

SARIT AND THAILAND'S "PRO-AMERICAN POLICY"

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The idea of "pro-Americanism," appearing at the same time as America's sense of world mission, is a phenomenon of the post World War II period, and for this reason has a very short history. The basic point is that "pro-Americanism" fluctuates according to American conditions, but fundamentally it is controlled by the internal conditions of the "pro-American" country. At the same time, as in most diplomatic relations, "pro-Americanism" is too a basically unstable condition and by trying to stabilize it and make it permanent, both American and the other countries undergo severe stresses. The "pro-American" relationship which ties the United States with numerous small countries in a chiefly bilateral relationship is certainly not immutable. How should the changes be measured and in what context should they be viewed? I shall take the case of Thailand, the most "pro-American" of the Southeast Asian countries. I shall be looking at political leadership as the basic key to the changes, and from this angle the main problem of this article is how to evaluate the part played by Sarit.

I. THE COURSE OF THAI "PRO-AMERICANISM"

In discussing modern Thai "pro-Americanism," the most important factor in Thai-American relations is the formation of the "Free-Thai" organization (*Khabuan-seerii-thai*) which came into existence as an underground organization during the Pacific War, and which controlled the Government from 1944 onwards. The reason for saying this is that before 1941 Thai-American relations were distant. There were no substantial trade relations and regarding the activities of government advisors and missionaries, relations tended to diminish after the revolution of 1932.¹ Under Phibuun Songkhraam, who was appointed Prime Minister in 1938, Thailand began to strengthen her ties with the Axis Powers, and in December 1941, when the Americans entered the Pacific War, went so far as to declare war on the United States. The "Free Thai" organization covers the anti-Phibuun and anti-Japanese underground resistance movement which operated within Thailand and in the United States and United Kingdom during the war. The "Free Thai" was the general term for the anti-Phibuun faction led by Priidii Phanomyong at the outbreak of war.² The Thai Legation in the United States became the

¹ Frank C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, Washington, D. C., Public Affairs Press, 1965, p. 32ff.

² Naai Chanthanaa (pseud.), *X. O. Group—rûang phaa'inai khabuan-seerii-thai* (X. O. Group—An Inside Story of the Free Thai Movement), 1946, gives greater detail on the Free Thai movement.

headquarters of the Free Thai movement in America, and Seenii Praamoot, who was at that time Thai consul in the United States, and who was later to become post-war Prime Minister, was the leader of the group. In his judgment the directive he received concerning Thailand's declaration of war did not represent the opinion of the Thai people. He did not pass the information onto the Americans, but applied for permission for the continued existence of the Thai Legation and requested cooperation for the Free Thai movement. During the war he stayed in Washington as the eyes and ears of the Free Thai. He cooperated with Priidii, who was in Thailand, and played a large role in the anti-Japanese movement.

In 1944, no later than the end of the war, the Free Thai faction replaced Phibuun as the major political force, and they continued in power until the autumn of 1947. With their predominance, naturally, Thailand's diplomatic relations with the United States became more positive. Nevertheless, unlike Thai-American relations after 1947, the relations of this period showed no signs of strong pro-American leanings. Why should this have been the case? One can indicate various reasons both for Thailand and America.

In the first place, the Free Thai party was an organization deficient in any positive internationalism. Of course they had joined the Allies on a policy opposed to Japan, but their main attention was directed toward the democratization of government at home. They were not very conscious of a need to define Thailand's role in international affairs, and had not given it any serious consideration. The party was anti-Japanese and anti-Phibuun, but the emphasis was on the latter.

Secondly, a close examination of the relationship between the Free Thai and the United States reveals that the Free Thai lacked any inclination toward any special treatment of deference to the United States. The reason the Free Thai had adopted an anti-Japanese policy and a pro-American attitude was not due to any special respect for American political and social concepts, but was a coolly pragmatic decision based on a long-term comparative assessment of the actual power of America and Japan.³ Thailand's later obvious inclination to ally itself totally and exclusively with any one country is not apparent at this stage. England and the United States received equal treatment.

Thirdly, Seenii Praamoot was the member of the Free Thai party who inclined most closely to the American Government, but, when he was appointed Prime Minister on his return to Thailand after the war, he "did not make an issue of things with the Priidii group, who had had a difficult time in the underground movement, and he eventually became a yes man."⁴ This

³ Seenii Praamoot, who described Thai-U. S. relations during the war, touches on the motives for this decision in the text of his speeches—Seenii Praamoot, *Paathokthaa phiseet, khwaam-samphan rawaang thai-ameerikaa nai rawaang mahaasongkhraam look khrang thii leo* (Thai-American Relations during World War II). In this Seenii states positively that he worked on the pragmatic (*prayoot*) decision.

