

THE POLITICAL ELITE CYCLE IN THAILAND

TōRU YANO

I. AUTOCRACY AND OLIGARCHY

EVER SINCE the "revolution (kaan-pathiwat)" by the People's party in June 1932, the Thai political stage has been characterized by the cyclical emergence and disappearance of various power groups. Two distinctive patterns of leadership can be discerned in this period, arising from delicate changes in the character of oligarchic rule. At times a particular individual has gained power with the oligarchy almost assuming the nature of an autocracy, while at other times plural power units, involved in conflicting or mutually-restraining relations, have emerged within the political elite. These two patterns may be described respectively as the *autocratic* and *oligarchical* forms of oligarchy.

Typical examples of the former, or autocratic type of oligarchy, can be seen in the elite group of Phibuun Songkhraam during the first half of the 1950s and the leadership of Sarit Thanarat after 1957.

The autocratic nature of the Phibuun's rule is well illustrated by the kinds of men who constituted the seventh Phibuun cabinet (March 24, 1952 to 1957). This cabinet included twenty-six ministers, most of them members of the so-called Phibuun clique. The clique included various subgroups, but all members had personal ties to Phibuun himself. Their relationships with him can be classified as follows: (1) members of the People's party at the time of the 1932 Revolution;¹ (2) friends and aides from the days when he was defense minister in the late 1930s;² (3) those who helped in the 1947 coup d'état;³ (4) those who secured his favor after 1947, through service in national affairs,⁴ and (5) those introduced to him by mutual political acquaintances.

One is impressed with how few of the cabinet appointments came from outside these five categories. Phibuun obviously cherished and tried to perpetuate his personal relations.⁵ And his subordinates (*luuksit*) in turn seem to have

¹ For a list of the members of the People's party see [32, pp. 5-10].

² Biographies of Yutthasaatkooson and Fūn Ronnaphaakaat found in [22] are useful.

³ For a list of those who participated in organizing the Coup d'État Group, see [2, pp. 480-81] and [25, pp. 383-85]. A useful reference for studying the background of the 1947 coup is the court testimony of Navy General Luang Sin, who was later arrested during the Incident of June 29, 1951. See article in [1, June 23, 1956].

⁴ They share the characteristic of having served as cabinet minister a great number of times. For instance, Sukit Nimaanheemin was a minister consecutively from the 22nd to the 29th cabinets, Phrayaa Borirak from the 22nd to the 26th cabinets, Luang Phonsoophon in the 20th, 21st, 24th, 25th, and 26th cabinets, and Keemchaat Bunyarathaphan in the 22nd through 26th cabinets.

⁵ For incidences of kindness and reward shown by Phibuun to his subordinates and friends, see [26, p. 343].

rewarded him with firm support and confidence as a result of their long association with him and the benefits he had bestowed upon them for their loyalty. The overall result was the emergence of an autocratic situation, a period whose stability greatly aided in Phibuun's world tour and encouraged his bold lip service to democracy. Phibuun, in short, occupied a uniquely superior position in an elite oligarchic group.

In contrast to this autocratic form of oligarchy, there also have been periods of *literal* oligarchy, such as the years of civilian reign in 1945–46⁶ and the period of contention between the Phao and Sarit factions prior to the 1957 coup.⁷ Both of these were characterized by tensions between a ruling group and a contending force (*khana*), resulting inevitably in great political instability. This true oligarchical form, prone to political feuds and instability, has however been short-lived, liable at least until now to being replaced soon by a new elite group under a strong autocratic leader. This process of oligarchic dissolution and transfer to more autocratic leadership has resulted from the seizure of power by the *khana*. However, the autocratic situation also tends eventually to give rise to political confrontations and, in time, to a shift back again to the "true" oligarchy. The above-described Phibuun autocracy of the early 1950s illustrated this cycle when it at last lost its autocratic nature and began struggling with the rising Sarit faction.

II. LINEAGE OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The political elites of Thailand belong to *khana*, or ruling circles, which have successfully seized power through a coup d'état. Such ruling circles normally remain in power for rather long periods of time. Indeed there have been only four such *khana* since 1932: the People's party (*khana raatsadoon*, 1932–44), the Free Thai (*khabuan seeriithai*, 1944–47), the Coup d'État Group (*khana rathaprahaan*, 1947–57), and the Military Group (*khana thahaan*, 1957–73).

Each *khana* has a number of common features. First, having started as a secret society, it will have a small and limited membership so as to retain its secrecy. Second, there will be a clear line of distinction between core members who first organized the circle and the mass membership recruited later through personal ties, propaganda, professional relations, and other means. The core group is small, its members easily identified. Third, each *khana* ordinarily will have more than one subgroup. Plans for seizing power in an unstable political period often cause different revolutionary groups to join together into a unitary *khana*, but each group can be expected to retain a certain autonomy after the merger. Fourth, a strategic division of labor is effected in the actual execution of a coup, with a number of leaders forming the strategic center (*seenaathikaan*) and assuming posts as chiefs of the functional divisions. Fifth, each *khana*

⁶ For the most detailed account of the political situation during the civilian control in 1945 and 1946, see [9].

⁷ For a detailed account of the confrontation between Sarit and Phao prior to the 1957 coup, see [30].

member is assigned a specific rank in his organization. Lists of names made public after the seizure of power are scrutinized carefully by observers to see which of the principal leaders sign edicts in what order. It is not out of mere curiosity that the press describes a certain person as the *n*th-ranking member of a revolutionary group (*nak pathiwat maai leek-n*).

