


STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THAILAND FROM 1973 TO 2006



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สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ในการศึกษากลุ่มนิสิตนักศึกษาที่เป็นนักเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมืองระหว่างช่วง พุทธศักราช 2510 ซึ่งเป็นกลุ่มที่เรียกว่า “คนเดือนตุลา” หรือ October Generation ช่วงเวลาดังกล่าวเป็นช่วงที่ประเทศไทยกำลังเผชิญหน้ากับเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมหลายด้าน ในทางการเมืองมีความขัดแย้งระหว่างนิสิตนักศึกษาที่ต้องการการปกครองระบอบประชาธิปไตยและอุดมการณ์ฝ่ายซ้าย กับระบอบเผด็จการถนอม-ประภาสที่ขาดความชอบธรรมในสายตาประชาชน การปิดกั้นสิทธิเสรีภาพได้สร้างเงื่อนไขที่นำไปสู่การเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมของมวลชน อันนำไปสู่การขับไล่ระบอบทหารในที่สุด ในห้วงสามปีหลังเหตุการณ์ 14 ตุลา 2516 ขบวนการนิสิตนักศึกษาได้เป็นผู้นำการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเมืองแบบก้าวหน้า และกลุ่ม “คนเดือนตุลา” ยังคงเป็นแนวหน้าในการปฏิรูปทางการเมือง และเป็นกำลังสำคัญของประชาสังคมไทย และการเคลื่อนไหวประชาธิปไตยในช่วงพุทธศักราช 2520 ถึง 2530 ต่อเนื่องมาจนถึงปัจจุบัน

ในทางกลับกัน นิสิตนักศึกษารุ่นใหม่ หรือ Millennial Generation ถูกมองว่าไม่มีความตื่นตัวทางการเมือง เพราะเติบโตใน “ยุคประชาธิปไตย” และเห็นว่าการทุจริตของนักการเมืองเป็นเรื่องธรรมดา พวกเขาเติบโตขึ้นในสังคมที่อุดมการณ์ทุนนิยมและบริโภคนิยมเป็นใหญ่ ภายใต้การบริหารของ พ.ต.ท.ทักษิณ ชินวัตร นายกรัฐมนตรีจากพรรคไทยรักไทย มีนิสิตนักศึกษาเพียงส่วนน้อยที่คัดค้านการปกครองแบบอำนาจนิยมและการคอร์รัปชันของรัฐบาล เพราะนายกทักษิณสามารถสามารถสร้างความชอบธรรมทางการเมืองได้จากผลการเลือกตั้งที่ได้รับเสียงสนับสนุนอย่างท่วมท้นจากประชาชนและผลงานจากโครงการประชานิยม รวมทั้งการบริหารอย่างเบ็ดเสร็จเด็ดขาด

อย่างไรก็ตาม กิจกรรมนิสิตนักศึกษาถดถอย ทึกคักอีกครั้งในประเทศไทยในยุครัฐบาลทักษิณระหว่างวิกฤตการณ์ทางการเมืองในช่วง 2548-2549 พวกเขาแสดงการคัดค้านทางการเมืองในหลายรูปแบบ เช่น เข้าร่วมกับภาคประชาสังคมและกลุ่มพันธมิตรประชาชนเพื่อประชาธิปไตยในการเคลื่อนไหวต่อต้านรัฐบาลทักษิณ บ้างก็เคลื่อนไหวด้วยอุดมการณ์ฝ่ายซ้ายและใช้วิธีการเผชิญหน้าโดยตรงกับรัฐบาลในการต่อต้านแผนการแปรรูปรัฐวิสาหกิจ ต่อต้านความตกลงเขตการค้าเสรี และต่อต้านรัฐประหาร ในปี 2549 บ้างก็เลือกที่จะเป็นนักกิจกรรมนอกแบบในการคัดค้านนายกรัฐมนตรีในที่สาธารณะ บ่อยครั้งกลุ่มนิสิตนักศึกษาคัดสินใจปฏิบัติการอย่างฉับพลัน เช่นการ ขู่ที่จะคว่ำบาตรบริษัทซีเอ็มเอ็มแกรมมี่ หรือการเดินขบวนสนับสนุนคณะศิษย์ของคณะรัฐศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย และด้วยรูปแบบพิเศษของพวกเขาเอง กลุ่มนิสิตนักศึกษาอีกกลุ่มหนึ่งได้เลือกวิธีการตามกระบวนการกฎหมายเพื่อจะเคลื่อนไหวภายใต้กรอบของระบอบประชาธิปไตยแทนวิธีการเรียกร้องชุมนุม แม้ว่ากลุ่มนิสิตนักศึกษาจะไม่สามารถสร้างฐานมวลชนจำนวนมาก หรือไม่มีอำนาจต่อรองมากพอเพื่อเรียกร้องให้เกิดความเปลี่ยนแปลงที่ก้าวหน้าขึ้นในระบอบประชาธิปไตยของไทย แต่กลุ่มนิสิตนักศึกษาก็ได้แสดงถึงจิตวิญญาณประชาธิปไตย ความเป็นอิสระ และพร้อมที่จะมีส่วนร่วมในประเด็นสาธารณะและการเมืองในระบอบประชาธิปไตย.

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This thesis examines the student activists of the October Generation who led the Thai democracy movement in the early 1970s, a time when Thailand was undergoing rapid social change. There was a clear contradiction between the students' pro-democracy and leftist ideology and the weak political legitimacy of the Thanom-Praphat dictatorship. The military regime allowed limited political space for these students to articulate their concerns. These factors created the conditions that led to a mass social movement responsible for ousting the regime. Over the next three years these student activists were in the vanguard of progressive political changes. Those *Khon Tula* remained at the forefront of political reform, Thailand's civil society and the pro-democracy movement throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and remained politically active in the twenty-first century.

In contrast, the Millennial Generation of Thai students were generally characterized as apathetic about politics and "jaded" by democracy while regarding corrupt politicians as the norm. They grew up in a nation whose ideology was capitalism and consumerism, epitomized by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Few students voiced objections to his authoritarian rule and widespread allegations of corruption since Thaksin was able to establish his political legitimacy with huge electoral victories, impressive achievements, and strong leadership.

However, student activism did reemerge in Thailand during the Thaksin era during the political crisis in 2005-2006. They followed several paths to express their opposition to the prevailing political and social culture. Some added their voices to Thailand's civil society, joining with the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in its anti-Thaksin movement. Others adopted a leftist ideology and more confrontational approach in opposition to Thaksin's privatization plans and free-trade agreements, and against the coup d'etat. Some chose 'guerilla' activism to stage photo ops and harass the prime minister and his supporters. Many of their actions were seemingly spontaneous, quickly threatening to boycott GMM Grammy or march in support of Chulalongkorn University's political science dean. And, in a style they could call their own, many students chose to eschew the mass movement in favor of a legal approach, trying to work within the existing institutions of democracy. Although the student activists did not create a mass movement nor successfully negotiate democratic and progressive changes in Thai politics, they showed their democratic spirit, independence and willingness to engage in public and political issues in a democratic political system.

Field of Studies	Thai Studies	Student's Signature..... 
Academic Year	2006	Advisor's Signature..... 

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ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Administrative Court
AMLO	Anti-Money Laundering Organization
ARM	Administrative Reform Council
AOT	Airports of Thailand
A-NET	Advanced National Education Test
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
AOP	Assembly of the Poor
CDA	Constitution Drafting Assembly
CDR	Council for Democratic Reform
CDRM	Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy
CLU	Central Labor Union
CPD	Campaign for Popular Democracy
CPMR	Campaign for Popular Media Reform
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CRMA	Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy
CSNSTS	Civil Society Network to Stop the Thaksin System
EC	Election Commission
EGAT	Electricity Generation Authority of Thailand
FIST	Federation of Independent Students
FRD	Farmers' Restoration and Development Fund
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GLO	Government Lottery Office
GMO	genetically modified organisms
HEC	Higher Education Commission
ICL	Income Contingent Loan program
ICT	information and communication technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISOC	Internal Security Operations Command
IT	information technology
KMIT	King Mongkut Institute of Technology
KPI	King Prajadhipok Institute
LCCT	Labor Coordination Center of Thailand
MCOT	Mass Communications Organization of Thailand
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	New Aspiration Party
NBC	National Broadcasting Commission
NCCC	National Counter-Corruption Commission
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGO-CORD	NGO-Coordinating Committee
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission of Thailand
NIDA	National Institute of Development Administration
NIDA-SFD	NIDA's Student for Democracy
NLA	National Legislative Assembly
NMG	Nation Multimedia Group

NPKC	National Peace-Keeping Council
NPL	non-performing loan
NRC	National Reconciliation Commission
NSC	National Security Council
NSCT	National Student Center of Thailand
NTC	National Telecommunications Commission
OAG	Office of the Auditor General
O-NET	Ordinary National Education Test
OTOP	“One <i>Tambon</i> , One Product”
PAD	People’s Alliance for Democracy
PAT	Port Authority of Thailand
PCP	People’s Coalition Party
PFT	Peasant’s Federation of Thailand
PTT	Petroleum Authority of Thailand
PRD	Public Relations Department
RUSO	Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization
RYU	Rajabhat University Yala
SAC	Supreme Administrative Court
SBPAC	Southern Border Provinces Administration Center
SCC	Student Coordination Center
SEC	Security Exchange Commission
SET	Stock Exchange of Thailand
SFT	Student Federation of Thailand
SME	small and medium enterprises
SSF	Social Security Fund
SSO	Social Security Office
TOT	Telephone Organization of Thailand
TRRM	Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement
TRT	Thai Rak Thai
TUSU	Thammasat University Student Union
TVS	Thai Volunteer Service
WHO	World Trade Organization
YIY	Youth Innovation Year (later “Why? I Why?”)
YPD	Young People for Democracy

ABBREVIATION OF SOURCES

BP	<i>Bangkok Post</i>
FEER	<i>Far Eastern Economic Review</i>
IHT	<i>International Herald Tribune</i>
TD	<i>ThaiDay</i>
TN	<i>The Nation</i>

SPELLING

Transliteration from Thai into Roman script is a challenge for any printed matter, especially when spelling names. It is not unusual for the *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation* and *ThaiDay* to have three different versions of the same name; in fact, within each periodical I have found multiple spellings; for example, Chai-anan Samudavanija has his first name spelled five different ways (Chai-anand, Chai-anant, Chaianan, and Chaianand) and his surname is also spelled five different ways (Samudvanija, Samuthawanid, Samutwanit, Samutvanich). I tried to consistently base transliteration on the Royal Institute System, except when an individual has designated a different choice. My apologies for any confusion you may experience in the event of mistakes.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the Study

This study examines Thailand's student activists as a force for political change in the nation's history with emphasis on their participation in the anti-Thaksin movement (2001-2006). Student activism is considered an important realm of focus for several reasons: worldwide, students are often the leading edge of pro-democracy and progressive political movements; young people are greater risk-takers and more willing to be aggressive in making their political demands; and once students have engaged in political activism in their youth, they are more inclined to remain politically involved in later years, thus contributing to a politically engaged citizenry. This thesis asks why the relatively diminished role played by Millennial Generation¹ students is in such great contrast to that of the October Generation², what that foreshadows for Thailand's future and what can be done to overcome the apathy today's students now display.

Upon the overthrow of Thailand's absolute monarchy in 1932, the nation embarked on an uneven path toward democracy. While that path was frequently interrupted by coup d'états and military dictatorships impeding progress, Thailand did develop into the freest and most democratic nation in Southeast Asia. Although much of that progress was initiated by student activists of the 1970s, credit is due to the many generations of activist Thais that came before them, for having created a national legacy of courageous dissent that began in the late nineteenth century and continued through the 1960s. That sometimes violent opposition stands in stark contrast to Thailand's self-image of its Buddhist culture: a nation of non-confrontational citizens valuing a harmonious social order based upon hierarchical client-patron relationships. These agents for change challenged the traditional Thai

¹ The 'Millennial Generation', also known as Generation Y, was born approximately between 1978 and 1995, although those dates range from as early as 1977 to as late as 2000.

² The 'October Generation' refers to the generation who were students during the events of October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976; the term is unique to Thailand.

concept that the powerful and wealthy deserve their high positions and large fortunes as a result of their good merit accrued in previous lives. They also overcame a historical inclination toward political apathy. That contrast can be partially explained in the conflict between Thailand's Bangkok-based central government and its village-centric rural provinces that resisted government intrusion into their lives.

While the common form of resistance was evasion, it took violent form in banditry and armed revolts. The monkhood was also a domain of a jealous rivalry between competing sects—the *Mahanikai* and *Thammayut-nikai*—and clashes between the official Sangha hierarchy and forest monks. The Chinese immigrants, whose population boomed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were also a field of political conflict, especially those forming the majority of Thailand's urban work-force and labor movement.

Lastly, and most central to this thesis is Thailand's intelligentsia, including university professors, their students, and the country's journalists and writers. Originally they comprised the 'palace-temple' and 'government-bureaucracy' intellectuals, many of whom studied abroad or attended Chulalongkorn University, established 1916, and its earlier incarnations: the Royal Pages College and King Chulalongkorn's Civil Service College. Thammasat University of 'moral and political sciences', established in 1934 after the fall of the absolute monarchy, opened intellectual life to a broader, less privileged segment of the nation. Although social criticism had appeared in print since the mid-nineteenth century, in the early twentieth century numerous newspapers devoted themselves to criticism of the government and monarchy. The government responded then, as it often has since, by closing papers and prosecuting publishers. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia stirred a world-wide communist movement that saw the Soviet Union emerge as a super-power in the aftermath of World War II, communists come to power in China in 1949, Vietnamese defeat the French in 1954, the emergence of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the beginning of the communist insurgency in Thailand in 1965—inspiring an anti-communist reaction in Thailand that attacked, arrested and

sometimes murdered the intelligentsia and students, Chinese activists, labor-union leaders and progressive monks in addition to communists.

1.2 Objective and Hypothesis

During my first two years of study in the Thai Study program, the political issues that challenged Thailand's democratic government revealed an interesting paradox. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's popularity was soaring as the economy boomed and he fulfilled the promises of a 'can-do' businessman that would lead the nation out of the post-Financial Crisis doldrums. Yet, there was an undercurrent of dissent that protested his increasingly authoritarian rule that limited the political space for a free media, Thailand's civil society, and political criticism. Students, however, were largely absent from the political discussion that ensued. Instead, they seemed to be caught up in mood of consumerism that was sweeping the nation. The general consensus was that they were apathetic about politics. Rather, politics was the domain of the older generation—more specifically the October Generation who had brought democracy to Thailand in 1973 and remained at the forefront of the nation's civil society. The conundrum of political activism in an era of democracy and authoritarianism, and the role that Thai students would play during the Thaksin era, fascinated me and led to this research. More than two years ago the objective of this thesis was defined as follows:

This thesis will establish how those factors influencing student activism are similar and/or different for today's students as compared to former student activists. Its conclusion will determine whether student activism remains a viable factor to influence political events in Thailand in the near future.

The hypothesis expressed the belief that "the seeds of student activism remain alive in Thailand—seeds that can germinate and grow under similar circumstances in the future despite substantive historical, social and cultural differences between former student activists and students today."

Prior to the commencement of research for this thesis, the conflict of culture and dissent in Thailand was addressed, posing the research question: Does Thailand's non-confrontational cultural dominate the people's historical quest for justice, with emphasis on the era between the beginning of the Chakri dynasty and World War II? The product of that research concluded that Thailand has experienced an on-going conflict between its cultural bias in favor of social order and its struggle against authoritarianism and abuse of power—a struggle that continued throughout the writing of this thesis. The approach of this thesis, however, is on contemporary events, especially as they relate to students and the contrast between the activist October Generation and the allegedly apathetic Millennial Generation. The research questions narrows the focus to address the factors and values that drove student activism in the 1970s and that reportedly fail to motivate a similar political engagement among today's students. The research further sought to discover the seeds of student activism that did exist and address the last research question: What factors and values inspire student activists in the Thaksin era? The objective of this thesis is to narrate and better understand that activism, and offer suggestions to encourage political engagement among young people in Thailand today.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

The author's inability to read, speak or understand Thai was the most severe limitation of this research. First, the Thai-language books, articles and academic papers that discussed various aspects of Thailand's history and politics were inaccessible, except in the rare instance when a translator was engaged to translate them; fortunately, however, there are many Western academics who have dedicated their careers to a study of Thailand. Their endeavors were of enormous benefit to this research. Additionally, several Thai academics have written their dissertations and magazine articles in English, and contributed chapters to books edited by Western authors. Their contributions were significant in allowing a native Thai perspective to be included in this research. Second, the language barrier limited the field research included in this thesis. Although many respondents spoke English, it was necessary to

engage an interpreter in most instances. Although those services were exceptional, some details and nuances were likely to have been missed.

While there was an abundance of written material about student participation in the events of October 1973, October 1976, and Black May 1992, very little was written about student political involvement during the Thaksin era. Therefore, it was necessary to rely on English-language newspapers, field observation and in-depth interviews to uncover that information.

Lastly, it is difficult to ignore the comment of one professor in the Thai Studies program who remarked that *farangs* cannot understand how Thais feel about their king, in the context of a discussion about Paul Handley's book, *The King Never Smiles*. That cultural difference, among others, between Thais and Westerners likely limited this study as much as language or a scarcity of recent written articles.

1.4 Literature Review

There are several theoretical themes and extensive research from the realms of sociology and political science that address the issues underlying the issue of student activism, including civil society, social movements, social transformation, mass movements, political change, political legitimacy and political space.

The dominant issue in politics is power. Who has it? C. Wright Mills argues that in the United States it lies within a small number of the elite in business, the military, and politics—a “triangle of power” that denies the “popular folklore” of the significant political role played by the public and public opinion. Instead, “the classic community of publics is being transformed into a society of masses” with little if any political influence.³ In Thailand, Duncan McCargo describes a slightly different pattern: The power elite is comprised of the “network monarchy” that includes the

³ C. Wright Mills, 1956, “The Power Elite”, *Classes & Elites in Democracy and Democratization*, Eva Etzioni-Halevy, Editor (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), p. 73

palace, military, bureaucracy and ‘old money’.⁴ Both paradigms suggest that the elite rather than the public pull the strings of power in Washington and Bangkok.

Having power is only one part of the equation in politics. Maintaining it is the other, and central to that issue is political legitimacy. Historically in Thailand, kings established their legitimacy by association with Buddhism, building temples and commissioning religious scripture. In modern politics, although the use of religion remains a powerful force in maintaining legitimacy, the picture is more complicated. Harry Beran cites three criteria for attributing political legitimacy—the right of govern—to a government: first, “on procedural grounds...because it has acquired power in the proper way (constitutionally)”; second, “on substantive grounds, i.e. because it pursues good ends and uses good means”; and lastly, because it is internationally recognized.⁵ Jean-Marc Coicaud expands Beran’s definition to include the importance of ‘consent’ in describing the relationship between the governed and those who govern, and the importance of shared values. In the case of corruption or public office serving private interests, “the right to govern is called into question....This reversal can ultimately make it impossible to provide a foundation for political obligation.”⁶ In contrast to Coicaud’s view, Somchai Phatharathananunth characterizes most Thai politicians as arrogantly claiming that elections give them absolute legitimacy. Coicaud’s definition and Somchai’s observation explain much of the political conflict and claims of illegitimacy that existed in Thailand.

Tied into the concept of political legitimacy in a democratic society is the allowance of ‘political space’ for an engaged citizenry. Kevin Hewison describes its ebb and flow in Thailand, beginning with the opening of political space around 1918 through 1937 when the military secured control of the nation. Since that time, most Thai governments, whether military-authoritarian or quasi-democratic have generally

⁴ Duncan McCargo, December 2005, “Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand”, (*The Pacific Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4)

⁵ Harry Beran, *The Consent Theory of Political Obligation*, (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 146

⁶ Jean-Marc Coicaud, *Legitimacy and Politics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 32-33

kept the country's political space limited, except when it was forced open by mass movements.

Peter Burke introduces several sociologists who discuss civil society, including Jurgen Habermas who wrote *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in 1989 and E. Gellner who authored *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* in 1994. The latter defined civil society as "that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state."⁷ Somchai cites the need for a "lively civil society" that plays "a role in transforming the state" in contrast to an elite civil society that becomes "part of the state."⁸

If civil society is a counterbalance to the state, then Alan Scott argues that social movements are the primary agents of social transformation. He defined social movements as:

...a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilization, or the threat of mobilization, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence power. They are further distinguished from other collectives, such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society, or the relative position of the group in society.⁹

Chaichana cites the work of Hans Toch who suggested "five key elements which belong to social movements in general: (1) relatively long-lasting large groups, (2) arise spontaneously, (3) a clear program or purpose, (4) aimed at correcting, supplementing, overthrowing or in some manner influencing the social order, and (5) a collective effort to solve a problem that many people feel they have in common."¹⁰ Scott also wrote that protest and social movements appear in response to the inability

⁷ Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), p. 79, further citing Gellner, E., *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*, (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 5

⁸ Somchai Phatharathananunth, "Civil society and democratization in Thailand: A critique of elite democracy", Duncan McCargo, Editor, *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asia Studies, 2002), p. 138

⁹ Alan Scott, *Ideology and New Social Movement*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 6

¹⁰ Chaichana Ingavata, Ph.D. dissertation, 1981, "Students as an agent of social change: A case of the Thai student movement during the years 1973-1976", (Florida State University), p. 44-45.

or unwillingness of mainstream political institutions to heed popular demands and, it could be said, to a nation's civil society. In the absence of other venues to articulate their concerns and issues, they seek mass mobilization to express their pleas, which he considers as "manifestations of 'dysfunctions' in the political decision-making processes."¹¹

Scott's definition of 'success' for social movements is particularly interesting as it relates to Thailand's social movements. He wrote that success is measured by the integration of the "previously excluded issues and groups into the 'normal' political process" and often leads to the "disappearance of the movement as a movement."¹² In 1990, Scott also characterized 'new' social movements as having two phenomena that seemed relevant for a study of the Millennial Generation: They have a "loose organizational structure...to replace hierarchical organization" and are largely focused on the political process of "participatory democracy".¹³

From the broad category of social movements, it is necessary to focus on the unique student component: student activism and student protest. Mills' rather negative assessment of 'the public' described above is in contrast to his earlier and more positive writing about the roles of intellectuals and students. According to Chaichana Ingavata, Mills considered that "students and intellectuals have remained a source of new radical leadership and mass support, while other elements of society have not."¹⁴

In his Ph.D. thesis on the Thai student movement between 1973 and 1976, Chaichana considers "the two most important perspectives of student movement are the psychological and sociological."¹⁵ His explorations into psychologically-based theories—based upon the displacement of anger towards the father and projection onto the authorities in the university and government—were unhelpful and ignored them as a basis for this research. That choice was further supported by the field research which revealed little expression of psychological issues by both the

¹¹ Scott, 1990, p. 10

¹² Scott, 1990, p. 10-11

¹³ Scott, 1990, p. 153

¹⁴ Chaichana, 1981, p. 4

¹⁵ Chiachana, 1981, p. 4.

Millennial and October Generation student activists. Rather, this thesis focuses on the sociological theories that describe student activism.

Robert Lauer writes, “The young of society do not generally have economic and psychological commitments to the existing social order; they are, therefore, a potent source of change....”¹⁶ Chaichana similarly sees students who are “not restrained” by fear of the loss of their jobs as more likely to “become highly politicized.”¹⁷ Historically, Lauer notes that youth (defined as those under 35 years old, of which students are only a subset), have played a prominent role in many social movements and revolutions, mentioning the Protestant Reformation in England, revolutions in France, the United States, and Cuba, the Abolitionist Movement in the US, the course of modernization in Meiji Japan and, in China, since the May Fourth Movement (1919) through the democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square (1989). Chaichana adds that students have played a major role in “forming a nationalistic front against colonial powers” in developing countries.¹⁸

In contrast to the youth participation in the social movement and revolutions listed above, it is important to remember that in the decade prior to “the sudden emergence of student activism”—the 1950s—young people were career and family oriented, “only rarely manifest[ed] interest in the sociopolitical life of the country...[and were] relatively apathetic in politics.”¹⁹

Lauer then goes on to list several contexts likely to generate a commitment by young people to social change. First, he writes that “the young are likely to lead in change when there is a clear contradiction between ideology and reality.”²⁰ The second “context likely to generate youth commitment to change is a society

¹⁶ Robert H. Lauer, *Perspectives on Social Change*, (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), p. 314-315

¹⁷ Chaichana, 1981, p. 2.

¹⁸ Chaichana, 1981, p. 3

¹⁹ Otto Klineberg, Marisa Zavalloni, Christiane Louis-Guerin and Jeanne BenBrika, *Students, Values, and Politics*, (New York: The Free Press, 1979), p. 1

²⁰ Lauer, 1991, p. 314

undergoing rapid change,"²¹ a condition that is worthy of examining in Thailand during the periods discussed in this thesis.

Several studies tried to generalize commonalities among students in general, and student activists in particular, based upon research in either the United States, or France, often leading to contradictory conclusions. The work of Otto Klineberg, Marisa Zavalloni, Christiane Louis-Guerin and Jeanne BenBrika, who conducted an in-depth survey of students in eleven countries between 1969 and 1970, was particularly impressive. They sought to explore youth culture and determine whether it was globalized or unique to each of the different countries. They concluded, "On almost every issue there are such marked differences associated with political position as to indicate that variations within a nation are at least as important as variations among nations....[We] feel justified in concluding that the idea of a single, pervasive youth culture, even if restricted to the case of students, is not supported by our data."²² That data, however, is now thirty-seven years old and globalization has only increased worldwide. It is not known if an updated survey, and this researcher was unable to find anything more current, would reach the same conclusion.

Regardless, a few of their conclusions are worthy of summary here and useful to the research. Reports of a 'conflict of generations' seem overblown; instead they "mostly saw an inter-generational conflict rather than one between generations."²³ In fact, studies show American student activists in the 1960s and 1970s as having had "little generational conflict", but instead carrying on as "their parents' spiritual and ideological heirs."²⁴ Their findings support Chaichana's mention of several American studies that describe the socio-economic background of student activists as coming "from families of upper and upper-middle class origin."²⁵ However, Otto Klineberg, et. al., concluded that generalization does not hold true in other countries. Their data did support the hypothesis that student activists are more likely to study in the social

²¹ Lauer, 1991, p. 315

²² Klineberg, et. al., 1979, p. 276

²³ Klineberg, et. al., 1979, p. 276

²⁴ Klineberg, et. al., 1979, p 4

²⁵ Chaichana, 1981, p. 32

science faculties and they also found that most student activists were “nonbelievers or atheists, with a negative attitude toward religion in general.”²⁶

While abandoning the emphasis of generational conflict, it is useful to consider the argument of Margaret Mead that rapid social change has caused the influence of parents to diminish in favor of the students’ peers as they create a new culture to adapt to those changes. Similarly, Klineberg, et. al, paraphrase one sociologist as suggesting that “the young are the natural agents of modernization.”²⁷

An issue related to student activism is the role of the university in promoting civic engagement among its students. Susan Ostrander focuses on the educational theories and philosophies of John Dewey and Jane Addams that shape active social participation at American universities. Their work was supported by “the reemergence of a wider [American] movement for civic engagement and renewal that includes a call for civic education and public scholarship”²⁸ in the works of numerous academics writing between 1990 and 2001. One educational theory supporting that movement is the theory of “moral development” which argues that universities should stress the development of “student integrity, social responsibility, and civic and political engagement and leadership.”²⁹ Ostrander believes that universities need to play a leading role in increasing civil engagement in order to strengthen democracy and enhance their legitimacy as opposed to “the view that university education and scholarship should simply serve the goals of the market” and have its value be measured “by students’ future economic success.”³⁰ In Thailand, the university’s role in encouraging or discouraging its students’ civic participation was worthy of study in this thesis, as is the question whether the “moral development” of its students should be the concern of universities.

²⁶ Klineberg, et. al., 1979, p. 277

²⁷ Klineberg, et. al., 1979, p. 6

²⁸ Susan A. Ostrander, “Democracy, Civic Participation, and the University: A Comparative Study of Civic Engagement on Five Campuses”, (Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 1, March 2004), p. 76

²⁹ Ostrander, 2004, p. 89

³⁰ Ostrander, 2004, p. 77

While it is not the primary focus of this thesis, today political apathy is considered the norm among students (and older generations, as well) and stands in stark contrast to the political activism of the October Generation. Andrew Steven Utschig's dissertation discusses the works of others and offers his own conception of political apathy as it changed in American culture over the period from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s. One set of theories blames the victims, explaining apathy as rooted in an individual's class or status, while others blame the system and see apathy as a result of political circumstance such as unappealing political parties. While both these concepts explain some aspects of apathy among Thai students, Utschig presents another facet: apathy as a conscious personal choice. He sees this type of apathy, prevalent in elite youth culture and popularized by the media, as based upon an emphasis of self-authenticity and individual expression in contrast to a monolithic and unchangeable society. Over time, he writes, that apathy has become increasingly escapist and nihilistic as youth counterculture suffers from a "sense of disenfranchisement and cultural malaise."³¹ Indeed, nihilism offers an alternative philosophy in the absence of ideology. Chaichana cites the work of Keniston who describes those youth as belonging to the "alienated student movement...seeking to find and develop his own inner world of aesthetically oriented, personal experience."³² That alienated student movement can be best characterized as an ever-changing counter-culture that, at the current moment, is apolitical.

In conclusion, these studies seem to prove one important point: the student activists were not a homogenous group and exhibited many differences among them and defied many assumptions.

1.5 Research Methodology

The methodology applied in this thesis comprises the abovementioned literature review and extensive field research. In addition to the books, articles, dissertations mentioned earlier, several daily English-language newspapers—

³¹ Andrew Steven Utschig, Ph.D. dissertation, "Rethinking apathy: Political apathy from Kerouac to Coupland", The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000, p. iii

³² Chaichana, 1981, p. 40.

including *The Nation*, the *Bangkok Post*, *ThaiDay* (until it ceased publishing in August 2006) and the *International Herald Tribune*—were an invaluable source of information and leads.

The field work for this thesis began in January 2006, with two visits to Sondhi Limthongkul's 'political road show' at Lumpini Park: the first to observe the 'lay of the land', and the second to search for students to interview. At that time, Sondhi was the most visible and prolific leader of the anti-Thaksin movement; however, there was little mention of student involvement in the movement by the press. Because the interviews had a 'man on the street' character to them, they were limited to a set of seven questions, summarized below:

1. Are you a student; if so, where are you studying?
2. Is this your first time; if not, how often have you come in the past?
3. Why are you interested in Sondhi?
4. Are you interested in Thai politics? Why, or why not?
5. What do you think are the most important issues facing Thailand?
6. What factors influence your opinion about Thai politics?
7. Have you ever attended a political rally or meeting before?

In response to the students surprising strong political interest, one follow-up question was asked: "Most people think Thai students are apathetic about politics. Why are you different?" Those interviews were valuable in providing some background and direction for further field research, and their vague answers to the last question led to a sharpening of future interview questions to elicit more thoughtful answers.

Next, the field research included multiple visits to the three Bangkok universities discussed in the thesis—Thammasat, Ramkhamhaeng and Chulalongkorn—and attendance at numerous rallies opposed to Thaksin and, in December 2006, the coup d'état and university autonomy plans. While some interviews were conducted at those locations, the focus was on observing students. At the universities, the focus was on trying to characterize the socio-economic status of the different student bodies, discern the existence or absence of political messages on campus, and get a 'feel' for campus-life.

The focus at the rallies was slightly different. First and foremost, the goal was to seek evidence of student participation. In the beginning, students were few in number and, even among a crowd of tens of thousands, the few student participants were recognizable from prior events. As the movement quickly grew, so did student participation. At all these events the focus was on more than numbers: the field research sought to determine whether the students came individually or with friends or parents; how they were dressed (or, if in uniform as was occasionally the case, the style of their hair and footwear) as an indicator of their identity with various youth subcultures.

The most interesting and rewarding part of the field work were the many unstructured interviews conducted over the eleven months from February to December 2006. In the beginning they were focused on two sets of subjects: student activists among the Millennial Generation and former student activists from the October Generation. The former were selected from the newspaper stories that quoted student leaders; for example, Kotchawan Chaiyabutr as secretary-general of the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) and Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai, president of the Thammasat University Student Union (TUSU) and leader of the impeachment petition against Thaksin. Another set of interview subjects originated from personal contacts; for example, one fellow student in the Thai Studies program arranged an interview with four members of the Social Criticism Student Club at Chulalongkorn University, and my wife arranged an interview with a former co-worker who had written her M.A. thesis about *A Day* magazine. Another interesting source of interview subjects were the interviewees themselves; they often recommended another student they thought would be of interest; for example, the editor of *A Day* magazine suggested Kritaya Sreesunpagit, creator of the YIY program for social entrepreneurs, and two interviewees recommended Muslim student Bakarín Tuansiri to better understand the political engagement of students in southern Thailand. In total, about twenty-five young people characterized as political activists were interviewed. Those interviews lasted, on average, about one hour each. In addition, an in-depth questionnaire was developed to reach a broader segment of the student

population. Unfortunately, it was difficult to elicit any significant participation by students. Therefore, the data was used in a limited manner to support the information obtained from the in-depth interviews.

It was more challenging to persuade members of the October Generation to submit to in-depth interviews. In the end, only eight consented, of which six were in-person (Pipob Thongchai, Phiraphon Triyakasem, Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej, Ramkhamhaeng's Wuthisak Lapcharoensap and Chaichana Ingkhawat, and Cornell's Thak Chaloeontiarana, formerly of Thammasat University), one was over the telephone (Phra Paisal Visalo) and the eighth (Khanin Boonsuwan) was via the Internet. Regardless, those interviews were equally rewarding to the student interviews as their personal perspectives on the historic events of the 1970s and the current environment of student activism were revealed.

Additionally, several subjects who did not fit into any of the abovementioned categories, but nonetheless had some relationship to the issues discussed in this thesis, were interviewed. They also provided useful information; among them were Thammasat University's Prinya Thaewanarumitkul who was a student leader during the events of Black May 1992 and currently is Vice-Rector for Student Affairs, Thai foreign exchange students at Cornell University, and the immediate past-president of the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization (RUSO) who participated in on-campus politics but claimed to stay neutral on national politics.

In all the in-depth interviews with students, five main topics were covered. First, the subject's personal biography was discussed, including family and geographical—rural or urban, and regional—background, and their parents' relationship to the 1970s student activism. Second, the students' relationship to political activism was covered, including their memories and impressions of the events of Black May 1992, the 1997 Financial Crisis and Assembly of the Poor rallies to determine if they had an effect on their political thinking; also included was their involvement in political activism, specifically as it related to significant events during the Thaksin government such as the protest against autonomy plan for state

universities, the protest against the firing of Khunying Jaruvan, the opposition to the government proposed ban on *rap nong* activities, the invocation of the emergency decree and the violence in the South, the proposed Grammy boycott and Sondhi's talk shows at Lumpini Park. Third, other factors influencing their political values were explored, including participation in social activism, the appeal of various ideologies, their values, youth-subculture identity, religion, educational experiences and relationship with professors, media influences, mentors and peer relationships. Fourth, they were asked about their awareness and impressions of student activist groups and individuals in Thailand; these questions often led to recommendations for further interviews. Lastly, their responses were sought to the question: Why aren't more students politically involved? For members of the October Generation, the questions varied only slightly. Their personal histories and the factors that influenced their political activism were equally interesting, as well as their impressions and comparisons between their generation and Thailand's Millennial Generation.

Those personal contacts allowed me to witness the idealism and enthusiasm of many young people, committed to a better future for their country, tempered by the wisdom of the older generation eager to pass the baton to the next generation in the hope that they will continue their struggles for social, economic and political justice.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This thesis is largely an empirical and analytical comparison of student activism during two different eras in Thailand, separated by less than four decades. It is based upon historical and modern research as expanded by the field work and interviews described above. The theoretical concepts discussed in the literature review were, however, useful in guiding these comparisons and analysis.

This thesis borrows from several of the sources described in the Literature Review for its theoretical framework and in evaluating the information obtained. This study addresses the fundamental question of how the student movement in the 1970s was similar and/or different from the student movement in the twenty-first century,

and what factors influenced those similarities and differences. The underlying premise is that the 1970s student movement ‘tipped’³³—it successfully led to the demise of the Thanom-Praphat military dictatorship and ushered in an era of democratic reforms and progressive politics in Thailand. In contrast, the student movement of the twenty-first century did not ‘tip’—it never became a mass movement in opposition to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Regardless, there were similarities between the October and Millennial Generations.

The student movements of both eras are discussed in the context of civil society (Burke: 2005) and social movements (Scott: 1990 and Chaichana: 1979) defined above. Of special relevance is Scott’s premise that protest and social movements appear in response to the inability or unwillingness of mainstream political institutions to heed popular demands. In the absence of other venues to articulate their concerns and issues, they seek mass mobilization to express their pleas, which he considers “manifestations of ‘dysfunctions’ in the political decision-making processes.”³⁴ That concept mostly accurately describes the mass mobilizations of October 1973, Black May 1992 and the anti-Thaksin movement in 2006 and from a framework for comparing the different political contexts discussed in this thesis. It was also useful to use Scott’s characterization of ‘new’ social movements as having two phenomena that were relevant when considering the nature of the Millennial Generation student activists: They have a “loose organizational structure...to replace hierarchical organization” and are largely focused on the political process of “participatory democracy”.³⁵

This thesis also relied upon Lauer’s theory that “the young are likely to lead in change when there is a clear contradiction between ideology and reality” and when “a

³³ “The expression [‘tip’ and ‘tipping point’] first came into popular use in the 1970s to describe the flight to the suburbs of whites living in the older cities of the American Northeast. When the number of American-Americans in a particular neighborhood reached a certain point—20 percent, say—sociologists observed that the community would ‘tip’: most of the remaining whites would leave almost immediately. The Tipping Point is the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point [Malcolm Gladwell, 2000, *The Tipping Point*, (New York: Little, Brown, and Company), p. 12

³⁴ Scott, 1990, p. 10

³⁵ Scott, 1990, p. 153

society undergoing rapid change.”³⁶ These criteria were important in establishing the similar and dissimilar socio-political contexts for the two generations.

This thesis also sought to build the work of Otto Klineberg, Marisa Zavalloni, Christiane Louis-Guerin and Jeanne BenBrika, and the conclusions they reached from their survey of students in eleven countries between 1969 and 1970. While Thailand was not included in that thirty-seven year-old study, this thesis attempts to compare modern data from Thailand against the frames they addressed in their work: specifically, whether there a ‘conflict of generations’ or if student activists carrying on as “their parents’ spiritual and ideological heirs.”³⁷ Similarly, this thesis sought to explore the relationship of religion to the lives of student activists. It also borrowed from Margaret Mead’s argument that rapid social change has caused the influence of parents to diminish in favor of the students’ peers as they create a new culture to adapt to those changes. This thesis accepted the conclusion of Otto Klineberg, et. al., that student activists were not a homogenous group and exhibited many differences among them and defied many assumptions.

Lastly, the work of Malcolm Gladwell was valuable in evaluating the popular appeal of the two different student movements that caused one to ‘tip’ and the other build slowly but never reach the threshold of a mass movement. Gladwell writes about how social change occurs and the influence of “trendsetters. People with more passion...somebody who is an individual, who has definitely set herself apart from everybody else, who doesn’t look like their peers....[W]hen something fails to make it out of the trendsetter community into the mainstream, it’s usually because the idea doesn’t root itself broadly enough in the culture.”³⁸ What Gladwell offers are the key ingredients that cause an idea or social movement to ‘tip’ into the mainstream—a concept that Thai student activists of the Millennial Generation understood in their quest to broaden their movement. Gladwell’s concluding statement guided the research as it searched for the factors that had influenced student activists of both the October and Millennial Generation:

³⁶ Lauer, 1991, p. 315

³⁷ Klineberg, et. al., 1979, p 4

³⁸ Gladwell, 2000, p. 208, 211-212

In the end, Tipping Points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push – in just the right place—it can be tipped.³⁹

1.7 Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two begins with the founding of both Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities, the 1932 abolition of the absolute monarchy and the conflict between the military faction and the leftist civilian faction. It then explores the brief opening of political space immediately after World War II and again in the mid-1950s, with Hyde-Park speeches, hunger strikes, protest marches and the radicalization of student organizations, as Phibun flirted with democratic expression during his second government (1947-1957)—a period that saw leftist students, especially those at Thammasat and Chulalongkorn universities, become more politically active. The Phibun, Sarit (1958-1968) and Thanom-Praphat (1968-1973) military dictatorships were all characterized by a violent suppression of dissent, thus heightening the social and political tensions throughout the country and creating a ‘culture of violence’ that survives today. The 1960s saw the world-wide spread of democracy, social justice, and radical politics, especially among students and young people. In Thailand, pressure for a democratic constitution and elections came from many quarters, including its rural population and emerging urban middle class and, most prominently, students.

The chapter continues with a study of the October Generation and the height of the student movement as it led Thailand to the peak of its democracy movement between 1973 and 1976 and seemed to turn the norms of Thai culture—hierarchy among them—upside-down. As Thailand’s economy grew in the 1960s, growing numbers of the middle class swelled the university population. Youth culture changed with the import of western rock and roll, the birth of ‘songs-for-life’, and a new genre of socially critical literature. Marxism became the popular ideology on campus. Left-wing journalists and writers, their magazines and books, flourished in the 1970s. The

³⁹ Gladwell, 2000, p. 259

students' national heroes were Pridi Phanomyong and Jit Phumisak; their international ones included Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevera and Ho Chi Minh. In 1971 Ramkhamhaeng University was established and quickly joined Chulalongkorn and Thammasat at the center of the student movement. Thai students participated in rural development camps that expanded their social awareness. They gradually expanded the political space for student activism with protests against Japanese economic imperialism, rising bus fares, corruption and the United States' troop presence in Thailand; they observed elections to fight fraud.

When Thanom dissolved parliament in November 1971 and re-imposed military control, the focus of their protests became the military government itself as students called for a new constitution and democratic elections. Eleven months later, the movement peaked over a one-week period as several hundred thousand students marched against the government, culminating in a violent confrontation on October 14, 1973 that left many students dead and injured. The king intervened, forcing Thonom, Praphas and Narong to flee the country, and installing an interim government that delivered a new constitution and democratic elections.

The period between 1973 and 1976 saw a wide-open political space for leftists as the student movement became increasingly dominated by Marxists and several socialists were elected to parliament. Students increased their opposition to the Vietnam War, participated in greater numbers in rural development programs, and helped create militant labor and peasant organizations that demanded social, political and economic changes. They were joined by progressive younger monks and older radicals who had been activists and labor leaders in the mid-1950s. The CPT extended its influence among the students, labor and peasant organizations while escalating the rural insurgency.

As the student movement—far from politically homogeneous but dominated by the left—became more bold in their demands and less respectful of traditional Thai culture, support for the students waned in the face of political instability, communist victories on Thailand's borders, and a well-organized right-wing anti-communist

campaign. Under sponsorship from Thailand's traditional institutions—the government, military, bureaucracy and palace—groups like the Village Scouts, Nawaphon, and Red Gaurs initiated a campaign of intimidation, assassinations and ultimately the massacre of students at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976. Thousands of leftists and students were arrested; many others escaped abroad or joined the communist insurgency, as Thailand entered another period of political repression.