⁴ On 28th August, 1967, the author had a chance to interview Professor Kenneth Landon, and this is what he said then. Professor Landon, incidentally, is the author of *Siam in Transition*, Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1939.

fact cannot be ignored. Even the nationalist Priidii, after he had seized power, became engrossed in complex internal problems and was unable to give his full attention to international problems. During the Free Thai period from 1944 onward, Thailand became more pro-American than ever before but there were still limits to it.

On the other hand, the American attitude to Thailand at this time was more placatory and friendly than ever before, but they were not actively trying to draw Thailand into their sphere.⁵ The Free Thai party itself was highly regarded. However, they had no stake in Thailand and out of deference to England they were not trying to acquire one in any part of Southeast Asia. In fact the image America had of Thailand at that time, that it had a splendid historical tradition and was a stable unified nation, was a very significant one in the context of later events. But in any case it is wrong to exaggerate the "pro-Americanism" of the Free Thai period.

In November 1947, the period of the Free Thai party came to an end with a successful *coup d'état* organized by a secret group called "Khanaratthaprahaan" (*Coup d'état* Group). For the next ten years Thailand underwent the second golden age of Phibuun Songkhraam. During this period Thai-American relations became stronger. An accurate assessment of the part played by Phibuun is the key to post-war Thai-American relations.

The undisguised pro-Americanism of the fifties is chiefly due to the influence of Phibuun alone. If one were to claim that the basis of Thai foreign policies subservience to the great power of the moment, then Phibuun Songkhraam is the man who set this pattern of Thai foreign policy. Phibuun, pro-Japanese during the Pacific War, reinstated in politics in November, 1947, met with the American Ambassador of the period, and impressed him as "a man of magnetic charm and pleasant friendliness,"⁶ and turned toward a policy of open pro-Americanism. As the successor of the Free Thai faction, he had no alternative but to continue their pro-American line. But there were other reasons.

He had participated in planning the 1932 Constitutional Revolution, and was a politician of the older generation—Sarit and Thanoom and others who came later may be termed the new generation. The politicians of the old generation had several features in common. The first was that their political careers dated from their frustration at the failure of the 1932 revolution, which should have been such a success. This frustration taught them the powerlessness of idealism and the effectiveness of *kamlang* (force) and the effectiveness of a wait-and-see policy.⁷ In this sense Phibuun was a repre-

⁵ Frank C. Darling, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-46, completely portrays the attitude of the Americans at this stage.

⁶ Edwin F. Stanton, *Brief Authority*, New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1956, p. 219.

⁷ See Tōru Yano, "Taikoku gendai seiji no bunseki" (An Analysis of Modern Thai Politics—A Study of the Laws of Power, Principles of Representation and Political Instability) (2), *Hōgakuronō*, the Kyoto Uni. Law Association, Vol. 81, No. 3, pp. 67-71.

representative of the older generation of politicians. As a politician he was an authoritarian who believed first of all in the efficacy of *kamlang*. He was also vindictive and merciless to his political opponents, and he was an unscrupulous opportunist. He took particular pains to justify himself by any means available and was always thinking how he could best act toward this end.

The second main feature common to the politicians of the older generation which should be indicated is the fact of their continued fear of political instability. The revolution of 1932 was a clumsy one which somehow succeeded in establishing the democratization of Thailand after a fashion, but democracy and mass support were as yet politically useless. Within their own ranks even, a power struggle was the only way to determine the power hierarchy. Phibuun, having come to power in conditions like this, was particularly aware of the importance of crushing even the slightest political instability.

It is symbolic that during the Pacific War he was Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Foreign Minister at the same time. One can see Phibuun's profound political ability in the way he made the people constantly aware of outside pressure, in the way he made free use of *kamlang*, and in the way he disposed of people who made his dishonesty public.⁸ When one says that the pattern of Thai diplomacy was settled by Phibuun, one must never forget the fatal political instability which characterized this generation.

The third characteristic of the older generation was that they were more concerned with internal affairs than with foreign policy. This of course has no small connection with the fatal condition mentioned above. The problem was that this lack of any particular attention to foreign affairs was covered by several rules distinctive to Thailand. This is easily seen when one checks to see how simple Phibuun's diplomacy was. Let us discuss these rules under three headings.

1. *Close relations with a single "Great Power."* Thailand is comparatively adaptable and it would plainly be of benefit to its government to adapt and draw closer to a great power, developing firm bonds of mutual friendship. However, not just any great power will do. The fact that Thailand has a long tradition of independence and a political culture of its own imposes limits upon its suitability to other countries. Also there must be only one great power. Close relations with several countries would complicate the rules of the game and make diplomacy intricate. Parenthetically, one might add that Thailand is not fond of regional alliances.

2. *Close ties with a great power involve relinquishing one's independence.* This is characterized by a strong tendency not to understand the internal conditions of the great power, and meekly to accede to its public assertions and demands.