Let us now examine each of the above-mentioned ruling circles within the framework of this general definition of a *khana*.

A. *The People's Party (khana raatsadoon)*

The People's party is a secret association organized at the end of 1931 by a small number of people intent on toppling the existing monarchy.⁸ On June 24, 1932 it succeeded in seizing power, thereby becoming a ruling circle. Its long history has provided an abundance of available materials, so much so that its organizational structure has become common knowledge among interested observers.

It consists of approximately seventy members belonging to four subgroups [27, pp. 10–11]: the veteran army officers (*naai thahaan bok chan phuu yaai*), the young army nooi officers (*naai thahaan bok chan phuunooi*), the navy officers (*naai thahaan rüa*), and the civilians (*phonlalüan*). The actual organization and control of the party was initially effected by fewer than twenty men, the remainder being recruited immediately before the revolution from among the ranks of those who worked for or studied under the leaders.

The first subgroup, or the army veterans, is sometimes called the German group since its members all studied in Germany; their main goal in supporting the revolution was the modernization of the armed forces. The young army officers and the civilians on the other hand have been called the French group, their members having spent the early 1920s in Paris. Members of these two groups have tended to be more ideally motivated. The People's party actually was formed when these German and French groups merged about December 1931. The last faction, the navy officers, was invited later for technical reasons, and not having a basic plan of its own, fell under the strong influence of the French group.⁹

The People's party successfully seized power on June 24, 1932. Its initial motivation was simply the narrow one of bringing down the monarchy. As a result, once this had been achieved, the unifying factor disappeared and tension began to threaten the party's dissolution. It never was able to become a stable ruling circle, yet, it nevertheless remained crucial in Thai politics as the party from which various later political elites evolved. As many as six premiers have come from this party (Phrayaa Phahon, Luang Phibuun, Luang Koowit, Thawii Bunyakeet, Luang Pradit, and Luang Thamrong). Its reign lasted from 1932 to around 1947, and the latter two *khana*s, the Free Thai and the Coup d'État Group, were both offsprings of the party. One may even claim that the reign

⁸ Study of how the People's party was founded is essential for understanding its characteristics. See [27, pp. 12–31].

⁹ On the establishment of the People's party see [17].

of the People's party thus lasted until 1957 when the rule of Phibuun and his Coup d'État Group was terminated.¹⁰

B. *The Free Thai (khana seerii thai)*

This circle was conceived by the Priidii Phanomyong faction immediately following the outbreak of the Pacific War, and was carried on through the war years, both at home and abroad, as a large-scale secret society involved in underground resistance. It maintained military mobility and operated even in Great Britain and the United States.¹¹ When Phibuun resigned from the premiership in August 1944, it became the ruling circle and remained an important power group until November 1947 when Phibuun made a comeback through his coup d'état. The Free Thai continued effective resistance even after the coup, harassing and threatening the Phibuun administration for some time.

It is most difficult to obtain a clear grasp of the real nature of the Free Thai for various reasons, among them its complex and often-covert history as an underground organization, its maintenance of both domestic and foreign organizations, its involvement in foreign interference, and its hazy connections to numerous other organizations of a similar nature which sprang up toward the end of the war. According to the writer Naai Chanthanaa (pseud.), the Free Thai was also known as the X-O Group [10, pp. 357-58]. It was organized in the United States in 1941 by the Thai envoy to Washington, Seenii Pramoot, and in Great Britain by an army lieutenant colonel, Suphasawat Sawadiwat.¹²

The Free Thai started as essentially a military organization. During the period from 1942 to mid-1945 continuous efforts were made at military reorganization and further armament. As of July 1945 it had the support not only of its own voluntary corps but also of part of the national forces. Fairly well organized military corps were created throughout the country, including the metropolitan areas of Phranakhoon and Thonburii, and arms were flown in by the Allies to perhaps ten secret airfields throughout the country. More than twenty thousand Thais were involved in these Free Thai military organizations.¹³

As a political organization, however, the Free Thai included only a group of several dozen persons who seized leadership in postwar Thailand and remained at the center of political power through the autumn of 1947. It remains impossible, nevertheless, to clearly outline the nature of its organization or to stipulate its precise size since the Free Thai always maintained links to the large-scale military organization created in the war years.

¹⁰ Khathaa Dam regards the 1957 coup as signifying the political death of the politicians of the 1932 Group [8, pp. 571-72].

¹¹ The most detailed account of the formation of the Free Thai is [10], which was written immediately after the end of World War II. Thai Nooi [28] takes up the Free Thai from a similar viewpoint and confirms the importance of [10].

¹² For a description of the Free Thai in the United States see [4, pp. 472-74]. For the Free Thai in Great Britain see [4, pp. 387-89].

¹³ Naai Chanthana describes the military power immediately before the end of the war [10, pp. 400-418].

The following three criteria are usually applied in identifying Free Thai members: (1) active involvement during 1941–45 in the secret anti-Japanese organization formed by Priidii; (2) appointment to a ministerial post in one of the cabinets formed between the first Khuang administration (August 1944) and the second Thamrong government (May 1947), or selection to an important post, such as the national Parliament, during the same period; and (3) involvement in resistance, in planning a coup, or flight to a foreign country during Phibuun's reign after November 1947. Many members received unduly harsh treatment by police superintendent, Phao Siyaanon.