Four years later, the students, disillusioned with the CPT hierarchy and their cause weakened by international communist conflicts, left the jungles under a government amnesty and rejoined society. The communist insurgency was defeated by 1983. The political left was demoralized and, by the end of the decade and the fall of the Berlin Wall, seemingly dead. Meanwhile, Thailand's political world was dominated by the military and provincial businessmen. Corruption was rampant. The progressive ideals of the October Generation survived, however, as many former student activists joined the ranks of journalists, professors, and NGO workers protecting the nation's environment and assisting rural villagers and urban-poor—often in conflict with the government and military—and evolved into Thailand's 'civil society'.

In contrast, Thailand's labor unions were devastated by government regulations, its villages wracked by increasing poverty and landlessness, and its middle class caught up with the prosperity and materialism of an economic boom. In May 1992, former student activists joined Thailand's middle class in several weeks of demonstrations that led to the ouster of another military government, once again, at a cost of many lives and the king's intervention. Although the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) was among the first organizations opposed to the military National Peace-keeping Council (NPKC), this generation of students were largely absent from the demonstrations. An era of 'people politics' was initiated in the aftermath of the Black May uprising, leading to a surge of rallies and demonstrations and the birth of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP). Political reform included the establishment of the iTV independent television station, the 'People's Development Plan' and culminated

in the adoption of Thailand's progressive 'People's Constitution' in 1997, while the military returned to their barracks 'for good', most presumed. However, those responsible for the deaths in 1973, 1976 and 1992 were never held to account for their actions. Many remained powerful figures in Thai politics while the story of those events remained obscure and sanitized in the nation's history books.

Chapter Three introduces the students of the Millennial Generation and the contrast between the negative stereotypes that characterize them and their engagement in social activism and university affairs. They are presumed to be apathetic about politics while focusing on their school work and future well-paying careers. The Millennials enjoy the benefits of their parents' prosperity and a multitude of opportunities, while multi-tasking on their cell-phones, iPods, and computers. Needless to say, they are stressed out and, more than any previous generation, inclined toward suicide. This generation of over-protected children are consumed by the global forces of capitalism, consumerism and materialism as seen on television, heard on the radio, read in fashion magazines and experienced in the shopping mall. Their schools and universities fail to teach them critical thinking skills and young people accept corruption and self-serving politicians as the norm. Nervous elders blame Buddhism, the government and western culture for corrupting Thailand's youth and dread the days when these young people become the leaders of their nation.

Yet Thai youth culture is not homogeneous. There is a significant 'indie' sub-culture that frequents different media, music, magazines and movies. The smaller 'grassroots' sub-culture identifies with rural Thailand and 1970s' music and radical politics. And there is a blended youth culture that 'mixes and matches' from various genres to create its own unique character. It is primarily among these alternative youth sub-cultures that one finds students engaged as social and political activists. The most popular type of social activism is among young people volunteering with NGOs and university clubs, typically among Thailand's poor rural villages but also in response to natural disasters such as the December 2004 tsunami. In many cases, these students gain an awareness of society's problems that leads them to political activism. Many students are engaged in environmental activism while a lesser number of students are

involved in gay and lesbian issues and with people living with HIV/AIDS. In contrast to the stereotype of mainstream Thai youth as being immoral, these students place a high value on morality, human rights and justice. They are also typically close to their parents and inspired by their values and prior civic involvement. Likewise, they seek support for their values from their likeminded university professors and peers. And, as in the 1970s, three state universities located in Bangkok are the center of that activism: Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Ramkhamhaeng.

Although these engaged youth read the mainstream press and watch the government-managed television, they also access information through a variety of media, including alternative magazines and Internet websites. While the Buddhist students are not particularly inspired by their religion, Muslim students are more likely to be motivated by the revival of the Islamic community in Thailand and worldwide. These activist students do not have a strong reference to Thailand's past and have few mentors, seeing leaders as elitist and an impediment to an equitable society. They enjoy a good network to support their activism, although it is more mainstream than in the past. In addition to their social activism, many students have engaged in issues that directly affect them as students--unsuccessfully opposing the relocation of the Thammasat University campus but successfully overturning a government ban on *rap nong* activities. High school students interacted with government officials over university entrance examinations and standards, and education reform. While university students had little to say about the government's student loan programs, they were repeatedly active in opposing autonomy plans for state universities that threatened to increase their tuition expenses.

Chapter Four covers the history of the rise and fall of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra with focus on the limited participation of student activists in the anti-Thaksin movement and their role in the subsequent anti-coup movement. Members of the October Generation played a very significant political role in the Thaksin era, with former student activists serving as prominent government officials and TRT party members. They were largely responsible for designing Thaksin's populist platform and programs that appealed to Thailand's rural provinces and urban poor, cementing

his base. In the October Generation's role as the country's leading academics, civil society leaders and NGO activists, they were also the largest constituency of the anti-Thaksin movement.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra asserted a strong leadership with a parliamentary majority that contrasted favorably with the previous coalition governments. He took credit for a growing economy and projected a 'can-do' image that made him widely popular, especially among business people. However, Thaksin manipulated the independent commissions and thwarted the progressive constitution, allegedly bringing corruption to new heights and leading to charges of presiding over a 'parliamentary dictatorship' and an authoritarian government. He was accused of cronyism and nepotism in his appointments within the government, military and police, undermining Thailand's free press, and showing a disregard for democracy. He endorsed state violence with impunity as evidenced in the 'extra-judicial' killings during the popular War on Drugs, the Tak Bai and Krue Se Mosque incidents in southern Thailand, the disappearance of Muslim attorney Somchai, and the unresolved murders of local activists.

Opposition grew throughout Thaksin's terms among academics and Thailand's civil society, despite a landslide re-election in February 2005. Beginning in September 2005, the anti-Thaksin movement was led by the charismatic Sondhi Limthongkul, a newspaper publisher and former Thaksin supporter, who attracted huge crowds to his 'talk-show-cum-political-rallies'. When Thaksin's family sold their Shin Corp stock without tax liability, the opposition increased and students engaged in the anti-Thaksin movement, now led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) that included Sondhi and Major-General Chamlong Srimuang. They organized numerous demonstrations and marches that often attracted crowds of one hundred thousand protesters, while calling for the king's intervention. A tense seven and a half month standoff followed amid fears of a violent confrontation, as pro-government groups rallied in support of the prime minister and intimidated newspaper publishers and students. The memories of 1973, 1976 and 1992 were

invoked by both sides as anti-government critics called for Thaksin's resignation, and Thaksin called for 'unity' and calm.

Although weak by comparison to the student activists of the 1970s, these Millennial Generation students played an important supporting role in the anti-Thaksin movement. In September 2005 they were the key figures in successfully blocking a GMM Grammy take-over of Thailand's most independent newspapers. In February 2006, the Thammasat University Student Union led an impeachment petition against Thaksin and sought a legal approach to unseat the prime minister and disrupt his government. Despite its weak base, the SFT assumed a prominent role in the press, if not in the streets. Several other student organizations were formed on university campuses with weak coordination among them. While students' attendance at the anti-Thaksin protests increased over time, they peaked in late March when the PAD brought their demonstrations to the students at Siam Square and the downtown shopping area. About that same time, Ramkhamhaeng University's Alliance for Democracy staged a ten-kilometer protest march to the TRT headquarters. Students supported the Opposition boycott and 'Vote-No' campaign during the April 2006 snap elections.

Over their school 'summer' break, students from the SFT and Ramkhamhaeng University staged a two-month camp-out at the Election Commission (EC) headquarters in an attempt to force the commissioners to resign for their alleged compliance with the Thaksin government and TRT party, only to be attacked by pro-government supporters in police presence. Another student organization, Rangkids, including children of the former student activists, joined with the Civil Network to Stop Thaksin and staged 'guerilla' demonstrations during Thaksin appearances. They too were attacked in police presence, and joined student and PAD marches demanding police action against the offenders.

In his waning days, Thaksin obliquely attacked Privy Council president General Prem Tinsulanonda as the conflict escalated into a faintly masked struggle between the palace and the prime minister. Thaksin attempted to reshuffle the military

to insert his allies into combat positions, better positioned to wage or ward off a coup. An assassination attempt targeting Thaksin was uncovered, although skeptics assumed it was staged by the government to divert attention from his troubles and strengthen his hand in the military reshuffle. Despite year-long denials, but with seven month's planning, the palace's military allies ousted the Thaksin government on September 19, 2006.

Although the coup was initially popular for bringing an end to the political crisis and removing Thaksin, in the end, the students and civil society appeared to be little more than pawns of Thailand's conservative elite, in alliance with the palace, in bringing down the government. Students from Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Ramkhamhaeng universities and young activists were the primary protesters against the coup d'état in the following months. They were unified in opposing the interim government installed by the military, while members of the October Generation were anything but unified in their positions: those affiliated with Thaksin saw it as a defeat for democracy; some former student activists and fighters for democracy supported the military intervention; and others, while opposing the coup, joined the interim government in an attempt to mold Thailand's democratic future.

Chapter Five offers the conclusion through an analysis of the differences between the October and Millennial Generations, the implications for Thailand's future and suggestions for overcoming the apathy of today's students and ensuring a politically engaged culture as the key to a democratic future.

The timing of this thesis was interesting. It began conceptually in the absence of any student protest against the Thaksin regime, and developed over time as did the student movement. It seemed to hang in suspense as Thailand awaited a resolution of the political 'crisis' in the latter half of 2006, and added a new theme as the unexpected coup d'état on September 19, 2006 challenged Thais to reconsider the role of the military and the nature of democracy in their country. These events offered me the opportunity to cover entirely new material and make my own entry into Thailand's history—a challenge that I hope to have met in some small measure.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE OCTOBER GENERATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the generation of student activists who brought Thailand to the peak of its democracy movement in the brief period between 1973 and 1976, the emergence of student activism after World War II during their parents' generation, and the role those students played in promoting democracy in Thailand during the two decades following the October 6, 1976 massacre at Thammasat University. This thesis focuses on three universities that have historically been the most politically active: Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Ramkhamhaeng, all located in Bangkok, the nation's capital city. The focus, however, is not in retelling the well-known history of that era in depth, but focusing on those elements of that history that had the greatest influence on students in the twenty-first century.

There are three central themes that are critical to an understanding of that history. First is the class struggle between Thailand's elite and poor, whether rural villagers or urban workers. That struggle continues today despite the maturation of the Thai economy and growth of a Thai middle class. As it relates to the issue of student activism, this chapter focuses on how students involved themselves with peasant and worker struggles to improve their lives, sometimes engaging in environmental activism as a related issue. The second theme is the struggle for democracy. Those activist students joined with other members of the intelligentsia to create a dissident sector of Thai society, usually although not always aligned with leftist if not Marxist ideology, that surged and ebbed in response to changing historical environments. The third corollary theme is how the Thai elite—the business community, bureaucrats, military, Sangha and palace, aligned with various governments—managed to intimidate and repress that dissent, limit the political space for democracy, and maintain their status in relation to the lower classes.

2.2 Background

Chulalongkorn University had its roots in the absolute monarchy under King Chulalongkorn who established the original Royal Pages School inside the palace in the 1890s, aimed at training officials for the Interior Ministry. His son and successor to the throne, King Vajiravudh, expanded the school to serve all ministries, and renamed it King Chulalongkorn's Civil Service College. Its name changed again in 1916 when Chulalongkorn University was founded as Thailand's elite institution for the royal family and members of the nobility. In the 1920s, the student body comprised only one hundred sixty young men, bound for the nation's civil service. By and large, these students were firmly aligned with the monarchy and harbored no political dissent. Although the university was one of the three most activist universities in Thailand, it retained its elite status as Thailand's premier university with the wealthiest and most privileged student body.

The 1920s, however, were a time when students first contributed to the political and social discourse in Siam, primarily among those few studying abroad who brought back to their country the popular thinking of their host countries. Although little dissent was fermented in England where the majority studied, those returning from France were influenced by socialist thought and strove for social reforms. As advocates for democracy and a constitution, they led a generation of idealists on whose shoulders future student activists stood. Foremost among them was Pridi Phanomyong and his civilian faction of the 1932 coup. They were a strong voice for progressive politics and responsible for developing the socialist-influenced 1933 Economic Plan. The plan was condemned as 'communist' and Pridi was forced out of the cabinet and into short-term exile. He is still regarded as Thailand's most prominent progressive figure and served as a mentor to several generations of student activists.

When Pridi returned from exile, he founded the University of Moral and Political Sciences, later named Thammasat University. It reflected the radical element of the *Khana Ratsadon* (People's Party) and was dedicated to the education of a new generation of civil servants from among Thailand's 'ordinary people'. The faculties of

law and political science were transferred from Chulalongkorn University to the new institution. It started as an open university with about seven thousand students and moved to its current *Tha Phra Chan* campus in 1935. Its ‘open’ status ended in 1960. Thammasat’s reputation is academically the equal of Chulalongkorn; however, its student body is considered to be more middle-class and politically aware.

The period between the 1932 coup and World War II saw a blossoming of a radical political movement among those aligned with Pridi, reformist monks, the *Khana Kammakon* (Workers’ Party) labor movement, and Chinese community. There were two newspapers affiliated with the unions, and two leftist newspapers closely associated with Pridi’s ‘People’s Party’—*Sajjang* (Truth) and *24 Mithuna* (June 24).

Field Marshall Phibunsongkhram’s fascist government dealt harshly with those dissidents—leaders of the rebellious monks were forced to disrobe, newspapers were closed, labor unions were squashed, Chinese schools were raided by the police, Chinese leaders were deported, and members of the opposition were arrested and executed. Thammasat University’s Kasian Tejapira estimates that about one-third of the left-wing ‘People’s Party’ was arrested in the early 1930s; when additional members were arrested in 1936, the party faded from the political scene and communism in Thailand became almost exclusively the domain of the Chinese, Vietnamese and Sino-Thais. However inspired future student activists might have been by Pridi, there was no evidence of progressive student involvement at either Chulalongkorn or Thammasat universities during that period.

One exception would be Thammasat University student-turned-writer, Kularb Saipradit, also known as ‘Sriburapa’, who later served as an inspiration to student activists and the Thai intelligentsia. He was best known for his classic book, *Khang Lang Pharb* (Behind the Painting) published in 1938. As a journalist he criticized dictatorial governments and opposed Thailand’s participation in World War II. At an event celebrating the hundredth anniversary of his birth, Chaturon Chaisaeng praised him and noted, “Because of his idealism, his honesty, and the use of his pen to fight for humanity, peace and freedom, Kularb Saipradit was arrested and jailed twice by

undemocratic governments.”¹ He sought political asylum in China and died there in 1974. He was credited with penning Thammasat’s unofficial motto, “We love Thammasat because Thammasat teaches us to love people”, that served as an inspiration for students and alumni.²

Students in the pre-war era were more nationalistic than leftist. In their most prominent political involvement, about three thousand Chulalongkorn students and four to five thousand Thammasat students did rally behind Prime Minister Phibun in October 1940, supporting his call for war with French Indochina to reclaim ‘lost’ territory.

On December 8, 1941, Japan invaded Thailand and Phibun strategically aligned with Japan. In January 1942, Thailand declared war on the United States and allied forces. Anti-Japanese and anti-Phibun sentiment found a home in the *Khabuankan Serithai* (Free Thai Movement), controlled by the Pridi faction and aligned with Britain and the United States. Pridi established its secret headquarters at Thammasat University and recruited many of its students.

2.3 Post World War II (1944-1957)

Phibun was forced to resign after the war turned against the Japanese in 1944. Over the following forty months, the prime minister’s post changed hands seven times—including one six-month term by Pridi (1946) followed by a fourteen-month term by his ally, Thawan Thamrongnawasawat (1946-1947)—reflecting the volatility of the political atmosphere in Thailand. During this period, Thailand was divided between Phibun, who appealed to the military and conservative elite, and Pridi, supported by the civilian bureaucratic elite, the professional classes, and upper-level students. Meanwhile, the remnants of the Free Thai Movement retained possession of numerous weapons, many of which were stored at Thammasat where they served as Pridi’s private arsenal. The campus also served as the emergency meeting place in case of a coup d’etat against Thawan’s government.

¹ *Bangkok Post* (BP), April 1, 2005

² *The Nation* (TN), December 16, 2004

The Pridi-Thawan governments lifted the anti-communist law in 1946³, thus allowing the formerly underground Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) to operate openly; one of its members was elected to Parliament in 1947. The loose connection of Pridi's supporters, Chinese, communists and union leaders organized the Central Labor Union (CLU) in April 1947, claiming to represent seventy-five thousand workers among sixty member organizations and attracted seventy thousand workers to its first major rally on May Day that year. They led a wave of strikes among the large industries as workers pushed for wage increases to match the rapid post-War inflation.

During that brief period, leftist professor Benedict Anderson notes that the CPT "influence began to spread among the small Thai intelligentsia."⁴ Radical newspapers, magazines and books were published in Thailand and distributed in bookstores. Many leftist organizations sprouted up, including several with student membership: The Student Group of Thailand (of mostly radical Thammasat students), the Thai Youth Organization (later becoming the CPT-affiliated People's Democratic Youth, headed by a Thammasat student), and later, the Peace Committee of Thailand established in 1951.

The failure of the Pridi-Thawan governments to solve government corruption and other post-war pressing socio-economic problems led to the weakening of the democracy movement and created an opening for Phibun's return (1947-1957). On November 8, 1947, Thawan's government was overthrown by a military coup. Thailand developed a virulent anti-leftist, anti-union, anti-Chinese, and anti-communist history that saw a boost in military aid from the United States and military dominance.

³ There were two unsuccessful attempts to oust Phibun: the army's Wang Luang coup in 1947 and the Manhattan coup in 1951. The latter, instigated by navy officers, resulted in twelve hundred mostly civilian deaths and many arrests, including fifty Thammasat students who were charged with having communist ties. The Army,

³ The lifting of the anti-communist law was a pre-condition for their joining the United Nations as required by the Soviet Union.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*, (London: Verso, 1998), p. 268

fearing that Pridi could muster a third effort with the support of Thammasat students, seized control of the campus in June 1951. Thammasat students were joined with students from other universities in an October 11 march on Parliament to protest the take-over. When that plea was unsuccessful, they stormed the campus on November 5. The following month, under pressure from sympathetic MPs and newspapers, the army began evacuating the university grounds.

Students were active in other protests against the Phibun government. On April 7, 1947, a group of CPT-affiliated Thammasat students organized an anti-Phibun rally at Sanam Luang. On February 26, 1949, about fifty Thammasat students and faculty took part in the Royal Palace Rebellion against Phibun, led by Pridi and former members of the Free Thai Movement. The failure of that 'rebellion' led to the arrest or dismissal of administrators, faculty, and students, some of whom were murdered. Thereafter, the government discriminated against Thammasat students applying for jobs with various government bodies. Other students, organized as a 'Peace League', were suspended for protesting high military spending.

Phibun set about destroying the radical trend in politics and labor organizations, banning books, arresting labor leaders, journalists, Chinese community leaders, intellectuals, young military officers and assorted radicals, forcing monks to disrobe, and closing newspapers, just as the government had done in the 1930s. In 1952, the government reenacted the anti-communist law, extending the definition of communism to include "any act which created instability and disunity."⁵ Political murders were not uncommon. Phibun's economic policy was also decidedly anti-peasant as the government imposed a monopoly on rice exports; tenancy increased and village life disintegrated.

The intelligentsia was excluded from Phibun's military government, pushing them to the more radical margins of political thought in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During this time, a radical press emerged in Thailand. Kasian credits Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities as being the most politically active campuses in Thailand

⁵ Pasuk Pongpaichit and Chris Baker, (Second Edition), **Thailand Economy and Politics**, (Mayalsia: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 303

in the post-war era and postulates that those students, teachers, monks, writers and journalists constituted its estimated thirty-six thousand readers, especially those interested in the anti-colonial struggles in Thailand's neighboring countries. The radical press was as often written in Chinese as in Thai, as its audience was largely ethnic Chinese or Chinese-Thai, and post-war radical students were ideologically more closely related to Chinese communism than Pridi-inspired French socialism.

The ethnic Chinese also were the majority of the half million urban workers and represented most of the sixty to seventy-five thousand member communist-led labor movement. Many leftist politicians, journalists, writers, labor organizers and student activists (mostly from Thammasat and Chulalongkorn) made pilgrimages to the Soviet Union and China; many of whom were arrested upon their return to Thailand.

In 1948, an autonomous student union was officially established at Thammasat University in 1948. By 1956, the Thammasat Student Committee had joined with progressive student organizations at other universities in forming the Student Union of Thailand, a national umbrella organization of major university student unions. Kasian listed numerous leftist mass political protests and activities that included students between 1946 and 1957, including protests against Phibun; additional training requirements for the Bar Association; protests against government discrimination of Thammasat students; and leftist-oriented presentations by the Student Lecture and Debate Department.⁶ Kasian also wrote that the CPT had about twenty Thammasat students working in and outside campus, recruiting students into the Party and branching out to other universities. He added: "In the historical development of modern Thai intelligentsia, the decade after the War was the transitional period between the demise and/or eclipse of 'palace-temple' and 'government-bureaucracy' intellectuals and the rise of 'university' ones [at]...the center of intellectual and cultural life."⁷

⁶ Kasian Tejapira, Ph.D. dissertation, "Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1959", (Cornell University, 1992), p. 278-280

⁷ Ibid., p. 281-294

During that period, Chulalongkorn University saw two students become influential writers and intellectuals. Most prominent was Chit Phumisak, who was a literary critic and essayist in the early 1950s. According to Kasian, he was a recruit of the secret CPT-affiliated youth organization on campus and student activist. In 1953 he was suspended for one year for the 'communist' content of the university's yearbook, of which he was elected editor. He is best known for his Marxist critique of Thai society, *Chomna Sakdina Thai nai Patchuban* (The Face of Thai Feudalism) published in the Thammasat University Faculty of Law Yearbook in 1957. It is an anti-capitalist protest against the exploitation of the peasantry by the monarchy and nobility, and governments that oppress the public with their unjust laws and heavy taxation, while promoting class consciousness and class struggle against the establishment to create a new, classless society. John Girling compared Chit to Che Guevara and wrote that he "became a cult-hero of the Left in the exciting and turbulent years of democracy after October 1973."⁸ His work is still cited today as an inspiration to student activists.

Also well known was Khamsing Srinawk, from a peasant family in the northeast, who supported himself as a journalist while attending Chulalongkorn. Among his satiric short stories, *The Politician* is the best known for expressing the disgust young people felt toward the politicians of that era and since.

By the mid-1950s, Phibun felt the heat of his rivals in the military (Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat) and police (Police Chief Phao Siranon) and briefly allowed dissent to flourish between 1955 and 1957 in order to boost his legitimacy.

In August 1955, Phibun established a Thai version of the 'Speaker's Corner' that he had seen in London's Hyde Park, partially in the expectation that it would lead to criticisms of the highly unpopular Phao. Being as its Sanam Luang location was just outside Thammasat University, the audience included mostly students and young men; however, it also attracted women, older people and children. It became a focal point for mass rallies, sometimes attracting large crowds that numbered into the tens

⁸ John L. S. Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 270

of thousands. The first protest march was held on September 17, 1955, to protest against the Social Security Act. The last was held on February 19, 1956, with twenty-four pro-democracy demonstrators staging a hunger strike on behalf of constitutional reform and the elimination of appointed MPs. Days later, the fasters were arrested, public gatherings were banned, and the 'Hyde-Park' experiment in democracy was closed.

In another attempt to shore up his democratic support, Phibun enacted a labor law in 1957 that created legal status for trade unions and legalized strikes and led to a renewed involvement by the left in the Thai labor movement.

Phibun called for new elections in March 1957 to legitimize his rise to premiership by military coup, but his victory was deemed fraudulent. With encouragement from Sarit, students from Chulalongkorn and Thammasat gathered at the Sanam Luang and handed out leaflets asking the government to resign and accusing Phibun of dirty elections and destroying democracy. They joined leftist students in a massive protest march to Government House four days after Phibun's election victory. It was the first influential political involvement by students in Thailand.

2.4 The Suppression of Political Space (1957-1963)

Field Marshall Sarit (1959-1963) led a coup against Phibun in September 1957 and installed Thanom Kittikachorn as prime minister. He staged a second coup in October 1958 and assumed the post himself on February 9, 1959. In contrast to the anti-monarchist Pridi and Phibun, Sarit promoted the status of the king and drew himself close to the monarchy to enhance the legitimacy of his military regime. In turn, the palace supported the abrogation of the constitution and parliament by Sarit's proxies. As in 1940, the student movement during this time was nationalist and supported government policy.

Sarit presided over the most brutal regime in Thailand's history. He squelched the labor movement, declared martial law, closed eighteen publications, and outlawed

all political parties and gatherings. He was responsible for hundreds of arrests—including opposition members of parliament, Muslim MPs, critical newspaper editors, leftist intellectuals, teachers, monks, writers, several Chinese accused of communist sympathies, and activists—and numerous executions. Thammasat's autonomous student union was replaced in 1959 with a university administration-controlled 'Club Committee' that included appointed faculty and students.

By entirely closing the political space for dissent, progressive politicians and peasants were left with little alternative other than the CPT, which moved its operations from Bangkok to the northeast where it organized peasants for an armed insurgency. Among those arrested was Chit, who died as an insurgent in 1965 after spending six years in jail.

Despite rural development programs, that more often benefited businesses close to the government and military officers, the incidence of rural poverty remained very high.

Notwithstanding Sarit's brutal tactics and widespread corruption, he was well respected "as a man-on-horseback, a forceful leader, a man who could get things done and cared about the qualities of the lives of ordinary people."⁹

Upon Sarit's death, the Thai leadership smoothly passed to General Thanom (1963-1973), as prime minister, and General Praphat Charusathian, as deputy prime minister and minister of the interior. They pursued policies similar to Sarit, including development and modernization, a close alignment with the United States, and an authoritarian rule. They continued the rural development programs begun under Sarit, employing Buddhist monks to promote their mission. There were, however, increasing conflicts between the government and rural villagers over land rights, indebtedness, and landlessness as tenancy farming increased dramatically. More and more workers were forced into Thailand's cities to work as manual laborers to supplement their farm income. Traditional village life continued to disintegrate.

⁹ David K. Wyatt, *A Short History of Thailand*, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1984), p. 285

2.5 The Evolution of the Progressive Era (1964-1976)

But it was the United States' growing involvement in the Vietnam War that had the greatest impact on Thai politics during the Thanom-Praphat regime. Thailand not only hosted United States' bases and personnel, but also contributed their own troops to the war from mid-1964 through 1969. An infusion of American military aid and spending boosted the economy as the construction and hospitality industries boomed and rural workers found work in Bangkok and other cities near military bases. Whereas Western culture had previously reached only the Thai elite, a much larger segment of the Thai population was now exposed to its music, ideas, youth culture and liberal values.

Despite an authoritarian government that suppressed dissent, progressive movements began to rise throughout the country. Some younger monks became politicized and fought for equality and justice in the social, economic and political arenas, including support for land reform and unions, opposition to the Sangha's authoritarian structure, and against United States' imperialism and the war in Vietnam. Despite the ban on labor organizations and the arrest of union leaders, labor unrest continued as workers agitated for increased pay and improved working conditions.

The communist-led rural insurgency began in August 1965. Much of the leftist opposition, marginalized by the authoritarian regimes, joined with the communists. The issues of taxation, farm debt, tenancy and land rights were sufficient cause to attract a strong following among the rural poor with whom the CPT developed a close relationship, helping them build their houses, plow their land, and harvest their crops. With the support of China and Vietnam, by 1967 the insurgency had spread through northeastern, northern and southern Thailand, where Malay dissidents added to the military threat posed by Chinese troops of the Communist party of Malaysia. Not surprisingly, the government reacted with a violent campaign to suppress the insurgency that included torture, rape, executions and government-sponsored terrorism. "Under such circumstances, villagers had no choice but to join the insurgency for different reasons: some because they were afraid of further

government oppression, while some, whose parents or relatives had been killed by the government forces, became 'jungle soldiers' because they wanted revenge."¹⁰

Discontent with the Thanom-Prapath regime was not limited to the communists, union activists, progressive monks, and rural poor. During the late 1960s, their collective dissatisfaction with the Thanom-Prapath government was shared by members of the urban middle class, disenfranchised segments of the business community and the army, and the king, who expressed his discomfort with the heavy-handed repression and prevalent corruption of the regime.

In the end, however, it was the students who were the most formidable opponents of the Thanom-Prapath regime. In the 1960s, a university education became more widely accessible to the middle class and included students from rural lower-middle class families; for previous generations, it had been limited to the middle and upper-classes among youth intending to enter the bureaucracy. Between 1961 and 1972, the number of universities more than tripled and the student enrollment increased from fifteen to one hundred thousand.¹¹ Regardless of their larger numbers, students still represented a respected segment of the elite Thai population. Many of the students who gravitated toward political activism in the following years were, in fact, from elite families and had attended exclusive high schools in Bangkok; for example, Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej and Chaturon attended prestigious Suan Kularb, and Pansak Vinyaratn, whose father was one of the founders of Bangkok Bank, attended Vajiravudh College. Many other student activists and leaders were from political families; for example, Chaturon's father was an MP from Chachoengsao province, Adisom Piengket's father was an MP representing the Coalition Socialist Party of Thailand.

Among the dozen new universities was Ramhhamhaeng University, an open university, founded in 1972. In contrast to Chulalongkorn University's heritage

¹⁰ Somchai Phatharathananunth, "Isan political tradition: Patron-client vs. Socialism", Ji Giles Ungpakorn, Editor, *Radicalising Thailand*, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies Chulalongkorn University, 2003), p. 161

¹¹ Similar demographics were true in the United States as the 'baby-boomers' born after World War II swelled the university population in the 1960s. China is currently undergoing such a growth in its university population.

originating in the absolute monarchy, and Thammasat's from the civilian faction of the 1932 revolution, Ramkhamhaeng University's founding occurred at the cusp of the democracy movement in Thailand in 1971. At that time, Chaichana Ingkhawat said Ramkhamhaeng did not enjoy the same status as Thammasat and Chulalongkorn; therefore, Ramkhamhaeng students followed the lead of those other two universities.

These students grew up in a "suppressed democracy" era—beginning with the 1958 crackdown on the left and an environment of anti-communism and conservatism; however, they were exposed to democratic ideals as they studied the history and institutions of Western democracies. The few students who had gone to study in Europe and the United States in the later 1960s were similarly influenced by the Western democratic values they brought home with them.

The students were also exposed to mass media and, as previously mentioned, the American culture that pervaded Thailand during the Vietnam War. American armed forces brought western rock and roll and, to the more politically inclined, Bob Dylan and the counter-culture's folk-rock music.

Many Thai students were dedicated to working with villagers and were exposed to rural discontent. They joined volunteer camps at their universities and with Thailand's first non-governmental organization (NGO), the Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM) founded in 1967 by Puey Ungpakorn. The students worked with their poor fellow-citizens and brought a strong commitment to social justice back to their campuses. Phiraphon Triyakasem, president of the Thammasat University Student Union (TUSU) in 1973, said there was an interest in helping people, especially in the rural provinces, with concerns of law and health, among others. He and his fellow students were dedicated to a "better life [and] better country."¹² Thak Chaloehtiarana said students at that time were inspired "to love the people" and the purpose of their education was to "do good."¹³ One Millennial student

¹² Interview with Phiraphon Triyakasem, June 27, 2006

¹³ Interview with Thak Chaloehtiarana, October 18, 2006

noted that they were also valued because they saw education as a tool to give something back to their communities and society.¹⁴

The culture of the universities became increasingly political despite the imposition of martial law that still outlawed left-wing literature and banned political organizations. Independent groups of students began to meet in secret at Thammasat, Chulalongkorn, Ramkhamhaeng and other universities to discuss political issues.

Young Thais were also strongly influenced by the international student movement that had swept many countries in the late 1960s, with major demonstrations and riots in Paris, Chicago, Prague, and Mexico City all occurring in 1968. Chiranan Pitpricha expressed her idealism during that era in words that could have been spoken by students in France, the US, Czechoslovakia, or Mexico: “We believed in revolution and total rethink of the existing political system.”¹⁵ Thak characterized it as the “international intellectual movement” and social consciousness of that time.¹⁶

Among Thailand’s neighboring countries, the anti-colonial movement was closely aligned with communism. In Thailand, leftist Pridi was regarded as their political mentor, and many students began to read Marxist literature and discuss Marxist ideology. They were further inspired by the Vietnamese resistance to the United States and adopted Ho Chi Minh as one of their heroes along with China’s Mao Tse-tung. They admired Cuba’s Che Guevera and Fidel Castro who fought against the Americans on behalf of South America’s poor.

In addition to rock and roll, two new styles of Thai music emerged to energize the youth, both of which were a significant break from its past. In the 1970s, the Thai band Caravan blended Isan folk music with western rock and roll and created ‘*phleng phua chiwit*’ or ‘songs for life’ with themes related to the exploitation of the countryside. They later became active in the student movement. Also gaining popularity during that era was a new form of country music, *phleng luk thung*. It

¹⁴ Interview with Pisut Wisessing, October 18, 2006

¹⁵ *The Magazine*, BP, April 2005, Issue 38

¹⁶ Interview with Thak Chaloeontiarana, October 18, 2006

expressed the experiences of Thailand's villagers migrating into its urban culture, and brought the concerns of poverty and exploitation into national consciousness, with a cynical attitude toward politics and government officials.

Thai students were more avid readers than today's students. Popular Thai literature exposed young people to a critical analysis of poverty and rural life, exploitation and corruption. Among their favorite authors were the abovementioned Kularb, Khamsing and Chit.

Pipob Thongchai stated that there was very little political space for leftist thought at that time and one could not publish a magazine without government approval. In the 1960s, he joined with Sulak Sivaraksa and a group of students from Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Kasetsart, and Silakaporn universities to take over the management of the permitted *Sangkhomsat Parithat* (Social Science Review) magazine and change its content to appeal to the fledgling student movement. They protested against the American influence over Thailand and the destructive effects of foreign-induced economic and social change on Thai culture. In the late 1960s, the journal published reports sent by Thai students at US universities. They detailed the extent of the American anti-war movement among students and intellectuals, and relayed revelations about the US exploitation of Thailand as a military base.¹⁷

Although traditional Buddhist belief was still prominent among the students, Phra Paisal Visalo said that Buddhism had a small impact on the student activists. Most activists, he said, had a "negative attitude toward Buddhism." Some intellectual progressives and activists were influenced by the teachings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, notably for his accessible language, but they were a minority. The activist students largely believed in an "armed struggle" and saw those supporting non-violence as under "CIA influence to weaken" the movement. Due to his passion for Buddhism and non-violence his fellow students saw him as a rightist.¹⁸

¹⁷ Interview with Pipob Thongchai, June 26, 2006

¹⁸ Phone interview with Phra Paisal Visalo, July 6, 2006

Khanin Boonsuwan, a student at Thammasat in the late 1960s, wrote, “the student movement at that time was very limited and weak.” They lived with “fears, ignorance and passive action” due to the threat of being accused or arrested as a communist. That, he wrote, was “also the reason why there was never a radical movement among Thai students.”¹⁹ Considering that atmosphere, students had to slowly and carefully open the political space for their expression. In February 1969, Thai students successfully protested against a rise in the bus fare. They also protested alleged bribes received by Chulalongkorn University administrators related to a questionable land sale, and demanded their firings, while obliquely attacking the university’s rector, Praphat. However, they also faced the limitations imposed by their universities: When, in 1972, the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization (RUSO) issued a letter in support of two professors who had been fired, the rector ousted the leadership.

In 1968, Thanom issued a quasi-democratic constitution legalizing political parties. Whereas the new constitution provided civil liberties including freedom of speech and assembly, students were encouraged to exercise their political rights. In advance of the February 1969 elections, students organized seminars on political topics and marched from Sanam Luang to Parliament House to ask the government to lift martial law. They also volunteered to observe the elections in an attempt to circumvent fraud. It was the first political activity that united the student unions at Thai universities. Prior to that time, the student unions were apolitical and primarily responsible for organizing social functions; there was no linkage among the universities. Thanom won the election; however, some MPs criticized the government’s authoritarian rule, obstructed the budget and bills intended to increase the prime minister’s power, and produced evidence of corruption. In response to these problems, Thanom dissolved parliament and restored autocratic military rule.

After the 1969 general election, representatives from various student unions met at campuses throughout the country and decided to create a unified organization, consisting of two members from each of the eleven institutions. Chulalongkorn (a 1972 enrollment of 12,450) and Thammasat (9,148 students) were the oldest and

¹⁹ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

largest.²⁰ Named the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT), it was not a 'registered' organization and its activities were against the law. The secretary-generals for the 1969-1970 and 1970-1971 academic years were both Thammasat students. "During this period, the NSCT did very little concerning political matters and concentrated its efforts on such social services as fundraising for flood victims, organizing a television program blessing the king, and providing various counseling services to graduating high school students."²¹ For the next two terms (1971-1972 and 1972-1973), Thirayuth Boonmi, a Chulalongkorn engineering student, set the NSCT on a course of political activism as its secretary-general. When describing this era, Phiraphon said only a small group were behind the student movement. As president of TUSU and a member of the NSCT, he said the NSCT did not have a strong structure but was a strong organization. Various participants had responsibility for different concerns: for example, politics, economics, social issues and education.

Following in the footsteps of a 1971 campaign organized by thirty trade associations protesting Japanese goods, the NSCT successfully organized a boycott titled Anti-Japanese Goods Week from November 20 to 30, 1972. The prime minister did not stop the student movement, although he warned them against violence and demonstrations. The king supported the idea while urging caution. On November 30, the students organized a march from Sanam Luang to the headquarters of the National Executive Council where they met police resistance.

On December 15, 1972, about two thousand students from Thammasat University marched to Chulalongkorn University to protest the National Executive Council's decree that politicized the judiciary and placed it under their control. The Chula students agreed to support the protest and, two days later, representatives from all but one university presented a letter to the prime minister urging him to retract the decree. Four days later, the NSCT organized a sit-in at Sanam Luang by thousands of students. The decree was subsequently withdrawn, thus emboldening the students. By the end of 1972, their membership was estimated at one hundred thousand.

²⁰ Ramkhamhaeng University was established in 1971, and had a 1972 enrollment of 28,611.

²¹ Ross Prizzia, **Thailand in Transition, The Role of Oppositional Forces**, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. 49

Student demonstrations heightened in mid-June 1973 over the expulsion of nine students from Ramkhamhaeng University students for distributing an illegal publication that attacked the prime minister and government in cartoons and editorials. The NSCT called for all students to boycott their classes. At its peak, tens of thousands of students attended the demonstration at the Democracy Monument, demanded the reinstatement of the students, the removal of the rector and the re-opening of the universities that had been shut by the government. The students prevailed in all their requests and the stature of the NSCT was further enhanced. About the same time, the NSCT denounced the government for protecting military officers who had used helicopters to hunt game in the Thung Yai nature preserve.²²

In addition to the demonstrations organized by the NSCT, various clubs and universities staged their own rallies. Dr. Prommin said the primary issue was the Vietnam War that the Americans “brought to Thailand” and how a “real Thai” would oppose that threat to the nation’s sovereignty.²³ In 1971, Thammasat students published a pamphlet *Phai Khao* (White Peril) attacking US imperialism in South-East Asia.

As the first academic semester of 1973 drew to a close, students had become emboldened by their successful protests and the resultant opening of political space. The events of October 1973 began when Thirayuth and ten others called a press conference at Sanam Luang, producing a declaration demanding a constitution signed by one hundred people, many of whom remain important figures thirty-three years later. The following day, a group of about twenty students, professors, journalists and politicians, began marching and distributing a booklet calling for a constitution. The police arrested about a dozen of the demonstrators and charged them with violations of martial law, acts of rebellion, and engagement in communist activity. On October 7, the NSCT issued a statement protesting the arrests and the TUSU called for an emergency meeting. The protest escalated the following day with anti-government posters and speeches by students at Thammasat University, and petitions on behalf of

²² On April 29, 1973, a Royal Thai Army helicopter crashed, killing six military and police officers, apparently as a result of being overloaded with illegally poached game collected during a hunting trip organized by Colonel Narong Kittikachorn.

²³ Interview with Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej, December 18, 2006

the detainees. That night, the TUSU held a secret meeting and passed a resolution in favor of postponing the examinations. Phiraphon devised a plan to chain the doors and plug the locks with plaster. The students who arrived the following day were unable to take their exams; instead they became a captive audience for the protest as they listened to speeches by Seksan Prasertkul and Saowani Limmanon. They were joined by students from throughout the country, including high school and vocational students. Similar events were taking place at Ramkhamhaeng University. When negotiations between the government and the NSCT failed to resolve the impending crisis, the NSCT issued an ultimatum. By October 13, 1973, massive demonstrations began, involving hundreds of thousands of people, most of whom were students.

Throughout the events of October 1973, the students wisely choose to align themselves with Thai nationalism and patriotism. Prior to the demonstrations, the students had made merit to about two hundred monks. As the students began their carefully organized march, they bore photographs of the royal family. Despite an announced agreement between the government and the students settling the conflict, the students continued their march to toward Chitralada Palace to seek protection from the king. There they encountered police violence and several demonstrators died. The following day—October 14—student clashes with police escalated. The students burned several government buildings and various police posts, and about one hundred students were killed by the police and almost one thousand were injured. King Bhumibol intervened and Thanom was forced to announce his resignation as prime minister; Army Commander General Krit Sivara was credited with forcing Thanom to resign as Supreme Commander and leave the country with Praphat and his son Narong. Further damage was avoided. Despite the student initiated fires, the students behaved responsibly—directing traffic and cleaning up the streets afterwards—and minimizing the inconvenience to the city population. Having given voice to the long-suppressed and strongly-felt dissent against the military regime, the students enjoyed a welcome response from the nation.

The king, for the first time, appointed a prime minister, Sanya Thammasak, president of the Privy Council and former rector of Thammasat University. He also appointed a National Convention, excluding the ‘too young and inexperienced’

students, that elected a National Assembly. A new constitution was written and elections were scheduled for January 1975.

Although the government that served in the aftermath of October 1973 was dominated by royalist allies, civilian bureaucrats, professionals and businessmen, students and other progressive forces continued to play an important role in the political events over the next three years. While many students, having achieved their goals, withdrew from political activism and returned to their studies, others became more involved with a strong commitment to working with Thailand's poor. When Puey became rector of Thammasat University, he expanded on TRRM to provide opportunities for students to work in poor rural villages. Beginning in 1974, the government funded a campaign for students to educate peasants on their rights in a democratic system and encourage them to vote.

Activist students became involved in organizing labor in the private sector, leading six thousand textile workers in a mid-1974 strike protesting proposed reductions in the workforce. The protest drew tens of thousands of demonstrators to Sanam Luang and forced the government to raise the minimum wage²⁴ and support the textile workers in their other demands. Several weeks later, students led a strike of hotel workers against the Dusit Thani hotel, attracting between six and ten thousand protesters; in response, the government arbitrated on their behalf. Seksan joined with union leaders to form the Labor Coordination Center of Thailand (LCCT), which was more radical and anti-capitalist than the moderate unions belonging to the Federation of Labor Unions of Thailand.