3. *In order to maintain friendly relations with the "great power," there is a willingness to give national policies an acceptable veneer.* As long as the problems of national defense have been solved, ideology does not particularly matter, and national

⁸ Witheetsakoranii (pseud.), *Yuk thamin* (Dark Age), 1960, deals with the conditions of this period in detail.

interest can be interpreted widely. Phibuun wisely paid attention to this. Taking his relations with Japan and America as an example, he used semi-fascist nationalist movements like *Ratthaniyom* and *Thaiyai* to impress Japan, and political parties and anti-Communist slogans to impress America. He must have found these policies neither painful nor irritating.

These three principles can clearly be seen in the diplomacy of the Phibuun period. The seemingly naive principles of diplomacy were produced by internal conditions. However, this sort of foreign policy was not necessarily abhorrent to the Americans. It was fortunate for the United States, which was forced to harden its anti-Communist line when the Korean War broke out, that Thailand under Phibuun had freely chosen pro-Americanism, for it made one less uncertain element with which the United States had to contend. The nature of the ambassadors sent by Washington to Thailand during the Phibuun period speaks for itself. William J. Donovan, John E. Peurifoy, Max Bishop—they were not always specialists in diplomacy *per se*. Not only that, not one of them was the sort of person who would have any concern for traditional Thai culture; they came to Thailand as apologists for Americanism.⁹ They became personal friends with Phibuun and sometimes went so far as to obstruct his political opponents for him. Due to their optimism and efficiency American anti-Communism and Phibuun's anti-Communism meshed together.

In any case, the three principles in Phibuun's foreign policy indicated above are a sign of the problems inherent in Thai politics. These problems revolve around the political instability of a society which has not yet developed firm principles of political legitimacy which would allow the transfer of power.¹⁰ Since this is the case, the amount of energy which Thailand can expend in foreign policy matters is limited. The resulting naïveté shows itself in adherence to a great power and the loss of diplomatic independence and flexibility. If one can define a common approach to diplomatic behavior amongst the older generation of politicians who had been through the revolution of 1932, it is by this sort of naïveté.

This is the context in which Sarit Thanarat appears on the scene. Phibuun was exiled after the "Military" *coup d'état* in September, 1957, and the group of politicians of the older generation was overthrown. It was at this juncture that the politicians of the new generation made their appearance. It was a generation lacking in international experience and in contact with Western political ideas. However, the new generation took upon itself the burden of "normalizing" matters in both internal affairs and foreign policy. How can

⁹ Frank C. Darling, *op. cit.*, touches briefly on the characteristics of the three ambassadors. For example, Donovan, a military man from the Information Bureau, concentrated on strengthening the Thai army. Peurifoy was a career diplomat, but he was a specialist in anti-Communist tactics, and active in the overthrow of Communism in Central America. Bishop also was a career diplomat, but after his tour in Thailand he decided to support Phibuun, to the extent of antagonizing Thai public opinion.

¹⁰ See Tōru Yano, *op. cit.*, (1), *Hōgakuronō*, Vol. 81, No. 1.

one best explain what is meant by "normalization" in diplomacy? Naturally it is linked with the three principles which characterized the Phibuun period. "Normalization" is consequently a reform of the policy of dependence on a great power and an abandonment of its policy of submissiveness.

As a child, Sarit had had to learn the Thai language as a foreign language;¹¹ he did not excel in languages, and was not particularly fond of diplomacy. It is correct to say that, in 1957, he was neither pro- nor anti-American; his chief concern was with the reform of internal politics. But fortunately he felt the need for more study and research about America, and wanted to learn how to judge foreign countries from the standpoint of his own concern with the problem of internal political reform. He brought changes both to internal and external affairs. His foreign policy contains elements suggestive of the principle of "normalization" as defined above. He did not consciously aim at "normalization," but this was the result springing from his internal reforms. Sarit's aims for internal politics are, historically speaking, equally as significant as the revolution of 1932. We must now turn to an examination of them in some detail.

II. SARIT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The historical significance of the 1957 *coup d'etat* can be found firstly in the fact that, as symbolized by the overthrow of Phibuun, the group connected with the 1932 revolution was completely replaced by a new generation. This was, for one thing, related to the fact that the former members of the Democratic Party were growing old. However, more than anything else, it signified the "political demise of the politicians of 1932."¹² The difference in the social characteristics between the old 1932 generation and the new generation, treated in detail elsewhere,¹³ is quite marked. The second point of significance is connected with this—namely that with the disappearance of Phibuun's psychological adherence to Western ideology, or tendency toward hypocritical idealism, Thai politics came to be colored by a realism which was peculiarly Thai in its nature.

After September 1957, as he established his autocratic rule, Sarit Thanarat becomes the hero of this political history.