The following two cautions also would seem to be worthy of note. First, the Free Thai during its underground military days maintained a complex organization involved in nation-wide propaganda as well as in military affairs, and as a result many observers have seen only a part of the entire organization, yet have mistakenly assumed that part to be the whole. Neet Kheemayoothin's description of the Free Thai¹⁴ is a good example of this tendency. Second, the Free Thai as a political organization is sometimes called the Priidii-Khuang-Thamrong group [19, p. 233], as if it were composed of three factions whose bosses frivolously joined ranks without really forming a coherent organization. Such impressions are, however, misleading. For splits occurred only toward the end of the Free Thai's period of power, factional feuds were nonexistent during its initial period. And the eventual split resulted from personal antagonism between Priidii and Khuang [9, pp. 1–45], leading actually to the creation of just two groups, with Thamrong belonging to the Priidii faction.

C. *The Coup d'État Group (khana ratthaprahaan)*

The Coup d'État Group was a secret society of about forty members, most of them military personnel, founded under the leadership of Phin Chunhawan between the end of 1946 and November 1947 for the purpose of seizing power from the Free Thai.¹⁵ Its successful 1947 coup made it the ruling circle, a position it maintained for a decade.

The basic unifying factor of the Coup d'État Group was total loyalty to Phibuun Songkhraam. Indeed, the blind allegiance of so many of his political followers safeguarded this particular *khana* from the internal splits and factional feuds which had characterized other groups. Only when a new generation less familiar with Phibuun arose did criticism begin to suggest the decline, and eventual demise, of the Coup d'État Group.

In contrast to the People's party or the Free Thai, the roots of this group lay not in idealism but in the severe hardships caused by postwar inflation, an experience rendered even more bitter because many military personnel had been stripped of power by the Free Thai clique after 1944.¹⁶ A few made fortunes through means such as real-estate dealings, but most military veterans found it

¹⁴ Besides [10], the following are standard works on the Free Thai: [12] [13] [21] [24] [3].

¹⁵ For the most detailed account of the 1947 coup see [16, pp. 138–248].

¹⁶ It seems that this point has been completely neglected to date. Cf. [22, pp. 123, 187].

difficult even to secure a livelihood. And when Rama VIII died an unnatural death in June 1946, the Free Thai's prestige dropped sufficiently to offer the military an opportunity to attempt a comeback. With Phibuun hiding behind the stage, Phin Chunhawan planned the coup and by early November the Coup d'État Group was in power [16, p. 141] [15, pp. 279-302]. When several of Phibuun's powerful acquaintances such as Yutthasaatkooson and Fūñ Ronna-phaakaat subsequently joined the new government, it was able to establish a stable regime.

D. *The Military Group (khana thahaan)*

This group was a semi-overt resistance organization against Phibuun and Phao Siiyaanon, formed by fewer than one hundred military supporters of Sarit Thanarat when the feud between Sarit and Phao Siiyaanon grew fierce following the February 1957 general election [14, pp. 192-202]. In September of that year it successfully toppled the government and became the ruling circle, a position it has maintained until the present time.

The members of the Military Group can be identified fairly easily from the lists of those who signed the several demands Sarit presented to Phibuun during the summer of 1957; for these lists included all of those who participated directly in the coup. If the group is defined in broader terms, however, one also might include those who assisted in the attack on Phibuun by other methods, such as anti-Phibuun parliamentary speeches. These included about ninety parliamentary members who submitted their resignation on September 12, 1957 [35, pp. 527-32].

The Military Group differed from the others in maintaining a quasi-overt existence, a characteristic made possible by two factors. First, the group's strength was comparable to that of the Phibuun-Phao group. Second, its attack on Phibuun largely took the form of parliamentary debates. Phibuun had heard of the coup plan at an early phase but had been unable to take effective counter-measures due to the high level of Sarit's strength. And since Sarit fought publicly, the entire struggle was openly and keenly watched, both at home and abroad, with public opinion generally coming down in favor of Sarit and his followers.

The main leaders of the Military Group were Sarit Thanarat, Thanoom Kitkhacon, Phraphaat Caarusathian and Chaloemkiat Watthanaangkuun, with Sarit in the dominant role (cf. [31]). This group maintained the most stable of Thailand's recent ruling circles for the following reasons. First, personal relations among core leadership figures were stable. Second, it was made up only of military personnel. Third, an effective division of labor was put into practice once it became the ruling circle. Fourth, by focusing on national issues in their policy formulation, its members raised the need for a flexible political system that would help them maintain a "fresh" political image.

III. SIXTEEN ELITE POLITICIANS

In the final analysis, any efforts to identify the genuine political elite among Thailand's pre-1973 ruling stratum must take into account both the individual's rank in the bureaucratic order and his role in a particular *khana* and in that *khana's* power struggle. In concrete terms this means that a member of the Thai political elite should be expected to meet the following two essential criteria; As an official, he must have been a general, a prime minister, or the occupant of a post equivalent to supreme commander of the army, navy, or air force. And as a *khana* member, he must have helped lead a major incident in a power transfer, such as those which occurred in 1932, 1947, and 1957. The following generalizations also seem viable regarding Thailand's supreme political elite groups of the past four decades: (1) Membership in the People's party at the time of the 1932 Revolution seems not to have been a criterion. (2) With a few exceptions, prime ministers have been included in this supreme political elite group. (3) Generals and admirals in the army, navy, and air force, including even those granted the rank posthumously, have been considered among the top elite. (4) Those who played important roles in the Phibuun circle from 1947 to 1957 usually have qualified. (5) Most key members of the Sarit circle since 1957 also are numbered among the top elite.