In late 1974, students played an important role in organizing the Peasants Federation of Thailand (PFT), extending into forty-one provinces with an estimated one and a half million members. In response to rising rents, resulting from an intense competition for land, the PFT was successful in having the government pass a Rent

²⁴ "The Sanya government raised the 60c. minimum wage, first to \$1.00 and later (October 1974) to \$1.25 a day [Anderson, 1998, p 155]."

Control Act. They campaigned on behalf of its enforcement and in favor of land reform and tenancy rights.²⁵

Students also continued their political opposition to the Vietnam War, calling for an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Thailand. The NSCT and other groups staged massive anti-American street demonstrations. Meanwhile, the ideology of the activist students was increasingly affected by writers on the left. The swing in political ideology led to a left-wing takeover of the student movement. According to Girling, in "1974 Marxist activists gained control of the NSCT, and by 1975 every student union in Bangkok was under radical control."²⁶ Seksan resigned from the NSCT to form the more radical Federation of Independent Students (FIST) of Thammasat and vocational students. Other student activists, including Kreingkamol Laohapairoj, were involved with a commission to draft a new constitution. Kreingkamol also worked for the *Atipat* (Sovereignty) newspaper, operated by the NSCT.

In February 1975, the NSCT also led successful demonstrations against an American mining company that was operating under a contract it had received from the Thanom-Praphat government. There were also renewed demonstrations against rising bus fares and Japanese imports. The number of student demonstrations multiplied, strikes increased dramatically and peasant organizations held mass rallies. Political activism among members of the monkhood reached its heights amid intense debates about the political role of monks. New political parties sprang into existence and public expression was exceptionally free with newspapers and magazines expressing all shades of opinion.

The opening of Thailand's democratic political system allowed the CPT to rapidly expand its underground influence into the urban areas and into the intelligentsia in a way that had been impossible since 1947. Meanwhile, the rural insurgency was growing with an estimated eight thousand active guerillas and over

²⁵ An estimated 20 to 30 percent of the households were landless. "In 1975, the proportions of land under tenancy in Chiang Mai and Lampang were 39 and 31 percent respectively [Pasuk and Baker, 2002, p. 315]."

²⁶ Girling, 1981, p. 200

four hundred villages totally under their control by 1974. They worked alongside the students in Bangkok and exerted significant influence within student organizations.

While the period between 1973 and 1976 is usually characterized as the peak of Thailand's pro-democracy movement, it was also a period of increased chaos in the country. The increase in unionization was accompanied by the global oil crisis and a downturn in the Thai economy. Inflation increased dramatically.²⁷ Thailand had never before experienced such a massive wave of labor unrest. Peasant demonstrations intensified, their demands escalated and petitions soared. Activist monks, unions and peasant organizations soon fell out of favor. The strong support enjoyed by the student movement in its early days diminished as the strongly-valued social order was disrupted and students challenged many deeply-held traditions. Politicians feuded and accomplished little as the country was polarized between conservatives and radicals.

2.6 The Closure of Political Space (1976-1980)

The instability of the governments during this period, combined with the opposition among the conservative Thai elite, fostered a rise in right-wing organizations backed by Thailand's traditional institutions—the military, bureaucracy, Sangha, and palace—that eventually led to the bloody counter-revolution of October 1976. Three groups, the popular Village Scouts, Nawaphon, and violent Red Gaur, were joined by the police in harassing leftist political parties, waging a campaign of political assassinations, and supporting right-wing politicians. Leaders of the PFT were accused of being communists and its members were systematically murdered, leading to the demise of that organization. The well-orchestrated attacks on leftist politicians, peasant organizations, progressive monks and union leaders were supported by a propaganda campaign in the military-controlled television and radio that accused them of being a communist threat to the nation. Samak Sundaravej, the darling of right-wing elements of the army, ran a news commentary program that was notorious for widening the chasm between left and right and fanning the fears of communism.

²⁷ In Thailand "the consumer price index jumped 12 percent in 1972, and 23 percent in 1973 [Pasuk and Baker, 2002, p 205]."

Some writers pose that the events outside Thailand's borders were an even more powerful force propelling the country toward a confrontation between the students and the conservatives. Beginning in early 1975, communists won power in Cambodia and the South Vietnamese government was defeated by the forces of Ho Chi Minh. The Pathet Lao consolidated its power in Laos and abolished the six-hundred-year-old monarchy in December of that year, creating the worry that the Thai monarchy might also be toppled and lending royal support for a counter-revolution. As a result of the social turbulence, many people thought that an extension of the rural insurgency into Bangkok was imminent, heightening their fear of the student and leftist movement. Samak predicted a Vietnamese invasion.

For all these reasons, the reaction was not long in unfolding. The progressive three-year period begun in October 1973 had devolved in the most unstable period in Thailand's recent history as the conservatives promoted an aggressive propaganda campaign that stoked public fears of insecurity. They tested the waters for a possible coup d'état in August 1976 when former Deputy Prime Minister General Praphat briefly returned to Thailand, supposedly for medical treatment, and had an audience with the king. Predictably, the students organized as the National Coalition against Dictatorship (with Phumtham Wechayachai as president) and NSCT (with Sutham Saengprathum as secretary-general). They staged demonstrations against Praphat; in turn, they were attacked by the Red Gaur, leaving two dead. When former Prime Minister Thanom returned from exile on September 16 to enter the monkhood, he was welcomed by right wing groups and visited by the king. In response, Phra Paisal and his fellow Buddhists held a hunger strike, accompanied by daily demonstrations at Thammasat University and other locations, to appeal to the Sangha and Supreme Patriarch to disallow the former prime minister from entering the monkhood. Over the next few days the violence increased with two students murdered by the police and hanged. On October 4, a left-wing student theatrical troupe staged a dramatic reenactment of the murder in the courtyard at Thammasat University as part of a nationwide campaign for Thanom's expulsion. The media accused the students of having one of its 'hanged' actors having been made up to look like the crown prince. The army accused the students of *lese majeste* and demanded an apology. Anderson highlighted the importance of the monarchy in the ensuing massacre:

The essential point is that the pivot on which the whole right-wing offensive turned was the monarchy, increasingly identified with and under the influence of the enemies of the liberal regime. It was therefore characteristic that the flash-point for the overthrow of the regime on October 6, 1976, should have been a falsified case of *lese majeste*.²⁸

The right wing struck back with the support of the ruling establishment, including the conservative monks, and much of the middle class. A massacre at Thammasat University followed, involving the Village Scouts, Red Gaur, Border Patrol Police and others in an orgy of violence. The Young Turks, including Major-General Chamlong Srimuang and General Pallop Pinmanee, staged a coup that ousted the Seni Pramroj government.

The Military Administrative Reform Council installed former high court justice, Thanin Kraiwichian (October 1976-October 1977), as prime minister. The Thanin regime justified the massacre with a statement released one month later:

Our culture, upheld by our ancestors and customs, was neglected, considered obsolete and regarded as a dinosaur or other extinct creature. Some had no respect for their parents, and students disregarded their teachers. They espoused a foreign ideology without realizing that such action is dangerous to our culture and did not listen to the advice of those who have much knowledge of that ideology.²⁹

Members of the royal family appeared in public with those responsible for the massacre, seemingly endorsing the wholesale violence that occurred. On the occasion of the king's annual birthday address to the nation, he declared his support for the coup:

At a time when our country is being continually threatened with aggression by the enemy, our very freedom and existence as Thais may be destroyed if Thai people fail to realize their patriotism and their solidarity in resisting the enemy....Accordingly, the Thai military has the most important role in defense of our country at all times, ready always to carry out its duty to protect the country.³⁰

²⁸ Anderson, 1998, p 171

²⁹ Anderson, 1998, p 169, quoting the FBIS Daily Report, November 8, 1976

³⁰ Girling, 1981, p. 215, quoting text in *Siam Chodmaithet*, December 2-8, 1976

Thanin's year-long term was characterized as being more authoritarian and repressive than any of his military predecessors. More than three thousand people were arrested. Rigid censorship was imposed and more than two hundred books were banned and burned, while libraries were closed, publishers were harassed and more than twenty journals were closed. Labor unions were silenced and political meetings outlawed. Bureaucrats and teachers were purged of dissidents and required to undergo anticommunist indoctrination. The Thanin government quickly alienated almost everyone by its incompetence and extremism. His execution of the leader of the failed March 1977 coup led to a successful coup seven months later. Although the government under General Kriangsak Chomanand (November 1977-February 1980) was favorable to the military and police, he made overtures to moderation, promising a new constitution and elections, easing press censorship, raising the minimum wage, and granting amnesty to many of those who were arrested in October 1976.

Given the level of violence that had ensued on October 6 and the severity of the crackdown that followed, the reaction of the students, the progressive members of the Thai community and even many moderates was predictable. Many fled the country, including Puey, Sulak and Pipob who went to England. An estimated two to three thousand activists, including many of the nation's brightest students, and peasant and labor leaders, joined the communist insurgency in the jungles more out of fear than ideology.

The severity of the crackdown and the failures of the Thanin regime caused a sympathetic response in support of the students, especially among their families and friends. The CPT was likewise viewed favorably. Many leftists who remained in Bangkok provided support for the students. The trial of the 'Thammasat 18', including Thongchai Winichakul and Sutham, before a military tribunal was widely protested, swaying public opinion in favor of the students. They were detained for two years.

Although by 1979 the CPT had an estimated ten thousand armed members fighting against the government, the insurgency was in trouble as it had become a pawn in regional and international politics. In December 1978, China, Cambodia and

Vietnam became engaged in a regional war that caused the insurgents to lose their bases in Cambodia and Laos. About the same time, Thailand and the United States drew more closely to China, leading to an erosion of support from their primary sponsor. While some CPT leaders aligned with China and others with Vietnam, the student leaders favored an independent course. Having fought against an authoritarian regime in Bangkok, they now found themselves in conflict with an authoritarian party leadership.

When the 1979 elections brought General Prem Tinsulanonda to power in March 1980, he offered a complete amnesty to the student activists. The students left the jungles *en masse*, complaining of boredom, disease and frustration; in fact, Khanin wrote, “Even before the amnesty, some students had quietly come back in to private business in the country.”³¹ Many of the students who had joined the insurgency had done so to avoid arrest, rather than for any ideological reasons, and never fully embraced socialism or the party doctrine. Some, including Kriengkamol, blamed the CPT for the demise of the student movement. Others, including RUSO President and NCST Deputy Secretary-General Pinij Jarusombat, appreciated the values and experience they gained in the jungles. Seksan summarized the feelings of many of his comrades, writing, “We went into the jungle dreaming that we could work up a solution for the country, but we ended up being ravaged by every faction. The government wanted us dead, the communists also wished to destroy us. Our plight—how we survived all those who were against us—epitomized the tragedy of a generation.”³² As the students returned, Thailand experienced a small reopening of political space. In 1979, the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) was founded.

2.7 The Era of Political Reform (1980-1997)

As it related to the thesis, there are five important themes that developed over the following seventeen years: The disillusionment with radical ideology; the integration of the student activists back in Thai society; the growth of NGOs and the

³¹ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

³² BP, March 22, 2001

evolution of Thailand's civil society; the Black May incident; and the political reform movement.

Thailand had changed during the years the students spent in the jungles. The Vietnam War was over and American troops were gone. Inflation was abating and the middle classes were busy at work as the economy grew. Agriculture played a diminishing role in the national economy, as manufacturing and industrial growth surged, fueled by labor from the rural sector. That growth, however, was of little if any benefit to Thailand's rural farmers and urban workers; if anything, their exploitation worsened as poverty, landlessness and tenancy increased. There were also increasing environmental conflicts, often related to dam construction and logging. The space for urban workers to organize unions was restricted by the employers' widespread use of short-term contracts and intimidation of union organizers, usually with government cooperation. Although the number of private and state enterprise labor unions and total union membership steadily increased³³, they were relatively weak and the number of strikes and labor disputes was relatively low. Political space was equally limited.

The left was hopelessly divided and demoralized. Communism was on the decline nearly everywhere, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and breakup of the Soviet Union soon to follow. Over the remainder of the 1980s, the remaining members of the CPT were arrested or left the country. Anderson noted, "The end of the CPT came with, as it were, a gentle whimper rather than a terrifying bang."³⁴

The student activists who abandoned the jungle and communist insurgency integrated back into society in many different ways, "liberally helped by sympathetic old friends, colleagues, professors and patrons."³⁵ Thak dispelled the notion that the student activists had been ideologically homogeneous. The disparate choices they

³³ "The number of unions increased between 1977 (164) through 1994 (888), despite the removal of state enterprise workers from coverage of the 1975 Labor Relations Act following the 1991 coup. Likewise, the number of union members increased between 1978 (95,951) and 1990 (336,061), although dropping after the coup [Andrew Brown, "Locating working-class power", Kevin Hewison, Editor, *Political Change in Thailand*, (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 170-172]."

³⁴ Anderson, 1998, p 295

³⁵ Kasian, 1992, p 5

made after their time in the jungle were indicative of their differences beforehand.³⁶ Some, disillusioned by the failures of the movement and attracted by the booming economy, joined the business community and sought financial success. Many continued their education at home or abroad and entered the world of academia; for example, Thirayuth, Seksan, Thongchai among others. Others re-entered the world of politics with mainstream parties and through family connections; for example, Adisorn, a former activist and graduate of Thammasat's Faculty of Law, ran and lost in 1983 before securing an MP seat representing Khon Kaen in 1988; and Chaturon was also elected MP in the same year. Many rephrased their ideology from Marxism and socialism to 'pro-democracy' in an effort to rehabilitate themselves into mainstream society, often adopting liberalism and market capitalism. Their prior admiration for Thailand's post-war radical culture turned "dismissive" as "they banished [the dynamic of Thai Marxism-communism] to the dustbin of theory."³⁷ Again, Anderson summed up their status: "Radically-minded thinkers in Thailand were, in the 1980s and early 1990s, living freely and usually comfortably in a buoyant, crassly rich, thoroughly corrupt, bourgeois semi-democracy....Most of them ended up with respectable positions in the universities, in the mass media, and in the Thai parliament."³⁸

Some former activists were attracted to the same issues that first attracted them to the student movement—poverty and an unjust society—and retained their commitment to social change. With political space closed since 1976, virtually the only place where those issues were voiced was within the NGO movement, which attracted many leftist refugees. They were typically focused on local development issues and were relatively free of government interference, provided they were formally registered and remained apolitical. In 1980, Jon Ungpakorn established the Thai Volunteer Service (TVS) with the goal of recruiting and training development workers. Over the following five years, the sector experienced tremendous growth, gradually becoming more assertive in its approach. They tended to fill the vacuum created by the failure of political parties, peasant organizations and trade unions to articulate a political philosophy and engage in political activism. NGOs were also

³⁶ Interview with Thak Chaloemtiarana, October 18, 2006

³⁷ Kasian, 1992, p 537

³⁸ Anderson, 1998, p 295

active in promoting the interests of rural farmers, peasants and forest settlers, involving demonstrations or public rallies in Bangkok and other major cities. They successfully campaigned against dams, logging concessions, and the forced relocation of peasant communities.

The 'collapse of confidence' in Marxism seemed to create a new ideology of NGO activism—an ideology of democratization achieved through local empowerment and popular participation. This new 'ideology', in contrast to the view that democracy should be limited to the casting of votes, provided opportunities for the masses to learn about democracy through their experience. It undermined 'patron-client' relations by encouraging members of the underprivileged classes to rely upon themselves and their own organizations, while protecting the rights of underprivileged classes. It also undercut the hierarchical structure of Thailand by empowering workers and farmers to take collective action to make demands upon the state. Among those former activists choosing this path were Chulalongkorn student Phumtham.

Meanwhile, the students who attended universities in the wake of the Thammasat massacre tried to create a small measure of political space for themselves. Considering the atmosphere at that time, it was not an easy task. They began to cautiously reemerge in late 1979, sometimes in support of government policy and often presenting their demands to parliament committees rather than taking them to the streets. In 1980, two hundred university students staged a demonstration protesting a move to extend the term of General Prem as army commander-in-chief. In December 1980, student leaders joined with labor representatives in protesting the price of sugar, although stopping in the face of government threats. In April 1982 they protested against an increase in bus fares and within months were resorting to sit-ins and a rally at Thammasat University that attracted three to four thousand protesters; in response, the government yielded to their demands. Also in 1982, students demanded that Gen Prem not install military officers and his close associates in the vacant senate seats. After the 1983 elections confirmed General Prem's government in power, he proposed constitution amendments to strengthen the military's influence; the plan was withdrawn in response to street protests and hunger strikes by students and Thailand's intelligentsia, with support from the press.

As the amnesty was unfolding, Girling wisely predicted that the “evolution of Thai society through reforms” might be the fate of the young-radical generation.³⁹ In fact, the growth of the NGO movement in the 1980s, its increasing political activism, and its use of linkages with members of the October Generation—now largely members of the academic, business and professional community—became identified as Thailand’s emergent civil society.

The events of Black May 1992, created another challenge to the growth of democracy in Thailand. When the Chat Thai party gained the most seats in the 1988 elections, democracy seemed to be on the ascent. They, along with other parties and groups, demanded that Prime Minister Prem resign as he had never been elected in his own right. To much surprise, Prem announced his retirement and General Chatichai Choonhavan became prime minister (April 1988-February 1991). The political space for former student activists reopened as they were elected to parliament and participated in union, peasant and villager movements. General Chatichai established a policy think tank headed by radical journalist Pansak and his own son, Kraisak, a university teacher and left-wing intellectual. He attended May Day celebrations and enacted worker-friendly reforms. However, General Chatichai also angered the military and was open to criticisms of corruption as the media dubbed his government the ‘buffet Cabinet’. He was also accused of vote-buying and presiding over a parliamentary dictatorship, eventually leading to an erosion of his political legitimacy.

General Suchinda Kraproyoon and his military allies, calling themselves the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), staged a coup on February 23, 1991. They sacked parliament, outlawed some labor unions, threatened the press, hand-picked a new body to rewrite the constitution, and conducted a minor purge within the army. From the student perspective, the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) wrote, “The coup also signifies the unchanging nature of Thai politics. Thai politics is still long dominated by the power struggle between the two factions of the Thai elite; i.e., the military-bureaucracy and the politician-capitalist while the people continue to be left

³⁹ Girling, 1981, p. 286

out of 'democracy'."⁴⁰ When the appointed prime minister, Anand Panyarachun (February 1991-April 1992), asserted his independence and fell out of the military's favor, they seized control in the next elections after the adoption of some favorable clauses in the constitution.

According to Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, secretary-general of the SFT at the time of the 1991 coup, students "organized a major seminar on this national issue [of corruption in the Chatchai government] and followed up with other campaigns to expose mismanagement." They were also the first group to oppose the military takeover. At that time, there were twenty four state universities as members of the SFT; twenty-three supported the SFT position. However, he admitted, their activities were "quite weak" and the "volume" of students was quite low as compared to the October Generation.⁴¹ One difference was that the October Generation had four years to develop their political activities as compared to his era when they had only one year. Joining the protests in opposition to the new pro-military constitution were members of Thailand's civil society—activist lawyers, former student activists, labor and community leaders,⁴² and NGO activists—organized under the umbrella CPD.

In violation of his previous promises, General Suchinda (April 1992-May 1992) assumed the premiership. Soon thereafter, protesters began demanding his removal and cancellation of the four controversial clauses in the constitution. As the movement's support was waning in late April, the charismatic Major-General Chamlong joined the campaign. Among the anti-Suchinda groups, there were three approaches considered. The CPD favored a 'campaign' without demonstrations and was non-violent in its approach, including wanting "to avoid violence from the other side."⁴³ Chamlong's approach was to rally, arguing that they "cannot sit down and wait for democracy." The SFT was in the middle, favoring a rally but opposing "any methods to bring a riot." Chamlong created a new organization, the Confederation for

⁴⁰ "Merely the Trust: Distress, Painful and Challenging Future", Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) & Movement for Democracy and Civil Society (MODEM), 1991, p. 3

⁴¹ Interview with Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, December 18, 2006

⁴² "The core organizers were activist lawyers, such as Somchai Homla-or, veterans of the 1973-6 activism such as the medics, Sant Hatteerat and Weng Tojirakarn, labor leaders such as Somsak Kosaisuk, and local community leaders such as Prateep Ungsongtham Hata, a teacher and slum worker [Pasuk and Baker, 2002, p. 377]."

⁴³ Interview with Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, December 18, 2006

Democracy, including the SFT and CPD among its seven members. When it came time for a democratic vote, Prinya was a minority of one against staging a rally. On May 17, over two hundred thousand people gathered at Sanam Luang. Chamlong took the people to Ratchdamnoen Road without proper planning in what Prinya characterized as “just like a soldier in a war.” Half the people joined Chamlong, while half stayed at Sanam Luang with Prinya and the SFT. Violence ensued as Chamlong was arrested and the military attacked the demonstrators, with numerous deaths, injuries and abductions among the protesters. On May 20, the demonstrators moved to Ramkhamhaeng University amid fears of a repeat of the events of October 1976. Three days after the initial attacks—many people wondered why it took so long—the king intervened and the demonstrations ended as Suchinda resigned and the Parliament agreed to cancel the pro-military constitutional clauses.

There were at least two differences between the events of May 1992 and the October events. Although it was not unusual for the military government to enforce a news blackout on the state-controlled television and radio about the mass rallies, those efforts backfired. People went to the rallies to see for themselves what they could not see on the television or hear on the radio. But they also obtained information in the local press, watched the events on CNN and BBC, and received news from their friends and family via the electronic media—faxes and mobile phones—that did not exist in the 1970s.

Unlike the events of October 1973, the protesters represented people from all walks of life. Generally, credit is given to the Thai elite and middle-class—the ‘mobile phone brigade’. The absence of students was widely noted, blamed by Dr. Prawase Wasi on “the spread of materialism and consumerism coupled with a curriculum that emphasized rote learning.”⁴⁴ Likewise, labor groups were also not widely involved, attributed by Andrew Brown to the devastation they experienced at the hands of the NPKC. However, students and workers were a disproportionately large percentage of the killed and injured. Michael Connors believes that a majority of the participants were members of the October Generation who were reappearing on

⁴⁴ Prawase Wasi, “An Overview of Political Reform Issues”, Duncan McCargo, Editor, *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2002), p. 26

the national scene some nineteen years after they last brought down a military government. However, Khanin wrote, “politicians and so-called business oriented politicians...played significant roles instead.”⁴⁵ Most commentators agree that these protesters represented Thailand’s civil society that had morphed into a mass movement entering the world of politics, if only for a brief time.

Anand (June 1992-September 1992) was reappointed prime minister on an interim basis in advance of the elections scheduled for September. He immediately instituted reforms to marginalize the military and safeguard freedom of the press. The 1992 elections saw the Democrat Party barely beat the pro-military parties; they formed a coalition government with Chuan Leekpai (September 1992-July 1995) as prime minister. As with the Thammasat massacre in October 1976, there was little resolution in the aftermath of the events of May 1992. More than thirteen years later, the Thaksin government began to compensate the families of the victims.

One group of writers believes that the events of May 1992 can be characterized by their successes. First and foremost, the political reform process was initiated and many intellectuals began to envision a new and more just constitution. Second, the role of the military in Thai politics was significantly and, some thought permanently, closed. Perhaps most significantly for Thailand’s civil society, was the space created for ‘people politics’. In the aftermath of Black May, there were several policy victories. Protests and marches on the capital increased after the election of a civilian-led parliament. Thirayuth optimistically predicted “a transfer of power and legitimacy from the state to society...from bureaucrats to businessmen, technocrats, and the middle class. Society will change from closed to open, from conservative thinking to broader perspectives, from narrow nationalism to greater acceptance of internationalism and regionalism, from centralization to decentralization.”⁴⁶

Less optimistically, the September 1992 elections were characterized by the same money politics, corruption and old patronage structures as previous military and quasi-democratic governments. The anti-Suchinda movement did not develop beyond

⁴⁵ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

⁴⁶ Pasuk and Baker, 2002, p 425

its initial demands and, although bureaucratic reform was oft discussed, it was never implemented. As one of the Asian Tigers, Thailand's economy boomed, but politics returned to 'business as usual' and a mood of political apathy returned. Less than one year after Chuan assumed office, he was busy attacking grass-roots environmental protests. In the aftermath of their initial success, the CPD lost NGO support and went into decline for several years.

Although estimates of the number of NGOs in Thailand vary widely, one researcher estimated that there were only two to four hundred hard-core activists driving the movement.⁴⁷ Regardless of their number, the number of demonstrations and protests in Thailand soared over the 1980s and early 1990s as people became less afraid.

The most significant of those protests were organized by the Assembly of the Poor (AOP), the first interest group to represent rural interests nationwide since the demise of the PFT in the mid-1970s. It grew out of the Isan-based Northeast Forest and Land Network and the Assembly of Small-Scale Farmers of the Northeast, with a strong presence of former activists from the October Generation. It was formed in 1995 with support from the SFT, which was under the leadership of Suriyasai Katasila at that time. Their immediate focus was the Pak Mun dam and, to a lesser extent, the Sirinthorn dam. Its base included the poor, NGO activists, academics and, to a lesser extent, students who often helped out at rallies and assisted with secretarial duties, public relations and building projects.

Bruce Missingham said its greatest triumph was the legitimization of the AOP as a political entity in Thailand. Its greatest drawback was the negative perception attached to its continuing demands when the country experienced the financial crisis in 1997. The Chuan government discredited the Assembly, characterized civil disobedience as illegitimate, investigated bank accounts and asserted that the many NGOs were "funded by foreign organizations that did not hold Thailand's national

⁴⁷ Dulcey Simpkins, "Radical influence on the Third Sector: Thai N.G.O. contributions to socially responsive politics, Ji Giles Ungpakorn, Editor, **Radicalising Thailand**, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies Chulalongkorn University, 2003), p. 282

interests at heart.”⁴⁸ That attack reflected a common theme of the Thai state: accusing popular movements of being ‘trouble-makers’ whose activities threaten national security.

The AOP Mun River Declaration revealed its left-wing anti-capitalist ideology, while the AOP message was based upon environmentalism, human rights, and democratic reform. Missingham estimates that six or seven of the twenty leading NGO activists had been student activists in the 1970s and joined the communist insurgency. Additionally, young people were drawn into the movement through university clubs amid a growing environmental consciousness and “red” or “green” activism.⁴⁹ The TVS was also a productive source of NGO recruits. Most new radical student activists joining the NGO movements appeared to be those whose dedication was nurtured in a relationship with a professor or activist belonging to the October Generation.

Dulcey Simpkins wrote about her research addressing young activists of the ‘New Generation’ in comparison with ‘The October Generation’. She concluded that the younger generation of NGO workers, having grown up in a different historical context, were not ‘hardcore’ in their commitment, often joining the movement during economic downturns, staying for a short period, and using their work as a stepping stone to a better career in the private sector.

The optimism of the post-May 1992 era propelled media reformers to attempt to diminish the military’s domination over broadcast media. The obvious differences between the broadcasts on army and government controlled television, and those shown on BBC and CNN, highlighted the need for broadcast media independence. Although media reformers sought to license several new TV channels and radio stations, their success was more modest. Within four years, and over the objections of the military, iTV was created in 1996—Thailand’s first independent television station.

⁴⁸ Bruce D. Missingham, *The Assembly of the Poor in Thailand*, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), p. 202

⁴⁹ Zcongklod Bangyikhan, former president of the Environmental Conservation Club at Chulalongkorn University, said environmentalists were characterized as “red” or “green” depending upon whether they were active with ‘mob’ activities or focused on the environment in a social context.

Following the events of May 1992, many NGOs lobbied for a change of government focus, from economic growth to social concerns, including education, health care, social welfare, and the legal system. With substantive involvement from the NGO community, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) created a 'people-centered' plan, the Eighth Development Plan adopted in March 1996. However, several months later the financial crisis struck and their vision was set aside.

Thailand seems obsessed with creating the perfect constitution—as of the writing of this thesis, the drafting of the seventeenth or eighteenth in the past seventy-five years is underway—with the hope of solving the country's politics woes. The abusive manipulation of the 1992 constitution by the military and the subsequent money politics created the impetus for political reform. In 1994, the first Chuan government established the Democratic Development Committee under Dr. Prawase's leadership, to devise proposals for a new constitution under the banner of 'political reform'. His process became an elite social movement with involvement from NGOs and the media, support from the CPD and SFT, and public participation. Although many progressives found fault with the document—unions saw their proposals evaporate and some labeled it "an investor's constitution"—most realized its strengthening of Thailand's civil society while protecting the rights of the poor were the best they could achieve. Most observers believed the 'People's Constitution', imbedded with the concept of 'participatory democracy' would not have been passed by Parliament, except for the 1997 Financial Crisis. Thai civil society credited themselves with an important success, and the political reform movement fell back into repose.

CHAPTER III

THAILAND'S MILLENNIAL GENERATION

3.1 Introduction

There probably isn't a time in modern history when a generation gap did not occur, when the older generation didn't look at the younger generation with concern about their lack of morality and manners, their immaturity, poor use of language, inappropriate appearance and non-traditional values. Youth, especially the teenage years and early twenties, is typically a time of rebellion and establishing an identity—individually and as a member of the peer group—that clashes with the norm created by their parents' generation. So it should not be strange that many of Thailand's October Generation express deep concern about Thailand's Millennial Generation—youth born between 1976 and 2000. Some of the comments I heard in interviews or read in books and newspapers could have come from another country—the United States, for example—or another era (the parents of the October Generation speaking and writing of their children).

Former student activist Phiraphon Triyakasem characterized the image of today's students as “look like empty” and “not concerned with anything.”¹

Ramkhamhaeng University's Chaichana Ingkhawat said, “They live individually, enjoy materially and [display] selfishness, [while having] no faith in collective, organizational behavior.”²

Former student activist Chiranan Pitpricha said, “The young have become a generation of rebels without a cause, hiding behind words like ‘personal freedom’ as an excuse to be just plain immature.”³

¹ Interview with Phiraphon Triyakasem, June 27, 2006

² Interview with Chaichana Ingkhawat, June 29, 2006

³ *The Magazine, Bangkok Post (BP)*, April 2005, Issue 38

The typical image of today's youth is of an irresponsible generation of eroding morals, fixated on pornography, obsessed with expensive electronic toys, engaged in gambling, drinking and meaningless sex. The older generation focuses on their cell-phones, mini-skirts and revealing outfits, poor manners, and non-traditional behaviors—and imagines only the worst: a generation of lazy, immoral citizens managing the future of their country.

But it is not only Thailand's older generation that expresses this generalization. Many young people see their peers in the same light. Passakorn Chorphaka, editor of *QuestionMark* magazine, compares Thai students to “sleeping kids” who are only sometimes awake.⁴

3.2 Stereotypes of the Millennial Generation

Much of what is true about Thai youth reflects international trends. Information provided by the United States census bureau reveals that the percentage of students following politics has fallen over the past twenty-five years.⁵ One American student characterized her fellow youth as Generation Apathetic and charged they “are in dereliction of our duty as a thorn in the side of authority.”⁶ Generally speaking, the same characterization can be made of Thai students: They are apathetic about politics and community involvement. A 2006 research of three thousand students in five provinces found that Thai youth do not significantly participate in community activities.⁷ Cornell University's Thak Chaloehtiarana said today's students “are not looking for answers.”⁸ A Suan Dusit Poll, released on Children's

⁴ Interview with Passakorn Chorphaka, June 23, 2006

⁵ In 1970, 57 per cent aimed to keep up with political affairs. By 2005, that figure had fallen to 36 per cent who aimed to follow politics. [*The Nation* (TN), December 18, 2006]

⁶ *International Herald Tribune* (IHT), November 8, 2005, quoting Endicott College student Victoria A. Bonney

⁷ Research by Dr Suriyadeo Tripathi, a pediatrician at the Queen Sirikit National Institute of Child Health, titled “Teenagers' quality: A case study on elementary and vocational students.” [TN, December 18, 2006]

⁸ Interview with Thak Chaloehtiarana, October 18, 2006

Day 2006, found that almost seventy-two percent of children had a negative view of politics.⁹

This chapter looks at Thai youth in the twenty-first century and attempts to answer the question: Who are these kids, what are they thinking and what are they doing?

These politically apathetic students are primarily focused on their studies. But unlike their elders who pursued an education to broaden their view of the world and as a tool to help others, by and large today's students are focused on developing a career and making a good salary.¹⁰ In research titled "Teenagers quality: A case study on elementary and vocational students", Suriyadeo Tripathi found that students "were taught to give priority only to study" to the exclusion of public responsibility and participation, religion and honesty.¹¹ Thak said the environment of the 1970s in Thailand was impacted by the "international intellectual movements" and social consciousness of that time. There was a clear cut goal to work on behalf of the poor, especially rural villagers. Students at that time were idealistic, were inspired "to love the people" and the purpose of their education was to "do good." He said that students in the 1970s looked forward to a career in the civil service, whereas youth in Thailand today have "more opportunities" in career choice.¹² Cornell student Pisut Wisessing said that in the past, students went to college because they wanted to, in contrast to today's students who 'need' to go to college in order to secure a good future.¹³ And more often, that career choice is determined by salary rather than personal satisfaction. In a 2007 joint study of Thai youth conducted by Assumption University's ABAC Poll and Srinakharinwirot University's psychology students, about forty percent of students thought having good grades was more important than understanding their lessons, and one-quarter chose subjects where they would obtain good grades over

⁹ The January 10-11 survey took place among children aged under 15 years old; among the most urgent problems children described were prolific corruption, the violence in the southernmost provinces, unsolved social problems including drugs, bickering politicians, traffic problems, rising oil prices and economic and poverty problems. [*ThaiDay* (TD), January 13, 2006]

¹⁰ The same is true in the United States. According to a US Census Bureau survey, while in 1970, 79 per cent of university entrants said they had a personal objective of "developing a meaningful philosophy of life", by last year 75 per cent defined their objective as "being very well off financially [TN, December 18, 2006]."

¹¹ TN, December 18, 2006

¹² Interview with Thak Chaloehtiarana, October 18, 2006

¹³ Interview with Pisut Wisessing, October 18, 2006

those they really wanted to learn. According to *Sisjan* magazine editor Tiwa Sarachutha, a former student activist in the 1970s, those students who are politically active are more interested in a career in politics than in serving society.

Thak believes that “life is good” for today’s students and, unlike previous generations, they have never suffered.¹⁴ While the parents of the October Generation experienced the depression of the 1930s, the 1997 Financial Crisis did not seriously impact the middle and upper classes.¹⁵ Primarily the lower class urban workers and their families in the rural villages felt the effect of layoffs and unemployment, while most of the students I interviewed described little consequence from the crisis on their families. Former student activist Pipob Thongchai described the difference between the generations in terms of rights and freedoms: for the October Generation they were limited and they were taught only their duties of being a citizen; in contrast, today’s youth are not limited.¹⁶ Twenty-five year old Papan Raksritong, a writer at prachathai.com, blames the apathy of Thai youth on their easy and happy surroundings that allows them to not “pay attention to politics and social problems.”¹⁷ Anti-coup activist Sombat Boonngam-anong said “[w]e cannot expect students to be leaders” because they don’t make the connection between their personal life and politics. Today, students have a *sabai-sabai* attitude in which things are OK if there is “no effect to them.” If they “have benefit, students are OK” with politics.¹⁸ U.S. academic researcher Dulcey Simpkins quotes from one of her interviews with an NGO staff:

There is a big difference between the two groups: those growing up after the 1976 incident have a different political socialization than those Thais who were not old enough to get socialized by the 1976 era. If you grew up during the economic boom instead of the 1976 crisis, life is easy; you can get everything quite easily.

¹⁴ Interview with Thak Chaloehtiarana, October 18, 2006

¹⁵ This idea was supported by Hewison’s comment, “The principal impact of the crisis was on millions of workers and small farmers [Kevin Hewison, 2004, “Crafting Thailand’s new social contract”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4].”

¹⁶ Interview with Pipob Thongchai, June 26, 2006

¹⁷ Interview with Papan Raksritong, June 22, 2006

¹⁸ Interview with Sombat Boonngam-anong, December 4, 2006

Money is the key....They don't have to think about other people. Everything is so beautiful, so glamorous."¹⁹

It seems that the economic good times that began in the 1980s—when today's students were born—led to an erosion of the political motivation that characterized the October Generation.

As a result of an unprecedented growth in technology that accompanied the economic boom, today's youth are engaged in the world in a very different way than their parents. They are consumed by new technologies. Virtually the entire world has experienced a stunning growth in electronic media—although television and radio still dominate venues for the access of information and entertainment, Internet use has dramatically changed the way young people make contact with the world. Thak noted that while today's students read less than the students of the 1970s, they have “more opportunities” in information access and entertainment.²⁰ Not only do they receive information, but they exchange ideas through chat rooms, social networking sites and weblogs. Cellular telephones provide instant and constant voice and text communications. According to a December 2006 survey, most Bangkok university students spend three hours a day talking on their cellphones and another three hours a day surfing the Internet. In addition, students watched up to four hours a day of television and listened to the radio for an average of three hours a day—obviously these students were engaged to more than one media at a time.²¹ Some social scientists believe that technology reduces social interactions and relatedness, while others argue that it enhances communication. While I have witnessed the use of technology to connect student activists with each other, it seems hard for this observer to believe that the thousands of Thai youth talking non-stop on their cell-phones are considering issues of social importance. Many skeptics of the benefits of technology would agree with US author Harper Lee when she described “an abundant society where people have laptops, cellphones, iPods, and minds like empty rooms.”²²

¹⁹ Dulcey Simpkins, “Radical influence on the Third Sector: Thai N.G.O. contributions to socially responsive politics”, Ji Giles Ungpakorn, Editor, **Radicalising Thailand**, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies Chulalongkorn University, 2003), p. 263-264

²⁰ Interview with Thak Chaloemtiarana, October 18, 2006

²¹ TN, December 4, 2006, based upon an ABAC survey conducted between October 26 and December 2 of 1262 university students in Bangkok.

²² IHT, June 28, 2006

The abundance of media access, non-stop communication and competitive academic pressure has created a generation of stressed-out young people in Thailand and throughout the world. According to a 2006 survey jointly conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) and the Social Development and Human Security Ministry, a significant portion of Thai children are suffering from chronic stress disorder and have contemplated suicide.²³

The differences described above—greater prosperity, more opportunities and choices and increased access to media and entertainment, accompanied by political apathy, stress and a redirected educational focus on career and salary—were, by and large, attributed to one dominant phenomenon in Thai society: the culture of consumerism, the focus on materialism and prevalent role of capitalism in the lives of young people. Chaichana characterized the context of students today as the capitalist system—including globalization and the information age—as governing individual thinking. Today, he said, “young people are seen as a commodity.”²⁴ His view was shared across the generational spectrum: members of the October Generation, NGO activists in their thirties and student activists of the Millennial Generation.

In an October 2002 discussion titled “Political Consciousness in the Young Generation: Does it Exist?” Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) secretary-general Phongsathorn Sornphetnarin said, “Society now sees youths as trouble-makers doing stupid things, but most of us grew up among illusions inspired by capitalism. Did we create them? Absolutely not. The older generation did. So are they really trouble-makers or victims?”²⁵

Pipob said the entire social and cultural context has changed over the past thirty years, especially the influence of capitalism and consumerism that was less strong in the past and the dominance of the USA as the world’s only superpower, bringing capitalism and Western culture to Thailand. NGO activist Atthaporn

²³ “Of 300,000 children surveyed... 23.3 per cent living outside Bangkok admitted to having contemplated suicide....The overall percentage of teenagers living in Bangkok who are suffering from chronic stress disorder is 47.8, and 38.3 for those living elsewhere [TN, July 25, 2006].”

²⁴ Interview with Chaichana Ingkawat, June 29, 2006

²⁵ TN, October 13, 2002

Khammano blamed capitalism and consumerism for making today's students apathetic to social problems, saying "generally every university student cares and is aware of social problems, but capitalism twists their ideas and keeps them away from a real understanding of the structure of the problem. [Thus], students no longer see the real problem."²⁶

Papan blamed the apathy of Thai youth on the media. Chakgrapong Buripha, deputy secretary-general of the SFT in 2005-2006, blamed consumerism and the media, with its soap operas and advertisements, as the main reason students are not politically active, while another student activist cited the lure of shopping as among the many distractions that deter students from political activism.²⁷ In fact, that "lure of shopping" was cited in two studies: An AC Nielsen online survey published in July 2006 found Thais heading to the malls twice a week, making them among the most avid recreational shoppers—those who shop simply to occupy their time—in the world. In a 2006 ABAC poll of Bangkok youth, sixty-six percent of them "knew they were overspending, and many admitted they could not control themselves... while forty-seven percent said their families had financial problems and criticized them for their spending habits."²⁸ When the joint Assumption University-Srinakharinwirot University study cited above sought to measure the Gross Domestic Happiness (GDH) of Bangkok-area youth, they found that materialism was a major factor in the happiness of young people, with one-third saying that plenty of money would make them happy.

Phra Paisal Visalo and the National Culture Commission attributed many of the problems in Thai society to poor parenting, in which hands-off parents shower their children with money in lieu of real parental care and affection.²⁹ Piyamitr Rangsitienchai, chief executive officer of Qualifiles, a recruitment and career-consultation firm, complained about a new generation of pampered graduates entering the work-force, spoiled by their overprotective parents who "don't encourage or

²⁶ Interview with Atthaporn Khammano, July 3, 2006

²⁷ Interview with Chakgrapong Buripha, June 21, 2006; also, interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

²⁸ TN, July 30, 2006

²⁹ TN, July 31, 2005

motivate their children to face up to life's challenges... They have maids who do their household chores, otherwise their mothers care for them. Some of these young adults don't even know how to heat instant noodles in a microwave; their mommies always did it for them."³⁰ What parents value, it seems, is for their children to achieve academically and financially, while political involvement is actively discouraged. Again, Simpkins quotes from one of her interviews with an NGO staff: "They are taught to learn, get degree, get job to get money."³¹

There is plenty of blame to go around and Thailand's educational system doesn't escape criticism for the apathy of today's students. Passakorn attributes the apathy among Thai youth to the education system that "doesn't activate young people to think by themselves."³² Two October Generation activists agree with his criticism of the education system, but failed to agree on the specifics: Phiraphon blamed its emphasis on theory rather than practical concerns, while Pipob bemoaned youth's lack of interest in political theory. Pisut discussed the status of Thai education and expressed his opinion that the popularity of 'tutorial schools' were a "sign of a bad education" system.³³

Many Thai social critics attributed the decline of student activism to Thailand's culture of corruption and the extent to which young people have accepted it as the norm. One poll of Bangkok high school students indicated that a majority believed corruption in politics was acceptable if politicians otherwise kept their promises.³⁴ Another study by the King Prajadhipok Institute revealed that Thais are more tolerant of corruption than in the past.³⁵

When Khanin Boonsuwan was asked why students are uninvolved in today's politics, he blamed the system itself as discouraging students. Among the factors he listed was the perception among students that politics is a "dirty business and full of corruption", that they feel excluded from a system that "tends to be more and more monopolized and restricted to special kinds of people only" and that "veteran

³⁰ TN, May 22, 2006

³¹ Simpkins, 2003, p. 264

³² Interview with Passakorn Chorphaka, June 23, 2006

³³ Interview with Pisut Wisessing, October 18, 2006

³⁴ TN, June 1, 2006

³⁵ TD, August 8, 2006

politicians and outspoken figures in Thai politics never set a good example for the youth and students to follow.” He also criticized “university administrators [who] do not encourage political activities in campus.”³⁶

At a September 2003 seminar, held at Rajabhat Institute Suan Dusit, organized to gauge students’ sentiment towards politics, Withoon Chomchaiphol, a student at Thai Chamber of Commerce University, said, “Today’s students are disillusioned with politics because a vast number of politicians are corrupt and work for their self-serving agendas.”³⁷ Thak also sees Thai students as disillusioned by rural villagers who have perverted the idealism of the 1970s, using their democratic rights to sell their votes. They see the rural population as opportunists and are not motivated to help them. In contrast to his students at Thammasat University in the 1970s, he said today’s students are “jaded by democracy.”³⁸

An absence of religion—Buddhism in particular—does not escape its share of blame for Thailand’s apathetic students. One survey on teenagers’ attitudes toward temples indicated that approximately half occasionally went to temples, while thirty percent went once a year and a little over twelve percent never set foot in a temple. They blamed their poor attendance on a lack of time and a negative image of monks in the media.³⁹ According to Privy Counselor Dr. Kasem Wattanachai, those who do attend follow the rituals but fail to understand the essence of Buddhism. Phra Paisal blames the low regard for Buddhism by Thai young people on the Sangha, which needs to be a more active model for social and moral issues. Others site the competition from the competing religions of materialism and consumerism, with their non-stop media promotion and worship of celebrities, that have pushed spiritual values—and concern for others—out of young people’s consciousness.

