself. The structural factors are thus only a background against which the kings made their choices. These choices were influenced by the personal history, the education, the values, intellect and morals of the monarchs as individuals. As was shown, Juan Carlos as a person whose character had been formed by his father’s desire to strengthen his son for his later task was more able to see the need for negotiation and inclusiveness than was Bhumibol who, tempted by the traditional powers he had inherited, found it easier to look back instead of forward. If, despite unfavourable circumstances, he had opted for a more conciliatory stance in the 1970s, Bhumibol Adulyadej would truly have deserved today’s adulation since this would have been a real historical achievement by an individual monarch.

Kings in a modern age can be beneficial to democracy if they strictly adhere to their role as neutral mediators in times of severe crises and, with their symbolic authority, strengthen the political system by committing themselves to constitutionalism and the rule of law – a law they do not themselves manipulate. However, as the embodiment of an old hierarchical order they potentially provide the ideological basis for elite sectors to give a veneer of naturalness to social inequalities. If this policy is set up or encouraged by the monarchs themselves, they act against the well-being of their people.

The Thai King is only human. As such, he is fallible. The main problem is that this fallibility cannot be discussed in public since the man is regarded semi-divine. No lessons can be learned from tragic events like 1976 if truth is hidden behind a cloak of silence in order to protect the charisma of King Bhumibol. Thai democracy will not progress as long as the role King Bhumibol has played in its checkered history is not discussed if not in public, then at least in the political backrooms.

171 Handley 2006a, p. 358.
Appendix

The postmodernization of Thai kingship has long been in the making. At Siam Square, Bangkok’s centre of consumer culture, the king becomes a symbol detached from its original meaning – as an object of art or as an integral part of window dressing.
Chronology: Spain