Regarding the People's party, it should be noted that even though its members reigned over the Thai political world for sometime following the 1932 Revolution, the party itself remained too weak to automatically propel its past members into the circle of the top elite. Moreover, frequent political feuds rising

TABLE I
POLITICAL ELITE IN THAILAND

Name	Prime Minister	General	Phibuun Clique	Sarit Clique
1 Prayaa Phahon	○			
2 Phibuun Songkhraam	○	○	○	
3 Khuang Aphaiwong	○			
4 Thawii Bunyakeet	○			
5 Seenii Praamoot	○			
6 Priidii Phanomyong	○			
7 Thamrong Naawaasawat	○			
8 Pot Saarasin	○			
9 Thanoom Kittikhacoon	○	○		○
10 Sarit Thanarat	○	○		○
11 Phin Chunhawan		○	○	
12 Yutthasaatkooson		○	○	
13 Fūūn Ronnaphaakaat		○	○	
14 Chaloeangkit Watthanaangkuun		○		○
15 Phao Siiyaanoon			○	
16 Phraphaat Caarusathian				○

Note: ○ indicates that the person in question has served in the position indicated by the column heading.

from the realities of power involved party statesmen in intense competition, and as a result membership in the party became less important for achieving elite status than actual political accomplishment.

By applying the five criteria listed above, a group of sixteen persons becomes clearly identifiable as members of the elite. Their names are found (though not in order of importance) in Table I. It should be noted that Chaloemkiat is an exception in that he was made a general following an accidental death [22, pp. 354-55]. And among the former prime ministers Seenii Praamoot, Phot Saarasin, and Thawii Bunyakeet assumed the premiership under peculiar circumstances, hence must be regarded in a somewhat different light from the others. The fact, however, that they were prime ministers demands that they be given due consideration.

IV. TRENDS IN THE ELITE CYCLE

On examining these men in terms of social mobility (as seen in data of birth, hometown, and family occupation), one finds a fairly distinct generational division. They fall clearly into the older, intermediate, and younger generations.

Typical of the *old* pre-1932 generation was Phrayaa Manoopakhoon, the first prime minister following the revolution and a leader not included in the foregoing considerations.¹⁷ Born in July 1884, the son of a commoner, he studied in a private village school, then attended the most modern and aristocratic schools of his time, Roongrian Suwankulaap and Roogrian Atsamchan.¹⁸ He later went to the Law School of the Ministry of Justice, intending to go into government service, and graduated with honor. Following study in Great Britain, also under Justice Ministry sponsorship, he served as a judge and law school instructor, and on the merit of his work in those posts was selected to the House of Councilors by Rama VII. As can thus be seen from his career, his generation followed a pattern characteristic to absolute monarchies. Leaders went through a competitive process and served the monarchy's bureaucratic court, but they also remained loyal *khunnaang* officials of the king. They were allowed only to follow pre-determined routes in ascending the bureaucratic ladder.

The 1932 Revolution brought about a fundamental change in this elite cycle by removing the inherent superiority of the royal family and opening the way for people of all social ranks to enter the circle of the elite by means of their own political abilities. Those who promoted the 1932 Revolution and tried to maintain exclusive political power thereafter thus represented a new generation of elites. They did away with the ascriptive principle of status and introduced new principles. The new patterns did not, however, become firmly established until well after 1932. Young new members of the People's party began at once to confront the older ascriptive patterns, but the social strata from which they

¹⁷ For a brief personal history of Phrayaa Manoophakoon, see [26] and [23] among others.

¹⁸ Detailed historical descriptions of the Thai school system can be found in [7, pp. 317-35] and [20, "kaansuksaa" & "roongrian"]. These works also comment on the modern aristocratic schools.

came were conspicuously mixed in nature. And as a result their generation constituted an intermediate stage which fell short of qualifying as a genuinely new generation.

The mixed nature of this intermediate generation is seen in the three different social backgrounds from which Khuang Aphaiwong, Thawii Bunyakeet, and Phibuun Songkraam came.

Khuang, born in Battambang, was the son of a local governor-general,¹⁹ inheriting the royal blood. When the family moved to Phraachiinburii upon the annexation of his birthplace by the French, his father was allegedly accompanied by thirty wives. Khuang's primary education was in a school built by his father solely for the sake of children in his clan. He was sent to Bangkok at the age of five, studied in aristocratic schools of Roongrian Theepsirin and Roongrian Atsamchan, then went to France as a private student with three of his brothers at age seventeen. In Paris he chanced to meet several members of the People's party but they tended to remain aloof since he was from the privileged class.

Thawii Bunyakeet²⁰ was the son of a *khunnaang* bureaucrat of *phrayaa* status, and like other children of bureaucrats then, he was sent to Roongrian Raatchawithayaalai. Success at studies earned him a government scholarship abroad, so he went to France, the first such student in agriculture. On returning to Thailand, he served in the Ministry of Agriculture, following a typical course for a capable commoner. Had it not been for the 1932 Revolution, he would have spent his life simply as a capable *khunnaang* officer.