³⁶ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

³⁷ TN, November 28, 2003

³⁸ Interview with Thak Chaloehtiarana, October 18, 2006

³⁹ TD, July 10, 2006, reporting on a Suan Dusit Rajabhat University Graduate School survey of 500 respondents nationwide

3.3 Youth Sub-Cultures

All these comments are obviously generalizations and, by their very nature, not entirely accurate. But, like most generalizations, there is at least some truth in them. In an attempt to find the falsehood in these characterizations and those students who are socially and politically involved, it is helpful to briefly explore Thailand's youth cultures.

The nation's dominate youth culture is called 'mainstream' or 'pop' culture—represented by the nicely, if somewhat immodestly, dressed young people who listen to Grammy-label⁴⁰ popular music, watch mainstream Hollywood and Thai films, read the popular fashion and entertainment magazines, and generally look like the majority of Bangkok youth. But, by and large, they are the apathetic and disillusioned youth that have disengaged from political and social activism; they also include young people who represent two sub-cultures that are slight variations of 'pop' culture. At the wealthier end of Thailand's socio-economic scale, many young people aspire to the 'Hi-So' sub-culture of popular entertainment stars, creating their image with the purchase of high-end name brand products, make-up and stylish dress. And some followers of 'pop' culture are more traditional—in their appearance, religious practice and manners—than their peers.

However, as in most countries, Thailand's youth culture is not homogeneous—there are also several sub-cultures, not necessarily very strong or obvious, that strive to carve out a niche that is different from the mainstream. They can be identified by their different choices of media (magazines, radio and internet websites), the music they listen to, the films they watch, where and how they shop, what they read and their style of dress. Many young people do not want to identify with "mainstream" culture. They don't necessarily listen to Grammy music, attend mainstream films, read fashion magazines, dress, shop and look like the majority of Thai youth.

⁴⁰ "Grammy" is the popular name for GMM Grammy, Plc.

Some are followers of punk music and dress like their western models; some are followers of the Korean Wave (adopting South Korean fashions including consumer products, clothes, hairstyles, music and television dramas such as the TV hit series *Dae Jang Geum*, *The Jewel in the Palace*) or Japanese (seen flaunting their Japanese copy-cat styles at the MBK center-organized Japanese Fashion Street) counter-culture; others belong to Thailand's gang culture usually associated with its technology schools. While these young people have definitely followed a niche that is anything but mainstream, their rebellion seems frustratingly impotent except in its ability to shock their elders and amuse their peers.

More relevant to this thesis are the 'indie' and 'grassroots' youth sub-cultures. The young people identifying with these groups tend to prefer to listen to indie, 'songs for life' or the rebellious message of hip-hop music, watch alternative films shown at The House or Lido theatres, hang out on Khao San Road, shop at second-hand stores, and read alternative magazines. Many students veering away from the mainstream culture aspire to be *dek naew*, or cool and unique. However, one observer says these students often create their own identity by "mixing and matching" from both mainstream and non-mainstream sub-cultures, and thus integrating into a new mainstream culture.⁴¹ To the small extent that Thai youth are socially and politically involved, it is primarily among those students who identify with the indie or grassroots sub-culture or have created their own unique alternative youth culture. In contrast to mainstream youth culture values, they espouse to be anti-materialistic, while claiming to focus more on the plight of farmers and laborers. They also do not seem overly career oriented but more concerned with wanting to "change our social system in a good way" and maintaining their socio-political values in whatever they do in the future.⁴²

Zcongklod Bangyikhan, editor of the 'indie' *A Day* magazine, described the 'indie' subculture as being born out of the 1997 Financial Crisis. At that time, young people rejected brand names and favored 'small-medium enterprises' including off-label products, small businesses, low-budget movies and music labels. They began to

⁴¹ Interview with Kattiya Chan-urai, June 17, 2006

⁴² Interview with members of Chulalongkorn University's Social Criticism Student Club, March 13, 2006

favor products in their own interest that were not oriented toward the big market. The impact of increased globalization brought international films and music to Thailand—more from Europe and Japan than the United States. The themes of ‘indie’ music and film are the common life experiences of young people; they are ninety-five percent non-political. Although it is a middle-class phenomenon, the young people “don’t like capitalism” and “reject the salary-man life” while favoring personal freedom and an almost hippie lifestyle.⁴³

The grassroots sub-culture seems to draw on Thailand’s rural radical past and music from the 1970s. While many of its followers have their roots in Thailand’s villages and agricultural society, its urban followers have adopted the long hair, casual clothes and disheveled appearance of their poorer citizens or hippies of the past. The men may sport goatees and berets. More so than the ‘indie’ youth, they are more political and radical than their university peers.

3.4 Social Activism

It would be a gross exaggeration to state that socially and politically involved students come from only the indie and grassroots youth sub-cultures; however, this observer believes that there is some truth to that characterization while recognizing that mainstream youth are also involved. NGO activist Atthaporn classifies students into three different groups—not by their sub-culture, but by their commitment to activism. The first and most popular group—social activists—is those who are willing to be a volunteer to help people with urgent problems like the tsunami, landslides and floods. The second group, that is growing smaller, is both willing to help with these urgent problems and protest against social and political problems. The third group, which is rare, expands their ideas into solving social issues, analyzing problems, and persuading their friends to participate with them. The third group can be further subdivided into those seeking public recognition and those who have no interest in being famous or well-known. For the purposes of this thesis, the second and third group are characterized as political activists.

⁴³ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

Young people's apathy toward politics does not necessarily carry over into social issues and many students are engaged in some type of volunteering. The tragedy and trauma of the December 16, 2004 tsunami propelled many young people to participate in some kind of activity as NGOs and government agencies sought volunteers to build houses and help villagers recover from the devastation. Some observers saw the response by a huge number of university students as a revival of Thailand's volunteer spirit. Atthaporn was skeptical that it would last. He agreed with Simpkin's rather harsh characterization that most volunteers are interested in pursuing more lucrative careers and engage in NGO activities to enhance their resumes, especially those in the first group mentioned earlier.

However, social activism is the first step of the path toward an involvement in political activism for many students—a process that was true for the October Generation and today's youth, although more so for the former. It was through that work that they experienced social injustice and were motivated to press for political changes in Thai society.

Chakrapong's political activism began with members in the Study of Slums ("Suksa Phanha Langsuam Som") club during his first year at Ramkhamhaeng University in 2001. The club worked with slum-dwellers and the rural poor, primarily to develop students' understanding of their problems. They used to provide volunteer teachers, but that activity was replaced with efforts in support of NGOs that help the poor obtain title to property.

Network of Concerned University Students member Ratchaneekorn Thongthip's involvement in the student movement began with her association with university clubs focused on culture and society. In 1999, she served as vice-president of the Northeastern Arts and Culture Club that focused on Isan culture—Thai dance and musical instruments—and joined a camp to prepare high school students for their university entrance examinations. In 2001, she served as president of The Southern Club that had a similar focus on southern Thailand. It was through these clubs that Ratchaneekorn enjoyed discussions,

developed her critical thinking skills and had an opportunity to see “what the situation is like—the inequality” in Thailand.⁴⁴

One of the SFT’s newly-elected leaders, Kittisak Sujittarom, said his political influence came from his participation in student clubs where he witnessed the exploitation of poor people at the hands of people in government.⁴⁵ He also served as a photographer for the clubs. As a result he wanted to change society for the better. His friends urged him to join the *Chom Rom Mahawhitaylai Chow Baan* (that he translated as the “Creative Youth Club”) that promoted volunteer camping activities while encouraging creativity and taught members to know themselves, leading to an involvement in politics.

Another SFT co-leader, Nithiwat Wannasiri said he witnessed people in his rural area [of Ayutthaya province] taking advantage of poor people, which motivated his involvement.⁴⁶ Two years ago he joined the People Club that was involved in studying rural communities and helping to solve their problems.

Young People for Democracy’s (YPD) Metha Martkhao lived in Yasotorn province during his high school years where he participated in social development and nature conservation activities, as well as a more politically-oriented volunteer camp in rural communities. At Ramkhamhaeng University he joined the Students for Peace club that participated in natural resource conservation issues and volunteer camping.⁴⁷

Anti-coup activist Uchaen Chiangsaen joined a volunteer camp while he was studying at King Mongkut Institute of Technology (KMIT)-North Bangkok; through that experience he educated himself and helped mobilize villagers, but

⁴⁴ Interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

⁴⁵ Interview with Kittisak Sujittarom, December 4, 2006

⁴⁶ Interview with Nithiwat Wannasiri, December 4, 2006

⁴⁷ Interview with Metha Martkhao, December 6, 2006

after one year he realized that they were not solving problems so his interest turned to politics.⁴⁸

There are numerous NGOs and university clubs that involve students in social activism. One such NGO is the Thai Volunteer Service (TVS) that facilitates student participation in volunteer activity. It was founded in 1980 by Senator Jon Ungpakorn to inspire intellectuals and activists to concentrate on social work, following the model of Graduate Volunteer Center—Thailand's first NGO established in 1969 by his father Puey Ungpakorn. The main project at TVS is recruiting university graduates to become NGO staff. They set up programs at universities throughout Thailand. Students have the right to choose the activities in which they participate. Staff member Atthaporn said he starts by making the students understand the problems with either an informal discussion after reading a book or watching a film, or a more structured orientation. Then he offers the students the opportunity to participate in a volunteer activity—perhaps only one day, five or seven days, or half a month. He creates “the space for students to learn and become aware of social problems, so they can continue working on their own, come back and help people.” Atthaporn “agrees that if students see the problems they will want to change society.”⁴⁹

Another NGO that works with students is the Mirror Foundation, directed by Sombat. The foundation, founded in 1992, has sixty full-time staff operating in offices in four cities. Their Chiang Mai office works with hill-tribes people on citizenship issues and rural development; their Phang Nga office works with tsunami survivors; in Uttaradit, they provide relief to landslide victims; and in Bangkok they work on multiple issues including anti-trafficking and media reform. They hire one hundred student interns and many other students volunteer for their disaster-relief projects.

In response to the question about how to encourage young people to be more politically active, *A Day's Zongklod* relayed the experience of two Thammasat students from the Faculty of Economics who created the Youth Innovation Year (YIY) project with a grant from the World Bank. *A Day* featured an interview with them in

⁴⁸ Interview with Uchaen Chiangsaen, December 6, 2006

⁴⁹ Interview with Atthaporn Khammano, July 3, 2006

2004. The two conducted a poll at Siam Square that showed that eighty percent of young people wanted “to do a good thing but don’t like the old-style NGO.”⁵⁰ Instead they created a ‘cool’ project that wasn’t boring like the NGO style. Seniors, they said, who want students to do good things, must speak their language.

YIY’s Kritaya Sreesunpagit found Thammasat University vibrant, with many activities and seminars; however, it was also “quite traditional” with emphasis on rural development camps.⁵¹ There were not many new innovations in the realm of social and political activism. She found that many students wanted to start new programs and be adventurous, but they didn’t pursue their ideas. Her goal, therefore, was to channel young people’s enthusiasm for social change. While in her senior year at Thammasat, she created her first project: Thai Rural Net that was an ICT (information and communication technology) program for rural development, working with the Thai 4-H clubs, based upon the concept of providing IT (information technology) support to farmers to assist them in the businesses. She posted announcements over a one-week period on the Internet and on-campus to recruit volunteers. Kritaya received an “amazing” response from four hundred students. However, at their first meeting she found that they had four hundred different ideas, creating a situation she described as “chaotic.” YIY grew out of that experience. When they decided to make it more than a one-year project, they changed the name to “Why, I Why”.

Now in its third year, YIY has sponsored many projects with the aim of creating future ‘young social entrepreneurs’. One of the newest groups YIY sponsors is the Kon Hin Group, consisting of about thirty Buddhist and Muslim students in southern Thailand that is behind the Folktale Preservation for Youth and Society Project that encourages the collection and writing of folktales with peaceful messages.

Each year YIY sponsors a reunion camp. Initially Kritaya and the organization tried to establish a location and agenda; however, the students involved were “strong-minded” and had their own thoughts. Now, she lets them decide the location and

⁵⁰ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

⁵¹ Interview with Kritaya Sreesunpagit, December 20, 2006

agenda. She is most pleased that the students “shift around” between different workshops, so that an organization focused on morality or corruption might sign up for a workshop on violence in southern Thailand (these three topics are the most popular). The students, most recently including thirty two groups, are “exposed to each other.”⁵²

Kritaya’s first political involvement was with an organization called Students Loving Democracy at Thammasat University, including “totally new faces” that responded to a sign up sheet. It has since grown huge. YIY has also organized forums for its student participants to talk and invited speakers involved in political issues, including Suriyasai Katasila who talked about the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD). She is also in touch with Pleethum Triyakasem from Rangkids. Many of her father’s friends, involved in the Social Business Environment, are also politically active. Kritaya “got to know them” and made helpful connections.⁵³

However, most YIY participants are not politically active. They are more attracted to social issues because they see lots of people already involved in politics and don’t really see a difference between social and political issues, except that they see politics as “very narrow.” If they are not interested in politics, they “don’t have a place to go”; therefore, they gravitate to social concerns. However, “these kids would also go to political events like the PAD rallies.” YIY has sponsored some quasi-political projects including the ECHO journal, now in its fourth year, by economics majors who want to reach “normal” people to aid them in understanding economics and politics.⁵⁴ Also, *QuestionMark* magazine has received support from YIY.

For the most part, “what we get” are students that identify with the ‘indie’ subculture, a few that identify with the artist/hippie/intellectual subculture; however, Kritaya doesn’t really see grassroots rural students.⁵⁵ Her challenge, Kritaya says, is to reach more students that identify with the mainstream/pop subculture.

⁵² Interview with Kritaya Sreesunpagit, December 20, 2006.

⁵³ Interview with Kritaya Sreesunpagit, December 20, 2006.

⁵⁴ Interview with Kritaya Sreesunpagit, December 20, 2006.

⁵⁵ Interview with Kritaya Sreesunpagit, December 20, 2006.

Giles Ungpakorn, a Marxist professor in Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science, said many Thai students were activists in the realm of gay and lesbian issues, people living with HIV-Aids and sex-worker rights—issues for which Thailand has a very mixed record. Despite the openness with which many Thais express their sexual preferences, there are many examples of regressive attitudes; for example, in December 1996 the Rajabhat Institute Council publicly prohibited homosexuals from enrolling at its teachers colleges. When students from Chulalongkorn's Mass Communication Arts Faculty tried to organize a gay and lesbian film festival, the police prevented them.

In response to that discrimination, many young people have engaged in social activism on behalf of Thailand's marginalized citizens and gay and lesbian issues. In December 2001, student organizations joined more than one thousand people living with HIV/AIDS in a march to draw attention to the issue of caring for HIV-positive people and to urge society to respect their rights and needs. In addition, several of the youth social entrepreneurs sponsored by YIY established programs for gay education in Aids prevention, self-expression and self-esteem building activities for children with HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS prevention utilizing songs, and the educational "Let Them Know" TV program about children with HIV/AIDS. Among the groups disseminating information at the November 2005 People's AIDS Forum was the Youth Network on AIDS that promoted condom use under a 'sex with responsibility' campaign.

At a December 2001 Chulalongkorn University "Chula & Society" forum, a group of students—including those from upcountry, disabled, environmental activists, women, gay and lesbians—talked about student diversity and voiced their concern that their university had paid insufficient attention to the diversity of the student body. One student stated, "In the modern world, where we cannot deny that gays and lesbians are also part of the whole population of the campus, we all may have to re-examine how open-minded we are."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ TN, December 3, 2001

One battle for gay and lesbian students has been finding an advisor to supervisor their master's theses on the topic of gays and lesbians. In 2003, Tertsak Romjumba became the first Chulalongkorn University MA student to overcome that challenge. Since then, several more students, primarily at Thammasat and Chiang Mai University, have also written their thesis on gay and lesbian issues. Academic Peter Jackson said, "I've been noticing a younger generation of Thai scholars enrolled in women's studies programs but doing queer research."⁵⁷ Since then, the academic world in general seems more open to transgendered and gay students and, in July 2005, hosted the first ever "International Conference of Asian Queer Studies". Also evidencing progress in their attitudes was Rajabhat Suan Dusit University that sponsored a beauty pageant for its transgendered students in August 2005.

There are as many, if not more, NGOs involved in environmental activism; often those students find a path from their environmental concerns to political activism. Zcongklod was president of the Environmental Conservation Club at Chulalongkorn University, which networked with other clubs at various universities. At that time, environmentalists were characterized as 'red' or 'green' depending upon whether they were active with 'mob' activities or focused on the environment in a social context, dedicated to raising awareness and 'camp' programs in the forest and rural villages.

3.5 Youth Values and Influences

In contrast to the negative stereotype of Thai youth as immoral, the opposite was true of the student activists I interviewed. I found them to be less attached to political philosophy, theory and dogma and largely inspired by their social values—primarily a high regard for morality and human rights. Despite its 'social' rather than 'political' nature, it motivated their political as well as social activism.

⁵⁷ TD, July 12, 2005

Thak said that while today's students are inspired by the ideals of 'morality', the vagueness of that concept makes its defense difficult. Pipob, however, had a more positive assessment of today's youth than many observers. He credited them with their concerns for morality (especially as it related to Thaksin's lack thereof), inequality, and the small details of the current political scene. Today's youth, Pipob believes, have a different, more positive attitude toward non-violence in contrast to that of the October Generation thirty years earlier.

While social activists are mostly focused on the value of morality, political activists share that focus with their concern for human rights and justice. In a survey of a small sample of political activists, "human rights" was rated as the most important "political, social and religious value", along with "ending corruption" (tied for first place), "environmentalism" (second place), "morality" (third place), and "free media" and "justice" (tied for fourth place). That was true for Thammasat University Student Union (TUSU) president Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai who said his most important political value is for human rights—that Thailand needs—and believes the law can help improve many aspects of society.⁵⁸ Papan likes the prachathai.com website's focus on human rights and said his experience at the website opened his awareness of the problems of injustice and human rights in Thailand. Papan's interest in human rights originated in his anthropology studies at Silpakorn University, where his study of culture helped him see people as different from one another. He considers the need to understand those differences as a human rights issue. He also has strong feelings against social injustice. SFT secretary-general Kotchawan Chaiyabutr cited 'human justice' as her practical inclination, rather than any ideology, that affected her,⁵⁹ while Network for Concerned University Students' Ratchaneekorn cited 'justice' as her primary concern.

Despite the generalization that today's youth are disrespectful of their parents, the student activists I interviewed had a strong and positive relationship with theirs. In the abovementioned survey, student activists listed "parents and family" as having the greatest influence on their values. In many cases, it was their parents' experiences—

⁵⁸ Interview with Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai, June 8, 2006

⁵⁹ Interview with Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, April 28, 2006

either as student activists themselves or through their civic involvement—that influenced their political values and motivated their political activism.

Kotchawan told me her father's story: A student activist during the events of October 1976, he later became a government official in Chaiyaphum province. Her earliest political memories were rooted in the election her father lost because his opponent allegedly cheated and bribed election officials—an incident that fostered her strong hatred of injustice and continues to drive her political activism.

Thanachai described strong impressions of his father's interest in politics and their frequent discussions, although he was allowed the freedom to have his own opinions.

People Coalition Party (PCP) member Pokpong Lawansiri got “a lot of ideas from my parents”, both of whom were student activists in the early 1970s at Thammasat University before the events of October 1973. They taught him that he “should be dedicated to people” less fortunate than those of his privileged middle class background.⁶⁰

Students for Democracy leader Yos Tansakul spoke a lot about his father who had been a student activist in 1973 while attending Ramkhamhaeng University, taking injured students to the hospital during the ensuing violence. Yos remembers his father taking him to see the destruction in the wake of the Black May events in 1992 when he was very young, to “make me interested” and sharing the thought that such events would never happen again in Thailand.⁶¹ His father also often discussed democracy and politics with Yos and was likely the primary factor in shaping his interest. His father was also involved in the democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong, on the anniversary of the Chinese government's suppression of the student movement at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

⁶⁰ Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

⁶¹ Interview with Yos Tansakul, June 20, 2006

Chakgrapong's father is involved in local politics as a member of the local tambon administration and was involved in protesting against the corrupt tambon leader; his father was committed to working for the benefit of local society and welfare work. Chakgrapong and his father never talked about politics, and his father never pushed him to get involved in politics, but his father stands as a model for his political activism.

Papan credits his father—a government official and agriculture teacher at the local college who was never corrupt and very straightforward—as a strong positive influence on his beliefs. Although his father's strong stance slowed his promotions, this was not a big problem for Papan's father because he was pleased with his status.

Nithiwat said his teacher-parents set a good example for him, thus encouraging him to become socially active. Ratchaneekorn credits her parents' role in "cultivating her to become" concerned about people, to help them and not to take advantage of others.⁶²

At home, Pleethum Triyakasem's parents talked politics all the time and shared the importance of doing "something for others, something for people."⁶³

Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization (RUSO) president Somchot Meechana also comes from a political family. His father—who died when he was six years old—was a former village chief. His grandfather—a former chief of the tambon—was his inspiration, as he was dedicated to villagers but saw politicians take advantage of grassroots people.⁶⁴

Metha's parents were farmers who supported the students and communist insurgents in the jungle after the October 6, 1976 tragedy. This family story made a strong impression on him, leading to deep political involvement.

⁶² Interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

⁶³ Interview with Pleethum Triyakasem, June 27, 2006

⁶⁴ Interview with Somchot Meechana, July 17, 2006

Pisut's father participated in the events of October 1976 when he and a group of friends walked from Nakhon Pathom to the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. They walked home again one day before the October 6 massacre. As a 'senior' and student leader at a local university⁶⁵, his father was responsible for distributing food to others. Pisut learned of these stories as his father told them to his friends rather than directly, father to son. His father was obviously proud of his participation, and Pisut likewise admired his father.

Many student activists related that their parents were worried about their involvement with the "mob". Student activist Bakarín Tuansiri did not tell his parents about his activities because he didn't "want to worry them".⁶⁶ However, they found out when his work became more public. He explained that "helping other people is good, as they taught him". They understood, although "at first, [they] did not want him involved because it was dangerous." While student activists didn't necessarily agree with their parents on political issues, they were free to argue with them but described those arguments as respectful rather than angry.

In the abovementioned survey, student activists listed "professors and university" as the second-most important influence on their values. When asked to rate their impression of "student activists from the past", Thammasat University professors Kasian Tejapira, Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, Thirayuth Boonmi and Seksan Prasertkul and University of Wisconsin professor Thongchai Winichakul were ranked among the top six persons. Only social critic Sulak Sivaraksa shared the top billing with the professors.

Thanachai credits his professors at Thammasat for bringing political topics to the students to discuss and debate, while maintaining an openness to—and not judging—the students' points of view without imposing their own.

⁶⁵ My notes indicate Rajabhad University, but by 1976 it had been renamed Nakhon Pathom Teacher Training School. I remain unsure of the correct name of the institution.

⁶⁶ Interview with Bakarín Tuansiri, July 6, 2006

Pokpong's most influential teacher was a US history teacher he encountered while an exchange student in Parker, Colorado. He "made us think" and exposed him to critical thinking, in contrast to his Thai teachers.⁶⁷

Ratchaneekorn credits one professor in exposing her to a new way of thinking. In 2000, Associate Professor Amornvich Nakornrap from the Faculty of Education influenced her to change her opinion about how to look at and solve social problems. He assigned her to do research on education and society in Songkhla province. Ratchaneekorn did research and talked with the local people, and began to feel the conflict between the national interests and local interests—and began to believe that "local people should have rights to protect local interests as well."⁶⁸

Uchaen said he was encouraged by a great teacher to discuss political ideas.⁶⁹

Bakarin's professors greatly influenced him and he became quite "close to many." Naturally, they "were concerned about him" because of his work in southern Thailand among victims of government persecution.⁷⁰

It was equally true that many students said that their professors did not play a significant role in their political thinking. Chakrapong said his professors and classes at Ramkhamhaeng had no effect on his beliefs.

In the abovementioned survey, student activists listed various forms of media—newspapers, books, television, magazines and music—as the third-most important influence on their values. The world has moved into the "information age" and Thailand is no exception—the volume, velocity and variety of information and media in the lives of young people have created a virtual tsunami engulfing society.

⁶⁷ Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

⁶⁸ Interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

⁶⁹ Interview with Uchaen Chiangsaen, December 6, 2006

⁷⁰ Interview with Bakarin Tuansiri, July 6, 2006

Duncan McCargo, author of *Politics and the Press in Thailand* based upon his 1995 research, criticized the Thai press at that time as unprofessional, unreliable and “deeply untrustworthy.”⁷¹ In a 2006 presentation before the Foreign Correspondent’s Club, he said the Thai press “was a shadow of its former self.” This negative analysis was shared by Pisut who bemoaned the poor quality of Thai newspapers, with their sensationalism and lack of news content. He related a discussion he had with *Phoojadkarn Daily* editor Sondhi Limthongkul in New York City in October 2006, about how Sondhi differentiated between what the readers ‘want’ to read as different than what he thought they ‘need’ to read. If he published the latter without including the former, Sondhi thought he would lose his readership. Despite their shortcomings, the newspapers that were popular among student activists were *Matichon*, the *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, *Post Today*, *Krungtheep Thurakit*, *Thai Rath*, *Thai Post*, *Daily News* and *Phoojadkarn Daily*.

Among magazines, *Fah Diow Kan*, *A Day*, *QuestionMark* and *Liow Sai* were student activists’ favorite choices. In addition, Pokpong mentioned the Thammasat student magazine, *Watchaput* (“Pesticide”), while Chakrapong mentioned *Matichon Weekly*.

Thailand’s best-known left-wing magazine of critical political and social content is *Fah Diow Kan* (Under the Same Sky), a quarterly edited by Thanaphol Eiwsakul, a graduate from Thammasat University’s Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology. In early 2003, when Thanaphol was thirty years old, he launched the magazine as an alternative source of information, citing the restrictions imposed by advertising and self-censorship on mass media, saying, “My magazine was created as a small voice. We aren’t saying the mass media are bad [for their inaction]. We just want to fill the gap.”⁷²

Among the magazine’s articles was an April 2004 interview with leftist Cornell University Professor Benedict Anderson and an investigative report on the violence in the deep South, particularly the April 28 Krue Se massacre. In December

⁷¹ Duncan McCargo, *Politics and Press in Thailand*, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000), p. 252

⁷² TN, December 19, 2004

2004, the magazine included a VCD on the Tak Bai incident as an insert despite government threats, explaining, "We just think it's the duty of the media not to stand idly by. We asked ourselves what we could do after reading people's comments that they [the Tak Bai protesters] deserved to die. As a media outlet, we cannot ignore the incidents, pretend they never took place. But deciding how to define coverage is another matter. But I care about the duty of the media and the public's right to know."⁷³ That issue was banned as was its October/December, 2005 issue for including articles touching on the Thai monarchy written by Sulak, Thongchai and Kasian, among others. Uchaen works on the editorial team of *Fah Diow Kan*. He said the magazine regularly sells out the five thousand copies it publishes and, for special issues, it sells out seven thousand copies within a year's time.

Thanaphol is also a political and social activist. In October 2005, he initiated an online petition opposing the closure of the BBC Thai Service that was an alternative media outlet at a time when Thailand was facing a crisis of media suppression. And, in the aftermath of the September 19, 2006 coup d'etat, Thanaphol was one of the first and most prominent voices opposing the military government.

A Day magazine, founded and edited by Wongtanong Chainarongsingh, is one of the few 'alternative' magazines that has survived over the past several years. In the past, alternative magazines were 'hand-made' in contrast to this more professional yet not glossy monthly. The magazine states that it has a readership, primarily in the Bangkok metropolitan area, of approximately one hundred thousand based upon a sale of thirty thousand copies per issue times 3.3 readers per issue. Its theme is positive thinking, while featuring articles and columns on entertainment, social activities including NGOs, reading and writing, sports and travel, family and home activities, art and culture, and self-improvement.

Zcongklod, the magazine's editor, handles political issues very gingerly. The magazine's goal is to "communicate with young people" and inform them about more than pop culture. *A Day* exposes them to the 'indie' subculture but doesn't, for example, "say soap operas are bad" when it introduces them to independent films as

⁷³ TN, December 19, 2004

an alternative choice. They sometimes write about things “the mainstream media didn’t tell you”, especially as it relates to the problems in the South. They also concentrate on NGO people and their jobs to “guide youngsters [to see that] life is so various” with many successful people in good non-traditional jobs.⁷⁴

Zcongklod had his first political involvement when he met Senator Sophon Supamong in Pattani. There he learned the truth about the problems in the South, most of which were caused by Thaksin. He decided to interview the senator and, in December 2005, ran a twelve-page spread about him, for which he received “good feedback” from the magazine’s readership. In February 2006, *A Day* presented an interview with ten students from Thammasat University behind the impeachment petition. Zcongklod liked that new choice—the legal way—and said it was a “smart choice for our society.”⁷⁵

Since then, there hasn’t been much political content in *A Day*. Zcongklod and the ownership “don’t like the PM [but] don’t believe in the way of Sondhi”, and have chosen to “stay in the middle.” Recently, the political issues are “so hot” that every newspaper, every magazine—even sport magazines—offer many opinions, some of which are not information based, leading their readers the wrong way. Regarding politics, Zcongklod thinks the “newspapers can do their jobs” which is clearly not the job of *A Day*. On the other hand, he said they plan a ‘political’ issue in October 2006, presenting about ten Songs for Life icons from each generation. However, “if we talk directly about politics my readers don’t want to read it.”⁷⁶

His company did have a political venture called *A Day Weekly* that was “more fresh” and presented “hard topics in a smooth way.” It had a beautiful layout and cover, and good interviews every week. However, it was not successful as a business, losing his company approximately ten million baht in its one year of operation. In Zcongklod’s opinion it was “too strange for society” while competing with *Matichon Weekly* and *Nation Weekly*.⁷⁷ Ultimately, there was a falling out between the editor

⁷⁴ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

⁷⁵ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

⁷⁶ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

⁷⁷ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

and owner, and the magazine ceased publication in late 2004 or early 2005. The team formerly associated with *A Day Weekly* recently formed a new magazine, *Way*.

A Day doesn't fit neatly into any category. It's not a fashion magazine, not a men's magazine, not a sport magazine. Zcongklod likes to describe its philosophy as 'thinking out of the box', although 'indie', 'non-mainstream' or 'alternative' also describe its style. Its presentation clearly tries to create a bridge between the mainstream 'pop' culture and 'indie' subculture—preferably a one-way bridge expanding the world of young people, but without “ever telling them ‘you have to...’.”⁷⁸ As a unique magazine, it doesn't really have any competition.

Several student activists cited *A Day's* style when they discussed ideas for politicizing today's youth. Bakarín said it was important to make politics appeal to *dek naew* through music, entertainment and dance, to “learn what they live and blend politics into it.”⁷⁹

The goal of *QuestionMark* magazine was to reach out to teenagers who are not involved in political and social activities and influence them to become interested. Most articles from other sources about political subjects are presented in unattractive brochures or in the style of *Turn Left* magazine that is strongly political. The magazine was initially funded by an anonymous former student activist (former SFT member) and had a staff of eight. Its first issue of one thousand copies sold out—Passakorn attributes that initial success to curiosity; the second issue also sold out because it featured the handsome son of former student activists Chiranan and Seksan on the cover. However, the third and fourth issues sold only half of their one thousand copies, primarily to student activists. Passakorn believes the drop off resulted from the 'heavy' political content that has limited appeal. At that point—they had already run short of funds—*QuestionMark* received additional funding from the YIY project and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, and tried to broaden its appeal—adding interviews, caricatures, articles about movies and music, and other features—and make it more accessible to university students. They increased staff (although they have one hundred registered team 'members', about twenty regularly attend the

⁷⁸ Interview with Zcongklod Bangyikhan, July 7, 2006

⁷⁹ Interview with Bakarín Tuansiri, July 6, 2006

weekly meetings in addition to some columnists familiar with the magazine's style and intent who do not attend) and increased their publication to three thousand issues. They are still selling about half their published copies, but now three-fold more than their third and fourth issues. Passakorn has tried to adopt the style of columnists from *A Day* magazine—addressing political issues less directly—to persuade more students to read it. Passakorn believes that every youth sub-culture wants to see society improve and aims to focus on both mainstream and 'indie' groups in the future, but it takes time for the activist students to adapt to the mainstream and 'indie' groups.

The fifth edition, the first under their increased funding, featured the headline "What are you looking for in the university?" and addressed the issue of *rap nong* and included an opinion piece opposing the ban. The magazine sent a representative to the Thammasat meeting (described later), but he did not attend. Although the magazine is intended as a bi-monthly, it is occasionally three months between issues. The seventh issue was delayed by Passakorn's involvement with the student 'mob' during the anti-Thaksin campaign.

Student members of the PCP publish the *Liow Sai* (Left Turn) monthly magazine. It is sold at rallies for fifteen baht per issue. *QuestionMark's* editor Passakorn characterized the magazine as "strongly political" and suggested that it is not well received by Thai students.⁸⁰

Among Internet sites, www.pantip.com, www.manager.com and www.pratchathai.com were the three most favored sites for student activists. In addition, Thanachai said he frequents the Matichon website, while Passakorn accesses the Midnight University website and www.thaingo.org. In addition, many young Thai write and/or read weblogs—personal opinions posted online on various subjects including entertainment, technology, travel, education and news.⁸¹ Two examples of politically-oriented weblogs are <http://whiteheart.exteen.com> written by Nun, a female freshman high school student, and <http://taocyber.exteen.com> written by Tao, a fifteen year old male student.

⁸⁰ Interview with Passakorn Chorphaka, June 23, 2006

⁸¹ According to a Microsoft survey, Thailand has 8.4 million surfers, of whom 1.76 million are bloggers, most of whom are women and under twenty-five years old. [TN, February 25, 2007]

A very superficial analysis of these sites, based upon translated texts over a short period of time, reveals a political bias associated with each website. The Rajadamnoern Forum on the pantip.com site most often included comments supportive of Prime Minister Thaksin and critical of student activists involved in the anti-Thaksin movement. In contrast, the most successful and frequently accessed web site among student activists and Thaksin critics was manager.com, owned by Sondhi. Not only did it disseminate news critical of the government that was not available in the mainstream media, it provided a web board for political discussion and engineered anti-government rallies and demonstrations. The comments were generally supportive of the anti-Thaksin student movement.

Prachathai.com website is the most professional Internet news site in Thailand, staffed by ten employees including one based in Southern Thailand and one in the north. Senator Jon is the founder and currently a member of the board. The website carries no advertising and is supported by Thai Health Promotion Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. Its readership is approximately two thousand per day, consisting mostly of academics, some politicians and NGO figures. Its serious content is considered “too heavy” for the younger generation. The website includes a web-board for reader comments. Papan said most writers disagree with his ideas and support Thaksin’s approach in dealing with the issues in the South.

In addition to these more well-known sites, several student activist groups have their own web sites, including Rangkids (www.rangkid.com), a site run by Thammasat University student volunteers (www.tuthaprajan.org), a site run by an NGO-student network (www.tonkla.org), a site established by anti-Thaksin people from the Rajadamnoern Forum (www.serithaiwebboard.org/forum), (www.dekd.com) and (www.fridaycollege.org).

In Thailand, as in most other countries, the Internet is the free media most used by political activists and, therefore, is seen as a threat by the government. In November 2005, the Thaksin government kicked off its “Cyberclean” campaign to monitor the content of websites based in Thailand, requiring website operators to publish only ‘accurate and appropriate information’ or have their sites shut down.

Although the effort highlighted concerns over pornography, content that damages the national security was also targeted. By the end of the month, the government announced that there were almost two thousand sites on its prohibited list including some that were offensive to the monarchy or politically sensitive. According to the Southeast Asian Press Alliance, the Thaksin government extended its censorship to news sites as a part of its broader efforts to rein in the media.

Ramkhamhaeng professor, and dean of the political science faculty, Wuthisak Lapcharoensap said today's students "don't read now" compared to his generation that "read more."⁸² Thak agreed, while recognizing they "take in information differently."⁸³ A survey of Thai youth conducted in early 2006 revealed that talking on the phone and surfing the Internet were more popular than reading.⁸⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that few students activists mentioned books or writers that had significantly impacted their thinking. Among the writers mentioned were Karl Marx, Chit Poumisak—both inspirations to the October Generation—and SEAWrite award winners Kanokpong Songsomphan and Binla Sangalakhiri

Television in Thailand, like most of the world, is dominated by soap operas, game shows, reality shows, celebrity showcases and scant programming that contributes to the nation's intellectual, social or political benefit. Television news is dominated by government ownership, and programs that offer thoughtful consideration of political issues often have a short shelf life. While there are examples of socially stimulating shows—*Khob Nok Kala* (Out of the Box), *Lhum Dum* (Black Hole) and *Khon, Khon, Khon* (Exploring Life) from Modernine TV have received critical acclaim—they are few and far between. Only one student activist cited television as a source of political influence: Yos said he received ninety percent of his news information from the television, watching and comparing both government stations and *The Nation's* program. A March 2007 poll revealed that television is the favorite news medium for ninety eight percent of Bangkok residents between the ages

⁸² Interview with Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, July 12, 2006

⁸³ Interview with Thak Chalontiarana, October 18, 2006

⁸⁴ TN, July 7, 2006, reporting on an ABAC survey of 4920 youth between the ages 12 and 23, conducted in February and March 2006.

of eighteen and sixty, although more than half said they read the newspapers regularly, primarily for its local political news.⁸⁵

Among the music that influenced student activists, Pokpong talked about the music and writing of the band Nga Caravan that was “inspiring to me.”⁸⁶ As a band of Ramkhamhaeng University students from Isan, they sang protest songs against U.S. bases and toured the entire country in the 1970s, serving as the most influential music group to the October Generation as well. They joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and continue to support grassroots groups today. Other students listened to a wide variety of music, especially ‘indie’ music, but did not suggest that it was influential in any way.

In the abovementioned survey, student activists listed “peers” as the fourth-most important influence on their values. Based upon the in-depth interviews with student activists, it seemed their peers were less an influence and more a support-system for their already established values and ideas.

Kotchawan described her first SFT meeting where students discussed the political situation, society and the elections. There she “found a new home where she could freely express her opinions.”⁸⁷ Another SFT member interviewed at Sanam Luang during an anti-Thaksin rally commented that he gets along with others in the SFT and described it as a “good place” to do “something for society.”⁸⁸

Pokpong was unable to discuss politics with his peers until his fourth year at Thammasat. During that final year and since he began work with FORUM-ASIA he has found a group with whom he can freely exchange ideas.

Passakorn was one of the few student activists who described his friends as influencing his political involvement, although it seems those he met were

⁸⁵ BP, March 5, 2007, referring to an ABAC poll.

⁸⁶ Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

⁸⁷ Interview with Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, April 28, 2006

⁸⁸ Interview at Somrak, March 9, 2006

similarly inclined rather than changing him. During his first year at Chulalongkorn University he attended an anti-SOTUS—standing for Seniority, Order, Tradition, Unity and Spirit—forum/discussion organized by the Worker’s Democracy Group (*Prachatipathai Rang-ngan*) led by Giles. There he met a new group of friends from the PCP who shared his interests. He did credit the influence of his new friends at Chulalongkorn as contributing to his political interest.

Ratchaneekorn credits her fellow students in the clubs with whom she shared similar interests. Many of those friends are members of the PCP but, although she is positive about their party, she thinks they are too strong, too intense.

Members of Chulalongkorn University’s Social Criticism Student Club said their education experience seems to have reinforced their thinking and values, as they have gravitated toward professors and fellow students who are the “same kind of people” who “make us become more strengthful”. For their political news, they “take all sources” and think and exchange information, views and ideas with their friends.⁸⁹

In the abovementioned survey, student activists listed “religion” as the fifth-most important influence on their values. The strong value of morality among Thai youth, generally speaking, is not strongly influenced by their Buddhist beliefs. In response to this observation, Phra Paisal said the situation is “more or less the same” as it was during the 1970s. Today, he said, the dynamism of Buddhism is contributed by the lay community, perhaps explaining why today’s students are “less negative” in their attitudes toward Buddhism than were their peers thirty years ago.⁹⁰ Pipob saw youth’s interest in Buddhism as concerned with their own minds and soul, rather than its philosophy and teachings. Atthaporn said that, for Buddhist students, their religion was less important to them “because Marxism is better at explaining problems and how to create equality in society.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Interview with members of Chulalongkorn University’s Social Criticism Student Club, March 13, 2006

⁹⁰ Telephone interview with Phra Paisal Visalo, July 6, 2006

⁹¹ Interview with Atthaporn Khammano, July 3, 2006

Members of Chulalongkorn University's Social Criticism Student Club said they respected Buddha's teachings, such as "don't harm others", but said they were Buddhist "in ID card only."⁹² Similarly, Pokpong considered himself a Buddhist in name only, although he occasionally attends temple. He believed in the Marxist maxim that 'religion is the opiate of the people' and criticized Buddhist teaching that encourages the lower classes to accept things as they are. Thanachai identified himself as a Buddhist and said that it teaches logic and reasonableness—which are in harmony with the principles of democracy. Chakrapong said Buddhism does not bear much influence on his thinking and he believes the religion should be separate from politics. Several students said they take good philosophical ideas from all religions although they were typically Buddhist by birth. Ratchaneekorn said that although Buddhism is not important in her life, she loves to go to the temple because it's a peaceful place.