1469  Marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon
1479  Dynastic union of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, regarded as the birth of the Spanish nation by traditionalists
1492  Completion of the *Reconquista*, the expulsion of Muslim Moorish rule from the Iberian Peninsula; Columbus discovers America
1516  Habsburg succession of Charles of Ghent to the Spanish throne – Charles I of Spain (1516-56) and, from 1519 on, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V; “Europeanization” of Spain
1556  Succession of Philip II (1556-98), apogee of Spanish power
1561  Madrid becomes capital, two years later beginning of the construction of Philip’s royal palace *El Escorial*
1588  Spanish Armada sent out against Britain, defeated in the English Channel
1598  Death of Philip II and succession of Philip III (1598-1621)
1621  Death of Philip III and succession of Philip IV (1621-65)
1648  Treaty of Westphalia, end of the Thirty Years War; Spanish recognition of the independence of the United Provinces of Holland
1665  Death of Philip IV and succession of Charles II (1665-1700)
1700  Death of Charles II, end of the Habsburg dynasty; succession of the Bourbon Philip V (1700-46); centralisation and rule of enlightened despots
1702  War of the Spanish Succession begins
1713  End of the war; Spain cedes Spanish Netherlands and territories in Italy to Austria, Gibraltar and Menorca to Great Britain and Sicily to Savoy
1746  Death of the mentally disordered Philip V and succession of Ferdinand VI (1746-59)
1759  Succession of Charles III (1759-88); educational and limited social reform
1788  Succession of Charles IV (1788-1808)
1808  Abdication of Charles IV in reaction to riots provoked by supporters of Prince Ferdinand; succession of Ferdinand VII (1808-33); violent crackdown on “Dos de Mayo” uprising against French military occupation in Madrid; Charles and Ferdinand cede the throne to Joseph Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon.
1810  Opening of the cortes at Cádiz
1812  Promulgation of the Constitution of Cádiz; Spain becomes a parliamentary monarchy
1814 Ferdinando VII returns and restores absolutist rule
1820 Liberal revolt led by Major Rafael de Riego compels Ferdinando to acknowledge the 1812 constitution
1830 Ferdinando VII publishes the Pragmatic Sanction of 1789 allowing his daughter Isabella to follow him on the throne; supporters of his brother Carlos will reject the validity of the Pragmatic Sanction → birth of Carlism
1833 Death of Ferdinando VII and outbreak of the First Carlist War (1833-40), which allows liberal supporters of Isabella II (1833-68) to enter government; liberal Moderates and Progressives begin to alternate in power
1840-3 Regency of General Espartero, who leads the Progressives to power; Queen Regent Maria Christina and Moderates sent into exile
1843 General Narváez establishes Moderates in power; legal and institutional foundations for a modern, centralized state are laid; extension of royal powers, suppression of dissent, establishment of a paramilitary police force; Narváez abandons his own constitution in 1848 and rules as a dictator.
1854 Return of Espartero; reintroduction of civil rights; to save her position, Queen Isabella aligns with the progressives (parallels to Bhumibol in 1973 are obvious)
1856-63 General O'Donnell serves as prime minister; foundation of Liberal Union to 'unite the liberals'; extension of suffrage and press freedom
1863-8 Queen Isabella appoints a series of reactionary governments
1868 "Glorious Revolution" of Liberal Unionists, Progressives and Democrats in reaction to the regime's vulgarity, corruption and formal religiosity; Isabella is sent into exile.
1873 Proclamation of the First Republic; revolts
1874 Brigadier Martinez Campos restores Alfonso XII (1874-85) to the throne
1875-1923 Restoration system; Cánovas de Castillo devises the turno pacífico by which Liberal and Conservative Parties alternate in power through elections managed by the minister of the interior and local bosses (caciques).
1909 Riots in Barcelona; end of the turno pacífico as party system fragments
1917-23 Social war of strikes and lockouts
1923-30 Coup by General Primo de Rivera abolishes constitution; Primo is accepted by Alfonso XIII as a military dictator
1931 Proclamation of the Second Republic after the Republican-Socialist coalition makes major gains in municipal elections; Alfonso XIII abdicates
1933 José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the dictator, founds the ultranationalist Falange; The right wins the November general elections
1936 The left, now united within the Popular Front, wins the elections; military uprising in Morocco spreads into Spain; outbreak of civil war
1938 Juan Carlos is born in Rome where the Bourbon family lives in exile
1939 Nationalists win the civil war; period of economic autarky and fierce repression of supporters of the popular front
1941 Death of Alfonso XIII; his son Don Juan becomes the legitimate heir
1947 *Ley de Sucesión* is proclaimed; Franco declares Spain to be a kingdom; he reserves the right to name his successor
1848 Don Juan and Franco meet; they agree to send Juan Carlos to Spain for education (until 1949 at *Las Jarillas* near Madrid, 1949-50 in Estoril, 1950-54 at Miramar in the Basque country, 1955-60 military training in all three armed services); Juan Carlos becomes legitimizing factor for dictatorship
1957 Opus Dei technocrats begin to replace old military guard; economic and limited political liberalization
1969 Designation of Juan Carlos as Franco’s successor
1973 Assassination of Prime Minister Carrero Blanco; recession brings Spain’s economic boom to a halt
1975 Franco dies; Juan Carlos is crowned king of Spain
1976 Juan Carlos asks Francoist PM Arias Navarro to resign and invites Adolfo Suárez to form a government; the Political Reform Act is passed by the Francoist Cortes which effectively disempowers itself and paves the way for democratisation
1977 The Spanish Communist Party is legalized; democratic elections for a constituent parliament; government and opposition sign a series of agreements (*Pacts of Moncloa*)
1978 The democratic constitution is overwhelmingly approved by referendum
1979 Granting of autonomy to the Basque country and Catalonia
1981 Resignation of Suárez. Aborted coup of “23-F”
1982 Spain joins NATO; the socialist Party PSOE wins elections in landslide
1986 Spain joins the EC.
1996 PSOE looses majority in general elections; conservative PP wins
2004 Madrid train bombings claim 191 lives; PSOE wins elections; José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero becomes Prime Minister
2007 *Annus horribilis* for Juan Carlos

Chronology: Thailand

1767 Sacking of the Siamese capital Ayutthaya by the Burmese Taksin, governor of Tak, re-establishes central authority. Crowned king in 1768. New capital at Thonburi. Reconstitution of Ayutthayan territories

1782 Coup against and execution of king Taksin by disaffected old nobility; Chaophraya Chakri is elevated to the throne as King Yotfa (Rama I); Bangkok established as capital