Sarit's speeches were very brief and explicit, yet nevertheless he was a long-winded politician. Whether he was an accomplished ideologist or whether he had a political machine around him to make decisions in his name is a point which needs more research. However, on the surface, it seemed as though Sarit was a uniquely gifted ideologist. So the political characteristics

¹¹ Sarit's political career is dealt with in detail in the biographies referred to in the next section.

¹² Khathaa dam (pseud.), *Khaa bukkhon samkhan* (Killing Important People) 1962, pp. 571-572.

¹³ See Tōru Yano, "Taikoku seiji no renzokusei to furenzokusei" (Continuity and Discontinuity in Thai Politics), *Tōnan ajia kenkyū*, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto Uni., No. 1.

of the Thai system were formed on the whole by Sarit's personal "political philosophy."

Let us look at the development of Sarit's speeches. Basically his attention is focused on two problems. Sometimes his argument is fairly abstract, and sometimes it is very concrete, but this demonstrates a characteristic dualism which colored his concerns and his policies. When he uses the abstract conceptual arguments his speeches justify national politics in terms of ethos (*lak, lakkaan*). On the other hand, those speeches about policies dealing with everyday matters and program are substantially concrete. At first glance, Sarit gives the impression of being a politician who is concerned only with everyday policies and programs, but his characteristic is that he understood instinctively, intuitively, the problem of ethos on which the mechanism of national politics is to be founded, and did not neglect to give it orderly expression. In other words, Sarit forgot neither concern for the political ethos (*lak, lakkaan*) nor concern for routine themes and policies (*panhaa, nayobaaï*), and he was revolutionary in the way he reconciled these two levels.

There are several important speeches and letters which are useful in explaining Sarit's "political philosophy." I would like to deal here with the following five. 1. A speech given at the National Conference of *Palat cangwat* (Vice Governors) and *Naai amphaa* (District Chiefs), on April 27, 1959.¹⁴ 2. A letter to the President of Thamasaat University (Thanoom) on 10th November, 1959.¹⁵ 3. A speech at the first anniversary of the formation of the Cabinet, February 10, 1960.¹⁶ 4. A speech at the meeting of *Phuu waa ratchakaan cangwat* (Governors and Prefectural Police Chiefs) on March 16, 1960,¹⁷ and 5. the speech entitled "Thailand's New Era," made by Foreign Minister Thanat Khooman, a spokesman for Sarit's philosophy, at a meeting of the American Association of Thailand, on March 9, 1959.¹⁸ Using these, we can explore Sarit's ideas on political ethos. In this case, the essence of the political ethos is closely linked to the theory of normalization which is under discussion in this article.

The fact that Sarit had to think about the national political ethos, combined with his dualist policies, means that he had decided on a fundamental challenge to the Phibuun system which he himself had overthrown. His determination to surmount the old system inevitably led him to a consideration of the nature and rules of politics (*lak kaanmiuang*). The national political ethos he used to surmount the old system was made up of three elements.

¹⁴ Samnak naayok-ratthamontriï, *Pramuan-sunthoonphot khoong coomphon Sarit Thanarat naayok-rattha-montriï* (Collection of Speeches by Prime Minister Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat), phoo. soo. 2502, pp. 1-13.

¹⁵ Udom Pramuanwit, *Naayok-ratthamontriï coomphon Sarit Thanarat* (Prime Minister Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat), 1962, pp. 233-235.

¹⁶ Samnak naayok-ratthamontriï, *Pramuan-sunthoonphot khoong coomphon Sarit Thanarat naayok-ratthamontriï* (Collection of Speeches of Prime Minister Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat), phoo. soo. 2503, pp. 9-20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-47.

¹⁸ *The Bangkok Post*, 10 March, 1959.

Firstly, politics must always work according to *lak thai* (Thailand's own principles). A basic challenge to the preference for foreign ideals which had characterized the Phibuun system, this was clearly expressed in Thanat Khooman's speech. "The fundamental cause of [our political instability in the past] lies in the sudden transplantation of alien institutions on to our soil without careful preparation and more particularly without proper regard to the circumstances which prevail in our homeland, the nature and characteristics of our own people in a word the genius of our race, with the result that their functioning has been haphazard and ever chaotic.... If we look at our national history, we can very well see that this country works better and prospers under an authority not a tyrannical authority, but a unifying authority around which all elements of the nation can rally. On the contrary, the dark pages of our history show that whenever such an authority is lacking and dispersal elements had their play, the nation was plunged into one disaster after another."¹⁹ The point of view here expressed looks to a unified authority capable of producing forcing order (*kamlang*) as a key to political stability. There is an attempt at a reasonable assessment of an individual political culture. Sarit claims "the Thai way is the right way," and clearly confirms the view casually expressed before by Phrayaa Phahon.