The generally weak relationship between religion and social and political activism among Thai Buddhists was not true among Thai Muslims. Atthaporn said that Muslim students were strongly influenced by their religion to be politically and socially active because the Islam religion is very practical and "precise on how to construct society in an equal way."⁹³ Bakarín said he thought "Islamic economics is best, between capitalism and socialism," including the concept of sufficiency economy practiced by rural people.⁹⁴ Wuthisak said that today's Muslim students are more politically active than their Buddhist classmates. In commenting on the contrast between Buddhist and Muslim young people, Phra Paisal said Muslims "have confidence in Islam" and "integrate Islam into their daily life, much more than before because of the revival of the Islamic community in Thailand and everywhere."⁹⁵ He noted that even the average person is expected by their community to practice their religious beliefs.

One oft-quoted Muslim student was Nimanase Sama-arlee, chairman of the Muslim Youth Association of Thailand. Although I had no contact with him or his

⁹² Interview with members of Chulalongkorn University's Social Criticism Student Club, March 13, 2006

⁹³ Interview with Atthaporn Khammano, July 3, 2006

⁹⁴ Interview with Barakin Tuansiri, July 6, 2006

⁹⁵ Telephone interview with Phra Paisal Visalo, July 6, 2006

organization and cannot personally vouch for the extent that he and his organization represent Muslim students, Nimanase was outspoken on behalf of Muslims in southern Thailand. In addition, each southern province had a youth organization that was reported to be involved in the social and political problems in that region. Furthermore, Atthaporn identified Prince of Songkhla University's Pattani campus, with its mostly Muslim student body, as the most "receptive" socially and politically active campus in Thailand today.

To much surprise and in great contrast to the experience of the October Generation, most student activists did not easily identify mentors that had influenced their political thought. Most responded that they respected "no one special" or just trusted themselves.

Kotchawan said she believed that leaders weaken people's involvement in the movement. She sees Thai revolutions as always being led by the elite, including the events of 1973 and 1976, for 'grass-roots' people were not in the university at that time. To Kotchawan, people's participation in democracy is more important than leadership. Ratchaneekorn does not have any mentors in her life, but respects "decent people [who] work for people."⁹⁶ She doesn't see a need for any one leader; rather she would like to see a mass force join together at the same level, making it easier to expand ideas.

When pressed to name someone they admired as an inspiration, the most common although reluctant responses were writer Chit Poumisak, former Prime Minister Pridi Bhanomyong and Puey—from Thailand's past—and former student activists Seksan and Thirayuth, labor activist and PAD leader Somsak Kosaisuk and Pipob. In addition, Chakrapong said Tiang Sirikhan, a farmer turned politician who was dedicated to society and was later shot, was an inspiration to his political activism. Yos mentioned two mentors that have impressed him: Zhuge Laing, a peasant-turned-hero fictional character from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and His Majesty the

⁹⁶ Interview with Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, April 28, 2006

King, whom he described as “a genius”.⁹⁷ Chiranan was also rated favorably among current student activists.

In the interviews with student activists, they were queried about their memories of significant events in Thailand’s recent history and whether those events had made a strong impression on the development of their political values and beliefs. By and large, these students were too young to recall Black May 1992, and their schools had not taught them about the ‘people’s movement’ in the 1970s. There were, however, a few exceptions. Uchaen, while not referring to any historical event, had witnessed police and corrupt politicians bullying his family members and neighbors. That injustice made him aware that politics is involved with people’s lifestyles.

Although all the students interviewed were born after the events of 1973 and 1976, Pokpong recalled attending an exhibition at Thammasat University on the twenty-fifth anniversary of October 14, 1973 when he was fifteen years old. There he was exposed to pictures of thousands of students on the street—something he “never saw at school”—and attended a seminar about the student activists.⁹⁸ As a result he began reading about the student movement and leftist political thought. Ratchaneekorn’s father was a student activist in his youth and maintained a collection of historical data from the events of October 1973 that she loved to read when she was young; however, she didn’t know the details of her father’s involvement.

The students interviewed were between five and sixteen years old during the events of Black May in 1992, two of whom attended the demonstrations in Nakhon Si Thammarat on their own: Ratchaneekorn joined the rally that was held outside her junior high school when she was fourteen years old. She listened to the speeches because she wanted to know what was going on. Although her parents were OK that she joined the rally, she had to sneak out of her dormitory because the landlady forbade the students from attending. She remembered that one person burned himself to death in Nakhon Si Thammarat to protest the military takeover. Ratchaneekorn felt bad about the government and didn’t understand why the prime minister would not

⁹⁷ Interview with Yos Tansakul, June 20, 2006

⁹⁸ Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

resign and when the soldiers killed so many people. Uchaen attended the same demonstrations, opposite his vocational school, with many of his friends (at his encouragement) when he was sixteen years old. Pleethum joined the 'mob' in Bangkok with his father, former student activist Phiraphon.

Yos remembered his father taking him to see the destruction in the wake of the Black May events when he was very young, to "make me interested" and sharing the hope that such events would never happen again in Thailand.⁹⁹ Thanachai remembered his father trying to explain the situation when his school, proximate to the activities, was closed down by the "emergency". Papan was eleven years old at that time. He remembered being concerned about his mother who was going to Bangkok at that time; otherwise, he and his friends admired "how the soldiers look smart" in their uniforms, and had a favorable impression of how they "can use power".¹⁰⁰

In the past, Kotchawan said that Thailand had the CPT as an alternative, as a source of anti-government influence; "now we have nothing" she said.¹⁰¹ While it is true that Thailand has nothing like the CPT to promote student activism, many former student activists are eager to support the efforts of young activists. In addition, there are many mainstream networks that play an important if understated role in supporting student participation in social and political activities.

The Thai Health Promotion Foundation was established by the 2001 Health Promotion Foundation Act and funded by collecting two percent of the excise taxes on tobacco and alcohol, totaling about two billion baht per year. Although its charter requires that it focus on programs "to enhance the physical, mental, and social health of Thais" it interprets that charge loosely and acts as a catalyst for a wide range of activities. Although under government control, it has supported many socially-oriented youth programs including the Youth Expo 2006, *QuestionMark* magazine and the progressive Prachathai.com news website.

⁹⁹ Interview with Yos Tansakul, June 20, 2006

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Papan Raksritong, June 22, 2006

¹⁰¹ Interview with Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, April 28, 2006

Passakorn described how his new friends at Chulalongkorn University encouraged him to attend the Young Activists Fair organized by the Faculty of Political Science at Chulalongkorn. It attracted students from many universities including Thammasat, Kasetsart and Chiang Mai University, and the SFT. Part of the discussion addressed students belonging to the 'indie' sub-culture and whether they can make any changes in society. One of the ideas that came out of the discussion was for students to create their own press rather than relying on the mainstream media to help them communicate their ideas, thus leading to the birth of *QuestionMark* magazine.

There were numerous other discussions, seminars and activities organized at the universities. One example was a November 2002 discussion hosted by Chulalongkorn University's Siam Dek Len club of student activists, titled "From the Grassroots to Globalisation: human security from the experiences of Thai youth", that brought together teenagers from throughout Thailand and all walks of life to explore issues of education, democracy, consumerism, morality, and politics.

For three days in mid-December 2006, YIY and seventeen other youth networks joined with the Thai Health Promotion Foundation and the government's Social Development and Human Security Ministry to host the Young Expo 2006, to promote constructive activities for young people and opportunity for them to network with each other. Each youth organization showcased its programs, including the Condom Protection Society, educating HIV/AIDS awareness, the Child Media Network aiming to ban television programs with negative messages for youth, the Inter Tribal Youth Education and Culture Project working to preserve Hmong and Karen hill-tribe culture, the Phrasumen Creator Limited Partnership promoting indie and boy bands, Seeds of Spirituality developing youth leadership programs, and The Gang encouraging creativity. Other groups promoted anti-violence in the southern provinces, anti-alcohol at universities, democracy development among youth and local wisdom preservation. Prime Minister Surayuth Chulanont delivered the closing speech.

3.6 Campus-Centered Activism

In the first few years of the twenty-first century, student activists were primarily engaged in issues that directly related to students. Metha, SFT secretary-general in 2001, said at that time Thaksin was popular, so there were no anti-Thaksin activities.¹⁰² Instead, they had problems closer to home. In November 2002, the SFT condemned the government for forcibly ending a demonstration by more than two hundred KMIT-Thonburi students. They blocked the road outside Government House and demanded the Interior Minister issue them professional engineering licenses. After the police arrested one hundred students and injured others, SFT secretary-general Pongsathorn Sornpetnarin accused the government of overreacting, saying, “The government has failed to solve the problems of students for years and we don’t have any bargaining power and obstructing traffic was the only way to get our message out.”¹⁰³

Beginning in 1994, freshman students at Thammasat University were required to spend their first year at the Rangsit campus rather than its *Tha Phra Chan* campus. Two years later the Thammasat University Council announced a plan to relocate all undergraduate students to the distant campus and educate only graduate students at the more centrally located campus, as part of a plan to convert part of the campus and the Rattanakosin Island area into a cultural tourism area. When the Council began implementing that decision for second-year students in 2001, students and professors protested the university’s decision with demonstrations and sit-ins in June 2001 and February 2002—citing the university’s historical, and very political, relationship with the Rattanakosin Island. Thirayuth characterized the issue as the problem of the “politics of space because Thammasat University was the center of political fighting in Thailand.”¹⁰⁴ As a member of the Thammasat University Student Council during his first year in the university, Pokpong became involved in the opposition to the relocation proposal. Six students sued the university for malfeasance, charging that

¹⁰² Interview with Metha Martkhao, December 6, 2006

¹⁰³ TN, November 28, 2002

¹⁰⁴ Thirayuth Boonmi, “Politics of Space: ‘Rattanakosin Island’ What is Preserved? What is Evicted?”, *Thammasat and the Space of Politics in Thailand 1932-2004*, (Bangkok: Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2005), p. 4

the Rangsit campus was not ready, appealing their case to the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) after the Central Administrative Court rejected their claim. The university prevailed and the Council finalized that decision despite strong opposition; beginning in June 2006, all first-year students were required to complete their undergraduate studies at the Rangsit campus.

One of the first protests involving members of the Chulalongkorn University's Social Criticism Student Club and PCP was a protest against the SOTUS system in Thailand's universities, especially its old and conservative institutions such as Chulalongkorn and Kasetsart. Pokpong compared the system to 'pledging' a fraternity or sorority at an American university, except that it is not voluntary. Thai freshmen were ordered to *wai* senior students and participate in *rap nong* activities, including cheering rites as well as humiliating and abusive pranks under the threat of ostracism. The system was sometimes supported by the universities during military dictatorships "to keep students in line and in order." Pokpong said the student protesters "would hand out leaflets and use acts of civil disobedience such as walk into the session where SOTUS [was] happening and speak to the freshmen that they should not let their senior students force them to do things they do not want to."¹⁰⁵

Several *rap nong* activities led to bad results. A Rajabhat Institute Suan Dusit student drowned while trying to fulfill a dare to swim fully clothed off a Rayong beach, while many activities involved sexual pranks and abuse, and newspapers published photographs of female freshman students forced to simulate oral sex on male students. In response to the suicide of a Kasetsart student, allegedly because of stress related to the activities, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) proposed a ban on *rap nong* on university campuses. Students jumped in to defend the initiation rites while raising awareness about growing abuses and violence associated with the activities. In mid-June 2005, representatives from fourteen universities attended a meeting at Thammasat University to debate the proposed ban and decide on a unified response. Thanachai, participating in the first major political event of his term as president of the TUSU, said there was good cooperation among the students regardless of the different sub-cultures of each university. Narongsak Methitham,

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

chairman of the Kasetsart University student union, said, “We’re not violating the commission’s policy, but we believe that good and beneficial activities should be allowed to proceed” while assuring that the activities would be closely supervised.¹⁰⁶ Several days later, the SFT petitioned Education Minister Adisai Bodharamik to override the HEC decision and host a meeting with all concerned parties to discuss guidelines for the activities. Several months later, the SFT submitted an open letter to universities, asking them not to ban the initiation events. SFT deputy secretary-general said, “The institution should allow students to take a major part in tackling the problem, not just setting rules against their activities. It is undemocratic to ban initiation parties outside campus.”¹⁰⁷

Although recognizing the occasional abuses of the activities, Thanachai believed they mostly do good, positive things and opposed the ban—a position that prevailed among the student unions and, ultimately, the government. The following year, Education Minister Chaturon Chaisang said, “This year, we will focus on harsher punishments for those who arrange activities that abuse individual’s rights, cause physical or mental distress or result in sexual harassment of college freshmen during their initiations.”¹⁰⁸ Although no activities were banned, Chaturon warned “We may not be able to stop it completely, but we’ll do the best we can.”¹⁰⁹

There were two issues that directly affected high school students and the crucial university entrance examinations they were required to take in March each year. The first was the leak of the examinations test questions in 2004, the same year in which Thaksin’s youngest daughter Paethongtan passed the test to gain acceptance to Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Political Science. The SFT and its secretary-general Pichit Chaimongkol took a prominent role in calling for an investigation. On April 18, 2004, they joined a coalition of activists, academics and parents to call for Voradej Chandarasorn—the person at the center of the scandal—to resign as secretary-general of the HEC. They also wanted an investigation to look into students with unusually high scores. When Education Minister Adisai failed to release the

¹⁰⁶ BP, June 14, 2005

¹⁰⁷ TN, September 20, 2002

¹⁰⁸ TN, May 5, 2006

¹⁰⁹ TN, May 5, 2006

results of an investigation, the SFT started a petition drive for its release. After the report was disclosed by the media, Pichit said it was “much more serious than Minister Adisai led the public to believe. He failed to tell the truth to the public again and again. He must resign to show responsibility.” On June 14, 2004, the SFT lodged a petition with the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) demanding they investigate Voradej’s conduct in the scandal. Several months later Voradej resigned from government service although he was never charged with any offence.¹¹⁰ Neither were any students ever charged with having received the examination questions in advance of the test. A network of parents and youths fought for fairness for students from the Education Ministry and its HEC, the main agency responsible for the tests. They also set up a website to receive tips on the exam leak scandal. Students also expressed their anger over the scandal another way: Hundreds, if not thousands, of students, took to websites to complain about the incident and query its relationship to the prime minister’s daughter.

The second issue was the Education Ministry’s proposal to increase the weighing of high school grades for university admission in 2006 and subsequent years from ten to twenty to fifty percent, a move that would negatively impact students at top-tier schools. There was strong opposition from parents and students, including the Parent-Youth Network for Education Reform. Network leader Kamolphan Cheewapanthusri invited disgruntled students, via Internet websites, to join her at a protest. Students collected more than one thousand signatures around Siam Square to protest the change before they were asked to leave by security guards. Then, on April 28, 2005, more than one hundred high school students joined her in a demonstration in front of Government House to oppose the change. In response, rectors from twenty four public universities agreed to defer full implementation of the plan until 2008. In an April 2006 hearing, Yos told the HEC, “I think it’s unfair if these grades carry forty percent weighting next year because schools still have different standards in giving grades,” while urging the government to freeze the new admission system.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Thaksin removed Adisai from the cabinet in August 2005 after a dispute between the former Education Minister and his deputy over the latter’s support for a proposal to allow teachers in the South to carry guns to protect themselves from terrorist attacks—an idea Adisai blasted as worthless. At the same time, Voradej was nominated as a vice minister, triggering suspicion that he was rewarded for his role in the exam-leak scandal.

¹¹¹ TN, April 21, 2006

Afterwards, Yos admitted, “Mostly I did it” in response to a question about other Students for Democracy members’ involvement in the protest, “but the government didn’t listen.”¹¹² In May 2006, the Network petitioned the Ombudsmen, demanding that the new university-admission system be canceled.

Part of the government’s plan to revise the admission process was to introduce the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-Net) and Advanced National Educational Test (A-Test) in 2006. The results of both actions were disastrous as the testing results were repeatedly inaccurate and delayed, leading to an extraordinary amount of confusion in university admissions that year. Amid widespread suspicion of corruption in awarding the testing contract, two government officials resigned to accept responsibility although Education Minister Chaturon and HEC secretary-general Pavich Tongroj remained in their positions. Students from Songkhla and Hat Yai, calling themselves the Guinea Pig Generation, threatened to stage a demonstration in front of Education Ministry. A *Thai Post* writer said he admired the students for challenging the integrity of the National Institute of Education Testing Service and HEC.

Thai students also had a decidedly conservative streak as evidenced by their reaction to three social issues affecting students—drug-testing, caning and condom machines on campus.

In January 2002, Interior Minister Purachai Piamsombun proposed that the government require drug-testing for students, reviving a 1998 plan by the Drug Suppression Bureau that was similarly defeated by parent and teacher—but not student—protests. In November 2003, Prachin Buri Technical College responded to Thaksin’s War on Drugs by instituting mandatory testing to prove that its campus was drug free—and charge students for the test administered by a private company controlled by Thaksin’s family. In response, they petitioned university officials to protest the fee—not the testing or the prime minister’s conflict-of-interest.

¹¹² Interview with Yos Tansakul, June 20, 2006

Also in January 2002, students joined school administrators and parents in supporting Education Minister Suwit Khunkitti's plan to reintroduce caning in schools, out of concern that students had become more aggressive since caning was banned by the previous government.

In 2003, students successfully stopped a Public Health Ministry proposal to install condom machines on vocational college and university campuses in an attempt to fight unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Leading the fight were the Student Union Network—with members at 105 institutions of higher education—and the SFT, who complained that the proposal could lead to promiscuity. The SFT's Pichit, a senior at Ramkhamhaeng University, said "Educational institutions and other organizations must listen to students' opinions."¹¹³

During Thaksin's tenure as prime minister, no issue was more discussed, and yielded fewer results, than education reform. After his first Education Minister, Kasem Wattanachai, quit after confronting the enormous resistance mounted by the education bureaucracy, Thaksin assumed the position himself to stress its importance. He was followed by Suwit Khunkitti, Pongpol Adireksarn, Adisai and Chaturon—an average tenure of one year each. Regardless of those changes, the Thai education system remained mired in rote learning and poor results. In May 2002, a seminar titled "The Critical Teen Stage on Education Reform" was held at Chulalongkorn University, with outspoken high school students harshly criticizing Minister Suwit and one panelist urging Thaksin to appoint a knowledgeable and hard-working commissioner rather than an unintelligent and corrupt one. Wiphoo Rujopakan from Triam Udom Suksa School said "Teachers never teach students how to learn and children do not dare to try learning anything on their own" while Nanthaphon Ketphongsuda from Satee Withaya School urged government officials to give children an opportunity to participate in the reform process.¹¹⁴

Surprisingly, one important issue that directly affected most students was not subject to sustained protest or discussion: the loans that university students secured to

¹¹³ TN, November 29, 2003

¹¹⁴ TN, May 16, 2002

enable their studies, even though approximately one-third of Thai university graduates failed to repay their debts and many remained unemployed. In June 2005, the government announced its new method for financing university education—the Income Contingent Loan (ICL) program that would offer student loans to be repaid once they start working—likely accompanied by an increase in tuition fees. Pinrat Pairat, vice president of the student union at KMIT-Phra Phra Nakhon Nua campus, accused the government of shifting the burden onto students. Otherwise, students seemed to accept that scholarships and the ICL loans benefited wealthy families as often as poor ones, as state officials acknowledged that “students will have to pay more fees as education services become more market-oriented.”¹¹⁵ Likewise, the ‘hidden’ fees that students and their families had to pay for ‘free’ education were not subject to student protest except in rare circumstances.

However, tuition expenses were a significant concern when students protested against the government’s plan to make state universities autonomous from the government bureaucracy—an idea that was first seriously proposed by Puey in the 1970s. At that time it received an unfavorable reaction from the state universities. It was revived in the 1990s by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun but was never enacted during his brief two terms. It met the same fate during the second Chuan Leekpai administration when it was opposed by a group of political science and political economics professors at Chulalongkorn University. However, it was again proposed by the Thaksin government, only to face sustained student protests.

Those opposing the plan feared that tuition expenses would increase as the government reduced subsidies, forcing institutions of higher education to focus on income-generating programs and wealthier students while placing a greater burden on poor students. Rangsan Thanapornphan of Thammasat University’s Faculty of Economics predicted tuition fees would increase at least eight hundred percent when the government stopped subsidizing state universities in favor of providing student loans.

¹¹⁵ TN, July 21, 2006, quoting Pavich Tongroach, secretary-general of Thailand’s HEC

Those supporting the government's plan said it would limit government interference in funding and administration, thus increasing efficiency by freeing them from the bureaucracy. They also argued that autonomy would boost university earnings, which would help finance more research work and the recruitment of competent lecturers. Many supporters disagreed with the concerns that tuition would increase. Ramkhamhaeng's Wuthisak said his university receives only seven to eight hundred million baht from the government and the plan will have "no impact at all."¹¹⁶ However, many government officials admitted that tuition fees would rise and others, such as Education Minister Education Minister Wijit Srisa-arn, offered weak reassurances.

In 2001, Ramkhamhaeng University held a public hearing to discuss autonomy for the university; however, only a few staff attended as the university's half million students were uninformed of the event. Angry students deluged the rector's web page, while also complaining that he had not supported student activities and removed student post and information boards. They followed up that protest with a letter to University Affairs Minister Sutham Saengprathum. The plan for Ramkhamhaeng University was delayed until 2004.

In February 2002, the Thaksin government announced plans to seek autonomy for Chulalongkorn and seven other universities: Naresuan, Srinakharinwirot, Thaksin, Mahidol, Chiang Mai, Maharakham, and Khon Kaen. That month, a public hearing at Chulalongkorn centered on whether the university should become more exclusive, or whether it was already too elitist, with students adding their voice to the protest. Again, the plan was stalled.

In April 2004, the plan was again revived with the proposed conversion of Burapha, Mahidol, Ramkhamhaeng and Thaksin universities. The SFT presented a petition to House Speaker Uthai Pimchaichon and the government's chief whip, Snoh Thienthong, in opposition to the proposal, but did not receive any response. The Council of Lecturers of Universities in Thailand joined their protest against the bill on Burapha University, seeing it as a precedent for other state universities. Six months

¹¹⁶ Interview with Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, July 12, 2006

later, the SFT and Council of Lecturers joined in petitioning the Senate committees on social affairs and education in a continuing effort to stop the bill. Ratchanart Wanichsombat, a Ramkhamhaeng University student and a representative of the SFT, complained that the government had failed to conduct a public survey. They received support from Senator Niran Pithakwatchara, chairman of the committee on social development and human security, who said, “We’re highly concerned about the proposed bill because we’re equally afraid that state universities would then be turned into money-spinners by some administrators only bothered about business-related benefits rather than the quality of education.”¹¹⁷

On October 6, 2004, ten clubs at Ramkhamhaeng University joined with the SFT in a protest against the dean of the university and the Education Ministry for again proposing the autonomy plan for Ramkhamhaeng. Wuthisak characterized the protest as involving about “thirty to forty students walking around campus.”¹¹⁸ They were ultimately successful in reversing the government’s plans.

The following month, students continued their protest at Burapha University. On November 22, about fifteen hundred students—primarily from Burapha, Thammasat, Prince of Songkhla, Mahasarakham and KMIT—protested outside Government House in opposition to renewed legislation to turn state universities into autonomous institutions. Acting SFT secretary-general Jamorn Sornpetchnarin said, “The government is trying to push through the drafts aimed at cutting loose state universities without listening to the opinions of interested parties.” Burapha student leader Pakinai Chomsinsapman said, “We are protesting out of concern about the anticipated impact of the plan,” while citing the example of KMIT-Thonburi campus, where tuition was raised between four hundred and eight hundred percent.¹¹⁹

In December 2004, the SFT again spoke out in opposition to the autonomy plan. Jamorn said, “When you increase tuition fees, it means fewer educational opportunities for poor students. Universities can still improve even if they stay in the public sector. We will convene another meeting of all university students next month

¹¹⁷ BP, October 6, 2004

¹¹⁸ Interview with Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, July 12, 2006

¹¹⁹ TN, November 23, 2004

to gauge their opinions on this issue.”¹²⁰ According to Jamorn, most students were against the plan. Pakinai proposed a meeting with Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to discuss alternative ideas.

The Thaksin administration appeared to let the idea rest at the more political universities. As of September 2006, there were only a few autonomous state institutions; there were twenty state universities that had not yet completed the autonomy process.¹²¹ It was not until after the September 19, 2006 coup d’etat that the proposal was revived by the military government with the support of the Council of University Rectors. This time the student response was even stronger than before, with the SFT and Chulalongkorn graduate student Kengkit Kitriangrarp leading the protest.

On November 28, 2006, about fifty SFT members staged a march from the Education Ministry to Government House where they submitted their demands to Prime Minister Surayuth. They called for the government to stop their plans and return the four autonomous universities to the state system, citing the soaring tuitions at autonomous universities. They also said the military-installed government lacked legitimacy to run the country and should schedule democratic elections as soon as possible. Nithiwat said, “If this plan continues, students will have to shoulder higher tuition fees and this means students from poor families will not be able to further their education at universities.”¹²² Two days later, about eighty protesters including students, lecturers and staff from Chulalongkorn, Burapha and Ramkhamhaeng universities, announced their opposition to the autonomy plan at a meeting at Chulalongkorn University’s political science faculty.

On December 6, more than two hundred students from Chulalongkorn, Kasetsart and Burapha universities staged a protest at Government House where they burned an effigy of Education Minister Wijit. Burpha’s Pakinai said, “After the state universities become autonomous, youths from poor families will lose their

¹²⁰ TN, December 15, 2004

¹²¹ *The Nation* reported four—Walailak University, Suranaree University of Technology, King Mongkut’s University of Technology-Thonburi, and Mae Fah Luang University—and six autonomous institutions in the same November 29, 2006 article.

¹²² TN, November 29, 2006

educational opportunities, because the tuition fees are set to soar so much that they cannot afford them,” while Taweeporn Khummetha, a Chulalongkorn University freshman, asked for a referendum of all relevant parties.¹²³

On December 8, approximately two hundred students at Chulalongkorn University attended an afternoon rally in front of the main library to listen to fellow-students rail against the plan. Political science lecturer Suchai Treerat said the majority of staff, teachers and students were opposed to the government plan, and proposed a status as special bureaucratic entities which enjoyed more flexibility and independence in running their own affairs. The event was followed by a candle-lighting ceremony. There were also simultaneous rallies at Khon Kaen University and KMIT-North Bangkok campus, where about one thousand students protested. Third-year Khon Kaen student Anantachai Bodhikhham said, “The university executives have ignored what students are thinking. They have never come to talk to us.”¹²⁴

On December 12, the education minister withdrew plans for Silpakorn and Ubon Ratchathani universities while denying the move was in response to student protests and Silpakorn’s Student Union president Pratcharat Saengchan’s letter delivered earlier in the day. The following day, several hundred students from nine universities, including KMIT-North Bangkok, Mahidol, Kasetsart, Chulalongkorn, Srinakharinwirot, and Ramkhamhaeng, protested in front of Government House and submitted petitions opposing the autonomy plan. Pattaradanai Jongkua, secretary to the student union of KMIT-North Bangkok campus, said the students would form the Anti-Education Privatization Network to continue their opposition.

On December 20, a group of Burapha University students petitioned the king after the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) accepted several draft bills for deliberation. Chulalongkorn University decided to delay its plans to proceed with autonomy status after His Majesty the King asked for a public hearing in response to a similar petition submitted by university professors. Thereafter, plans for KMIT-North Bangkok and Thaksin University were also delayed to seek public input as the NLA committee on public participation held a seminar to discuss the issue. The students

¹²³ TN, December 7, 2006

¹²⁴ TN, December 7, 2006

were not assuaged. On December 28, the Anti-Education Privatization Network, including representatives from KMIT- North Bangkok and Chulalongkorn, Kasetsart, Mahidol, Ramkhamhaeng and Burapha universities, released a formal statement calling on the NLA to withdraw all the bills.

On February 19, 2007, two students—Pakinai from Burapha University and another from Ramkhamhaeng University—began a hunger strike outside Parliament, demanding the government withdraw bills that would make universities self-governing. Two days later, about twenty NLA members asked the students to end their strike as the assembly had ceased hearing three of five university bills. NLA member Wallop Tangkananurak told the students to “allow the problem to be solved by NLA mechanisms.” Pakinai, however, refused to end his strike until the legislation was axed, saying “We are asking the NLA to stop these laws because they will destroy national education.”¹²⁵

In the final chapter of this story, in February 2007, the Prince of Songkla University announced tuition fee increases for all faculties in its five campuses, ranging between twenty and 252 percent. In response, a group of student activists at the university’s Pattani Campus launched a protest campaign against the ‘unreasonable’ fee hike. Tadapong Sampaosri, a Faculty of Humanities student who led the protest, said, “We want to know why they want to aggravate the plight of southern people like us with this hike. Incomes of locals are now very low due to the unsolved problems of the unrest. How can parents find money to pay such high fees for their children? It’s such a cruel hike. If necessary, we might go on hunger strike like Bangkok students who are striking against the plan to make universities autonomous.”¹²⁶ Wutthipong Chansrinuan, a leading student activist at the university’s Hat Yai Campus, promised more protests once the examination period was finished.

When it was suggested that those problems directly impacting students might attract more of them to activism, Kotchawan shared her frustration that even the issue of university privatization did not concern many students. While none of these

¹²⁵ TN, February 22, 2007

¹²⁶ TN, February 26, 2007

protests attracted a mass outpouring of student interest, many students were engaged in 'political' issues that directly affected them. When combined with students that were engaged in social activism, it would be difficult to characterize all Thai students as apathetic.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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CHAPTER IV

STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE THAKSIN ERA (2000-2006)

4.1 The Democratic Election of Thaksin Shinawatra

The January 2001 general election saw the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party collect 248 seats in the 500-member parliament and its party leader, Thaksin Shinawatra, become Thailand's prime minister. He served until the coup d'état on September 19, 2006—also having won subsequent elections in February 2004 and March 2005—making him the longest-serving democratically elected prime minister in Thailand's seventy-four year democratic history. He was also the first elected prime minister to serve a complete four-year term, the first to be re-elected, and the first to preside over a one-party majority in the parliament. The story of his rise to power, his five year, eight month tenure as prime minister, and fall is the context in which I have chosen to study Thailand's student movement in the twenty-first century.

Thaksin's electoral success was credited to many factors. His platform took advantage of a nationalistic mood in response to the anger and humiliation caused by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands that followed the 1997 Financial Crisis. The People's Constitution, adopted in a spirit of political reform and in response to previous weak coalition governments, enabled the formation of Thaksin's strong national party. In this new political environment, the Democrat Party of Chuan Leekpai was a model of weakness and failed policies. Thailand could not have been better prepared for the rise of Thaksin's TRT party. As one of Thailand's most successful and richest businessmen, Thaksin's business credentials were unquestioned although his political qualifications were dubious.

The TRT party brought together a multitude of interests, images and tools that overwhelmed Thailand's weak political landscape. Primary to its success was the projection of Thaksin as a leader on a 'white horse' dedicated to turning his business success and acumen to the country's advantage. He stressed that he was so rich that he

did not need to be corrupt; instead he was motivated by working ‘for the people.’ It was a hopeful message hyped by a professional campaign. Thaksin assembled a large group of business leaders attuned to the critical relationship that existed between business and government, as they benefited from public sector contracts or enjoyed state protection from international competition. Previously they had sponsored political parties and elected officials; now they took a direct role in controlling their own financial interests. Thaksin also gathered prominent academics into his party leadership, lending their credibility to TRT’s image. Thaksin rounded out his TRT team with former Phalang Tham members, his military, policy, and personal connections, and various bureaucrats.

Central to the theme of this thesis is the inclusion of former student activists among the TRT party leadership. Veterans of the October 6, 1976 massacre at Thammasat University, their individual histories are an important component of this story. Although one-time leftists with a strong network among their former comrades, they now saw capitalism as the best system to improve the lives of Thailand’s poor. Throughout TRT’s turbulent history, they claimed to remain true to their leftist idealism and pro-democracy values. Nine of them were instrumental in developing the party’s platform and implementing the government’s programs.

Pansak Vinyaratn was a famous journalist in the late 1960s and 1970s, at first with the English-language *Bangkok World*. He was editor of the leftist *Weekly Square* when he was arrested in 1976, but escaped to the United States through family connections. He took advantage of the government’s amnesty to return to Thailand in 1981 and later served with Kraisak Choonhavan as head of the “Ban Phitsanulok” policy team between 1988 and 1991. When Chatichai Choonhavan was overthrown in 1991, Pansak again left the country. Upon his return he was an editor of the *Asia Times* newspaper founded by Sondhi Limthongkul; when that paper folded he began to work with Thaksin. Pansak was credited with designing the strategies and slogans that helped the TRT party achieve their election victories, creating the dual-track economic policy and Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) model, and promoting the drive to establish an entrepreneurial culture in Thailand. At that time he was quoted in *The Nation* as saying, “The poor are already the prisoners of capitalism. What this

government is doing is to make capitalism create wealth in Thai society. It is different from runaway capitalism.”¹ He served as Thaksin’s chief advisor and as a director on the Board of Investment that awarded tax privileges to investment projects in Thailand.

Praphat Panyachatrak joined the October 1973 student uprising when he was in his third year at the Faculty of Forestry, Kasertsart University. Although involved in the events of October 1976, he was in Lumpang during the Thammasat massacre and worked for a forestry company during the communist insurgency. Eventually he became an organic farmer and later became the original architect of TRT’s rural policies, serving as Thaksin’s first Deputy Agriculture Minister and later as his Minister of Natural Resources and Environment and chairman of the Farmers Restoration and Development Fund (FRD). He was the only former student activist who left the TRT party during the anti-Thaksin movement.

Prommin Lertsuridej became politically active, while a medical student at Mahidol University, after the events of October 1973, quickly shifting his university priorities “from organizing social activities, a prom, to demonstrations.”² He described the objectives of the student movement as working “for the poor” and furthering “the pro-democracy movement.” Prommin fought with the communist insurgency after the October 1976 massacre until the 1980 amnesty—“designed to separate the intellectuals from the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) fighters”—allowed him to return to his studies. He became a doctor because of his desire to use medicine to help people. Between 1985 and 1988, he was the director of a rural hospital, acting as both a medical doctor and social worker. Afterwards Prommin studied in Canada and learned about “how capitalism works” while working in the private sector. When he returned to Thailand he became Head of the Health Planning Section at the Thai Ministry of Health. In 1993, at the invitation of a friend and MIT graduate, he joined a cable television business and Shin Corp’s empire, becoming VP of Ground Services for Shin Satellite. Prommin later met Thaksin Shinawatra and joined his TRT party, becoming the first secretary-general to the Prime Minister’s

¹ *The Nation* (TN), November 11, 2002

² Interview with Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej, December 18, 2006

office and, in October 2002, his Deputy Prime Minister for economic affairs. He was credited with being the architect behind the thirty-baht health care scheme and other populist programs. In a 2001 interview, Prommin said he entered politics “to work to serve the people.”³ He was considered among the prime minister’s most loyal aides, also sharing the confidence of Thaksin’s wife Pojaman. When criticized for abandoning his idealism, Prommin said “[w]e have to respect different roles of different people. For those who can achieve their ideology, we should be glad for them but those who cannot make it should not be blamed.”⁴

Dr. Prommin’s fellow medical student at Mahidol University and friend, Surapong Seubwonglee, followed a similar path to the TRT party. He also escaped to the jungle after the October 1976 massacre, returning to his studies after the amnesty and obtaining his MBA at Chulalongkorn University. He ran for parliament under the Phalang Dharma party in 1996 when the party performed poorly at the polls under Thaksin’s leadership. Dr. Surapong was also credited with establishing the Thirty-Baht Health Care Scheme with Prommin and served as Deputy Public Health Minister, Minister of Information and Communications Technology and Government Spokesman. Like his friend Prommin, he was close to Pojaman.

Kriengkamol Laohapairot was secretary-general of the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) in 1975 and, as a student in the Faculty of Law at Chulalongkorn University, established the Chulaprachachon Party (Chula’s People Party) along with his friend Phumtham Wechayachai. At that time he first met Thaksin. After October 1976, he joined the CPT insurgency in the jungle in protest against the government’s abuse of power and exploitation of the poor. In response to the amnesty, Kriengkamol returned to enter the business world while remaining politically active, campaigning against Prime Minister Suchinda Kraproyoon during the events of May 1992 and acting as a coordinator between the demonstrators and the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT). He worked with Thaksin in the Phalang Tham party and helped the TRT party establish relationships with NGOs and former student

³ TN, September 7, 2001

⁴ TN, October 6, 2002

activists. Kriengkamol was a close aide to Thaksin and served as an advisor to Chaturon Chaisaeng.

Kriengkamol's Chulalongkorn classmate and friend, Phumtham Wechayachai, also joined the CPT and escaped to the jungle after the October 1976 massacre. During his student years he was an activist from October 1973 through October 1976. Taking advantage of the amnesty, Phumtham returned to his work with NGOs for more than a decade—dealing with poor people in rural areas and suggesting ways to improve their living standards—before entering the business world in 1990. He remained politically active and worked with several politicians before joining the Phalang Tham party, where he aligned himself with Thaksin in 1995. In 1997, Phumtham went to work with the Shin Corp and later served as deputy secretary-general of the TRT party, secretary for Interior Minister Purachai and eventually as Deputy Transport Minister. Phumtham was credited with managing the party's operational strategy and acted as coordinator of its many factions. He was one of the three former activists and TRT party leaders closest to Pojaman.

Following in Kriengkamol's footsteps, Sutham Saengprathum served as secretary-general of the NSCT in 1976. He was arrested after the massacre at Thammasat University in 1976. Sutham was a former MP representing southern Thailand and member and campaign director of the Phalang Tham party before becoming a founding member of the TRT party. Like Dr. Surapong, he also failed to win an MP seat in the 1996 general election. He was responsible for the party's campaign in southern Thailand and served as University Affairs Minister, deputy party leader, Deputy Education Minister and Deputy Interior Minister. Sutham was considered to have good relations with NGOs and farmer organizations and was one of Thaksin's representatives in talks with protesting farmers in 2002.

Chaturon Chaisaeng, the son of a veteran politician and MP from Chachoengsao province, was a student activist from the Faculty of Medicine in Chiang Mai University during the October 1976 massacre at Thammasat. He also joined the communist insurgency; after the amnesty, Chaturon went to the United States to obtain his MA in economics from American University in Washington, DC.

He interrupted his doctorate studies to return to Thailand in 1986 to contest and win a general election under the Democrat Party. He later joined the New Aspiration Party (NAP), briefly serving as its secretary-general until joining the TRT party in 2000. Chaturon served as PM's Office Minister in charge of the National Energy Policy Office and the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), Justice Minister and Minister of Education.

Adisorn Piangket was also the son of an MP; his father was a member of the Socialist Party of Thailand. Adisorn was a veteran of several political parties—the Mass People Party (1988), Phalang Tham (1992-1995, serving as a Deputy Minister), Thai Leading Party (lost in 1995), and NAP (1996-2000)—before joining the TRT party in 2000. He spent the years after 1976 in the jungle; upon leaving he went into the business world before launching a political career and serving as a Khon Kaen MP. Adisorn became a cabinet member in Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's government and NAP's deputy leader before leaving the party to run on the TRT party-list in 2000. He became a party executive, deputy government chief whip, and deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives where he promoted the 'million cows' scheme.

Pinij Charusombat, a student activist who served as president of the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization (RUSO) in 1972 and deputy secretary-general of the Student Center of Thailand in 1974-1975, also joined the communist insurgency in 1976. After the amnesty, he returned to business in Chaecherngsao province before becoming an MP from Nong Kai province in 1992. Pinij joined the TRT party when his Seritham Party merged with TRT after the 2001 election. He became deputy head of the TRT party, Thaksin's senior advisor, Science Minister, Industry Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Health Minister.

According to Pasuk and Baker, “[t]hese ex-radicals helped to articulate TRT's social agenda. They gave Thaksin a tinge of legitimacy with journalists and activists from the same [October] generation.”⁵ These former activists played an important role throughout Thaksin's tenure and maintained their ties with former communist

⁵ Pasuk Pongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), p. 69

insurgents, many of whom served as village headman and rural leaders—thus helping to reinforce Thaksin's rural base of support.

Even more impressive and diverse was the platform that Thaksin and the party developed leading up to the 2001 general election. Of special interest to this study is the populist agenda that appealed to the poor and Thailand's rural voters who became the base of Thaksin's support throughout his tenure. That agenda was based upon a 'social contract' between the government and 'the people', toward solving their problems, improving their livelihoods and creating "greater opportunities for them to enrich their lives."⁶ It included a debt moratorium long demanded by struggling farmers, a One Million Baht Village Fund to provide credit and stimulate small business development throughout the country, and a Thirty-Baht Health Care plan to assure accessible health care for all Thais. Another aspect of Thaksin's populist agenda was his nationalistic rhetoric that opposed the Chuan government's 'mass privatization' proposal that anticipated significant foreign participation. This agenda in particular appealed to state enterprise unions who enjoyed their elevated status, and local businesses that associated privatization with bargain prices for foreign investors. They aligned with some senators and NGOs in a vigorous anti-privatization campaign.

4.2 Thaksin's Political Legitimacy

Thaksin's political legitimacy can be attributed to four primary factors: first, his party won more votes than any previous party in Thailand's democratic history; second, he was the first prime minister who seemed to genuinely care about the concerns of Thailand's poor, even after their votes were cast; third, he promoted economic growth that benefited Thailand's middle and upper classes; and fourth, he projected the image of an effective, strong leader. An essential element that is relevant to this thesis is his fulfillment of the populist promises he made during his election campaign that allowed him to maintain his support among the majority of Thais.

⁶ Kevin Hewison, 2004, "Crafting Thailand's new social contract", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 511, quoting Thaksin Shinawatra from a 2002 speech

The Thirty-Baht Health Care Scheme, developed by former student activists and cabinet members Dr. Prommin and Dr. Surapong, proved to be the most popular of Thaksin's populist programs. For the first time, many poor Thais were able to secure affordable medical care for their families. Almost seventy-five percent of all Thais registered with the program within two years. Despite its problems—underfunded subsidies, overburdened doctors and hospitals, and a lack of transportability—its beneficiaries eagerly gave Thaksin credit for providing for the poor and saving lives.

The agrarian debt moratorium, developed by Praphat, offered relief for 2.3 million indebted farmers. They were given the choice of a three-year moratorium on the repayment of debts or the ability to secure additional loans at a lower interest rate.

The One Million Baht Village Fund was launched with much fanfare as Thaksin personally presided over a funds-transfer ceremony, symbolically handing out money to village leaders to lend to their residents. Although the source of the funds was from the government, Thaksin's political image benefited from his personal connection with villagers who seemingly reacted to his personal generosity.