Phibuun Songkraam symbolized the emergence of a new category of elite. His father was an industrious, honest peasant, barely able to maintain a solvent existence. After study at a private school in Nonthaburii, Phibuun entered a military academy of which he had learned accidentally through the Governor of Nonthaburii [26, pp. 194-95]. On graduation from the academy, he won a scholarship to the army artillery school and subsequently to the army staff school, from which he graduated at the top of his class. Next he went to France on a scholarship from the Ministry of Armed Forces in order to study modern artillery and other military techniques. With his peasant background, Phibuun likely would have joined the ranks of the middle level military personnel under an absolute monarchy; he might have become "a colonel with the *phrayaa*'s honor" [11, p. 217]. Following the revolution and the emergence of military power, however, his became the course followed by most political elite. He symbolized in this sense, the rise of a new political generation already in the 1930s.

The mixed nature of this intermediate generation is seen in the fact that three men of such varied social backgrounds could belong to the same party. It also shows up in each man's personal limitations and ties to tradition. Most were given a name by the king, for example, and went through the ceremony of pledging him their allegiance. The nature of the *new* generation on the other

¹⁹ The modest detailed personal history of Khuang is found in [2].

²⁰ A handy reference on Thawii's personal history is found in [5, pp. 315-56].

hand differed markedly. Sarit, Thanoom, Praphaat, Chaloemkiat and others of this generation were born in the twentieth century and graduated from military academies. But since their graduations coincided with the political and economic unrest preceding and following the 1932 Revolution, few of them had a chance to study abroad (Thanoom, for instance, was chosen to go abroad but was prevented from doing so by the depression) [6, pp. 11–12]. Their sole education was military in nature, and it took place in Thailand. Their origins also differed in that they were of peasant stock, a fact made possible by the military academy system. In the days of Sarit and Thanoom, children seven or eight years of age were allowed to enter army academies, going through four years of preliminary education, six years of primary and two years of secondary school (twelve years altogether). They lived together in dormitories and had all expenses paid by the government (except for their own clothes and miscellaneous belongings).²¹ Though sons of military personnel were granted the advantage of being allowed to attend without taking an entrance examination, anybody else was eligible if he passed the exams. Upon graduation, they would become second lieutenants. Thus those who emerged in from this open atmosphere to become members of the political elite shared the common social traits characteristic of a new political generation.

Phrayaa Phahon and the other nine ex-prime ministers all have one thing in common: each occupied this top position during his early forties—a fact that bears evidence of a rapid pace of political ascendancy due to the existence of bona fide competition in modern Thai politics. And this existence of competition makes the historical significance of the 1932 Revolution all the more apparent. The cycle of elite movement was transformed into an extremely competitive and open form while, the principle of status by ascription declined rapidly. That this revolution focused on a challenge to royal privilege is clear from the post-revolutionary attempt at a once-for-all eradication of all practices inherent in the status society. One also notes that the People's party, which monopolized the revolution, never won for itself a privileged existence of the kind the royal family had known. This was not, of course, due to intentional benevolence on the part of the party but because waning leadership and factional strife prevented a return of ascriptive principles. Competition among party members served as the means whereby men entered the elite after the revolution, though mere membership in the party served no value in and of itself in the competitive process.

The first point to note in studying the elite cycles of recent years is the *initial equality* of members contending for power. Along with a basic similarity in origins, nearly all contenders left their respective, military academies as second lieutenants. Whether military or civilian personnel, they all started from low, *non-political* ranks. Let us look, for example, at the careers of fourteen classmates of Thanoom Kittikhacoon [6, pp. 1–22]. Thanoom, a 1929 graduate of the army military academy, had forty classmates, all of whom were appointed

²¹ For a brief account of the military academy system, see [14, pp. 30–33].

second lieutenants as of April 10, 1930. Nearly all were then dispatched to various posts throughout the country, while a few went overseas to study. Despite these similarities, a few of these soldiers were to lead truly vicissitudinous lives. They may all have been merely loyal soldiers, but the twists of history brought them greatly varied careers. Three of the forty-one participated in the 1932 Revolution as members of the People's party. At the time of the rebellion by the Loyalist party in October 1933, twelve found themselves on the side of the rebelling party simply because of the posts in which they were serving. As a result, they were disgracefully labelled later as rebels. Some lost their lives in this incident. Thanoom himself was fortunate in serving in the map section of the Ministry of Armed Forces in Bangkok at this time, thus avoiding disgrace. Others actually left the military and went into business. The pace of their promotions after 1933 thus shows marked differences. (See Table II for the highest ranks each had achieved by 1962 [6, pp. 284-317].) The fact that

TABLE II
HIGHEST RANKS ACHIEVED BY THE CLASS OF 73

General	1	Major	6
Major general	1	Captain	2
Brigadier general	3	First lieutenant	4
Colonel	3	Second lieutenant	13
Lieutenant colonel	4	Others/unknown	4

a large number only became second lieutenants reflects numerous early deaths or resignations. This table makes it clear that posts above the rank of major general were won only by those who entered politics; none in purely military service had risen above brigadier general as of 1962.