Secondly, the nation should not be kept in order by a vertical system of political parties but rather by a horizontal division of classes into rulers and ruled. If one examines Sarit's terminology in detail, it is plain that he has in mind a horizontal political system which derives from the three classes—government (*raat, ratthabaan*)→bureaucracy (*khaaraatchakaan*)→people (*prachaachon* or *prachaakhom*). A comparison of Sarit's rule with that of the old period of absolute monarchy, more than anything else, should focus on this horizontal principle. Sarit seems to have considered that this three-class structure should be the ideal norm of national order, and went on to set up hypothetical definitive rules and regulations about the nature of the "bureaucracy" and the "people," or in other words, what role they are to play. His view of the bureaucracy is clear; "I feel all of you (i. e. the bureaucrats) are my eyes and ears and heart towards the people. I am deeply concerned for the happiness and well-being of my people, and I would like you to represent my concern. I want you to offer the people love and enthusiasm. I want you to help me hear, see, and above all think.... You occupy the same position as the old *khaaluang taangcai* (local governors representing the king); in short, I want you always to remember that you are representatives of my feelings. I love the people and I intend to devote myself to them, and in the same way I want you to love the people and devote yourselves to them."²⁰ As far as Sarit was concerned, the entire national bureaucracy had to be loyal servants of his benevolent despotism. In the same way, Sarit's idea of the position of the people is clear and simple, for his artless and materialistic view of humanity sees people as being content if they "live in a farming

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See note 14, p. 49.

society" (*nikhom chonnabot*), "have something to eat" (*mii kin*), and "somewhere to live" (*mii thii yuu*). It is well known that Sarit abolished *samloo* (three-wheeled rickshaws) in Bangkok, and one reason for the resolute enforcement of the abolition is that it was believed more desirable for the nation if the common people lived in villages with somewhere to live and something to eat, to enable them to farm.²¹ It was held to be unhealthy for farmers to leave the countryside, go to Bangkok, and drive rickshaws, and was believed to be something which would "ruin the national economy."²² Thus Sarit idealized a society built on a three-class system. He saw mankind not as individuals but from first to last, as a part of a collectivity, to be subsumed into a totality.

Thirdly, and lastly, is a point connected with the two already discussed, namely, that he felt it desirable that the Thai government be paternalistic. This was made clear in a notable speech at the 1959 Conference of Vice-Governors and District Chiefs. "In the modern age, no matter how much progress is made in political science, the principle one can see in the traditional form of Thai government has an irreplaceable value and must be used for a long time to come. The principle to which I refer is the principle of '*phoo baan phoo müang*' (father of the family, father of the nation). The nation is like a large family. Provincial Governors, Vice-Governors, District Chiefs are like the heads of various families. So it should be engraved on the minds of all administrative officials that the people under their jurisdiction are not just other people but their own relatives."²³ This "*phoo baan phoo müang*" theory has two characteristics; one is that it is a justification for despotism, the other is that since society is seen as a family, the political leader is naturally benevolent. Sarit regarded benevolent despotism as a given axiom.

The characteristics of Sarit's political philosophy show up clearly in these three ideas about political administration. It was atavistic in that essentially it was not different from the principles of the period of despotic monarchy of a century ago. But if one considers this atavism, coming after the modernizing policies of members of the older generation like Phibuun, as a means used to surmount them, one cannot conclude that Sarit was simply reactionary. In his own mind, his atavism was just the opposite—the media, the plan for a new modernization. He took pride in the fact that he was a progressive leader. His favorite expressions were "*patthana*" (prosperity) and "*khwaam caræn*" (development). What is revolutionary and instructive about Sarit is that he perceived and gave form to an idea that for developing countries, political modernization of political legitimacy must be rooted in particularistic and indigenous elements (although of course this was a concept of which Sarit was not aware). Hence to him, before modernizing, developing countries must recognize the laws which form the basis of national existence, and to make them an obligatory element of government.²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

What was it that Sarit worked to create in Thailand? His ultimate aim was the establishment of a modernization which would realize, in modern terms, the basic and eternal values of the Thai people (*lak thai*). Firstly, his modern state was not the usual sort, but had to be one which completely realized the "fundamental values of the Thai people," values which are expressed in the three ideas of monarchy, religion, and nation. In his idea of a modern state the monarch must be revered as symbolizing the spirit of the people; Buddhism was to be embraced by the whole country as the source of its ethics. As the monarch and Buddhism are to be revered as absolute values, ideological claims which slight these values must not be allowed to invade Thailand. Here anti-Communism clearly becomes a self-seeking national policy. Nation seems to have been defined by wholesomeness, the possession of strength, resourcefulness, and dignity. If one had strength, and plenty of resourcefulness, and dignity, as well as fulfilling essential requirements relating to the values of the Thai people, one was then "progressive." Sarit's concern with economic development and with "*kamlang*" in its broader sense, and his obsession with purity and discipline are spelled out here.