1809 Death of Rama I, succession of Prince Itsarasunthon as Rama II (1809-24); Reign over a relatively quiet realm

1824 Succession of Prince Chetsadabodin as Rama III (1824-51); half-brother Mongkut enters monkhood due to tensions over succession

1851 Mongkut is handed the crown by the noble Bunnag family which makes itself indispensable; Surface-modernization of the monarchy

1855 Bowring Treaty; extra-territorial rights granted to British subjects in Siam

1868 Bunnags name Prince Chulalongkorn as Rama V (1868-1910); his education combines Thai and Western elements

1873-74 Chulalongkorn comes of age. Bunnags try to secure their position in naming Prince Wichaichan as heir-presumptive → Front Palace Crisis. Edict abolishing slavery

1885 Prince Prisdang proposes liberal constitution to preserve Siamese independence; in his reply, Chulalongkorn sets the tone for future anti-liberals: Siam is different, people trust the king and there are no able people to man a parliament

1893 Paknam Incident. French gunboat diplomacy forces Siam to cede the rights she claims over territories on the left bank of the Mekong

1897 Chulalongkorn’s first visit to Europe

1901-02 Provincial revolts against centralizing measures

1910 Chulalongkorn dies; succession of Vajiravudh (1910-1925) as Rama VI

1912 Plot against the king by junior military officers uncovered

1920s Journalism begins to openly reject absolutism; the centralization of kingship makes the king the one responsible to blame for problems

1924 Palace Law of Succession: primogeniture as principle; hierarchy of dynastic lines along the ranking of Chulalongkorn’s queens: Saowabha, Sawang and Sukumala; prioritisation of king’s choice; exclusion of women

1925 Accession of Prajadhipok as Rama XII
1927  People's Party (PP) founded in Paris
1927  Bhumibol born in Massachusetts
1929  Death of Prince Mahidol, father of Ananda, Bumibol and Princess Galyani
1932  Revolution; Thailand becomes a constitutional monarchy
1933  Rama XII advises Prime Minister Mano to reject party applications and to
dissolve the PP; Mahidol family is sent off to Lausanne; Mano ousted by
PP-coup; suppression of royalist rebellion
1935  Disappointed over his loss of power Prajadhipok abdicates; cabinet offers
the crown to Ananda, who becomes Rama XIII
1938  Phibun becomes Prime Minister; the Mahidols return to Siam
1939  Mahidols return to Switzerland; Phibun arrests royals, nobles and soldiers
for plotting against him; Siam renamed as Thailand
1941  Alliance with Japan; declaration of war on Allies; battle with French
1944  Phibun ousted as Prime Minister
1945  Bhumibol enters Lausanne University, he leans towards engineering;
Later that year return of the Mahidols to Thailand
1946  Pridi’s constitution; death of king Ananda; accession of Bhumibol as Rama
IX; return to Switzerland, takes up personalized studies of political science
1947  Coup backed by royalists against liberal government brings Phibun back
1949  Promulgation of royalist constitution; Pridi flees into exile
1951  Silent anti-royalist coup in advance of the return of Bhumibol to Thailand;
nullification of the 1949 constitution
1955  Phibun commits himself to democracy to counter his rivals; execution of
apparently innocent former royal secretary Chaleo Pathumros and two
pages as scapegoats for Ananda’s death
1957  Coup by Sarit Thanarat against Phibun
1958  Sarit’s second coup; backed by the USA and the palace; declaration of
martial law; abrogation of the constitution; annulation of parliament;
banning of political parties; arrests; king becomes legitimizing factor
1963  Death of Sarit; Thanom Kittikhachorn takes over
1965  “First shot” of communist insurgency
1966  Bhumibol pilots his OK dinghy across the Gulf of Thailand
1971  Thanom coup against own government; abrogation of the constitution;
formation of Village Scouts, the king’s “private army”
1972  Student protests against Japanese goods and for the constitution
1973  Student uprisings involving between 200.000 and 500.000 persons;
military crackdown; intervention by General Krit Sivara, Bhumibol on TV

1974 Promulgation of the 10th constitution of Thailand

1976 Students demonstrate against the return of former dictator Thanom; royal couple visits ordained Thanom at the Chakri temple Wat Bowon; brutal student massacre on 6 October at Thammasat University; Queen Sirikit and the princesses visit Village Scouts in the campus of Thammasat