Other popular schemes included the OTOP ("One *Tambon*, One Product") program made use of government loans and Thaksin's marketing expertise to promote local handicrafts and increase rural incomes; OTOP's offspring—the "One Computer, One School", "One District, One Doctor" and "One District, One Scholarship" schemes; the *Baan Ua Aarthorn* low-cost housing scheme and its offspring—*ua aarthorn* ("we care") plans for accident insurance, life insurance, subsidized credit for buying taxis, loaning bicycles to poor rural students, and other schemes; and the government's "assets into capital" scheme to help low-income earners obtain loans by putting up their previously unrecognized "assets" as collateral. Thaksin also declared a 'war on poverty' and promised to abolish poverty and establish a comprehensive social safety net in Thailand within six years. By August 2006, Thaksin boasted that

“[t]he number of people living below the poverty line has decreased from 12.8 million to 7 million.”⁷

In sum, these populist programs, including schemes to prop up farm prices, were seen by the former leftists in Thaksin’s government as the party’s “grass-roots policy”. They were considered the fastest and most effective way to put money in the pockets of the rural poor—an estimated thirty to forty million Thais dependent on the agricultural sector—and stimulate domestic consumption and economic growth.

The February 2005 general election gave Thaksin an overwhelming victory margin unprecedented in Thai political history. The TRT party won 366 seats—almost seventy five percent of the total—thus inoculating itself from an Opposition censure motion against Thaksin or impeachment motion against individual cabinet members. His political legitimacy seemed safely secure.

4.3 The Legitimacy Challenge

The Thaksin government accomplishments could have foretold an outstanding legacy of leadership and success for Thailand’s businessman-turned-politician. Unfortunately, it was not to be. Tragically, his achievements were rivaled—perhaps history will deem them overshadowed—by his failures. Some might argue that the failures were a function of Thailand’s dysfunctional democracy and culture of patronage and money politics. Either way, Thaksin faced a deluge of criticism for the ‘dark side’ of his administration that steadily eroded his political legitimacy.

Despite the groundswell of support that Thaksin enjoyed leading up to the January 2001 general election, there were three disturbing events that caused concern among some political observers. Despite the promises of political reform designed in the 1997 Constitution, the 2001 general election was characterized by MP-buying, the use of vote canvassers, intimidation, harassment, vote-buying and fraud. The *Phuchatkan* newspaper said that the TRT “party played politics in a way that it would

⁷ TN, August 6, 2006

buy off or buy up anything that may come in its way.”⁸ The second event was the asset-concealment charges made against Thaksin, alleging that he had listed his assets in the names of his household staff and business colleagues. Thaksin claimed ‘an honest mistake’ and received an outpouring of public support in his defense. The Constitution Court found Thaksin not-guilty in a convoluted 8-7 decision. The third event was the sacking of twenty-three reporters working for the iTV station controlled by the Shinawatra family, widely attributed to their reporting on the general election and subsequent asset-concealment case, foreshadowing a media clampdown throughout his premiership.

While the 1997 Constitution provided the wherewithal to allow Thaksin to create what critics called a ‘parliamentary dictatorship’, it also established numerous provisions to create the infrastructure for democracy and empower public participation. Thaksin systematically undertook a process of hijacking the constitution to serve his own goals. The senate, intended as the primary body empowered to balance the institutions of government and comprised of respected, non-political persons, became the first casualty of his assault on the constitution, followed by the Election Commission (EC), Constitution Court, National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG), the Anti-Money Laundering Organization (AMLO), and Revenue Department.

Thaksin also initiated a campaign to intimidate and restrict Thailand’s media. Subsequent firings at iTV in September 2003 and February 2004 were directly related to journalists resisting political interference or reporting news and interviews critical of the government. The government controlled television and radio stations were even more restrictive. Shows airing any news critical of the government, even if part of a balanced debate, were forced off the air and critical interviews and broadcasts were frequently interrupted by the ‘temporary loss’ of their signal. The print media, independent of government ownership and control, was nonetheless intimidated into self-censorship by visits from the police, the threat of lawsuits and loss of advertising revenue. The Thaksin group also controlled the media in a less restrictive, but equally

⁸ Michael Nelson, Editor, *Thailand’s New Politics KPI Yearbook 2001*, (Bangkok: King Prajadhipok’s Institute and White Lotus, 2001), p. 290

damaging manner—through manipulation. They overwhelmed the Thai media with a barrage of news stories and distracted them with alternative ‘public interest’ stories that allowed the under-funded and unprofessional journalists to let the government do their work for them.

Thaksin also exercised an abuse of power not seen since the days of Thailand’s military strongmen, exemplified in three areas—the War on Drugs, the violence in Southern Thailand and the pattern of political disappearances and murders that were never resolved during Thaksin’s tenure. Despite the overwhelming popularity of the War on Drugs campaign with the Thai population, it had many critics at home and abroad. The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC) issued a report that criticized several aspects of the campaign, including unreliable blacklists, planted evidence, improper asset seizures and a failure to account for the high number of extrajudicial killings.⁹

Thaksin’s response to an upsurge of terrorist acts and violence in 2002 was heavy-handed and seemed to perpetuate a cycle of violence. In addition to the daily confrontations between the police and military and local residents, there were three incidents that accentuated Thaksin’s abuse of power. In December 2002, demonstrators protesting against the Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipeline were brutally attacked by several hundred police, and several NGO members were arrested. On April 28, 2004, a group of Muslim teenager insurgents were massacred at the historic Krue Se mosque in Pattani “in one of the worst days of violence in modern Thai history.”¹⁰ And on October 25, 2005, police and soldiers broke up a peaceful demonstration outside the Tak Bai police station, resulting in the deaths of eighty five demonstrators—seven of whom were shot dead by the police, and seventy eight who suffocated while being transported.¹¹ The government’s violent approach was widely supported by most Thais outside the South, but did rouse student protest, to be discussed later in this chapter.

⁹ In February 2007, the DSI said they had evidence linking police to four extra-judicial killings and that Thaksin could face charges of incitement [*Bangkok Post* (BP), February 20, 2007].

¹⁰ Pasuk and Baker, 2004, p. 238

¹¹ In March 2007, the Defense Ministry paid Bt42 million in compensation to the relatives of the seventy nine victims of the Tak Bai tragedy.

The state-sponsored violence against alleged drug dealers and Muslims protesters was part of a pattern of intimidation and violence with impunity conducted by the military and police. During Thaksin's tenure as prime minister, sixteen community leaders, environmentalists, and human rights defenders were killed or went missing, including Somchai Nilapaijit, president of the Thai Muslim Lawyers Association, who was abducted on March 12, 2004. They received no protection from the state and those responsible remained largely unpunished. Pipob Thongchai "said disappearance cases here remained largely unsolved because state officials were either the culprits or their accomplices, in most cases."¹²

The darkest blemish on Thaksin's tenure as prime minister, however, was the widespread corruption that permeated his government. The press reported story after story of schemes to extract money from virtually every aspect of the government. Corruption in government contracts and procurements were reported in several high-profile cases; most prominent, however, were contracts associated with the Suvarnabhumi Airport. The CTX bomb-scanner scandal, exposed in an April 25, 2005 story in *Krungthep Turakij*, marked the beginning of an increased public awareness of corruption within his government, leading the Opposition to launch an unsuccessful no-confidence debate against then-Transport Minister Suriya Jungrungraengkit. Thaksin's adamant defense of Suriya and lackluster state investigation seriously damaged the government's image.

The most serious charges against the Thaksin government related to policy corruption and conflicts of interest among his family and members of his cabinet. A 2003 study ranked Thailand in second place, behind only Russia, for its high correlation between government officials and stock market ownership.¹³ Governmental decisions had a positive impact on businesses owned by TRT MPs, cabinet members and supporters; however, the greatest beneficiary was Thaksin Shinawatra family's own Shin Corp and private holdings.

¹² BP, May 18, 2005

¹³ BP, December 8, 2005, referring to a study titled 'Money Politics' by Pasuk Phongpaichit and Thanee Chaiwat

Despite Thaksin's two electoral victories, overwhelming majority in the parliament and wide national support, opposition to his government steadily increased between 2001 and 2006. Largely, that opposition occurred among Thailand's elite. Sondhi analyzed the opposition as "old capital" fighting a rearguard action against the domination of "new capital".¹⁴ That "old capital"—including the conservatives and royalists and their allies in the military—was the power that ultimately undid the prime minister. They were not pleased that Thaksin and his big-business "new money" friends seized all the institutions of power and exclusively enjoyed its benefits. Additionally, Duncan McCargo argues that Thaksin challenged the king's influence by seeking "systematically to displace the palace power network with a new set of connections."¹⁵ That aspect of the opposition, however, seemed to operate behind the scene and largely apart from public awareness excepting the king's annual birthday speeches that he used to regularly criticize the prime minister.

In contrast to the 'behind-the-scenes' opposition originating from Thailand's conservative elite, the more vocal and visible opposition was occupied by Thailand's 'civil society' including NGO activists and academics, many of whom were former student activists from the 1970s. The organization that was most prominent in the anti-Thaksin movement was the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD). Their first attack was leveled against the Constitution Court judges that voted to acquit Thaksin. Year after year, they increased their attacks and the publicity they generated.¹⁶ In addition, academics were especially critical of corruption, immorality and human rights abuses by Thaksin's government, while economists criticized the prime minister's reliance on increased debt to stimulate Thailand's aggressive GNP growth.

4.4 The Student Movement (2000-2005)

During the first five years of Thaksin's tenure, students also added their voices to attacks on the prime minister, usually over specific incidents that roused their ire.

¹⁴ Pasuk and Baker, 2004, p. 241, quoting from Sondhi's April 9, 2004 television show

¹⁵ Duncan McCargo, December 2005, "Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4, p. 500

¹⁶ One measure of their attacks was the number of press articles in *The Nation*. They numbered 15 in 2001, 52 in 2002, 91 in 2003, 147 in 2004 and dropped down to 118 in 2005.

In most cases the lead organization was the SFT. By most accounts, the organization was not very strong. Two of the 2006-2007 co-leaders, Kittisak Sujittarom and Nithiwat Wannasiri, said that the strength of the SFT depends on the situation in the nation and whether there is a crisis or not; Metha Martkhao, the SFT's 2001-2002 secretary-general, agreed, explaining that it is dependent on the political context and its membership.

In 2000, during the lead up to the general election, Uchaen Chiangsaen was secretary-general of the SFT, having working with the organization for four years. At that time the group was devoted to political reform following its August 15, 1997 resolution urging the national unity government to pass the new constitution. Also, there were many students involved in the SFT and the organization was involved in contacts with villagers for social development.

The following year, Metha was elected secretary-general with Prakarn Klinfung as deputy secretary-general. Metha had joined the SFT during his first year at Ramkhamhaeng University in 1999 as a member of the Students for Peace club. During Thaksin's first year in office that coincided with his term as secretary-general, Thaksin was popular, so there were no anti-Thaksin activities. Instead, the SFT focus remained on political reform to check politicians, and to support the people's movement. The SFT also proposed that Thailand adopt an inheritance tax as a measure to address the rich-poor gap. Uchaen said that when Metha was elected secretary-general the organization became more closely aligned with the CPD.

As a representative of the Southern Club, Ratchaneekorn Thongthip participated in the SFT that same year, with responsibilities for public relations. At that time, the SFT was very close to the NGO movements and "would go anywhere there were political and social issues"¹⁷ to join in field work and participate in discussions. She said they talked about newly elected Thaksin's conflicts of interest. In January 2002, the government proposed converting the concession contracts of private telecom firms into licenses—a change that would benefit Thaksin's AIS mobile phone business at the expense of government revenues. In response, the SFT

¹⁷ Interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

joined with the CPD, the Campaign for Popular Media Reform (CPMR), the Consumer Federation of Thailand and the Committee for Relatives of May 1992 Heroes in submitting an open letter to Thaksin, calling for a review of the concession-revision plan.¹⁸ The following month, the SFT joined these same NGOs in forming the Network of People's Organizations in calling on the Senate to delay the appointment of NTC commissioners, pending resolution of conflict-of-interest and transparency criticisms.¹⁹

Also in January, the SFT joined with several environmental NGOs in protesting against the Bo Nok coal-fired electrical plant in Prachuap Khiri Khan province. Over a three-day period, January 21-23, 2002, they initiated a petition campaign at the Victory Monument and handed out leaflets criticizing the power plant (and the Hin Krut plant) as unnecessary and overly expensive.²⁰ They also joined the Assembly of the Poor's (AOP) projects in the communities impacted by the Pak Mun Dam by building a shelter and providing food, supporting their public relations efforts, and educating university students about the villagers' concerns. It was during the AOP rallies that Ratchaneekorn attended, joining the mob in front of Government House, that she changed her impressions of the demonstrators—at first believing “someone hired them, but [learned it was] not like that.”²¹ In commenting on the SFT activities that year, Ratchaneekorn said the members were efficient and had good team work, especially in reaching the students at Ramkhamhaeng University.

In February 2002, they protested against military class festivities organized by former Prime Minister Suchinda and his colleagues from the February 1991 coup d'état. Metha condemned Suchinda for the coup that led to the bloodshed in May 1992, saying it was not an event to be celebrated.

A controversy was exposed in March 2002 involving an AMLO investigation was into the assets and bank accounts of senior editors and journalists who had been especially critical of the government. It provoked a powerful media backlash with

¹⁸ TN, January 9, 2002

¹⁹ TN, February 4, 2002

²⁰ TN, January 22, 2002

²¹ Interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

Thaksin accused of intimidating his critics. On March 8, 2002, several students were among more than one hundred backers gathered in a show of support for the Nation Multimedia Group (NMG) executives, at which time the SFT issued a statement accusing the government of “destroying democracy”. It continued, “If the prime minister doesn't show responsibility and change this kind of behavior, he will become another [former strongman] Sarit Thanarat.” Metha warned Thaksin against suppressing dissent and, as if looking into a crystal ball, predicted there would be an uprising against the prime minister and that “no matter how graciously he rose to power, [he] would go down in disgrace”.²² In the following days it was also revealed that AMLO had investigated twenty Thai activists, including three members of the Confederation of Democracy, and other prominent government critics. The affair ended with an investigation by Cabinet secretary-general Vishanu Krua-ngarm and a ‘slap on the wrist’ of the two AMLO staffers who were scapegoats for the affair.

Later that year, Pongsatorn Sormpetnarin, a Thammasat University student, became secretary-general of the SFT. Among their activities, they protested the change of content, from primarily news to entertainment, at iTV. They continued to work with villagers from the Pak Mun Dam area. They also supported the protesters against the Thai-Malaysia Gas Pipeline project in the same way, providing public relations for the opponents and educating fellow students about the issue. In June 2002, SFT deputy secretary-general Songsak Panya submitted an open letter to National Police Chief Sant Sarutanond, in response to the shooting of two land reform activists in Chiang Mai that many believed involved policemen. The SFT asked for a speedy and fair investigation and security for the one survivor of the attack and other community activists.²³ In December, the SFT joined the AOP, other NGOs, villagers and conservations in a protest in front of the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok. Citing environmental concerns, they opposed a plan to clear rapids on the Mekong River to facilitate commercial navigation.²⁴

The SFT kicked off 2003 by joining a network of fifty NGOs in a critical review of the Thaksin administration, accusing it of “Reversing Democracy” and

²² TN, March 9, 2002

²³ TN, June 27, 2002

²⁴ TN, December 13, 2002

conflicts-of-interest in a government “dominated by six business families—the Shinawatras, Jungrungreangk-its, Maleenonts, Siritwadanabhakdis, Chiravanonts and Bodharamiks—resulting in rising criticism of the misuse of policy to favor business.”²⁵ One year after fighting government plans to convert the telecom concession fees into an excise tax, the Cabinet issued an executive decree usually reserved for emergencies, putting that plan into effect. In January 2003, the SFT joined several NGOs in submitting a letter to Thaksin, calling for the plan to be stayed pending a public hearing.²⁶ The next month, the SFT joined the CPD and Consumer Federation of Thailand at a gathering on Silom Road distributing leaflets and collecting signatures on a petition to the Senate opposing the plan.²⁷

Ramkhamhaeng University student Pichit “Tam” Chaimongkol was elected SFT secretary-general for the 2003-2004 term. In October 2003, he called on student groups nationwide to staff booths for the thirtieth anniversary of the October 1973 student demonstrations despite Bangkok Governor Samak Sundaravej’s refusal to allow the anniversary to take place at Sanam Luang, saying the activities could damage lawns prepared for the upcoming APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit. However, during Pichit’s term, the SFT was more focused on activities relating to high school (exam leak) and university students (autonomy plans) than the anti-Thaksin movement.

In what could be characterized as a quiet year for the SFT, student activists independent of the student organization were focused on the United States’ Iraq War. As the US was preparing its plans, students joined about three thousand demonstrators and fifty Thai organizations in a protest in front of the US Embassy in February 2003. In October, US President Bush attended the APEC summit in Bangkok, attracting several groups to demonstrate against him and the Iraq War. On October 19, Chulalongkorn University’s Giles Ungpakorn led about one thousand people—including students, farmers, workers, environmentalists, Aids activists, and artists—in a protest march from Chulalongkorn University to Siam Square, after the Special

²⁵ TN, January 3, 2003

²⁶ TN, January 22, 2003

²⁷ TN, February 19, 2003

Branch Police asked him not to stage the rally at Central World Plaza.²⁸ On October 20-21, the SFT staged a demonstration against the US president. The following month, United States activist Reverend Jesse Jackson spoke at Thammasat University to a mostly student audience, criticizing his country's policy of unilateralism and double standards. On March 20, 2004, about one hundred fifty demonstrators marched to the US Embassy to mark the first anniversary of the US attack on Iraq. The Thai Alliance for Peace, organized by Giles, included many students. Ramkhamhaeng University student and SFT member Anuncha Uyseng said, "It may not lead to the end of the US occupation, but we are making our stance known to the world: we oppose war for profit."²⁹ Fifty students, calling themselves the Chiang Mai Student Alliance for Peace, marched around Chiang Mai's town center to the US Consulate where they declared, "The Thai government sent soldiers to Iraq just as a trade off for US investment deals, especially the free-trade agreement, after claiming humanitarian reasons and without parliamentary approval." While this anti-war movement paled in comparison to its counterpart three decades earlier, it also represented a core of the leftist opposition to the government that included student members of the People's Coalition Party (CPC) and Worker's Democracy Group.

For reasons I have been unable to discern, the SFT seemed to weaken the following year. There was no mention in the press of any secretary general for the 2004-2005 term; only Jamorn Sornpetchnarin was mentioned in December 2004 as acting secretary-general of the Federation.³⁰ In advance of the February 2005 general election, the SFT joined an alliance of the CPD, human rights, and anti-privatization labor groups to persuade voters to snub the TRT party and restore the system of checks and balances. The alliance echoed the Democrat Party's call for voters to give the opposition more than two hundred seats in the House of Representatives, thus enabling the Opposition to censor Thaksin for the first time since he came to power in 2001.³¹ Ironically, the other note-worthy activities in which the SFT participated seemed contradictory, if not hypocritical. In April 2005, they called for the government to remove Samak's three radio and television programs from the air,

²⁸ TN, October 17, 2003

²⁹ TN, March 21, 2004

³⁰ TN, December 15, 2004

³¹ TN, January 20, 2005

charging that the former governor was instigating hatred, confrontation and conflict. SFT member (and soon-to-be secretary-general) Kotchawan Chaibutr said, “These three programs must be reviewed or scrapped, because the content is destructive and provokes violence like what happened during the October 14 and October 6 [student uprising] incidents.”³² The following month, the SFT co-sponsored a seminar entitled “Freedom of Expression in Mass Media after the May 1992 Incident”, held at Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Political Science.³³

As mentioned above, the SFT appeared to get weaker each year during Thaksin’s term as prime minister. Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, the SFT secretary-general during the events of Black May 1992 and currently vice-rector of student affairs at Thammasat University, said the SFT had ceased being a federation as the student unions were not represented; instead, its membership was comprised of student clubs on university campuses—approximately thirty at the beginning of 2006 and perhaps an additional ten to twenty by the end of the year. Therefore, its base of support was less strong when it tried to speak on behalf of all Thai students.

Another change from the recent past—abolishing the requirement that its secretary-generals have four years involvement in the organization—allowed weaker leaders with less experience to assume responsibilities for which they were likely not prepared. Uchaen said that when the SFT became more closely aligned with the CPD, they believed they were the “self-center” of the political movement—an assessment Uchaen thought was “too shallow.”³⁴ One student activist said the SFT was seen as a proxy for the CPD and that it was more comfortable working with other NGOs than students. Members of the Social Criticism Student Club characterized the SFT as “all head, no tail” and “just a name now.”³⁵ They said there was no longer any debating; just a few people make decisions.

In February 2005 the SFT leadership strengthened with the election of Kotchawan as secretary-general. So did the criticism of the organization by other

³² TN, April 22, 2005

³³ TN, May 16, 2005

³⁴ Interview with Uchaen Chiangsaen, December 6, 2006

³⁵ Interview with members of the Social Criticism Student Club, March 13, 2006

students, some of which seemed quite personal against Kotchawan (accusing her of being a “too self-important” individual) and Suriyasai Katasila (wanting to control the SFT through Kotchawan, his proxy). While comments on these criticisms shall be saved for the following chapter, it is clear that the SFT was largely absent (excepting individual involvement and the occasional press release) from a half-dozen major issues during the first five years of Thaksin’s term as prime minister. However, other student activists—participating as individuals or with other student organizations—were involved in several high-profile issues directly challenging Thaksin’s government.

The Thaksin government favored a plan of privatization to mobilize funds from the stock market for investing. Economist Sungsidh Piriyarangsan saw it differently, saying that “the purpose of privatization was to shift economic power to conglomerates owned by the prime minister’s cronies and to companies owned by the Shinawatra family.”³⁶ The first three enterprises sold were the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) in 2001 and in 2004, both Airports of Thailand (AOT) and the Mass Communications Organization of Thailand (MCOT). All allegedly benefited politically connected politicians and businessmen at the expense of the public, although MCOT supposedly allocated its shares to retail investors through banks in a bid to boost transparency.

The next national asset proposed to be sold was EGAT, the nation’s electricity giant, scheduled to be listed in 2004. The government argued that capital from the stock market would allow expansion to meet growing energy needs without increasing debt. EGAT employees’ expressed opposition to the plan, based upon concerns related to job security and memories of the PTT experience that favored politically connected investors. Beginning in February 2004, “demonstrations of up to fifty thousand people were maintained over several weeks.”³⁷ Andrew Brown and Kevin Hewison characterized them as the largest in Thailand since May 1992, with “organized labor as the driving force.”³⁸ On March 13, 2004, Somsak Kosaisuk,

³⁶ BP, January 10, 2006

³⁷ Andrew Brown and Kevin Hewison, Kevin, 2004, “Labor politics in Thaksin’s Thailand”, SEARC Working Papers 62, City University of Hong Kong

³⁸ *Ibid.*

general secretary of the State Enterprise Worker's Relations Confederation, led about three thousand demonstrators, including students, academics, workers and representatives from seventeen NGOs, who gathered at Sanam Luang to protest the plan.³⁹ Although they won a one-year delay in the listing, the protest escalated into a movement against Thaksin's plan to privatize state enterprises. Among the students involved in the protest were members of the Worker's Democracy Group organized by Giles, and the SFT.

In April 2005, EGAT management undermined union opposition by offering employees the opportunity to buy shares at par value, putting them in the same class as politically connected investors. Consumer groups continued the fight in the courts and successfully delayed the listing when the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) issued an injunction on November 15, 2005. On March 23, 2006, the court made the ruling official, saying "the privatization process involved conflicts of interest, incomplete public hearings and missteps in the preparatory stages of the listing."⁴⁰

There was also an eighteen month battle over Khunying Jaruvan Maintaka's seat at the head of the OAG. After an effective two and a half year term in office, a group of pro-government senators filed a petition challenging her selection. On July 6, 2004, the Constitution Court ruled that the Senate had wrongfully elected her and she was dismissed from office. Her dismissal set off an extensive public protest,⁴¹ and she became the public face of the fight against corruption and a popular hero to many Thais. On May 19, the SFT joined thirty civic groups, led by the CPD and Confederation for Democracy, demanding the Senate reconsider its decision.

On September 6, 2005, a seminar was held at Thammasat University to discuss royal power, especially as it related to the palace's silence on the nomination of a new auditor-general to replace Khunying Jaruvan, attracting an audience estimated at fifteen hundred to two thousand—the largest crowd at a political seminar in ten years according to the university's rector. For the first time, the conflict

³⁹ TN, March 14, 2005

⁴⁰ BP, March 24, 2006

⁴¹ In May 2003, the king bestowed the title of 'khunying' on Jaruvan for her vigorous anti-corruption campaign.

between the prime minister and the palace became a public issue, with many anti-Thaksin critics aligning themselves with the king. Speaking of Khunying Jaruvan, three law students attending the seminar were quoted as saying “[s]he has become a symbol for the nation” and “[w]e need her and she is still fighting corruption outside her office by standing up to Thaksin and this [Visut Montriwat’s] nomination.”⁴²

Thammasat University Student Union (TUSU) leader Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai, however, explained that the event was not well attended by students as it was held during final exams. He said that students don’t usually attend the political events organized by the university because they don’t seem oriented toward students; rather, they attract people from outside the university.⁴³ After nearly four months of silence from the palace, Visut withdrew his name on September 22, 2005. Khunying Jaruvan was eventually reinstated by the State Audit Commission on February 1, 2006. Two weeks after the controversy ended, Khunying Jaruvan said the OAG and State Audit Commission had been subject to strong political interference during her long absence and its work severely disrupted.

Thaksin associates tried to purchase control of the media it couldn’t manipulate. Family members of Suriya increased their holdings in NMG, threatening the independence of one of Thailand’s freest media groups although never assuming influence over its publications. In September 2005, GMM Grammy chairman Paiboon Damrongchaitham, known to be Thaksin’s close friend and TRT supporter, purchased shares of Matichon Group and Post Publishing, publishers of the *Matichon* and *Bangkok Post* newspapers. There was an immediate and powerful reaction as students and media reformers called for a boycott of Grammy products, fearing a Grammy takeover that would further reduce press freedom and editorial independence for two of Thailand’s most independent papers. Student members of the Phirap Noi Club of young journalists at Chankasem Rajabhat University were among the first, followed by the ad hoc Target Group formed by students from seven leading universities, including Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Chiang Mai and Kasetsart. Speaking at a seminar at Chulalongkorn University titled “Free Media: Free People”, Narisara

⁴² *ThaiDay* (TD), September 7, 2005

⁴³ Interview with Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai, June 8, 2006

Saisan-guansat, a student from the university's communication arts faculty and Target Group member, said, "We would like to tell Grammy that we want some independent media. Please spare some thought for us... Grammy's executives are concerned only with business. We want to tell them that media outlets are not 'business' organizations. They are public and intellectual institutions... [Paiboon, a graduate of Chulalongkorn's faculty of communication arts] should understand that the media has a commitment to be responsible to society. If he wants to run print media, how about launching a good newspaper for young people? We would like to see more alternatives and more constructive products."⁴⁴ Paiboon quickly backed down and agreed to reduce his holdings in *Matichon*, while failing to gain a seat on their board.

Some critics charged that Thailand's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) were often created to benefit Thaksin's family businesses, especially ShinSat's contracts with Australia, China and India, and other listed companies in the auto industry and large-scale agriculture in which members of the cabinet held shares. Those deals were allegedly made at the expense of Thai farmers and small businesses, including the local liquor industry, dairy cooperatives, onion, garlic and orange growers and beef producers. The public doubted the government's impartiality because of perceived conflicts of interest and a lack of transparency during the negotiation process. Between 2005 and 2006, Thailand negotiated an FTA with the United States, in which the key issues were intellectual property rights, the liberalization of financial services and agricultural imports from the US to Thailand. Opponents of the agreement charged that Thaksin's political and personal financial issues would drive the talks to a conclusion that ignored Thailand's best interests, especially since Thaksin by-passed the Senate, Parliament and palace in adopting the agreements. Of particular concern among anti-FTA NGOs was the impact on Thailand's ability to research and produce generic drugs, especially for AIDS patients. Between January 9 and 13, 2006, the trade talks being held in Chiang Mai were interrupted by approximately eight thousand protesters, including student members of the Workers' Democracy Group and members of FTA Watch, AIDS Access Foundation, Thai Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS and the Consumer Federation of Thailand. The *Bangkok Post*

⁴⁴ TN, September 21, 2005

reported that “[m]ore than three hundred protesters prostrated themselves on the street on the way to the meeting venue, praying for sacred spirits to protect the country from the FTA. There was also a confrontation between protesters and the one thousand police deployed to secure the meeting venue, with some protesters slightly injured.”⁴⁵

The issue that engaged most students, however, was the government-sponsored violence in southern Thailand. Whereas the Thaksin administration avoided violent confrontations in all other parts of the country, its policy in the South brought back memories of strong-arm tactics under Prime Ministers Phibun, Sarit and Thanom. There were four situations that highlighted the confrontation between the government and students: the Hat Yai protest against the Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipeline, the Cabinet’s emergency decree, and the massacres at Krue Se Mosque and in Tak Bai.

In December 2002, the protest against the Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipeline came to a violent head in a Hat Yai demonstration, where Thaksin was meeting with Malaysian’s Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.⁴⁶ The non-violent protesters—including an independent group of about two hundred students, a quarter of whom were from the Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani campus—were brutally attacked by several hundred police, and several NGO members were arrested. SFT deputy secretary-general Pichit was seen being dragged away to a nearby gas station, where he later claimed he had been beaten up by a group of uniformed police officers.⁴⁷ Fifteen NGOs, including the Thai NGO Coordinating Committee, the Union for Civil Liberty, the October Network, and the CPD, issued a joint statement condemning the use of violence against a peaceful demonstration, demanding the unconditional release of the NGO members, and removal of the interior minister and the national police chief. Both the NHRC and Senate separately blamed the violence on the interior minister and police. The SFT supported the anti-pipeline protesters with their public relations efforts and by educating university students about the villagers’ concerns.

⁴⁵ BP, January 11, 2006

⁴⁶ The gas pipeline was a joint project between Malaysia’s state oil and gas firm Petronas and Thailand’s PTT Plc to extract natural gas from the Gulf of Thailand. The pipeline was supposed to be completed in late 2004; however, as of the date of this paper, it has not been finished because of protests by local residents.

⁴⁷ TN, December 22, 2002

In July 2003, following a coordinated insurgent attack in Yala and in advance of the APEC summit in Bangkok, the Cabinet adopted an anti-terrorist law by emergency decree. The decree vested extraordinary power in the prime minister, who needed only one cabinet member to approve a cabinet proposal during an emergency; according to Thai law, the Parliament was allowed to accept or reject it but could not amend it. On July 19, 2005, the SFT, CPD, EGAT labor union and other NGOs submitted a letter to the Office of the Ombudsman seeking a ruling on the constitutionality of the decree.⁴⁸ At a public forum held on August 21, 2005, the SFT joined other leading civic groups in submitting a petition to Parliament calling for the revocation of the controversial emergency decree. Kotchawan called on people to protest the decree, saying, "Our elected representatives must respond to the people and not their party. We also want the public to make a stand and show the government that it cannot just pass laws that are undemocratic and get away with it."⁴⁹ The following day, the groups petitioned the Senate. Despite their protests, the decree was approved by Parliament.

The violence in the South escalated on January 4, 2004, when an unidentified group of approximately thirty men attacked a military camp and looted about four hundred assault weapons, while others set fire to twenty one schools. In response, the government declared martial law and increased the police presence in the South. As mentioned above, Somchai was abducted from the streets of Bangkok shortly after starting a signature campaign calling for martial law to be lifted from the three southern provinces, and petitioning the Senate to investigate allegations that the police had tortured five people he was defending.

On April 28, 2004, seven groups, consisting mostly of Muslim teenagers armed with little more than machetes and knives, attacked police posts in three provinces and killed five members of the security forces. One group retreated to the historic Krue Se mosque in Pattani, shouting radical slogans at the security forces outside. The government forces responded with rocket-propelled grenades, killing thirty-two people inside; in total, 108 insurgents died "in one of the worst days of

⁴⁸ TN, July 20, 2005

⁴⁹ TD, August 22, 2005

violence in modern Thai history.”⁵⁰ An independent inquiry carried out by the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC)⁵¹ blamed security officials acting under the orders of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) Director-General General Pallop Pinmanee who, ignoring a directive from Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit to resolve the situation through negotiations, had used excessive force and heavy weapons disproportionate to the threat posed by the assailants. On November 28, 2006, the Pattani Provincial Court’s inquest concluded that General Pallop and senior army officers were responsible for many deaths.

On October 25, 2005, police and soldiers broke up a peaceful demonstration outside the Tak Bai police station, resulting in the deaths of eighty five demonstrators—seven of whom were shot dead by the police, and seventy eight who suffocated while being transported. Those seventy eight were among 1,324 protesters and bystanders who were arrested. One of Thaksin’s cronies, National Police Assistant Commissioner Lt-General Wongkot Maneerin was in charge but never held responsible for the deaths. Despite government protests to the contrary, news agency video footage showed the soldiers beating and violently dragging defenseless protesters and firing directly on the crowd. That footage was widely distributed as a VCD by the Democrat Party, NGOs, anti-Thaksin networks and as an insert in the *Fah Diow Kan* magazine. The Worker’s Democracy Group showed it at three university campuses: Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Ramkhamhaeng. Thaksin spoke out against the distribution of the video “because it is the country that stands to lose. It’s not right to play the VCD and attack the government as if the government had killed Thai Muslims....we fear that people who may not be fully informed could misunderstand and cause more social rifts. This should not be allowed to happen as the entire country is cooperating in trying to bring back peace to the deep South.”⁵² After the VCD was banned by the government as a ‘threat to the national security’⁵³ several activist groups distributed it underground.

⁵⁰ Pasuk and Baker, 2004, p. 238

⁵¹ The NRC was appointed by Thaksin in February 2005 to build peace and reconciliation in the southern provinces, although critics alleged it was established to deflect criticism from the prime minister. Thaksin never adopted any of the commission’s recommendations.

⁵² TN, December 11, 2004

⁵³ Classmate Philip Baechtold suggests the threat was to ‘national ignorance’.

One student activist credited the Tak Bai massacre as the primary event that “sparked my activism”⁵⁴. As a result of the incident, he joined with several hundred student activists and members of NGO/grass-root organizations in campaigning in front of Government House every Friday evening for three or four months, although that number dwindled to about fifty people—the “cream”—over time. They also formed the ad hoc Faculty of Liberal Arts Students for Peace at Thammasat University that condemned the government’s excessive use of force in the South and organized a seminar at which Senator Jon Ungpakorn spoke. Twenty-five year old Papan Raksritong, a writer for prachathai.com, opposed Thaksin’s aggressive approach toward the problems in southern Thailand—focusing on power and force—in contrast to the sensitive problems of culture, society and religion. He said Thaksin tried to bring mainstream Central Thailand to the South, creating a huge gap between the government and the people who were made to feel like second-class citizens. With the dissolution of the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC), the people had no one to turn to, creating a void that was filled by the terrorists. “Incidents abusing the local people’s human rights—the massacre at Krue Se Mosque, the Tak Bai incident, the unexplained disappearance of human rights attorney Somchai, and the police impunity during the War on Drugs—further alienated the [southern] people from the government.”⁵⁵ In contrast, the government’s violent approach was widely supported by most Thais outside the South. It did, however, raise the awareness of many students and caused many of them to question the Thaksin government for the first time.

One issue significant to this thesis due to the absence of any student protest, was the country’s most publicized case of media intimidation: the Shin Corp lawsuit against Supinya Klangnarong, secretary-general of the CPMR, for saying in a July 16, 2003 interview that the company’s profits had soared since Thaksin became prime minister. The *Thai Post* newspaper, its editors and publishing company were also named in the lawsuit. At the first court hearing on December 1, 2003, more than fifty leading activists appeared at court in her support. Throughout the legal process that lasted into 2006, Supinya enjoyed strong support from many NGOs and leading Thai

⁵⁴ Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

⁵⁵ Interview with Papan Raksritong, June 22, 2006

citizens, including former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun and Sulak Sivaraksa. However, students had no visible or public presence in her support. One explanation may have been criticisms that she was a publicity-hound, as expressed by *Fah Diow Kan* editor Thanaphol Eiwsakul, “As for Supinya, I think her problem is that she could not see anything beyond herself. Not that I don’t feel for her predicament, but whatever articles she writes seem to be all about herself.”⁵⁶

During this period, as the abuses and corruption by the Thaksin government increased, so did the criticism from Thailand’s civil society. With Kotchawan’s election as secretary-general of the SFT, the student organization’s participation in that criticism increased and gained more media attention. However, they seemed to attract a small following to participate in their events. Instead, a small group of students joined in public protests—critical of the EGAT privatization, in support of Khunying Jaruvan, to threaten a boycott against GMM Grammy, in opposition to the FTAs, and against Thaksin’s policies in southern Thailand. In Gladwell’s terms, these students were the “trendsetters” among the Millennial Generation. They probably numbered in the hundreds and had yet to inspire a significant following among their peers.

4.5 The Sondhi Phenomenon

In September 2005, Manager Media Group owner Sondhi became the face and voice of the anti-Thaksin movement that changed the dynamics of Thai politics. Sondhi was not an NGO activist, social critic or member of the Opposition—he was a businessman with a complicated history in relation to the prime minister: a former business partner and one of Thaksin’s most loyal allies and vocal supporters. He broadcast his popular radio programs and TV talk show *Muang Thai Rai Sabda* (“Thailand This Week”) on government stations, by satellite and online, often acting as Thaksin’s alter ego while justifying the prime minister’s policies. It is unknown exactly why Sondhi turned on Thaksin, but over time he began bashing the prime minister, while often claiming to be protecting the monarchy. On August 29, 2005,

⁵⁶ TN, August 15, 2005

Sondhi's newspaper launched a stinging attack on Thaksin's cousin, General Chaisit Shinawatra, accusing him of ignoring the king's powers to veto, appoint or remove when it comes to highest bureaucratic or military transfers. Sondhi's popular Channel 9 TV show was canceled by MCOT the following month for being too critical of the government. In its place, he took his show on the road as his web audience expanded from twenty to ninety thousand viewers. The first five shows were held at Thammasat University, with Sondhi saying, "Historically, Thammasat University has been the cradle of major political changes in Thai society and its atmosphere is very conducive to this kind of activity."⁵⁷ Sondhi attacked Thaksin for the corruption allegedly perpetrated by his relatives and ministers, for the problems associated with the caretaker monks acting on behalf of the Supreme Patriarch, and for failing to reinstate Khunying Jaruvan as auditor-general. The Thammasat auditorium could hold an audience of only three thousand people and, needing to reach a larger audience, on October 29, Sondhi moved his as "talk-show-cum-political rally" to Lumpini park where thousands of fans filled the hall or sat on the grass outside. Sondhi and his co-host wore T-shirts that read 'We love the King'. They called for Thaksin's resignation and appealed to the king to appoint his replacement.

His eighth show, on November 11, 2005, collected a crowd estimated at between twenty and forty thousand people. After more inflammatory criticisms of the prime minister, Thaksin filed six lawsuits, including a one billion baht defamation claim, against Sondhi. As the government tried to suppress the broadcast of his show, many people watched it on the ASTV1 cable channel broadcast via satellite, on the manager website or on VCDs issued following the show. Sondhi's show became the talk of the town with heated discussions in various website chat rooms. *The Nation* wrote, "Welcome to a world of new media. The government's attempt to silence Sondhi from slamming the premier have been futile in the face of new, sophisticated technologies that are proving to have a profound impact on the Thai political landscape."⁵⁸ The lawsuit, veiled threats, grenade attack on his offices, court order and broadcast ban only served to increase Sondhi's audience as a reported fifty thousand people turned out for his ninth show on November 18.

⁵⁷ TD, September 24, 2005

⁵⁸ TN, November 19, 2005

As 2006 began, Sondhi's appeal seemed to have peaked. His shows were becoming repetitive while exposing less sensational stories, and the government threats created an aura of fear among his followers. It was clear, however, that Sondhi had energized a movement that posed the most serious challenge to Thaksin in five years. Prinya compared the history of the 1992 event with Thaksin's regime, saying "What was the same with the two incidents is that media freedom was taken away, and if there is no press freedom then there is also no democracy, whichever way you look at it."⁵⁹ Attitudes toward Sondhi were mixed, even among anti-Thaksin Thais. His audience included a wide spectrum of socio-economic classes and age groups; however, the attendees were more likely lower-middle class and were clearly mostly middle aged or older.⁶⁰ Students and young people were scarce. The audience was clearly not similar to that of the 1970s student movement, or the 'middle-class mobile phone people' from the May 1992 demonstrations. Many, if not most, were dressed in yellow t-shirts and headbands, with the slogan "We Love the King" prominently displayed. They were definitely Sondhi's fans and responded enthusiastically to his remarks. Even though I did not understand his words, his delivery was obviously superb and he exuded a charismatic charm that captivated the audience. Sales of VCDs and t-shirts seemed brisk at venues throughout the park.

Nine students were interviewed at the January 13, 2006 show for this thesis. They were interested in Sondhi because they believed he expressed a "different point of view" that was not available elsewhere, with most believing it was the "truth" or "real" while the "government hides things from the Thai people". They believed that the most important issues facing Thailand were first, "corruption", and second, "the economy", especially the "gap between the rich and the poor". One particularly vocal student said "Thaksin tries to reduce poverty, but fails." Additionally, one student expressed a concern about the media versus the government's power. The students I interviewed could hardly be classified as student activists, as with only two exceptions they had not previously attended a political rally. One student had attended an anti-privatization EGAT rally, and another had attended a teacher anti-decentralization rally—but as a school assignment rather than as a participant. All,

⁵⁹ BP, November 26, 2005

⁶⁰ This observation is based upon personal observation; however, this researcher does not profess an expertise in identifying members of Thai socio-economic classes.

however, had attended Sondhi's previous shows, between two and eleven times. When asked why they were interested in Thai politics, the students responded with a general, unsophisticated but nonetheless deeply felt view that, "It's our country and we must do something", "Thais should be interested", "It's good to know because it is necessary to benefit my future" and "Political policy affects people in a good or bad way." This small contingent of students was different from their politically apathetic classmates because they had a non-specific "personal" interest in politics that they were unable to further explain.⁶¹

There were many anti-Thaksin people who did not attend the talk shows, even though Sondhi was the focus of the movement from October through mid-January. There were at least three reasons for their lack of participation: first, several questioned Sondhi's reputation and motives. They had the impression that he was an opportunist seeking revenge against his former ally. Second, Sondhi wrapped himself in yellow, emphasized his allegiance to the king and sought a royal solution to the political crisis that was unfolding. Some student activists and academics favored a democratic solution to the crisis and wanted to keep the King uninvolved with politics. Third, among more radical members of the anti-Thaksin opposition, Sondhi represented capitalist interests just as Thaksin did, although backed by 'old money' as opposed to 'new money.' Expressing all three reasons, student activist Pokpong opposed the strategy proposed by Sondhi, believing that "it was not productive for the people's movement to invoke Article 7" [to allow a royally appointed prime minister]. Also, he criticized Sondhi for "never mentioning privatization, the violence in the South or speaking in favor of constitutional amendments." Rather, Sondhi was seen as a former Thaksin supporter who was "simply getting back at Thaksin."⁶² Others had a more mixed opinion. Thanachai said he did not have a good impression of Sondhi and didn't agree with all his ideas, but recognized that he was the "spark to influence people to be interested in politics and criticize Thaksin." Although he did not attend the talk shows, Thanachai followed the news they generated.⁶³

⁶¹ Interview at students at Lumpini Park, January 13, 2006

⁶² Interview with Pokpong Lawansiri, June 13, 2006

⁶³ Interview with Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai, June 8, 2006

The fourteenth installment on January 13 drew the smallest crowd, estimated at ten thousand, since he had moved his shows to Lumpini park two and a half months earlier. It was disrupted by a belligerent anti-Sondhi group from northern Thailand, led by close associates of Natural Resources and Environment Minister Yongyuth Tiyapairat. Next planned was the February 4 rally at Royal Plaza as Sondhi tried to keep his movement from faltering. Sondhi's impact on the Thai political scene was best summarized by Democrat Party Deputy Secretary-General Korn Chatkavanij, who applauded Sondhi for having "created a channel for tens of thousands of people to engage themselves in politics" and establishing a "forum [that] has become the channel for genuine issues to be recognized—such as the privatization of EGAT and the rampant corruption that plagues our politics."⁶⁴

4.6 The Tipping Point: 2006

The whole calculus of the anti-Thaksin movement changed on January 23, 2006 when it was announced that the Shinawatra-Damapong families had sold their stock in Shin Corporation to Temasek Holding Corporation, an investment arm of the Singapore government. Thaksin claimed that his family sold their shares because they wanted to put an end to conflict of interest allegations and allow him to focus on politics. It was not an explanation that convinced many people. The sale netted the families 73.3 billion baht, all of which was exempt from taxes. The public outrage focused on the tax-exempt character of the sale, with two-thirds of surveyed Bangkok residents saying the gains should not be tax-exempt. In response to an outpouring of criticism, Thaksin called his critics "jealous" and told his critics to "calm down."⁶⁵ He later claimed that "[a]lthough my family wants to pay tax, the Revenue Department is not in a position to accept it."⁶⁶ Neither the public, activist groups nor the Democrat Party calmed down. Over the following months there were almost daily charges related to the stock sale and the various transactions that had preceded it, including allegations of asset concealment, violation of disclosure regulations, share manipulation, insider trading, money laundering, tax evasion, and conflicts of interest.