Up till now I have used quotation marks when referring to Sarit's basic political ideology; I have used quotation marks because this ideology was not the result of any philosophical thought by Sarit. Sarit was neither a thinker nor a fanatic ideologist. He was a soldier, a sportsman, and a farmer.²⁵ His thinking was concrete and practical. Nonetheless, the reason I have used the term "political philosophy" at all in connection with Sarit is that, without being conscious of it, his thought processes were fairly logical. These directed his actions in specific directions, and showed themselves as political instinct or insight. His particular skill lay in the purity with which he endowed political objectives.

The fact that he was able to establish political objectives, even if only at an instinctual and intuitive level, meant that when it came to actual government, his political thinking was extremely strategic and tactic. Whenever he was faced with a concrete problem (*panhaa*) involving political principles, he always took it as a problem to be solved pragmatically. We can see the simplicity of his thought processes clearly, for when he was confronted by a specific problem he would immediately set about finding a solution. He was a born solver of problems. The smooth union of instinctive ideas and an ability to solve problems with foresight and skill was the basic feature of his political thought. In solving problems he tried to be scientific, and he held modern technology in great respect.²⁶ However, to him, scholarship (*wichaa-khwaamruu*) was a means of achieving specific tactical objectives and was useful only in so far as it was efficient.

The special interest Sarit showed in telegraph and communications was

²⁴ Sombuun Wooraphong, *Coomphon Sarit Thanarat* (Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat), 1964, pp. 485-486.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 477ff.

²⁶ See note 16, p. 40.

related to his fondness for the practical solution of problems. He paid great attention to news media, and had the unpopular reputation of "wanting to know even the smallest details,"²⁷ but this can never be considered inappropriate in one who solves practical problems. His goal in reorganizing the country was to create a government responsive to actual conditions and to provide strategic leadership. His method was to reorganize government offices in such a way as to permit presidential control of things like the news media, planning law enforcement, and education.²⁸ He also paid great attention to modernizing the bureaucratic organization,²⁹ and to making plans for regional development, an effort apparently aimed at reorganizing his power base. He displayed an unusual interest in mass psychology.³⁰ Being well versed in practical matters like this, he could be very realistic about his foreign diplomacy and internal politics. Extending the period of martial law and suspending the constitution also followed from his view of government *efficiency*. Internationally, too, he planned Thailand's policy realistically in order to catch the keypoints and *ad hoc* changes in American policy toward Communism.³¹ The self-effacement which characterized Phibuun's relations with the United States came to an end, and calculating diplomacy became the rule. Sarit's realism was, after all, based on strategic ways of thinking.

Sarit was basically opposed to the old Phibuun foreign policy which had become an end in itself. In accommodating Thailand's policy to international events, Phibuun lost any individual foreign policy. Accommodation to international politics is indeed necessary, but it must be a means. A country must have a foreign policy, but it must always be a means to an end, never an end of national government in itself. Once the prime objectives of the nation have been decided, a foreign policy should emerge naturally. Sarit was extremely fond of the word "*prayoot*," meaning profit, or usefulness. Through his "political philosophy" he tried to reaffirm the meaning of "*prayoot*." Phibuun and Phao ruled the state by paying attention only to their own personal "*prayoot*," and Phibuun went so far as to "sell out to the Chinese Communists, switch to a republican policy, and try to make himself president" as Khuang has revealed.³² In short, because of Phibuun's mistaken idea of "*prayoot*," he did not know what was the best policy for the nation,

²⁷ Sombuun, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

²⁸ David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1962, pp. 140-142. For details of special features of the Cabinet, see *Thailand Official Yearbook*, 1964, pp. 36-44.

²⁹ One of the keynotes of the Sarit administration was "*Oprom*" (discipline). He enforced discipline throughout the bureaucratic hierarchy. The "*Oprom*" for the officials with the rank of *naai amphao* and above has especially been conducted under a system based on modern, rational principles, devised by the staff of the Administration Research Institute of Thammasat University.

³⁰ See note 14, p. 129.

³¹ Frank C. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 169ff.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³³ Reported in *Thai raai wan*, which leans to Sarit, 31 October, 1957.

and he could not distinguish between what was internationally appropriate and what was internationally expedient.