1977 Coup against royalist ultra-conservative PM Tanin Kraivixien

1979 Restoration of elections and parliament

1980 Prem Tinsulanond attains premiership through a “royal coup” (Handley)

1981 Coup by Thai Young Turks against Prem fails due to royal disapproval

1988 Impatience with Prem’s semi-democracy grows. Pressure for full-scale democracy makes Chatichai Choonhavan the first elected PM since 1976

1991 Chatichai ousted by a coup led by general Suchinda Krapayoon; palace-favoured civilian Anand Panyarachun serves as Prime Minister; growing discontent with the military constitution; in his birthday speech Bhumibol conveys that he thinks little of constitutions which are always mutable

1992 “Black May” protests force Suchinda out of office; Bhumibol on TV with Suchinda and protest-leader Chamlong Srimuang whom he seemingly lectures about the needlessness of the uprising; Chuan Leekpai as PM

1995 Constitution Drafting Assembly established

1997 Asian Crisis; 1997 constitution passed (Thailand’s 17th constitution)

1998 Foundation of Thai Rak Thai Party by businessman Thaksin Shinawatra

2001 Thaksin voted as PM; Prem intervenes in court case in Thaksin’s favour

2003 Popular War on Drugs proves Thaksin’s disrespect for human rights, endorsed by the king

2004 Escalation of insurgency in Thailand’s southernmost provinces, Krue Sae Mosque and Tak Bai incidents fuel anti-Thai sentiments among insurgents

2005 Thaksin wins again in a landslide; start of anti-government protests

2006 Thaksin ousted by a military coup on 29 September; king approves; publication of Paul Handley’s critical biography “The King Never Smiles”

2007 TRT dissolved; military constitution passes referendum; TRT follow-up party Phalang Prachahon (Peoples Power) wins elections

2008 Lèse majesté charges against PM’s office minister Jakrapob Penkair, BBC-correspondent Jonathan Head, Chotisak Onsoong, a student who refused to rise for the royal anthem, and 28-year-old Rachapin Chancharoen on the same charge; Fresh anti-government protests

Bibliography


• 2008b. “’Crusading Spirit’ Adrift on Thai Political Winds”, Asia Times Online, June 13. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JF13Ae03.html. 13.06.2008].


Stengs, Irene Louise. 2003. “Worshipping the Great Modernizer. The Cult of King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai Middle Class”, Academisch Proefschrift, Amsterdam, Universiteit van Amsterdam.


Zusammenfassung (Summary in German)


Während Juan Carlos als “wahrer” konstitutioneller Monarch also Legitimation aus seiner Rolle als demokratischer Stützpfeiler Spaniens zieht, basiert die Macht des “authentischen” Königs Bhumibol auf historischen Mythen und Traditionen die im Kern konservativ und elitär sind. So ließ er sich zum ideologischen Instrument reaktionärer Kräfte aus Royalisten, Militärs und Mittel-Klasse Thais machen, die ein Interesse an der Konservierung des thailändischen Status quo haben. Indem er und sein Netzwerk gegen politische Institutionen arbeiten, unterminiert Bhumibol die demokratische Konsolidierung um den Staat weiterhin – und entsprechend angeblicher Thai-Tradition – von der Person des Monarchen abhängig zu halten.

In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden kultur-deterministische Erklärungen als interessengeleitete Elite-Konzepte weitgehend ausgeschlossen. Vielmehr wird argumentiert, dass eine Kombination aus strukturellen Faktoren und individuellen Charakterzügen die konträren politischen Entscheidungen der beiden Könige begründet haben. Während die spanische Geschichte zwei Republiken (1873-74 und
1931-1936/39) sowie eine faschistische Diktatur gesehen hat, welche die Kontinuität des spanischen Königtums brachen, ist die thailändische Monarchie eine institutionelle Konstante. Dementsprechend war Bhumibol eher geneigt, eine „rückwärtsgewandte Legitimation“ anzustreben als Juan Carlos, der weniger auf die monarchische Tradition als auf eine „forwärtsgewandte Legitimation“ in Richtung Moderne setzte.