A second point regarding the elite cycle is that regular promotions based on

TABLE III
RECORD OF PROMOTIONS FOR PHIBUUN SONGKHRAAM
AND THANOOM KITTIKHAOON
1. Phibuun Songkhraam

Rank	Year	Explanation
Second lieutenant	1915	Graduation from the army military academy
First lieutenant	1922	Graduation as the top student from the army staff school
Captain	1927	Return from France
Major	1928	King bestows <i>luang</i> status and gives a name
Lieutenant colonel	1933	(June) Meritorious service in 2nd coup of the People's party
Colonel	1933	(October) Meritorious service in suppressing rebellion of the Loyalist party
Major general	1939	Prime ministership assumed
Lieutenant general	—	(a three-fold jump)
General	—	
Five star general	1941	

2. Thanoom Kittikhacoon

Rank	Year	Explanation
Second lieutenant	1930	Graduation from the army military academy
First lieutenant	1935	No particular circumstance
Captain	1938	No particular circumstance
Major	1943	Activity at Lampaang Front
Lieutenant colonel	1944	Meritorious service at Phetchabuun
Colonel	1948	Meritorious service in organizing the Coup d'Etat Group
Major general	1951	Commander of 1st Division
Lieutenant general	1955	Commander of 2nd Legion
General	1958	Meritorious service in coup by Military Group
Five star general	1964	Prime minister

official achievement gave way at times to political promotions—an eventuality that constituted a basic condition for entering the political elite. Personal histories of military-officers-turned-statesmen, men like Phibuun and Sarit, clearly indicate this point (see Table III).²²

Phibuun Songkhraam followed the ordinary course until he became a major, but all of his promotions from the rank of lieutenant colonel onward hinted of being political rewards. What was more, Phibuun promoted himself after becoming major general. Thanoom Kittikhacoon belongs to a different political generation from that of Phibuun, but the same political factors influenced his promotions from the time he became a lieutenant colonel. His early political promotions were given by Phibuun, his later ones by Sarit. Without going into detail, suffice it to note that Sarit Thanarat was promoted from colonel to major general following the 1947 coup, after which all his promotions were political in nature.

The reason these regular career promotions were eclipsed by political advancements lay in *politicization* of the person himself, and such promotions usually came from one of the following three developments. First was the formation of an acquaintance with an influential politician. Phibuun in the 1930s was surrounded by several such acquaintance-seekers. When he was almost poisoned to death in December 1938, several military men, such as Captain Phao Siyaa-non, Lieutenant Colonel Luang Yutthasaatkooson, and Air Force Major Khun Ronnanphaakaat, risked their lives to protect him, as is well known. As long as Phibuun retained power, they also wielded power as his aides. But when he went into exile in 1957, they too lost their political life en masse.²³ The second possible development was participation in a coup. One did not have to plan a coup; simple membership in a successful *khana* operation was sufficient. With a few exceptions, all sixteen elite politicians belonged to a *khana* and participated in a coup. Third, the road to political promotion sometimes came when

²² For a personal history of Phibuun, see [19].

²³ They came to acquaint themselves rather accidentally with Phibuun, Phao while serving as a military officer attached to the minister of armed force and Yutthasaatkooson while serving the secretariat of the same ministry. They subsequently rose respectively to the ranks of head of the police department and general (Füün also became a general).

one suppressed counterrevolutionary activities and helped create political stability, thus deserving a reward. The rebellion of the Loyalist party in October 1933, was a counterrevolutionary attempt against the People's party, and Phibuun Songkhraam's successful efforts to crush it made him the star of the armed forces almost overnight [26, pp. 326, 329-41]. Sarit Thanarat and Phao Siyaa-non also achieved similar results by suppressing a series of counterrevolutionary and anti-government attempts in the early 1950s. Both of them subsequently attained rapid political promotions through the favor of Phibuun.²⁴

A third point with respect to the elite cycle is that the military has become more and more transcendent as the basis of power. As long as power transfers are seen as depending on military intervention, the superiority of the military is almost inevitable. Consequently, at least three aspects of military rule in Thailand need further examination: (1) the question of how permanent military rule is likely to be; (2) changes in the social character of the entire elite stratum due to the military presence; and (3) the study of how the military has achieved legitimacy for its rule.

Perpetuation of military rule remained likely for the following reasons. First, the military rulers strongly cling to power. They enjoy their privileges and believe in their mission too much to be expected to forsake power.²⁵ Second, there has been no growth of any alternative bases from which other political elites might genuinely challenge the military. Khuang Aphaiwong and Seenii Praamoot, who once represented the non-military elite, must be regarded as 'men of the past,' both by the military itself and by the general public.²⁶ Neither had the generally recognized integrity or respect to secure full confidence from the public.²⁷ And with the fading of their prestige, the nation had lost any apparent chance for the emergence of a capable civilian group until the students revolted in 1973. For as these men grew older, no competent successors seemed to have arisen. Third, the military has often shown itself capable of skillful politics and adroit administration,²⁸ thus attaining a sense of social legitimacy. The military elite who succeeded Phibuun, men such as Sarit and Thanoom, had a supreme sense of confidence in their own abilities to maintain stable power relationships. At the same time they understood the pending issues quite clearly and were able to deal with them rationally, thus winning respect for

²⁴ A clear account of Sarit's "achievements" and his political promotions is found in [22, pp. 206-12] and a detailed description is given in [18, pp. 91-110]. See [8] for a detailed account of Phao's case.

²⁵ For an excellent comment on the Thai military see [34].

²⁶ In January 1965, Khuang Aphaiwong spoke at Thammasat University on the contemporary state of political affairs, criticizing the form of government the military had adopted. His speech was followed by unhesitating criticism of Khuang by incumbent politicians, who labeled him bluntly a "man of the past."

²⁷ Khuang's opportunistic behavior is broadly known. Immediately after the 1957 coup, when Phibuun exiled himself, Khuang started making numerous critical comments on Phibuun and even revealed past secrets. Khuang's personal integrity has been looked upon as rather doubtful ever since.