In this way, as far as Sarit is concerned, principles of representation were clearly conceived in a special Thai mold. In essence, "*lak thai*," in its modern meaning, is a sort of philosophy of togetherness which is to be brought about by the harmonious union of the people. Sarit felt intuitively that political order in Thailand would never be made secure through foreign theories of representation, and that Thailand had not yet produced the type of person who could establish such concepts, and realized that it would be imprudent to force his policies into conformity with them. He was a realist in that he thought that objective social facts had to be considered before political ideology. However, he was also a romantic in the emphasis he placed on a well-organized social system, and on law and order. At any rate, this political conviction tended essentially toward political stability. Perhaps he may have learnt from the realities of international politics that in the twentieth century national survival is dependent upon political stability. Yet still more would it be correct to say that he prized political stability itself as the most essential prerequisite for that efficiency in government and political creativity which he valued so highly. As a result, he firmly believed that the culture of an individual nation was more important than foreign theories, and this is why he emphasized the "father of the household, father of the country" theory of leadership, as well as the three-class theory. To Sarit, political stability had great tactical value; he could be called a romantic strategist, and in this respect, both within Thailand and in other countries, Sarit has not been fully estimated.³⁴

III. SARIT'S LESSONS AND HIS LIMITATIONS

All this shows clearly how revolutionary Sarit was. For the political leader of a small country, his principles were ambitious. His contribution to foreign policy was a firm restatement of the general principle that all foreign relations must be based on national interests, and at first he put this wholeheartedly into effect. In response to this, the United States had to alter the policy it had employed during the Phibuun period. Ambassador Johnson (U. Alexis Johnson) was quite different from his predecessors of the Phibuun period, symbolizing an American shift toward "normalization." He personally decided against overclose contacts, and it was mainly due to him that Thai-American relations came to be based on assistance for development projects.³⁵

Sarit's success highlights the importance of at least three common principles. The first is that political stability is an essential prerequisite for an effective diplomacy, providing a situation which makes "normalization"

³⁴ Army Vandenbosch and Richard Butwell, *The Changing Face of Southeast Asia*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966, pp. 291-296 is one of the few examples of a favorable evaluation of Sarit.

³⁵ Frank C. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

possible. Needless to say, in this context, political stability means stable leadership and a stable social order based on a consensus. In the Sarit period, a conscious desire for political stability created a situation which made a barren foreign policy intolerable.

Secondly, political stability needs a stable theory of representation. To put it another way, those nations which have effectively based their theory of representation on "operative ideal," are able to have successful foreign policies. Here Sarit used a flexible attitude to modernization. As he saw it, modernization did not make necessary the destruction of all pre-modern survivals. There are two sides to the concept of "modern," one involves adjustment to pre-modern survivals, and the other involves the surviving elements themselves reforming to fulfill "modern" demands. By this logic Sarit could put his own philosophy into practice.

In third place is the fact that, under circumstances where there is no concept of a national interest which transcends the personal interest of individual leaders, foreign policy can run into trouble. Sarit and Phibuun differ in the extent to which they were conscious of this fact. Metaphorically speaking, Sarit was a "monarch" and Phibuun was a "tyrant." Not that Sarit himself clearly perceived the national interest—a true sense of national interest does not come from an abstract and ideological view of the state, but rather from a feeling for the personal interest of every individual citizen. Sarit's idea of national interest was much too abstract and idealized, but he did have a sense of the nation as a family. By basing his definition of interest on this, he gave logical form to it particularly in his statement on the mission of political leadership and in his description of the functions of a national bureaucracy. It is important to note that he considered himself a part of the nation, and so could produce foreign policy based on national interest.

It must be realized, however, that Sarit had several limitations. I have no wish to refer to the well-known moral lapses in his private life during his last years. It is rather the problems implicit in his political thought, to which I have already referred, which must be examined. He had severe limitations on at least three points.

The first lies in the way he justified his relations with America. The relations were determined intuitively, and the eagerness with which he pursued "normalization" was also intuitive. Sarit wanted his foreign policy to be a means of attaining the national interest, not a reflection of his personal wishes. Certainly in his best foreign policy he stressed that unreasoning anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism were both mistaken, and that what had to be done was to get to know and understand America.³⁶ This, however, was not reflected in his own personal intuition, and his intuition did not take a form which made it readily understood by anybody else. There is some question whether he really knew how important it was to resolve conflicts between the

³⁶ It should be noted that Sarit was extremely interested in America, and always wanted to learn even the smallest details about it, even from interpreters at international conferences.

national interest of Thailand and that of the United States. To summarize, he relied on his intuition, unfathomable to anybody else, and the move toward "normalization" came from his own personality. When he lost his intuitive strains, then Sarit could no more be a good diplomat. A shrewd observer would notice that there came a change of Sarit's foreign policy in the latter half of 1959.³⁷

Secondly, the principle of representation, which Sarit introduced as the most effective way to political stability, came mainly from his antiquarian interests, and was dangerous for that reason. Above all, his principles of social order contained elements incompatible with the facts of social change.³⁸ Did he think it possible to enforce a law ordering all rickshaw drivers back to their villages without encountering resistance? How long could he believe in the viability of an idyllic pastoral theory which saw life in the villages as easy and pleasant? Wasn't it inconsistent to develop the national level of knowledge and skill while at the same time promoting a theory of social order dependent on a primitive class system? Only a great politician could have solved the conflict between these theories and the facts. As an almost omnipotent autocrat, Sarit managed to succeed, but because of this, too, he could never find grounds of legitimacy for his political philosophy. His theory of representation and his other theories were all tied too closely to his own personal resourcefulness. Hence, although on the surface it seemed as though social facts were being accommodated within the system, in fact this was not so. Sarit was far too much the charismatic politician.