⁶⁴ BP, December 15, 2005

⁶⁵ TD, February 2, 2006

⁶⁶ BP, February 25, 2006

Other charges focused on the sale of ‘national assets’ and the illegal use of nominees to facilitate the sale. The question of legality was passed from one government agency to another—among the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET), Security Exchange Commission (SEC), the Council of State, the Transport Ministry, the Ministry of Commerce, the Business Development Department, the National Telecommunications Department, and the economic crime police—endlessly delaying resolution.

On February 3, 2006, a group of twenty-eight senators initiated a legal effort to oust the prime minister. Their petition demanded that the Constitution Court investigate and judge whether Thaksin had violated the constitutional ban against cabinet members holding stocks in private firms. Less than two weeks later, the Constitution Court rejected the petition in an eight-to-six vote. The Constitution Court’s decision appeared to be a replay of their 2001 decision acquitting Thaksin, further undermining its already damaged image as a supposedly independent institution. Many called for an impeachment of the eight judges while fifty law lecturers from fourteen universities demanded their resignation. The decision was deeply disappointing to those who relied on neutral agencies and the judiciary to help solve the political impasse. The implication of the Court’s decision was that constitutional and legal mechanisms would fail to resolve the crisis. Thitinan Pongsudhirak, from Chulalongkorn University’s political science faculty, warned “if all parliamentary and constitutional channels fail to deliver, then people will take to the streets. We need some constitutional release valve; otherwise, it’s like a boiling pot with a fire underneath and the lid closed.”⁶⁷

Beginning on February 1, 2006, several groups of academics began calling for Thaksin’s resignation. Amara Pongsapich, dean of Chulalongkorn University’s political science faculty, led a group of professors in submitted their own letter calling for Thaksin’s resignation, saying the prime minister “clearly lacks any legitimacy to rule in a democratic society.”⁶⁸ The dean’s participation set off a firestorm with competing calls for her resignation and in her support. Nonetheless, throughout

⁶⁷ TD, February 17, 2006

⁶⁸ TD, February 3, 2006

February more and more academics from universities nationwide joined the anti-Thaksin movement.

The outrage stemming from the Shin Corp stock sale only twelve days before Sondhi's February 4 rally propelled that event into renewed prominence. In the morning, Sondhi led a group of two thousand followers to meet with General Sonthi Boonyaratglin⁶⁹ at Army headquarters, seeking military support for his campaign. According to Sondhi, when he asked General Sonthi, "Are you going to stand by the people?" the general nodded in agreement and responded, "I will stand by the people because I am a soldier of the King."⁷⁰ Whereas attendance at Sondhi's talk shows had been steadily declining, the afternoon rally drew the largest anti-Thaksin crowds ever with an estimated fifty thousand attendees.⁷¹ There were only a few students scattered among the crowd at Royal Plaza, mostly alone or in small groups of friends. None were associated with their university or any organization, with one exception: Rangkids. The few students that were interviewed for this thesis explained that their friends stayed away because they were skeptical of Sondhi.

Although students had largely stayed away from Sondhi's talk shows and the February 4 rally, they were not unaware of the corruption accusations against the prime minister. At the annual Chulalongkorn-Thammasat football game in January 2006, students displayed a float satirizing Thaksin's greediness with a sign reading "*Daek Jang Gae*" ("you eat much"), a play on the title of a popular Korean television serial, "*Dae Jang Geum*."

On February 8, TUSU's Thanachai announced that members of the university's student body would initiate a petition campaign to impeach the prime minister. *ThaiDay* reported that the student union president said, "We will now seek the support of student bodies at other universities....Our move is a show of student

⁶⁹ Although first names of Sondhi Limthongkul and General Sonthi Boonyaratglin are spelled identically in Thai, the English-language press spells the General's name as 'Sonthi'. Their precedent has been followed throughout this thesis.

⁷⁰ TN, March 5, 2007, quoted in a column by Chang Noi

⁷¹ Crowd estimates varied dramatically, between 20,000 and 100,000. The *Bangkok Post* estimated 50,000.

power.”⁷² In an interview several months later, Thanachai said the petition was also seen as an “alternative political democratic action—an alternative political space and way to express our opinion—to Sondhi and the mass movement that protested against Thaksin.” He thought the mass movement was “good as it allowed people who shared the same goal—deposing the prime minister—to participate in many ways.”⁷³ The kickoff was held on February 10 at *Laan Bhodi* on Thammasat’s *Tha Phra Chan* campus. The location was symbolic to student activists as the site of the October 6, 1976 massacre and May 1992 rally against the National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC). A Thammasat senior student said, “This is probably the first time since Bloody May that students from the university have fully taken part in such political activities at *Laan Bhodi*.” Prinya celebrated the “reawakening” of students who were once again becoming politically active, saying, “Whenever *Laan Bhodi* becomes active, changes will take place.”⁷⁴

On the afternoon of February 10, the campus was bustling with activity. Numerous tables were staffed with student volunteers while others handed out flyers describing the petition. Banners criticizing the prime minister were hung around the university. The students interviewed for this thesis at the campus that day were divided; a few were loyal to Thaksin, a few described themselves as ‘apolitical’ and others supported the campaign. *Thai Day* characterized the law and political science faculties as the home of most of the anti-Thaksin activity while the business faculty had more Thaksin supporters. Although most students did not know Thanachai, either personally or by reputation, they thought he was doing the right thing and trusted him.

On the morning of February 10, the TUSU submitted a letter to Senate Speaker Suchon Chalikrua declaring their intent to gather fifty thousand signatures and explaining why Thaksin should be removed from office. The impeachment process they pursued was a complicated and lengthy one: once fifty thousand signatures were gathered, the petition would be forwarded to the NCCC that, as of February 2006, had no commissioners. Then, if the NCCC voted to forward the petition to the Senate, a vote of at least seventy-five percent of the senators would be

⁷² TD, February 9, 2006

⁷³ Interview with Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai June 8, 2006

⁷⁴ BP, February 12, 2006

required to unseat Thaksin. It was a daunting task, but met with great enthusiasm and resolve. A student coordinating center was formed to synchronize petition-gathering activities across several university campuses, with their first meeting at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science on February 16. Petition forms were available online and distributed at universities from all regions of the country, with booths at Rangsit University in Pathum Thani and Walailak University in Nakhon Si Thammarat staffed with students. Stands were also set up on Silom Road and Sukhumvit to distribute literature and collect signatures. On February 18, students were joined by union members from the Self Employed Women's Union in gathering signatures in Chatuchak Park.

The TUSU petition campaign was in sharp contrast to the Sondhi talk show and the rallies that followed. Rather than pursuing a mass protest, Thanachai and the TUSU's approach was constructed as a legal process using the institutions established in the 1997 Constitution to achieve their means—a direction that various observers attempted to explain. Most of the TUSU students were from the faculty of law and approached Thaksin's abuse of the constitution from a legal point of view. Although both Thanachai and Prinya emphasized the students' independence in choosing the petition campaign over mass rallies, it seems obvious that Prinya's experience during the violent Black May protest strongly influenced them. In a December 2006 interview for this thesis, Prinya explained that he told his story to the students—of being the lone vote against marching to Democracy Monument and his anguish with Major-General Chamlong Srimuang for leading protesters to their deaths. The *Bangkok Post* reported Thanachai's view, as follows:

Those times [the violence of Black May] are over, and the students, too, have a different way of fighting against the abuses of democracy, according to one student....“It's time we, as Thai citizens, did something for our country. Rallies are no longer a part of our strategy. What we're doing now is exercising our democratic rights to demand an investigation into the prime minister, and we're asking the public to join us if they agree with us,” [Thanachai] said. “Every previous political activity at *Laan Bodhi* was linked to violence, but our current activity is different. We are just exercising our constitutional rights in a peaceful way,” he said.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ BP, February 12, 2006

That ‘constitutional’ approach was set back when the Constitution Court rejected the Senate’s impeachment petition on February 16. It was a powerful disappointment to those students who relied on the legal approach—choosing the institutions of democracy over street demonstrations—to the political crisis. Thanachai said, “The court’s decision has taken our faith in independent agencies to the lowest point.”⁷⁶ Prinya shared Thanachai’s reaction and placed his hopes in the students’ petition campaign as it “bypasses the Constitutional Court, and could offer a rules-based exit strategy for the current political impasse.”⁷⁷ Although the petition-gathering campaign was scheduled to end on February 26, the same day as the major anti-Thaksin rally at Sanam Luang, TUSU’s Assaree Charukosol stressed that the student organization would not participate in the rally because it wanted to maintain its focus on the impeachment campaign.

There were various attempts to explain the students’ late arrival to political activism. Thananya Shrespha, dean of the university’s journalism faculty, asserted that the Thammasat students were as interested in political and social issues as previous generations but had no reason to become involved as “[y]oung people trusted Parliament and the government to exercise power on behalf of the people. But, apparently, under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s governance, those mechanisms are no longer trusted by the people. They see many problems accumulating with no solution.”⁷⁸ In response to criticism that Thammasat students had been slow to become involved in the political crisis, the *ThaiDay* reported on one law student who “denied that students had been politically apathetic, claiming that they had been biding their time. ‘We believe that if we stand up now, people will support us. But if we had made the same call earlier, nobody would have listened to us,’ said Kleepradawan.”⁷⁹ Obviously, people did listen to them. By mid-February students from twenty-two universities in Bangkok joined Thammasat in calling for Thaksin to resign. The *Bangkok Post* reported that “Pratabchit [Nilapaijit], daughter of missing lawyer Somchai, welcomed the political mood in which youngsters had come out to show a sense of nationalism. ‘It’s the duty of everyone to express views

⁷⁶ TN, February 17, 2006

⁷⁷ TD, February 17, 2006

⁷⁸ TD, February 14, 2006

⁷⁹ TD, February 13, 2006

of problems that affect society, for what happens today will affect our future,' she said."⁸⁰ In commenting on the petition drive after one week, Thanachai said, "We've seen new faces showing up to sign up for the impeachment campaign at Thammasat University. We ignited the flame. Now it's the question of how to keep it burning."⁸¹

By comparison, the campaign to unseat Thaksin was relatively quiet at Chulalongkorn University. Banners with slogans such as 'Laws for the Shinawatras or the People?' were hung at the political science faculty. The activist students were generally associated with the Workers' Democracy Group, the PCP and the Social Criticism Student Club, most of whom were strongly influenced by Giles. In early February, about thirty to forty university students—mostly from those three organizations at Chulalongkorn, but also from other universities—formed the leaderless, unstructured Network of Concerned University Students in response to their increasing frustration with the abuses of the Thaksin regime. On February 9, they gathered at the Faculty of Political Science in a show of support for Dean Amara and walked from canteen to canteen of the different faculties. The thirty to forty marchers—their numbers varied as students came and left—handed out fliers and invited students to an evening rally. The day culminated in the first-ever anti-Thaksin gathering at Chulalongkorn University, with between five and six hundred students participating, and a declaration in opposition to the prime minister. On February 17, approximately five students staffed tables at Chulalongkorn University to collect signatures for the TUSU impeachment campaign; however, the interest was fairly subdued. Despite the good turnout at the February 9 rally, one student characterized the political interest at Chula as "pretty flat."⁸²

Ramkhamhaeng University's student organizations are much more complex than any other institution in Thailand, with eleven political parties contesting on-campus elections. With about four hundred thousand students, the on-campus political campaigns attract the involvement of national political parties and financing from businesses. Satchatham Party, formerly one of the most politically active and since with little influence, was behind bringing the impeachment campaign to

⁸⁰ BP, February 11, 2006

⁸¹ BP, February 20, 2006

⁸² Interview with Pattippa Saengpitak, February 2006

Ramkhamhaeng University. The party set up a booth for collecting signatures on campus between February 13 and February 18. In its first day, they collected only two hundred signatures as most students were not aware of the activity. Furthermore, the party's chair, Chorfa Manthong, claimed the students faced harassment from university officials as the two sides disputed their right to erect a tent in front of the political science faculty on campus. The students claimed the university had granted them permission; however, Political Science Dean Wuthisak Lapcharoensap rejected those charges and defended university rules that require political activities occur in front of the campus—not on it—especially during the very busy final exams month. He said that the security officials rightly forbid the activity.⁸³ A second political party, Prachaatham (Moral People), joined the anti-Thaksin campaign at a later date.

In February 2006, Ramkhamhaeng University held its elections for a new student organization president, electing Somchot (“Daeng”) Meechana from the Sansaengthong Party. Somchot said his party had “no relationship with any political parties” and his party was “clean and transparent.”⁸⁴ However, Wuthisak said it was supported by the Democrat Party and southern students. The election represented a significant change in student union politics, as the 2005-2006 RUSO president Surasak Niengphan was from the Tawanmai Party that remained neutral toward national politics—it did not field a candidate in the 2006 election due to a change in the political climate. Somchot attributed his success to popular policies oriented toward students—a shorter registration process, “enough space for students to work on their studies”, more support for “extracurricular activity that is useful to society” and “free tuition for activities” like volunteer camps—and the psychological impact of the anti-Thaksin campaign.⁸⁵ Somchot was also leader of Ramkhamhaeng University's Alliance for Democracy, which claimed the support from one thousand students at universities throughout Thailand. The Alliance issued a statement calling on Thaksin to resign, saying he must first amend the constitution and then dissolve parliament. They rallied at the university on February 24.

⁸³ Interview with Wuthisak, Lapcharoensap, July 12, 2006

⁸⁴ Interview with Somchot Meechana, July 14, 2006

⁸⁵ Interview with Somchot Meechana, July 14, 2006

Throughout the month of February 2006, students from other universities joined the anti-Thaksin campaign as it seemingly spread across the country. Among those gathering headlines were students from Thaksin University, Khon Kaen University, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Silpakorn University, Ubon Ratchathani University, Rajabhat University in Nakhon Ratchasima, Maha Sarakham University, Chiang Mai University (organized as the Brave Step for Democracy), Rangsit University and Burapha University in Chonburi. The students' complaints had a common theme: Thaksin's lack of legitimacy due to his abuse of authority, malfeasance, lack of ethics, and restriction of media access.

One student organization formed in response to the political crisis was the Confederation of Students in the Isan Region, headed by Witthaya Khamkhoosaen, including students from fifty-two colleges and universities in the northeastern provinces. In mid-February, they held a seminar at the Rajabhat Institute Nakhon Ratchasima, with students participating from five other universities—Suranari Technology University, Wong Chavalitkul University, Northeast Technology University Nakhon Ratchasima, Rajamangala Technology Nakhon Ratchasima and Princess Mother Nursing College. Speakers included Kotchawan, and Somkiat Pongpaiboon, president of the Rajabhat council. *The Nation* reported that Kotchawan “told the seminar that student activists did not side with anyone in their campaign against Thaksin but were fighting for their rights and to end government dishonesty” while Somkiat said he would visit the southern provinces to invite people to join the anti-Thaksin rally.⁸⁶ Around two thousand people signed up to support the students' anti-Thaksin campaign.

University students from southern Thailand were particularly strong in the campaign to unseat Thaksin, but with a different emphasis than students elsewhere in the country. Echoing sentiment throughout their region, Prince of Songkhla student spokesman Abdullohman Mukem said Thaksin's main failure was his inability to tackle the violence in the south. On February 9, several hundred students and lecturers at the Prince of Songkhla University signed a petition demanding that Thaksin resign. One week later, political science student Niarong Nite led his fellow students on a

⁸⁶ TN, February 20, 2006

march through the streets of Pattani with the same message. The rally ended with speeches, dubbed 'Hyde Park,' from representatives of the SFT, Thaksin University in Songkhla and Rajabhat University in Yala (RYU) and a six-point declaration citing the students' accusations against Thaksin. On February 25, RYU students gathered for a rally at Prince of Songkhla University in Pattani while "students at Thaksin University held a 'pure power' campaign to heighten pressure on Thaksin to step down despite attempts from within the university to block the movement."⁸⁷ Yupawan Damrongpipat, vice president of Walailak University in Nakhon Si Thammarat said students planned to join a Bangkok rally and cook for the demonstrators. Students at Walailak University in Nakhon Si Thammarat also joined the campaign.

The student movement took a youthful turn with the formation of Students for Democracy, an organization of high school students. Although billed as including approximately one hundred students from thirty schools, it was led by a small group from the prestigious Triam Udom Suksa. On February 21 they announced their campaign against 'Satan who disguises himself as a saint' with a disproportionate amount of excellent publicity. The *Thai Post* wrote, "[t]he criticism from students should make the prime minister, his cabinet and TRT MPs ashamed of themselves. When even young students have the clarity of vision to see the PM for what he is, Satan disguised as a saint, it is baffling to watch adults, despite their experience and supposedly greater wisdom, delude themselves."⁸⁸ Leader Yos Tansakul, promising to intensify their protests after university entrance examinations, said "[w]e think people should have the right to express their opinions on the issues they feel uncomfortable with. If people say we have a duty to study, we would say that this political move is a practical part of our education."⁸⁹ Despite their youthful enthusiasm, the group faced many difficulties, including the school's administration that distanced themselves from their activist students, TRT politicians who warned that they risked being used as pawns in a power struggle, and anxious parents who feared for their safety.

There were also student activist groups forming independent of any university affiliation. Metha, a graduate of Chulalongkorn University and former SFT secretary-

⁸⁷ BP, February 24, 2006

⁸⁸ *Thai Post*, as reported in TD, February 23, 2006

⁸⁹ TN, February 22, 2006

general, established the Young People for Democracy (YPD) movement consisting of recent graduates. Thai students throughout the United States and Europe joined with their peers in Thailand in calling for Thaksin's resignation. On February 16, Germany-based students issued a statement calling on Thaksin to resign and dissolve the parliament "since he no longer has the legitimacy to administer the country."⁹⁰ In Paris, Thai students calling themselves Members of Act up Paris supported anti-Thaksin demonstrators while anti-Thaksin rallies were held in front of the Thai consulate in Los Angeles.

In contrast to the many universities that joined the anti-Thaksin campaign, there were a few with no noticeable participation. Anand Wanla, chairman of the Mahidol University Student Union said, while Mahidol students were free to participate in anti-Thaksin rallies, their involvement was purely personal and they should not claim any association with the university. Furthermore, he said, Mahidol University's Student Union was not part of the SFT. ABAC Faculty of Law Professor Sunee said there were no political activities at her university. Ms. Boo, president of the ABAC Student Union, said that although they sent a delegation to a meeting of Thammasat and Chulalongkorn students as observers, they were staying 'neutral' during the political crisis. Likewise, students at Bangkok University were not involved in any political activities. Suravudh Kijkusol, dean of the law faculty, said the bulletin board displayed no political notices. During interviews with students from the Faculty of Humanities and Tourism, some expressed private disapproval of the prime minister but confirmed their lack of activism.⁹¹

On February 8, a few days before the next scheduled rally, Sondhi announced that he was relinquishing his role as sole leader of the anti-Thaksin campaign and forming a broad alliance with about fifteen leading citizens and members of civil society groups. He announced to the press, "[i]t's now up to the alliance. I'm just one of them. I'm no longer the leader."⁹² The following day, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) was launched at a press conference at the October 14 Memorial, with its leaders agreeing on three main goals: 1) ousting Thaksin for his lack of ethics;

⁹⁰ TD, February 17, 2006

⁹¹ Interview conducted by Pittippa Saengpitak, February 2006

⁹² TN, February 9, 2006

2) exposing Thaksin's secret agendas; and 3) promoting political reform. Additionally, the group said it would support the impeachment-petition campaign initiated by TUSU. Sondhi, with a large loyal following, remained as one of the coordinators of the group. *The Nation* assessed Sondhi's move, writing, "In Thailand, politics of personality is still very important and it cannot be denied that Sondhi still remains the highest profile anti-Thaksin crusader and will likely continue to be that unless he opts to take a lesser role."⁹³ Other leaders included former student activists from the 1970s, veterans of the Black May incident, academics, NGO leaders and secretary-general Kotchawan. Suriyasai, secretary-general of the CPD who was strongly influenced by the events of Black May 1992 and served as secretary-general of the SFT in 1995, became its spokesman.

Although the anti-Thaksin movement had grown under Sondhi's leadership, it was limited by questions about him as well. Now, the many Thais who were skeptical of Sondhi's leadership were comfortable joining the broad-based PAD, thus increasing the momentum of the anti-Thaksin movement. The inclusion of Kotchawan on the advisory group provided a prominent student component to the anti-Thaksin movement. The newspapers were eager to highlight her role as evidence of a renewal of student activism in Thailand. In advance of the February 11 rally, *The Nation* quoted Kotchawan, saying "The Student Federation of Thailand thinks he should no longer be prime minister because of his attempt to hide his assets and evade tax through all means. He may be an able person but he definitely is not a good one. The Thaksin system has also corroded and weakened the social structure of Thai society...Under these circumstances, I ask all people who hold justice dear to help oust this man from the position. Every day he spends [in power] is damage done to the country, and the sooner he's gone, the better."⁹⁴

The PAD held the first rally under its auspices on February 11, despite Thaksin's initial denial of permission to use Royal Plaza. For the first time, there was a significant although still small student presence at the rally. Small groups from Chulalongkorn University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Chiang Mai University and

⁹³ TN, February 10, 2006

⁹⁴ TN, February 10, 2006

Prince of Songkhla University (Pattani campus) attended the event. The rally was attended by tens of thousands of protesters, although less than the February 4 rally. A wide range of speakers addressed the crowd, but the *Bangkok Post* reported that “[m]edia firebrand Sondhi Limthongkul remained the highlight of the rally. The crowds roared ‘Get Out!’ when he shouted ‘Thaaaaaaaaksin!’ and waved flags and banners.”⁹⁵

Thaksin did his best to distract the growing mass movement that threatened his government. In response to an on-going dialogue about amending the 1997 Constitution, Thaksin announced and then withdrew a plan to hold a referendum to approve amendments. He then decided to solicit public opinion on reform and invited the rectors of one hundred thirty eight universities throughout Thailand to a February 17 meeting, kicking off a constitutional amendment study. However, Thaksin’s late entry in the constitutional reform issue was not seriously considered by Thailand’s civic society and demands for reform only increased. *The Nation* reported on the RUSO’s February 23 statement that “[t]he country has plunged into political turmoil and relevant parties are obliged to overcome it.” They recommended adopting four amendments to resolve the political crisis before calling for new elections:

Article 209 of the Constitution should be rewritten to spell out in detail that a prime minister must not commit, condone or harbor conflicts of interest, it said. Article 185 should be revised to make it easier to launch a censure motion against a prime minister. Instead of needing the endorsement of 200 of 500 MPs, the number should be halved to 100, the union said. The union also called for the Senate to be appointed by the Privy Council and said the educational requirement needed to run for political office should be scrapped.⁹⁶

Thaksin’s next diversionary strategy was to announce a joint session of Parliament to address the crisis that faced his administration; however, critics decried the limitations imposed by Thaksin, some senators declared it a public relations exercise and the Democrat Party called it “a game to buy time.”⁹⁷ When that proposal failed to gain any traction, Thaksin played his ‘trump card.’ For the past year, he had

⁹⁵ BP, February 12, 2006

⁹⁶ TN, February 24, 2006

⁹⁷ BP, February 22, 2006

based his legitimacy on his popular election with nineteen million votes. He sought a repeat of that mandate in another election. On February 24, Thaksin received the king's permission to dissolve the House. The EC, in cooperation with the government, set an April 2 date for the snap election. The early date, only thirty-seven days after Thaksin's announcement, angered many Thaksin opponents as it did not allow opposition parties and officials ample time to prepare for the election. Three days after Thaksin's announcement, the TUSU against pursued the legal approach. They sought a ruling from the Administrative Court (AC) revoking the April 2 date, based upon two reasons: First, the early date was less than the 'within sixty days of House dissolution' as required by the constitution. Second, the student union said the commission acted illegally by setting the election date without having a quorum of four of the five commissioners. Only three had made the decision as one member was abroad and one had died. Four days later, the AC rejected the petition on the grounds that it was outside their jurisdiction. However, the debate over the election continued.

On the day after Thaksin's announcement, his opponents called for a boycott of the snap election because it would not solve the political crisis. It was anticipated that a boycott would create a stalemate as the TRT party would be unlikely to receive the required twenty percent minimum vote in each of the constituencies where it would run uncontested, especially in the south and some areas of Bangkok. As a result, the election would not result in the seating of five hundred MPs as required by the constitution, thus creating a constitutional crisis. After several days of negotiations and wavering by the Opposition parties, they agreed to boycott the election.

In advance of the second PAD rally held on February 26, the anti-Thaksin movement received an additional boost on February 19, as Major-General Chamlong called on Thaksin to resign and announced that he would attend the rally. As the rally date approached, there was a seemingly orchestrated chorus of demands for Thaksin to resign and commitments to participate in the rally. The SFT stepped up its presence with Kotchawan saying, "What we are doing is not just a fad. We firmly believe the prime minister must quit to show his spirit," while SFT committee member Somrak Utjanda said, "I know that it's hard to stay together. But the SFT must do the right

thing. If the PM doesn't quit, we have prepared another step to get him out."⁹⁸

Labor leaders, women's organizations, the teacher's network joined the anti-Thaksin movement and more and more prominent voices joined the call for his resignation.

Between fifty and one hundred thousand people attended the February 26 PAD Rally at Sanam Luang, led by a coalition of groups that included a broad spectrum of social backgrounds and ages including Chamlong's Dharma Army. The number of students in attendance was larger than previous rallies. Rangkids and the SFT shared a booth at Sanam Luang. The SFT sold t-shirts and anti-Thaksin items while Rangkids provided a registration sheet for students to sign up their names. Despite their similar goals, there was some initial suspicion toward Rangkids. Thirty-year old Rangkids' leader Pleethum said some other students seemed not to trust him and criticized him by asking, "You're not a student anymore—why are you doing this?" On the second day of the rally, the SFT removed the Rangkids' banner asking students to register. Regardless, Rangkids continued with their efforts and "found out that there were many students that wanted to join and participate in political events; some came as [an] individual and didn't know which group to join." Responding to what seemed like a disconnection between student interest and student activism, they helped organize the Student Coordinating Center (SCC) a few days later to "function as a coordination center for student activists to mobilize the student activities to develop their potential and assist them into better condition."⁹⁹

The rally continued the following day with approximately twenty thousand people, including an increasing number of university students. The rally continued past midnight as tens of thousands of demonstrators marched from Sanam Luang to the Democracy Monument, where more speakers addressed the crowd. Entertainment was highlighted by two performances that were prominent during the popular uprising of May 1992: the songs-for-life band Caravan and the Chinese-style opera known as 'Ngiew'. The latter had not performed for fourteen years. The 2006 script satirized Thaksin's tax-free sale and his refusal to step down amid the public outcry for his resignation. The movement also produced a new popular song, *Ai Khon Na Liam*

⁹⁸ BP, February 20, 2006

⁹⁹ Interview with Pleethum Triyakasem, June 27, 2006

(Square-Faced Man). The lyrics lampooned Thaksin, his populist policies, and his cronies. It became an instant hit with the anti-Thaksin crowd.

One unique character of the rallies was its non-violence, both on the part of the demonstrators and the government. There were reports that the former student activists in the government were united in their concern that Thaksin not overreact to the anti-Thaksin movement nor allow TRT MPs to organize 'counter-mobs', thus further enraging the public and inciting violence. Despite a campaign of intimidation intended to dissuade participation in the rallies, they were extraordinarily peaceful.

The SCC had its origins in a meeting of student leaders on February 11 when they agreed to meet at Chulalongkorn University several days later. It was formally established on March 3 at a meeting at Thammasat University, with Rangkids, the Workers Democracy Group, PCP, the Network of Concerned University Students, TUSU and other student activist groups and individuals from several other universities including Mahidol, Prince of Songkla (Pattani Campus), Silpakorn, Siam, Rajapat Nakorn Pathom and King Mongkut Institute of Technology (KMIT). According to Pleethum, their objectives were: 1) to act as coordinator between student groups and organizations to create creative activities; 2) to educate and support democracy to become a more understandable topic among youth; 3) to act as an open forum for youth to express their creative ideas; 4) to participate in a variety of activities to develop Thai society; 5) to create opportunity for youth to meet each other and discuss their ideas and their aspects with friends who share the same attitude; 6) to create opportunity for youth to search for their identity; 7) to become an example group of activity reflecting democracy, especially the equality of rights and freedom; and 8) to encourage and act as a support group for youth activity regarding democracy.

Later in the month, they organized a meeting and rally at Chulalongkorn University attracting a crowd of about five hundred students while proposing several points including opposing the Thaksin regime and demanding that he resign; proposing constitutional amendments including removing the BA degree restriction on MPs; opposing violence in the South and demanding the lifting of the emergency

decree; involving affected people in discussions related to privatization; and urging students to get involved with labor, NGO and peasant groups. Although TUSU had helped organize the meeting, they rejected the broad approach and walked out of the meeting.

In advance of the April 2 election, in addition to the proposed boycott, one other proposal gained increasing appeal within the anti-Thaksin movement. Although Sondhi had submitted a petition calling for the king to appoint a new prime minister several months earlier, it was not until the end of February 2006 that serious discussions began about invoking Article 7 of the constitution, which most people interpreted as allowing royal intervention as a last resort, relying on the king's 'virtuous rule' to appoint a prime minister. A group of senators, prominent citizens and representatives of civic organizations urged Thaksin to resign to pave the way for a 'constitutional coup'. The issue divided the anti-Thaksin movement. Those opposed to invoking Article 7 offered many different rationales for their opinion. Kasian Tejapira said Article 7 should be applied "only when state mechanisms failed and events turned barbaric."¹⁰⁰

Most of those opposed to invoking Article 7 saw it as a 'step backward' away from the circuitous path toward democracy that Thailand had traveled since the royal intervention after the events of May 1992. PAD leader Pipob and Kotchawan opposed the idea when they spoke before a seminar organized by Chulalongkorn University's political science faculty on March 12. Pipob said "the idea of a royally bestowed prime minister seems impossible unless we tear apart the constitution. The solution for me is not Article 7, but the people's continuing movement that will eventually drive out Mr. Thaksin."¹⁰¹ Despite their opposition, the PAD joined the call for a royally-appointed prime minister to replace Thaksin, seriously eroding their support among student activists and leftists in the anti-Thaksin coalition. Members of a pro-democracy group began lighting candles at the Democracy Monument in protest against the proposal, which they regarded as a setback for democracy. The group, including relatives of people who died in the October 1973 uprising, pledged to

¹⁰⁰ BP, March 25, 2006

¹⁰¹ BP, March 13, 2006

continue with the candle-lighting every night until the political situation returned to normal.

Within weeks after the Shin Corp stock sale, the anti-Thaksin movement had begun to ‘tip’ and consume Bangkok, although less so outside the nation’s capital. The movement was dominated by the elite of Thailand’s civil society—its university professors, prominent NGO leaders, and former student activists from the October Generation. However, it was primarily Sondhi and Chamlong’s followers who provided the ‘mass’ to the mass movement. Students joined in increasing numbers, but there was little cohesion to their participation. The activity that generated the greatest support among students was TUSU’s impeachment petition campaign, which extended its appeal beyond the small student activist ‘trendsetter’ community. On other campuses the student participation was still limited to a few students who attempted to create a semblance of a mass mobilization at their universities. In fact, they seemed more successful in attracting media attention with ‘official’ statements than in generating the interest of their fellow students. The same was true for the SFT. Kotchawan eloquently represented the student component of the anti-Thaksin movement, but with the support of only a few students.

4.7 March Madness: Student Participation Intensifies

In the face of increasing calls for his resignation, growing attendance at anti-Thaksin rallies, the mounting resignations and defections of former supporters, a vigorous petition campaign for his impeachment, rising media attention to his critics, an escalating city-wide cry of ‘Thaksin Get Out!’ and boycott of the April 2 election, Thaksin began to fight back. He employed a broad spectrum of strategies to fend off his critics, including continuing attacks on critics and the media, staging pro-government rallies, mobilizing the pro-government Caravan of the Poor march to Bangkok, advertising extensively, discrediting the Democrat Party, shoring up the economy and offering another dose of populist programs. He chanted his mantra, “nineteen million votes”, to claim his legitimacy in the face of protests. Some of those strategies seemed successful while others had an air of desperation. In the end, none worked.

In response to snap poll and boycott, the Opposition parties, academics, students and other Thaksin opponents staged a 'Vote No' campaign. Voters were encouraged to 'tick' the 'No' box on their ballots to prevent an overwhelming TRT victory. Prinya announced his support for the 'Vote No' campaign, followed by academics Thirayuth Boonmi and Thongchai Winichakul and a group of fifty lecturers from ten universities. On March 20, Surapong Boondecharak, newly-elected president of the TUSU, announced that the student union was supporting the 'Vote No' campaign as a show of opposition to the election. *The Nation* quoted Thammasat student leader Salinee Ratanachaisit saying that "[v]oters will be encouraged to go to the balloting stations and cast a 'no-vote' ballot in a gesture of protest against the election, which is deemed undemocratic." Wannasingh Prasertkul, son of former student activists Chiranan and Seksan, led a march of the 'Students Love People Group' on Silom road hoping "the campaign would raise political awareness, especially among younger people."¹⁰²

The continuing calls for Thaksin's resignation were unrelenting throughout the election campaign. By late afternoon on March 5, the *Bangkok Post* estimated that 100,000 protesters had converged at Sanam Luang for another PAD rally despite attempts by state authorities to block provincial people from reaching Bangkok. A student group organized by Rangkids gathered at Thammasat University's *laan bodhi* and marched separately to Sanam Luang to demonstrate student participation in the anti-Thaksin movement. There were also large groups of farmers and state enterprise employees in attendance. That night the demonstration moved to Democracy Monument and Government House despite police attempts to dissuade them. The police remained calm and earned praise for avoiding the use of force while their supervisors complained that their forces were overworked and overtired from policing the continuing rallies. One veteran activist from the 1976 and 1992 protests praised the "[p]rotesters [who] have tried to control themselves, and the organizers [who] have experience from the past and have tried to steer away from violence.... The government was more oppressive, and people's anger and frustrations were greater in

¹⁰² BP, March 30, 2006. YIY's Kritaya Sreesunpagit said the Students Loving Democracy Group at Thammasat University has grown huge with "totally new faces" signing up to join [Interview with Kritaya Sreesunpagit, December 20, 2006]. It is probably safe to assume the two groups are the same despite their slightly different names.

1976, but this protest has no anger. They just want one thing: for Thaksin to get out.”¹⁰³

On March 7, the PAD called on the Singaporean government to cancel its tender offer for the remaining shares of Shin Corp or face a boycott of Singaporean products in Thailand. Approximately fifty protesters led by Rosana Tositrakul and Somsak and including a group of students, demonstrated in front of the Singaporean embassy. The *Bangkok Post* reported that they were “carrying banners saying ‘Temasek Get Out, Thaksin Get Out’, and ‘Thailand Not For Sale’ and shouting slogans...and demanding Temasek reveal all details of the Shin Corp purchase and suspend the deal pending further scrutiny.”¹⁰⁴ Two days later about fifteen hundred people, wearing yellow shirts bearing the slogan ‘We Love the King’, marched from Lumpini park to the Singaporean embassy to further protest the Shin Corp purchase. The PAD planned a series of ‘guerilla warfare’ tactics that also included protests at the SET, the Revenue Department, the Public Relations Department (PRD), the Ministry of Finance, the CP Building and the Shinawatra Building, where protesters destroyed their AIS SIM mobile phone cards. On March 8, five hundred women activists including Kotchawan commemorated International Women’s Day by marching from Royal Plaza to Government House, demanding Thaksin’s resignation.

On March 13, tens of thousands of demonstrators began to assemble at Sanam Luang in advance of the march to Government House. The stage was again filled with PAD leaders and songs-for-life musicians. Meanwhile, the PAD organized rallies in front of the offices of CP Group and Shin Corp where they appealed to office workers to attend the march. In the early morning of March 14, an estimated one hundred thousand people marched down Ratchadamnoen Avenue, around the Democracy Monument and onto Government House. The two-kilometer-long procession was extraordinarily well managed, with groups of marchers separated by PAD organizers in trucks barking out “Thaksin” to which the crowd responded “Get Out!” The atmosphere was almost festive. There were groups of students among a wide range of participants, but the only noticeable cluster was from Ramkhamhaeng University,

¹⁰³ TD, March 7, 2006, quoting Pirun Chatwanichkul

¹⁰⁴ BP, March 8, 2006

looking like hippies of old with their long hair and raggedy clothes. Union members had a more prominent presence with representatives from Thai Airways, TOT, the Provincial Electricity Authority, and the State Railway Workers Union.

Over the next several days the rally continued at Government House with additional speakers and entertainment. The March 15 appearance of former top ambassadors created the biggest impact with their attacks alleging that Thaksin's business interests drove diplomatic visits and worsened relations with neighboring countries. Although PAD activities took place throughout Bangkok, the Suan Misakawan intersection near Government House became the center of the anti-Thaksin movement. Many tents were set up after the demonstration to coordinate activities, provide a place to congregate and discuss political issues. The Santi Asoke tent was the most established, while others were put up by artists, union members, FTA-opponents, and medical staff from Mahidol University. One such tent was named 'Village of Political Youth' staffed by university students and members of the SFT. The *Bangkok Post* reported that "village chief Chakrapong Buripa, a political science senior at Ramkhamhaeng University [and SFT deputy secretary-general], said 'students from various campuses agreed to set it up to inform people about politics and provide accommodations to students who came from other provinces to protest. The student group signs up about thirty new members a day and ten to fifteen students usually stay overnight in the tent', he said."¹⁰⁵

The anti-Thaksin movement spread throughout other venues in Bangkok, with a Silom Road rally on March 16 by the Businessmen for Democracy group passing out free CDs, featuring the Chinese opera troupe's appearance at the February 26 PAD rally. On March 21, more than three thousand demonstrators marched from Lumpini park to Silom and Sathorn roads in a PAD rally, urging bystanders to join their March 25 protest at Government House. The rally continued to the Singaporean embassy. On March 22, approximately one thousand protesters marched from National Stadium to the EC headquarters where they called on the EC to disqualify Thaksin as a party-list candidate for violating the election laws and asked the EC to reschedule the election to a later date. On March 24, the PAD rallied in front of the

¹⁰⁵ BP, March 21, 2006

Ministry of Finance, the Revenue Department, and the PRD. On March 23, about two thousand PAD demonstrators rallied at the Finance Ministry. On March 24, the CPD reversed its previous position and supported invoking Article 7 as the only way to prevent bloodshed in a society bitterly divided by politics and compromise no longer possible.

The March 25 rally drew a crowd of more than 100,000 demonstrators with additional calls for royal intervention in their efforts to oust Thaksin before the April 2 election. The rally featured songs, including *Ai Khon Na Liam* and the royally composed *Kwam Fun Un Soong Sud* (Ultimate Dream), a candle-lighting ceremony, performances by Thammasat's Chinese Opera and speeches. Meanwhile, Ramkhamhaeng University students held a separate rally on their campus with the initial intent of joining the PAD rally in the evening. However, they became angered by reports that some government figures had lobbied van operators to deny transportation services for them, and decided instead to march to the TRT party headquarters on Petchaburi road. Somchot led a group of several thousand students on the "ten kilometer march [to demonstrate] against Thaksin's lack of morality and the pure power of students."¹⁰⁶ In response, approximately two hundred fifty policemen armed with shields and teargas were deployed at the party headquarters. Government officials alleged that students hurled objects at the party's offices and committed acts of vandalism and threatened criminal action against the protesters. The students later went on to join the anti-Thaksin rally.

On March 26, the PAD shifted their demonstration to Siam Paragon, Bangkok's newest upscale shopping complex. The *Bangkok Post* described the event as follows:

The burning heat failed to deter the demonstrators, who took their rally from Government House to the popular shopping streets. Led by the PAD, the march left the National Stadium about 10am. Flags and anti-Thaksin banners were flying while the boisterous chant "Thaksin, get out" could be heard from Rama I to Sukhumvit roads as the demonstrators made their way to the Siam Paragon, Central World and Emporium department stores. Police closed traffic on one side of the road to make way for the march. The crowd, many wearing

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Somchot Meechana, July 17, 2006

yellow and white 'save the nation' headbands, gradually built up from about 10,000 people at the start to about 100,000, according to organizers....Hundreds of youngsters left their weekend tutorial classes to cheer on the PAD rally against Thaksin Shinwatra's government. They added their young voices to the growing demand that Prime Minister Thaksin be replaced as the protest marched past Siam Square, a popular hangout for teenagers....Teenagers rushed out of classes to encourage the protesters, who marched from the National Stadium. They lined the street voicing support for those taking part. Many youngsters said watching the sheer number of people converging on the street to demand Mr. Thaksin's ouster stirred national pride in them and the determination to fight for a good cause....Most young people insisted the rally organizers had made the right decision by calling for a royally-installed prime minister to head off any violence from the current political stalemate.¹⁰⁷

As the PAD planned to continue its demonstrations in front of the Siam Paragon, Siam Centre and Siam Discovery shopping centers on March 29, 30 and 31, the three malls decided to close for safety reasons. They were also concerned that traffic—brought to a standstill for more than four hours on March 26—could only get worse. The night of March 29 saw about one hundred thousand protesters pack Siam Square for the PAD rally, including about one thousand Chulalongkorn University students and alumni. They marched from the university along Henri Dunant road wearing "pink, their university's color and carried banners with a message written in Chinese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Cambodian and English saying 'Thaksin, get out.' and 'Thaksin, liar'."¹⁰⁸ Student leaders from Rajamangala University of Technology and Pathumwan Institute of Technology—nearby vocational colleges that were often involved in inter-school rivalries and violence—called a truce and shared the stage to criticize the government.