²⁸ For a positive evaluation of the Thai military see, for instance, [33, pp. 310-11].

running a responsible governing body. Years have now passed, and no other strong and stable elite group has risen to replace them. The principle of the elite cycle had almost become that of a group dynamic operating solely within the military circle itself before 1973.²⁹

The change in social characteristics of political elite is an important concern in contemporary Thai politics. The large-scale change in the makeup of the political elite which resulted from the coup of 1957 ultimately caused a significant shift in the social nature of the ruling circle. One historical significance of the 1957 coup was that it terminated the period of rule by former members of the People's party—a fact vividly symbolized by Phibuun's exile. Prior to 1957 the core of power, whether civilian or military, was almost always occupied by past members of the People's party. And what determined the character of the ruling power was their a priori inclinations. The period preceding 1957 may be justly called that of Phibuun.³⁰ He first began to occupy an important place in the power structure at the age of thirty-five, assumed the premiership at age forty-one in 1938, and enjoyed a near-exclusive hold on power into the 1950s (except during temporary civilian control). He effected a kind of Phibuun autocracy until being forced into exile at sixty years of age. His reign was a long one, and the end of his political life signaled a chance for Thai politics to change qualitatively. Thus, it is not surprising that distinct social differences can be seen between the 1932 Group of politicians and that of 1957.

The foremost feature of the 1932 Group is that they grew up as so-called *nak-kaanmüang* ("politicians") reared in a specifically Thai context. They had to equip themselves with an ability to struggle under fundamentally chaotic and fluid conditions in order to survive both politically and physically. As a result, they were flexible and highly opportunistic. Members of the 1957 Group on the other hand were raised basically as soldiers (*thahaan*). Sarit, Thanoom, and Prapaat all awakened to political ambitions at a later age, remaining essentially non-political and unselfish throughout their 20s and 30s. Consequently, they are not good at tactful political haggling; they prefer simple human talent or strategic guidance in achieving specified objectives. While former members of the People's party looked at political situations in the context of confrontation, the newer generation preferred to observe them in the context of harmony. One reason for the lack of divisive power struggles among leaders of the new generation is that a kind of harmony-orientation has become one of their norms. A second point of difference between the groups centers on the matter of self images—or self-confidence. The 1932 Group was given to a kind of inferiority complex. While they challenged the absolute monarchy, they seemed to harbor

²⁹ Some think highly of abilities of such technocrats as Pot Saarasin. These technocrats, however, lack the ability to act autonomously.

³⁰ One should never neglect the influence of Pribuun's personal characteristics and traits on the development of modern Thailand. It is dangerous for this reason, to deduct some specifically Thai principles directly from the historical processes between the late 1930s and the 1950s. For there still is a need to filter out that part which is directly due to the personality of Phibuun himself.

hidden insecurities when they contrasted their new regime to its old stability and prestige. They also felt drawn toward—and inferior to—Western politics and culture, as a result of their studies in the West. In a way their complex thus was partly the natural destiny of the generation in which they lived. Through this complex, however, they had to come back again and again to the issue of political legitimacy, an issue that haunted them and increased identity crises. By contrast, the 1957 Group was free of this complex—able to face their own past more coolly, to interact with foreign politics and cultures more rationally. They neither harbored an inferiority complex toward Western ideas nor payed lip service to them. They sought justification in specifically Thai ideas and concepts. Moreover, they had a very clear understanding of what their strategic objectives should be and how they might rationally be attained.

CONCLUSION

A year has passed already since the October Incident of 1973. The year has been characterized by the poignant contrast between the forward-looking pathos of students seeking further democratization on the one hand and the instability of the internal political situation on the other. The new Constitution already is late in coming, and the policy of moving closer to China, which once seemed so well-established, now appears mysteriously deadlocked. How has the transformation from the Thanoom regime to the Sanyaa regime changed the core of the Thai political leadership? Of late it appears that Prime Minister Sanyaa is being assisted behind the scenes by Kūkkrit Praamoot, chairman of the Parliament, and Krit Siiwaraa, army commander. In early May of this year Kūkkrit openly expressed his willingness to assume the premiership if his party wins strong popular support in the coming general election. His interest in politics thus appears to be acute, the more so since it already is well known that Kūkkrit is the one who has been assisting Sanyaa, a prime minister who himself has no ample capacities for formulating new policies and making delicate political decisions. Krit Siiwaraa on the other hand has successfully consolidated his own position as the supreme authority in the armed forces, a position now seen as securely his. He seems bent on fully reducing the role of the military in politics, and the resultant low posture of the military has been quite apparent to all. There seems but a scant chance that Krit himself intends to rise to power. Observers agree that he will instead continue to assist Sanyaa by maintaining order, cooperating fully until the general election.

Thus the nature of the present administration differs significantly from former Thai political modes. The student movement, however, which was the prime promoter of the October Incident, has turned into a disturbing element of late. There have been instances too of peasants burning their identification cards (*bat pracam tua*). With administrative authority waning to such an extent, some already are questioning how long the present government will be able to maintain stability. It is obviously much too early to analyze the political leadership of Thailand's newest government.