Thirdly, and related to the above points, Sarit did not handle modernization very well. For our purposes we may describe "modernization" as an adjustment to the world-wide trend toward modernization. I have already indicated that Sarit was interested in modernization up to a point, in so far as it was *technological* modernization, which could be of assistance to his plans. This meant the sort of technology symbolized by electronic computers in the Finance Ministry and radio equipments in the Home Ministry. In fact, however, he did not realize how complex modernization is, and so was unable to encompass, either in his own mind or in his policies, the complex irrationalities to which modernization gives birth. For example, as he explained it, the expansion of the police force under Phao Siyaanon was due simply to Phao's hunger for power. He did not realize that it was natural for a modern police force to expand up to a point. Most interesting of all is the

³⁷ It has been said that Sarit, when he became Prime Minister, felt a little uneasy in his relations with America. One factor explaining his movement toward pro-Americanism might be perhaps his learning, when he went to an Eye Hospital in America, just how vast and resourceful America was. It is also true to say that at the same time as he was making himself an absolute ruler, his tendency to despotism was increasing and he began to follow a course like that taken by Phibuun. One has to decide whether Sarit's pro-Americanism marked his political coming of age, or his political degeneration. I leave this theme for future development.

³⁸ A group of scholars led by Australia's Edward Chapman is studying the phenomenon of social mobility in Thailand.

fact that he had many ordinary people executed.³⁹ Anybody who threatened social order for whatever reason was an obstruction to national modernization. To Sarit, modernization was the concern of the whole nation, and he personally was to dictate its content. His inability to handle the problems of modernization prompted him to get mixed up with that cultural phenomenon known as Americanism.

Sarit died on December 8, 1963 at the age of 55, but his political force lives on. The Sarit era continues. After his death there was no instability in the government and this is in no small measure due to the mysterious appeal which permeated his political philosophy. However, how far has Thanoom Kittikhacoon, his successor, continued to apply the political principles established, and how has he tried to overcome his predecessor's limitations?

Thanoom is faithfully following the path laid down by Sarit and plainly is not trying to add anything of his own. He has not differed from Sarit's political guidelines.⁴⁰ He is not a supreme autocrat, and so cannot give strong leadership, nor is he an unusually gifted and intuitive politician like Sarit. Because of all this, Thanoom has inherited intact, and accepted uncritically, the very same three limitations which Sarit had. Not only that, but in each case the limitations have become more pronounced.

First of all, under Thanoom, the logic behind Thai-American relations has become far too naïve. He imagines that America represents power, and that by closely allying himself to it he can supplement his own deficiencies in that respect. Secondly, as far as the limitations on the matter of representation are concerned, Thanoom finds control impossible, and so a lip service to democracy has begun, and at the same time they are trying to build up "pro-Americanism" as a new legitimizing principle. Thanoom does not differentiate between what is politically legitimate and what is socially appropriate. In the third place he has confounded modernization with Americanization to an even greater degree than before.

It is often said that Thanoom's tragedy is to have inherited the political system of a powerful political figure like Sarit without possessing anything like his strength. In fact, under Thanoom, Thailand and America are growing closer together once more. Can it be that the recent trend toward closer relations is not due to knowledge of America, or an inability to judge just how close relations should be, but is due solely to the incapacity of the leaders? Does it perhaps foreshadow the limits of the Thai political system? Perhaps both. As proof of this, Sarit's last years were characterized by corruption and close relations with the United States began during his lifetime. The blame cannot be laid on the Thanoom Government alone.

The problem with Thailand's pro-American foreign policy is whether

³⁹ For Sarit's inclination to tyranny, see D. Insor, *Thailand, A Political, Social and Economic Analysis*, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1963.

⁴⁰ For more detail on Thanoom, see Kao nung saam (pseud.), *Chiiwaprawat coomphon Thanoom Kittikhacoon—naayok khon süü* (Biography of Field-Marshal Thanoom Kittikhacoon—An Honest "Premier"), 1964.

Thailand should persevere with a normalization obtained by the intuitive acts of a charismatic politician of genius. Here is the classic tragedy of the "small nation" which has not established a stable internal political legitimacy, and is forced to use its foreign policy to stabilize its internal politics. How is this tragedy to be avoided in the future? This is one of the most notable features of Thailand's political history, and at the same time, Thailand's problems illustrate the alarming burden the emerging nations carry, and also the irrationalities inherent in modern international relations.