REFERENCES

1. *Bangkok Post* (English-language daily newspaper).
2. BUNCHUAI SINSAWAT. *Phantrii Khuang Aphaiwong—adiit naayokratthamontrii 4 samai* [Major Khuang Aphaiwong—former prime minister for four terms] (Bangkok: private publication, n.d.).
3. COAST, J. *Some Aspects of Siamese Politics* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1953).
4. DIREEK, CHAIYANAAM. *Thai kap songkhraam look khrang thii 2* [Thailand and World War II], 2 Vols. (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1966).
5. KAO NUNG SAAM [pseud.]. *11 khon samkhan khoong thai* [Eleven important persons in Thailand] (Bangkok: Oodian Satoo, 1965).
6. ————. *Coomphon Thanoom—naayok khon suu* [General Thanoom—honest prime minister] (Bangkok: Oodian Satoo, 1964).
7. KAWIICANYAAWIROOT, LUANG et al. *Prawat kaan-suksaa kap prawat latthi kaan-suksaa le kaan-suksaa haeng pratheet thai* [History of education, history of principle of education, and Thai educational system], 3rd pr. (Bangkok: Thai-wattanaaphanit, 1951).
8. KHATHAA DAM. *Khaa bukkhon samkhan* [Assassination of important persons] (Bangkok: private publication, 1962).
9. KIAT [pseud.]. *Phongsaawadaan kaanmuang* [Political chronology] (Bangkok: Kiattisak, 1950).
10. NAAI CHANTHANAA [pseud.]. *X-O Group—ruang phaainai khabuan seerii thai* [X-O group—inside story of the Free Thai] (Bangkok: Thaipaanit, 1946).
11. NAAI HONHUAI [pseud.]. *Caofaa Prachaathipok* [Prince Prachaathipok] (Bangkok: private publication, 1946).
12. NEET, KHEEMAYOOTHIN. *Ngaan tai din khoong phan-eek yoothii* [The underground work of Colonel Yoothii] (Bangkok: Phadungsuksaa, 1957).
13. ————. *Chiiwit naai phon* [Life of a general] (Bangkok: Phadungsuksaa, 1956).
14. PRAMUANWIT, UDOM. *Naayokratthamontrii Coomphon Sarit* [General Sarit] (Bangkok: Kaseemsamphan, 1962).
15. PRASANGSIT, WICHAL. *Buanglang kaan-sawannakhot roo. 8* [Behind the death of King Rama VIII] (Bangkok: Thammaseewii, 1955).
16. ————. *Pathiwat-raithaprahaan le kabot-calaacon* [Revolution, coup d'état, and rebellion] (Bangkok: private publication, n.d.).
17. PRIIDI PHANOMYONG. "Baang ruang kiao kap kaan-koo tang khana-raasadoon lae raboop prachaathipatai" [Background to the formation of People's party and democracy], *Rathasaat* (Thammasaat University), No. 14 (1971).
18. RAPHIN, PHOOTHICHAIIYAA. *Coomphon Sarit Thanarat—naayokratthamontrii khon thii 11* [General Sarit Thanarat—the eleventh prime minister] (Bangkok: Kaseemsamphan, 1964).
19. RIGGS, F. W. *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Policy* (Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Center Press, 1966).
20. SA-NGUAN, ANKHONG. *Sing raek nai muang thai* [Advent of a new civilization in Thailand] (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1959).
21. SEENII, PRAAMOOT, MOOMRAATCHAWONG. *Paathokthaa phiseet—khwaamsamphan rawang thai-ameerikaa nai rawang mahaasongkhraam look khrang thii laeo* [Special lecture—Thai-American relations during World War II] (Bangkok: Ruamsaan, 1966).
22. SIFPHANOM, SINGTHOONG. *12 coomphon thai* [Twelve Thai generals] (Bangkok: Ruamsaan, 1963).
23. SIRI, PREEMCIT. *Prawatsaat thai nai raboop prachaathipatai 30 pii* [Thirty-year history of Thai democracy] (Bangkok: Kaseemban, 1962).

24. SMITH, N., and BLAKE, C. *Into Siam—the Underground Kingdom* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946).
25. SOMBUUN, WOORAPHONG. *Coomphon Sarit Thanarat* [General Sarit Thanarat] (Bangkok: Kaseemsamphan, 1964).
26. THAI NOOI [pseud.]. *10 naayok ratthamontrii* [Ten prime ministers] (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1959).
27. ————. *Phrayaa Phahon* [Phrayaa Phahon] (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1954).
28. ————. *Prasopkaan 34 pii haeng raboop prachaathipatai* [Experience of democracy for 34 years] (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1966).
29. ————. *Bukkhon samkhan thai* [Thailand's important persons] (Bangkok: Khlang-witthayaa, 1962).
30. THAI NOOI [pseud.], and KAMON, CANTHORASAAN. *Wootoeluu khoong coomphon Plaek* [Waterloo of General Plaek] (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1957).
31. THAI NOOI [pseud.], and RUNGROOT, NA NAKHOON [pseud.]. *Naayokratthamontrii khon thii 11 kap 3 phuunam pathiwat* [The eleventh prime minister and the three revolutionary leaders], 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Phrae Phitthayaa, 1964).
32. THIBODII [pseud.]. *Cotmaaiheet prawatsaat prachaathipatai khoong sayaaam mai* [Documentary history of democracy in new born Siam] (Bangkok: Daaraakoon, 1950).
33. VANDENBOSCH, A., and BUTWELL, R. *The Changing Face* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1966).
34. WILSON, D. A. "The Military in Thai Politics," in *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, ed. J. J. Johnson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962).
35. WITHEETSAKARANII [pseud.]. *Coomphon Poo. liiphai* [General Phibuun's escape] (Bangkok: private publication, 1963).
36. YANO, T. *Tai-Biruma gendai seijishi kenkyū* [Studies in contemporary Thai and Burmese political history] (Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1968).