On March 29, the opposition parties and the PAD called on the EC to end the use of rubber stamps by voters to mark ballots, charging that the stamps made it easier for corrupt officials to mark fake ballot cards. They lodged a complaint with the AC, asking that it overrule the EC decision to introduce rubber stamps and order the EC to launch a public relations campaign urging people to use pens to mark their ballots. On March 30, about three thousand PAD demonstrators, including SFT members, marched from the Siam Paragon shopping centre to the EC headquarters, accusing the

¹⁰⁷ BP, March 27, 2006

¹⁰⁸ BP, March 30, 2006

four election commissioners of serving the TRT party and demanding their resignation. The students stopped vehicles exiting the building in a futile attempt to find EC commissioner Police-General Wassana Permlarp. On March 30, the PAD announced that it would continue its rallies at Government House after the election, and culminate in a big rally on April 7 at the Makkawan bridge.

The month of March saw an increase in student participation in the anti-Thaksin movement, including a significant role in the 'Vote No' campaign and greater presence at the PAD rallies. There were several possible explanations for this change, including the fact that students were on their summer break and no longer burdened by the demands of their studies. More importantly, however, was the change of location from Sanam Luang, Royal Plaza, Government House and Democracy Monument to Bangkok's shopping district. Not only were the rallies more accessible to students, they were unavoidable. The students were already going to Siam Square, Siam Paragon, and Central World. Borrowing from the theory of Malcolm Gladwell, a small change made a big difference.

The month of March also saw a rise in intensity in a campaign of media and opposition intimidation by pro-Thaksin groups, government officials and the police in advance of the April 2 election and continuing afterwards. Although the culprits were never found, on March 9, a homemade bomb exploded in front of General Prem Tinsulanonda's residence, similar to those that had previously rocked other Bangkok locations. Around two hundred motorcycle taxi drivers harassed the staff at the offices of the *Naew Na* newspaper for printing a picture of the drivers in its March 3 issue with a caption claiming they had been paid to join a TRT rally at Sanam Luang. They left only after the editor agreed to correct the story. However, later in the month several thousand drivers rode to the Press Council of Thailand after filing their case with the Criminal Court, demanding a half million baht in damages from the newspaper. On March 21, a crowd of about two hundred people, including motorcycle taxi drivers, picketed *The Nation* office, slamming the English-language daily for distorting news coverage of the premier and slanting the news in favor of the anti-Thaksin movement. On March 28, approximately one thousand members of the Caravan of the Poor rallied at the *Kom Chad Luek* office to protest the publishing of

Sondhi's remarks which were deemed as *lese majeste*. They also burned an effigy of the editor of the NMG and called for the resignation of the *Kom Chad Luek's* editor. The following day, two thousand angry demonstrators besieged the newspaper offices for seven hours and prevented its staff from leaving the building.¹⁰⁹

Journalist organizations denounced the protest as a serious act of intimidation and media harassment. Two committees related to the October 6, 1976 incident—the Committee on 30 Years of the October 6 Event and the Committee of Relatives of the October 6 Heroes—strongly condemned those resorting to violence and acts of intimidation while reminding the public of the October 6, 1976 violence. Senator Cherm Sak Pinthong said the aggressive mobs confronting the newspaper offices were signals that violence like that seen during the events of May 1992 might occur after the election.

4.8 The Post-Election Maneuvers

As the April 2 election date approached, Thaksin's aura of invincibility, eroding since the Shin Corp stock sale, continued to fade as a result of several other events: the iTV reporters had won their lawsuit against the station; Supinya had won her lawsuit against Shin Corp; the courts had invalidated the Arbitration Court's iTV concession-ruling; the EGAT privatization had been overturned; and, prior to the election, the SAC ruled in favor of a network of civic groups by allowing voters to mark ballots with their own pens instead of using only the stamps provided by the EC.

The April 2 election had failed to re-legitimize Thaksin's government, despite his claims to the contrary. The 'No-Vote' campaign prevented the election of five hundred MPs as the 'no-vote' ballots beat TRT candidates in many Bangkok and southern Thailand constituencies. The following month was plagued by political maneuvers, as Thaksin struggled to survive politically. At first he announced that he would step down as prime minister when parliament convened; then he announced he would take a 'leave of absence' followed by a world-wide tour to meet world leaders.

¹⁰⁹ Caravan of the Poor leader Khamta Kaenbunchan and five other members were indicted on March 16, 2007 for the March 2006 blockade of Nation Group headquarters [BP, March 17, 2007].

Thaksin's strategy, however, forced the PAD into "a lower gear because the public needs time for the dust to settle before it can see clearly that Thaksin's offer to step down is not sincere," stated Suriyasai.¹¹⁰ Instead, much of their time and energy was invested in defending against the government's attempts to suppress them through the courts.

In the aftermath of the April 2 election, there were three major issues that dominated the news: the inability to seat all five hundred MPs; the culpability of the EC in aiding the TRT party; and the EC's failure to secure the secrecy of the ballot. The political drama now focused on the EC, that had lost credibility and public trust. They scheduled continuous by-elections in an attempt to fill all the seats; allowed minor party candidates who lost in one constituency to register in another; and extended the registration deadline in Songkhla, charging several hundred anti-Thaksin demonstrators with having intimidated the minor party candidates. The actions of the EC commissioners, widely interpreted as trying to enable the TRT party to form a parliament, brought about calls for their resignation.

On April 25, the king finally responded to the calls for his intervention. In speeches to groups of new judges appointed to the SAC and other lower courts, he refused the requests to invoke Article 7 to break the political impasse, saying it would be inconsistent with democracy. He said the article "doesn't permit the King to do whatever he wishes. If he did, it would be overstepping his mark, doing something beyond his authority. That's not democracy."¹¹¹ Rather, he told the country's top courts to resolve the political crisis, or resign. After first criticizing the PAD movement, the king turned his censure to the government party that called for a 'quick schedule' of elections while saying that a single-party election was not democratic. Thongchai observed that "[i]t is ironic that the whole society needed a royal intervention to tell us that a royal intervention should not have been necessary if we had done our jobs properly and not created such a mess."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ TD, April 18, 2006

¹¹¹ BP, April 26, 2006, quoting His Majesty the King

¹¹² TN, May 2, 2006, from an opinion article by Thongchai Winichakul, titled "Reconsidering past actions in the wake of His Majesty's speech"

Naturally, the judges from the Supreme Court, AC, and the Constitutional Court agreed to follow up on the king's advice and several opposition groups smartly gave the courts some legal petitions to review. In a convoluted ruling, the AC suspended the April 29 by-elections on grounds that the court may invalidate the April 2 snap election. Several days later, the Constitution Court ruled that the April 2 election was unconstitutional (in an 8-6 vote) and ordered a new general election (9-6). It based its ruling on the rushed election date and improperly positioned polling booths. Political observers were of opposite opinions about the court's involvement in resolving the political problems. Thirayuth urged the courts to expand their role to reinforce the checks-and-balance mechanisms that were created in the constitution; others thought the courts had gone too far.

Students, largely sidelined by the post-election maneuvers, struggled to maintain a meaningful presence. Ramkhamhaeng University students staged a couple of 'photo-ops'. In response to the April 2 snap poll, *The Nation* published a photo with the following caption: "A Ramkhamhaeng University student covers his head with a can to protest against TRT MPs who received fewer votes than the 'no votes' cast in their constituencies. The student said the MPs-elect should be too ashamed to take seats in Parliament."¹¹³ In the aftermath of the April 19 senate elections—widely reported vote-buying took place with candidates closely linked to the governing party winning more than one hundred seats—they staged an event at the October 14, 1973 Memorial to draw attention to the failure of those elections. Calling themselves *Look Pho Khoon Koo Chart* (King Ramkhamhaeng the Great's Son Saves the Nation), they charged that party-affiliated senatorial candidates had become "slaves" to politicians.

The students' more prominent activities, however, were focused on the election commissioners. Beginning in late March, about one to two hundred protesters—of which about thirty were students, primarily from Ramkhamhaeng University, and ten others belonged to the SFT—camped out in front of the EC headquarters, demanding that the commissioners resign. After the king's speech, their calls were echoed by academics, opposition party leaders, outgoing anti-government senators and PAD leaders who demanded that the commissioners show responsibility

¹¹³ TN, April 27, 2006, photo caption

for the political crisis and lack of public confidence by resigning. Additionally, nine plaintiffs led by PAD leader Somsak filed a criminal lawsuit charging the commissioners with malfeasance and violating many laws with the intent to benefit one political party. On May 3, they held a press conference again demanding that the EC commissioners resign on the grounds that they mismanaged the polls. *The Nation* reported one student, Uthai Yodmanee, saying, “The four EC members failed to ensure honest and fair balloting” that caused a “rift in society” while calling for their resignations by May 10.¹¹⁴ The *Bangkok Post* published a picture of the same student holding a bottle of facial cream as he spoke, saying, “If the commissioners apply the cream to their faces they will become less thick-skinned.”¹¹⁵

In the early morning after the press event, a bottle bomb was thrown into a tent set up by protesters, setting it on fire. That act of intimidation followed harassment by a group of teenagers who threw rotten eggs and rocks at the protesters late in April. One protester said, “We have been harassed since we began our sit-in protest. People have thrown things into our tents, including rocks. A mentally ill man tried to set fire to our tents and [on May 4] a man with tattoos all over his body tried to get our group riled up and start a fight. The protesters were frightened but we won't give up.”¹¹⁶ Despite the increased patrols promised by the police, on May 10, angry supporters of the EC tore down the demonstrators' tent. The students, however, continued their protest.

On May 15, Kotchawan appeared at a press conference at the October 1973 Memorial to further publicize the campaign, asking the commissioners to resign. Joining her at the press conference, the PAD announced plans to collect fifty thousand signatures in the South seeking their impeachment. The following day, they gathered outside EC headquarters to distribute posters and fliers demanding their ouster and calling for a ‘free and fair’ election watchdog, while continuing their campout at the EC headquarters. The next day a pro-government group, calling themselves the

¹¹⁴ TN, May 4, 2006

¹¹⁵ BP, May 4, 2006. In the Thai context, the adjective “thick-skinned” implies someone who has no sense of shame.

¹¹⁶ TN, May 5, 2006

Democracy Protection Federation, rallied at the EC headquarters to demonstrate their support for the commissioners. The *Bangkok Post* reported the incident that followed:

[They] stormed angrily through the tents, placards and belongings of the anti-government demonstrators—the PAD and student activists....Some PAD members tried to stop the rampage—the second at the EC headquarters in less than two weeks. One PAD member was punched, which drew cheers from the pro-government group. About thirty police standing guard there stayed put. The group later demolished all anti-EC placards and tents in front of the building. Some demonstrators scolded the PAD members and later targeted a group of reporters, accusing them of biased reporting against the government. Upon spotting a woman reporter from Nation Channel, a woman demonstrator tried to hit her with an umbrella, but missed and instead hurt a cameraman. That prompted other cameramen to fight back. Police stepped in and separated them. The pro-government group still threw plastic bottles at reporters and cameramen and ordered them to stop photographing. A fight almost developed between a demonstrator and the photographers, but police took the man inside the building and the situation cooled down.”¹¹⁷

The Nation reported that some of the police disappeared, claiming it was the end of their shift, before the fighting stopped. The student activists, led by heads of the SFT, Ramkhamhaeng University student organization, and NIDA’s Students for Democracy (NIDA-SFD), demanded swift police action to arrest those responsible for the attacks. Somchot threatened to mobilize students in protests at the Thai Royal Police headquarters if the police failed to make progress within forty-eight hours. Kotchawan told reporters that “[p]eople who witnessed the incident asked police to jot down the names and identification numbers of the culprits, but we don’t know whether the officers paid heed to those suggestions” while suggesting that the “police could have also checked the television footage to identify those responsible for the damage.”¹¹⁸ The police said they asked television stations for copies of their footage of the incident, but no police action was taken against any members of the group. The EC officials denied being behind the tent demolition and asked reporters “[w]hy didn’t the media cover the protesters who camped outside our headquarters for three months? The public complained they broke the law for blocking traffic.”¹¹⁹ The Thai Journalists Association and the Thai Radio and Television Reporters Association

¹¹⁷ BP, May 18, 2006

¹¹⁸ BP, May 19, 2006

¹¹⁹ TN, May 19, 2006 quoting EC secretary-general Ekachai Varunprapa

condemned the attack on reporters and cameramen, while also urging news staff to be more careful when confronted by angry crowds. Two days later, another scuffle occurred at the demonstration site. *The Nation* reported that student protesters attempted to meet with the three remaining EC commissioners to protest their refusal to resign; however, the commissioners were not in their offices.

The students hung a banner at the entrance to the building proclaiming ‘Announcement—the EC’s office is closed temporarily to pave way for the new EC. EC supporters can offer their moral support for the EC at TRT headquarters.’ An old man walking past the group roundly condemned them and angry protesters punched him in the face. Police broke the brawl up and helped the man to safety at the rear of the commission’s headquarters.¹²⁰

The three student organizations behind the EC-headquarters camp-out renamed themselves the Student Network and vowed to continue to camp outside the commission's head office until the election panel unconditionally resigned. They marched to the Pathumwan police station to press the police to pursue charges against those who damaged their tents and assaulted them. On May 20, The Student Network announced plans for a May 26 rally to again push for the removal of the three remaining EC commissioners. They divided responsibilities among the three groups. NIDA-SFD, led by Sant Donsri, took care of public relations to create better understanding among the public, while the RUSO prepared the stage and mobilized students, and the SFT acted as coordinator. During the announcement of the rally, Sant said, “The gathering will be peaceful and we want police to ensure security for us in case of any contingency.”¹²¹ Five days later, the SFT decided to call off the rally. On May 28, a pro-government group demolished the tents and stages in front of the EC headquarters while around ten police guards in the building stayed put.

Kotchawan accused the EC and TRT party of being closely linked, with the two organizations supporting each other in their attempt to hold onto power. “We have been pressuring them to quit but they are not ashamed and show no responsibility. To successfully oust the EC, we must carry this out under the legal

¹²⁰ TN, May 20, 2006

¹²¹ BP, May 21, 2006

process [not a street protest].”¹²² On May 27, the SFT and the Alliance for Democracy co-sponsored an on-stage discussion at Ramkhamhaeng University about the EC, after which they “patiently waited on one or another of the numerous cases filed against the commissioners.”¹²³

Throughout the summer break, a small group of students had successfully maintained pressure on the election commissioners. Their actions, however, were overshadowed by Thailand’s elite and political maneuvers. Calls for the commissioners’ resignations seemingly came from every quarter—Thailand’s top judges, a group of twenty-eight caretaker senators, the Lawyers Council, and many of the country’s top business leaders, including the Thai Bankers’ Association and the Thai Chamber of Commerce joined in. The courts were fully engaged in numerous lawsuits as the TRT and Democrat parties filed charges against each other. After the resignation of General Charupat Ruangsuwan, there were pro-government attempts to fill the two vacant EC seats. After an EC investigation panel recommended the dissolution of the TRT party, the EC moved quickly to recommend disbanding the Democrat Party. In advance of the king’s sixtieth anniversary celebrations, Cabinet Secretary-General Bavornsak Uvanno resigned; he was followed by Deputy Prime Minister Visanu Krue-ngarm upon the conclusion of the celebrations. In one final activity before they returned to their classes, student activists joined human rights advocates in a demonstration in front of the United Nations’ offices on May 26. They displayed banners and placards drawing attention to the fragile state of human rights in Thailand and tried to meet with Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who was in Thailand to present an award to the king. They presented a letter urging Annan to press the Thaksin government to stop extra-judicial killings, abolish the emergency decree and review police practices in southern Thailand, among other things. Largely, however, the enthusiasm generated by ‘Vote No’ campaign and demonstrations in Bangkok’s shopping district had dissipated and there was little space or interest for student participation.

¹²² TN, May 26, 2006

¹²³ Interview with Chakrapong Buripha on June 21, 2006

On June 6, the two major political parties declared a one-week ceasefire so political battles would not spoil the sixtieth anniversary celebrations of the King's accession to the throne that were scheduled to conclude on June 13. On June 9, about half a million loyal subjects, almost all wearing distinctive yellow shirts bearing the special sixtieth anniversary royal emblem, filled the Royal Plaza and spilled out into Ratchadamnoen Nok Avenue and adjacent streets to cheer the king. It was an incredible sight to witness although difficult for a foreigner to comprehend. For days following, the royal family's photographs were on sale at newsstands and throughout Bangkok. One can only imagine it was a welcome respite from the political turmoil that engulfed the nation.

4.9 The Political Impasse

After the conclusion of the royal celebrations and the return of students to their classes, Thailand should have enjoyed a period of calm as it basked in the glow of international attention and worldwide good will towards its king. Instead, political tensions escalated. Confrontations were anticipated between pro-Thaksin and anti-government demonstrators and there were fears that protests could turn violent. The ongoing political impasse and prolonged instability ranked as the nation's most troubling problem, straining Thailand's non-confrontational psyche.¹²⁴ Both sides cited their loyalty to the monarchy in their campaigns, reminding many of the tactics used by the right-wing extremists to suppress leftists. The violent memories of October 1976 and Black May 1992 were constantly evoked by pro- and anti-Thaksin forces. A political crisis seemed imminent. The political uncertainty was accompanied by economic insecurity as Thailand's economic slowdown continued despite government efforts to stimulate growth. Bombings and murders continued unabated in southern Thailand. A mood of anxiety embraced the nation.

In the three and a half months between the end of the royal celebrations and the coup, Thailand experienced an increasing divisiveness in society. On the government side, led by an increasingly erratic Thaksin, were his attorneys, his alter-ego Samak, TRT party leaders, their grassroots supporters—including taxi drivers,

¹²⁴ Suan Dusit poll, published May 2006

motorcycle-taxi drivers, commuter van operators, Caravan of the Poor members and members of the *Khon Rak Chat* Club. The anti-Thaksin movement continued to be led by the PAD, academics, and members of the elite, who successfully kept their campaign in the headlines with favorable reporting from the newspapers. The balance between the two sides seemed to shift back and forth as General Prem, the palace's alter-ego, assumed a more controversial role, fissures appeared within both the TRT party and the PAD, and the power struggle within the military became more evident. Thaksin kept the nation guessing as to his political plans.

Students continued to play a minor role in the anti-Thaksin movement, with only a limited number participating. The battle was now clearly in the hands of the two groups of elite in Thailand—the conservatives and the “new breed headed by Thaksin.”¹²⁵ After Thaksin's ‘secret’ letter to US President Bush was leaked to the press, a group of students from Ramkhamhaeng University rallied at the TRT party headquarters, bringing a cartoon of the prime minister hugging Bush. They attempted to present a locket bearing a likeness of the US president “to Thaksin as a lucky charm. But the students were blocked at the entrance by policemen who told them to ‘go back’. The students also read a statement at the gate, saying: ‘We are here to celebrate the eighth anniversary of Thai Rak Thai. We bring a picture of the US president and his locket. We hope the PM wears it for his safety.’ While the statement was being read, some party members scolded the students and told them to take the items away. But the students instead left them at the party's nameplate.”¹²⁶

In late July, almost six months after they kicked off their petition drive, Thammasat University students Thanachai and Viroon Jinthanakul, leaders of the Students Loving the People Group, were featured in a *Bangkok Post* photograph as they prepared to deliver forty three boxes containing petition sheets, including almost eighty thousand signatures calling for Thaksin's impeachment. Thanachai said, “The Senate should launch a trial against Thaksin who has suspiciously dispensed his power relating to the sale of Shin Corp by his family and his stock transactions

¹²⁵ BP, July 8, 2006, quoting Nakin Mektrairat, dean of political science at Thammasat University.

¹²⁶ TN, July 15, 2006

involving a paper company Ample Rich Investment.”¹²⁷ Senate Deputy Speaker Sahas Pintusenee said the Senate Secretariat would verify the signatures, after which the NCCC would be asked to investigate. If the anti-corruption commission found foul play, the Senate would start impeachment action. Although the number of signatures was impressive, they had little impact as the conflict had clearly risen (or fallen) to a different level.

In early August, a new anti-Thaksin network called the Civil Society Network to Stop the Thaksin System (CSNSTS) was announced. Its organizers included student leaders Yos and Pleethum, university professors and representatives from about ten organizations. The group, promising to campaign for sanctions against Thaksin supporters, was partly born out of frustration with the PAD’s centralized decision-making and emphasis on large-scale rallies. The group began by issuing letters to pro-TRT government officials, police, provincial governors and businessmen, calling on them to end their support for the prime minister. They urged the public to express their opposition by employing a wide-variety of tactics including ‘social sanctions’. Associate Professor Sangsit Piriyaarangsarn said, “[w]e can jeer and refuse to *wai* them, refrain from using their businesses or services, or put up anti-Thaksin stickers or banners at our homes and offices.”¹²⁸ The network also created the www.stopthaksin.com website and agreed that the member organizations of the new alliance would work as equals without appointing any group or individual as leader.

On August 19, in response to a radio-news story that Thaksin was going to Siam Paragon for an event to commemorate the king’s sixtieth anniversary, one student member of Rangkids called Pleethum to ask if “we can do something.” They decided to attend the event and gathered about twenty people from Rangkids and the SCC with the intention to wait until the event was ended before they started their operation. When Thaksin showed up, “one of our guys made a mistake thinking the [large] crowds were on our side,” and shouted, “Thaksin get out.” Pleethum said they “were attacked very quickly, [we were] obviously a minority in the crowd; however,

¹²⁷ TN, July 28, 2006

¹²⁸ BP, August 7, 2006

good people came to our rescue.”¹²⁹ The *Bangkok Post* reported that nineteen-year old Rangkid’s member Yurachat Chatsuthichai, a second-year student at Bangkok University’s faculty of communication, “said he was punched in the head and face and later dragged out of the shopping mall’s compound by three men who acted and dressed like security guards accompanying Mr. Thaksin and some cabinet members.”¹³⁰

At a CSNSTS press conference held the following day, six people described themselves as victims of the attacks including one child and four women. Several claimed the ‘security guards’ followed them outside the shopping center and attacked them. Yurachat said, “If it’s this cruel in Bangkok, at Siam Paragon, in the heart of the city, in front of the prime minister and the media, what will happen to those disagreeing with the prime minister in remote areas? To be straight, I have begun to fear danger even in the city.”¹³¹ The press conference was picketed by thirty members of the pro-Thaksin Network of People Who Love Peace who were confronted by PAD supporters, with both sides pushing each other and exchanging angry words until the police intervened.

The following day, there was another more serious clash between pro- and anti-Thaksin groups outside Central World Plaza, where Thaksin presided over an opening ceremony of a digital learning center. About ten minutes after Thaksin left, the anti-Thaksin demonstrators began chanting ‘Thaksin get out’, leading to a violent clash with the Thaksin supporters standing nearby. Three members of the anti-Thaksin group were hospitalized with injuries and two members were arrested along with one pro-Thaksin person who was charged with assault. Some of the police were caught on camera observing—but not intervening in—the attacks, and some suspected the attackers were policemen dressed in civilian clothes since they wore identical white sneakers and white wristbands. Two men caught on film punching and kicking the anti-Thaksin demonstrators were subsequently arrested. They were alleged to be petty criminals who were close to Thaksin’s brother-in-law, Police-General Prieuphan Damapong, and TRT party canvassers. Police-Colonel Ritthirong

¹²⁹ Interview with Pleethum Triyakasem, December 19, 2006

¹³⁰ BP, August 20, 2006

¹³¹ TN, August 21, 2006

Thepchanda was alleged to have been involved with the men after he was identified in video footage as talking with them before the violence started.¹³²

Accusations were hurled back and forth, with TRT party leaders charging the PAD with instigating the violence and anti-Thaksin groups placing responsibility on the prime minister. Many political observers expressed concern that the upsurge in violence would further escalate. Dr. Prommin preached for reconciliation, saying he feared a repeat of the violence of October 1976 while calling on other October veterans to help stop the confrontations.

The victims of the attacks at Siam Paragon and Central World Plaza lodged complaints with Pathumwan police, and the Law Society filed a lawsuit against the police, claiming their inaction effectively supported the pro-Thaksin attackers. The PAD activists rallied at the Royal Thai Police headquarters to demand the police drop all charges against the anti-Thaksin demonstrators. They also threatened to stage mass protest rallies if the police failed to take action against those who attacked Thaksin's opponents.¹³³ Meanwhile, the PAD publicly distributed a VCD showing the police inaction and involvement. On August 24, the SFT issued a seven-point statement denouncing Thaksin for his handling of the incident and charging the police with facilitating the violence against the demonstrators. The student group requested that the police take legal action against the law violators even if they are government officials; the police recognize the freedom of political expression as allowed in the constitution; and the police treat people equally to maintain justice. They also denounced violence against youth, women and elders while “urgently” calling for “the government to protect people from violence in the present political situations.”¹³⁴

On August 25, three hundred PAD supporters rallied at the Royal Thai Police headquarters with Sondhi charging that the car-bomb plot against Thaksin had been fabricated. The PAD supporters later moved to the Pathumwan police station to file

¹³² Police-Colonel Ritthirong was fired on February 20, 2007, for abusing his power during the Central World Plaza incident.

¹³³ On February 12, 2007, the prosecution charged three supporters of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra with assault and illegal detention in connection with clashes outside the Central World Plaza in August 2006. [BP, February 13, 2007]

¹³⁴ www.manager.co.th, campus section, August 24, 2006

more complaints related to the Siam Paragon and Central World Plaza attacks. On August 30, the SFT joined with several human rights groups to demand the government investigate and punish public officials involved in the attacks while the PAD announced its intention to sue the Royal Thai Police for one billion baht in damages for allowing government supporters to assault the Thaksin opponents.

In the meantime, the election commissioners were found guilty of malfeasance and jailed, leading to a delay in setting the date for a new general election. General Prem and Thaksin elevated their war of words and battled over the upcoming military reshuffle. An alleged assassination attempt on Thaksin led to several arrests and the firing of General Pallop. By September, these events had become 'old news' and the anti-Thaksin movement regained the headlines. On September 10, about five hundred NIDA staff and students called on bureaucrats across the country to oppose Thaksin and refuse illegitimate political orders, while four days later the movement spread to Chulalongkorn, Rangsit and Srinakharinwirot universities. Anant Laulertvorakul, a coordinator of the Network said, "Students and academics will mobilize until peace has returned. The upcoming election cannot whitewash a leader who is accused of a lack of ethics, has committed policy mistakes, and faced numerous corruption charges."¹³⁵ He hoped that the Network actions would awaken political activism among students. On the rally day, about three hundred students, lecturers, alumni and staff of Chulalongkorn University marched around the campus, displaying banners and gathering before the statues of Kings Rama V and VI to pledge to adhere to morality and fight against a 'vicious regime'. Later in the day, about six hundred people joined a forum outside the library. *The Nation* reported, "Only a small number of students were drawn to the event" and Senator-elect Bhichit Rattakul, a Chulalongkorn alumnus, said he was disappointed in the small student participation.¹³⁶ Students, however, explained they were busy studying for the upcoming examinations.

The long-promised but often rescheduled PAD rally was finally planned for September 20 while Thaksin was attending the United Nations opening ceremonies in New York. Expecting their largest turnout ever, they intended to demand that the

¹³⁵ TN, September 13, 2006

¹³⁶ TN, September 15, 2006

prime minister remain abroad and not return to Thailand, continuing their protest on a daily basis until the prime minister was 'defeated'. A number of student organizations—including the SCC, YPD, NIDA-SFD, Rangkids, Social Criticism Student Club, Youth for Peace in Three Southern Provinces and the SFT—submitted an 'open letter to all students' on September 19, urging students to attend the rally. The letter concluded:

Our student friends, please be reminded of the October 14, [1973] incident in which the students were the first group facing the military dictatorial power. Then, people from every part came up nearby the youths. Finally, the dictatorial power defeated. Today, people from every section come out against the Thaksin regime which is much more fraudulent than military dictators of Thanom, Prapart, and Narong. Are we, the young people, supposed to leave the public to go against the government by themselves? We must show the power to insist the accuracy in society and retrieve the honor of youths which is the breath of tomorrow and never yield to the unfairness and dictatorship of Thaksin Shinawatra further. Additionally, we will never leave our friends (the relatives who fight near us) and our people.

However, few students planned to attend the rally because they were busy studying for their exams. Also, one activist admitted that the groups signing the letter did not enjoy mass support and each one only involved a few students.¹³⁷

As the PAD prepared for its September 20 rally, and in the wake of violent confrontations between pro- and anti-Thaksin partisans throughout the country, there were fears that 'volunteers' under the control of the Interior Ministry and Forestry Department might be mobilized to instigate a violent confrontation to justify the government's intervention. Some academics and political observers spoke of a 'civil war' atmosphere and predicted 'an era of bloodshed' reminiscent of Black October or the events of October 1973 and 1976. Polls indicated that people were bored, worried and stressed by the political conflicts and experiencing conflicts with their families and friends. ABAC Poll director Noppadol Kannikar worried that "[d]ivisiveness among the Thai people has reached an alarming stage and [serious] incidents totally unexpected may occur."¹³⁸ A peaceful solution was not in sight and the situation could only be seen as worsening, regardless of the election outcome.

¹³⁷ E-mail correspondence from Paninee Boonlert dated September 19, 2006

¹³⁸ TD, August 23, 2006

4.10 The Coup

Amid the political crisis there were rumors, followed by denials, that a military coup d'état would occur. In retrospect, it appears that military leaders led by General Sonthi were simultaneously appealing for national unity and reconciliation to ease the king's anxiety and planning a coup. In mid-May, four months before he staged the coup against Thaksin, the army chief sought a special audience with the king for the top military leaders while expressing concern that "[t]he situation in the country is a cause of great suffering for His Majesty."¹³⁹ While it is unknown whether the king was apprised of the coup plans, offered his encouragement or endorsed the plans, many political observers would conclude that the palace was fully involved at this time, if not long before. At the same time that General Sonthi was planning a coup, he was publicly cautioning Thaksin and his classmates from Pre-Cadet Class 10 against staging a coup.

The persistent rumors of an impending coup d'état, the alleged 'car-bomb' plot against Thaksin and political interference in the annual military reshuffle were all seen as threatening Thailand's shaky democracy. In the midst of that delicate situation, Thaksin was abroad for three major events: the Asia-Europe Meeting in Helsinki on September 11, followed by the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Havana and the United Nations General Assembly in New York. His September 22 return home was indefinitely delayed by the events of September 19.

Troops aligned with General Sonthi moved into Bangkok and staged a successful, bloodless coup against the Thaksin government. The following morning, PAD leader Sondhi announced the cancellation of their rally while praising the army chief for staging the coup. Several of Thaksin's chief aides were detained and troops took control of forestry units in several northern provinces, grounding helicopters, and seizing assault rifles loaned to the units. Among its first acts, the military council declared martial law, banned political activities, and restricted freedom of assembly while pressuring the media into self-censorship. They promised to establish a civilian government within two weeks.

¹³⁹ BP, May 18, 2006

While the palace insisted it was not involved in the coup, many political and monarchy experts saw another example of the king's behind-the-scenes power. Sulak said, "If the King didn't give a nod, this never would have been possible....Thaksin failed to realize that the King has been on the throne for sixty years and he's no fool. The man is old and Thaksin thought he could play around with him—and it was a dangerous game."¹⁴⁰

Over the next several days, the Administrative Reform Council (ARC)¹⁴¹ explained the reasons for the coup d'état, accusing Thaksin of being guilty of rampant corruption, causing national disunity, being a threat to the monarchy and responsible for the widespread abuse of power and gross interference with the independent bodies. The coup was also defended as a move to avert a deadly clash at the PAD rally between anti-Thaksin demonstrators and forestry police. *The Nation* reported "intelligence forces reported that the government planned to recruit two hundred people from the ranks of motorcycle taxi drivers, security guards and ruffians to instigate trouble [and] assassinate PAD leaders."¹⁴² Many political observers believed that Thaksin intended to declare a state of emergency, place the country under martial law or stage a coup in response to the violence that would have occurred at the rally. Chris Baker disputed that 'myth' as fabricated by "people who are surprised and a little ashamed to find themselves supporting a coup." He also doubted the myth of restoring national unity, questioning whether that can ever be restored "out of the barrel of a gun."¹⁴³

The next few days saw some unresolved business cleaned up. Key Thaksin cabinet members were detained and later released as the situation stabilized. The coup leaders quickly moved to root out Thaksin loyalists from the military and police and the annual reshuffles were redrawn for both; however, with few exceptions there was not an outright purge of those forces.¹⁴⁴ On September 21, the PAD declared an end to

¹⁴⁰ AP, www.aol.com, September 20, 2006

¹⁴¹ The coup went by several names. At first it was the Administrative Reform Council (ARC); later it was the Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy (CDRM) and finally the Council for National Security (CNS).

¹⁴² TN, October 21, 2006

¹⁴³ Chang Noi, "The persistent myth of the 'good' coup, TN, October 2, 2006

¹⁴⁴ A purge of Thaksin's classmates was completed in a mid-year reshuffle announced in March 2007. The reshuffle completed the CNS consolidation of controlling power of key military positions in the three armed forces. Several members of Class 9 who were believed close to former

its role as a protest group while vowing to persuade the new interim government to freeze Thaksin's assets and those of his cronies, and have them tried in a court of law for corruption. General Saprang Kalyanamitr, commander of the Third Army, revealed that the coup planning began around the time of the Shin Corp sale, when the outburst of anger showed a coup could rely on popular support in the capital.

4.11 The Epilogue

Immediately after the coup, polls reported that an overwhelming percentage of Thais, including eighty-six percent of residents in rural areas, supported the military takeover, believing it would end the political and social tension that had enveloped the country. A scant sixteen percent disagreed with it.¹⁴⁵

Thailand's civil society was divided over the coup. Most of those supporting the coup, including members of the CPD and PAD, emphasized the importance of returning to civilian rule as soon as possible, proceeding quickly with political reform and seizing Thaksin's 'ill-gotten wealth' to legitimize the military takeover. Thirayuth expressed complete confidence in the civilian government appointed two weeks later. According to Kasian, Thirayuth's opinion was shared by many other veterans from the October Generation who either openly supported the coup or agreed to be enlisted to serve in the government. A new network of NGOs, calling itself the NGOs Network for Political and Social Reform, reluctantly acknowledged the coup and urged the military leadership to stop curbing civil liberties, bring people into the interim cabinet with clear aspirations for democratic reform and open the reform process to participation by ordinary citizens. They both proposed a 'honeymoon period' during which the interim government was spared criticism and promised to monitor the new regime.

Another group of activists, including six NGOs led by the Union for Civil Liberty, outright opposed the coup. It issued a statement deploring the coup d'état and

Prime Minister Chavalit were also moved out of key positions, because of suspicions they could pose a threat to the Council for National Security [BP, March 22, 2007].

¹⁴⁵ TN, September 21, 2006

urging the military leaders to quickly pursue political reform and investigate corrupt ministers through the judicial process. The *Bangkok Post* reported that the Youth for Democracy Coordination Centre issued a statement with similar suggestions, writing, “The CDR [Council for Democratic Reform] should realize that a coup d’etat [as a means to attain state power] is out of date and should work out how to transform it into a progressive action that empowers the people for true democratic development.”¹⁴⁶

By and large, the anti-coup movement was sustained by a few groups of individuals. General Saprang, Council for National Security (CNS) assistant secretary-general characterized the anti-coup groups as “either hired guns or just free-spirited bookish-type people who want to see an ideal democracy that only exists in textbooks.”¹⁴⁷ The latter group included two prominent progressive leaders—the *Fah Diow Kan* editor Thanaphol and Chulalongkorn University’s Giles—and younger activists under three newly organized groups: Dome Daeng, the 19 September Network against the Coup, and the Student Information Resource Center.

The Student Information Resource Center was led by Chotisak On-soong, political editor of *QuestionMark* magazine. The group consisted of ten to twenty students from Thammasat, Chulalongkorn, Ramkhamhaeng and Silpakorn universities, representing different faculties, who knew each other through their relationship with *QuestionMark*. The magazine informally provides media relations for them. In the beginning, the PCP joined as a group but they stopped sending members to their meetings; the party does, however, support their activities. Dome Daeng, a group of approximately ten Thammasat University students and alumni, was led by Uchaen, the thirty-year old former SFT secretary-general and present-day Thammasat University graduate student. The 19 September Network against the Coup, consisting of NGO activists acting independently from their organizations, was led by Sombat Boonngam-anong, a self-described ‘student rebel’ with the Mirror Foundation, an NGO with sixty full-time staff operating in offices in four cities. He is

¹⁴⁶ BP, September 21, 2006. I was unable to locate this group under the reported name; it was more likely the Student Coordinating Center. According to student activist Paninee Boonlert, there were quite a number of student groups issuing statements after the coup, “but most of them are the same people.”

¹⁴⁷ TN, December 6, 2006

in his thirties and was active in the Black May anti-coup demonstration. While the three anti-coup organizations maintained their independence from each other, they appeared to work closely together.

The first prominent progressive voice to criticize the coup was that of Thanaphol. He condemned the coup and urged the public to peacefully oppose it by citing their rights under the 1997 Constitution. He further opposed military orders that the media should self-censor news critical of the coup while calling for “media diversity.”¹⁴⁸ Giles spoke at nearly all the events opposing the coup and was quoted extensively in the English-language Thai press. Although he denied being a leader of the 19 September Network, he was closely associated with that organization. More often, he spoke as leader of the PCP, which issued a statement saying, “We have disagreed with various policies of the Thaksin administration, but at least they came to power by election. They should be sacked in the same fashion, not by a coup d’etat.”¹⁴⁹

The day after the coup, the Student Resources Information Center issued a statement condemning the ‘anti-democratic and truly dictatorial’ coup, while urging Thais to wear black to mourn the death of Thai democracy and to refrain from cooperating with the coup-makers. As yellow became the symbol of the anti-Thaksin movement, black became the symbol of those opposed to the coup. The group also urged the CPD to oppose the coup. Chotisak joined Thanaphol in petitioning the NHRC to oppose the coup and support their right to protest. The following day, about eighty students and activists gathered under the umbrella of the 19 September Network and announced a planned demonstration for September 22. They called on the public to peacefully defy the coup-leaders. Sombat said, “Political differences are normal and will always be with us but the task of getting rid of Thaksin should be the responsibility of the people without relying on people with weapons.” The 19 September Network’s statement read, “Abolishing the Constitution, harassing the media and putting an end to independent agencies are regarded as acts abolishing the parliamentary democracy. This act will lead to the same outcome of previous

¹⁴⁸ TN, September 20, 2006

¹⁴⁹ BP, September 22, 2006

coups.”¹⁵⁰ The network also created a website, www.19sep.org, for the discussion of its activities and the political situation.

On the night of September 22, students, professors and political activists gathered in front of Siam Center to stage the first civilian protest against the coup. While *The Nation* reported the group as ‘nearly one hundred’, the *Bangkok Post* wrote that only twenty people participated. Chotisak’s group provided black armbands to the demonstrators who urged the public to resist the new military regime while vowing to continue their fight until democracy was restored. Protesters held small banners which read ‘No to Thaksin. No to coup’, ‘Don’t call it reform—it’s a coup’ and ‘No to martial law’. Although clearly in violation of the newly-established law forbidding an assembly of more than five people for political purposes, no one was arrested; however, Giles reported that he had received a call from a military officer who ‘requested’ him to cancel the rally.

The 19 September Network and Dome Daeng staged an outdoor political discussion on the lawn of Thammasat University on the evening of September 25. Defying the prohibition on political assemblies and threats of swift penalties, approximately fifty students—most from Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Mahidol, Ramkhamhaeng and Kasetsart universities and KMIT—participated in the event with faculty and another two hundred people witnessing the protest-cum-discussion titled “Why we must resist the coup.” The protesters held hands and sang pro-democracy songs while appealing to the crowd to resist the coup. Several students spoke in addition to labor activist Chanya Yimprasert, Chulalongkorn political science lecturer Kanokrat Lertchoosakul and Thanaphol, Thammasat graduate student and rally organizer Uchaen said, “Today our political rights have been curtailed by a military regime that tore up the Constitution. What we’re doing is intentional defiance of junta orders.”¹⁵¹ The protesters did not seek permission from university administrators because they believed they were under the power of the military government. Prinya said, “Such resistance is normal in the aftermath of a coup d’etat. The Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy (CDRM) may have to be more

¹⁵⁰ TN, September 22, 2006

¹⁵¹ TN, September 26, 2006

patient and think carefully before imposing any other bans or orders.”¹⁵² The university requested police security and several intelligence officers recorded the event; again, no one was arrested.

Uchane said students would hold mobile anti-coup demonstrations at various universities over the following weeks. Two days later, the anti-coup protest moved to Chulalongkorn University’s political science faculty in a rally organized by graduate student Kengkij Kitiranglarp, a member of the PCP, and the newly formed Chula Students for Liberty in cooperation with Dome Daeng and the 19 September Network. About one hundred students attended the event, listening to Prapas Pintoptaeng criticize the middle class, elite and academics who accepted the legitimacy of the coup while the “political space for the rural poor” was disappearing. Giles said the hope for Thai democracy rested on the shoulders of young Thais as he lashed out at the docile Democrat Party for failing to address the rural poor through its policies. Political science student Pattawit Thambutdee lamented, “Nobody can guarantee that this will be the last [coup], and it will be hard to grow the [democracy] back again.”¹⁵³

On October 2, several dozen students from the 19 September Network and Student Information Resource Center demonstrated in front of the Army headquarters on Rajdamnoen Nok road. In advance of the rally, Chotisak said the protest was planned “to tell the military junta that political assembly is a fundamental right.”¹⁵⁴ The students burned an enlarged copy of the interim constitution issued by the coup leaders as a symbolic rejection of their rule, with Chotisak saying, “The military tore apart the constitution drafted by the people, so we are burning the charter issued undemocratically by them.”¹⁵⁵ Several Army officers and police observed the rally but did not harass or arrest the students.

On October 6, the thirtieth anniversary of the Thammasat University massacre exposed a generational divide between the October Generation activists and the Millennial Generation students, with the former mostly praising the military for

¹⁵² BP, September 26, 2006

¹⁵³ TN, September 28, 2006

¹⁵⁴ TN, October 2, 2006

¹⁵⁵ TN, October 3, 2006

'rescuing' Thailand from Thaksin. The latter, including about two hundred students dressed in black, shouted 'CDR Get Out!' as they condemned the military as 'enemies of democracy' and accused the General Surayuth Chulanont administration of being puppets of the military. Uchaen said, "I can't understand why people who used to fight against dictatorship can accept today's dictators and the coup. These people have had their rights taken away before."¹⁵⁶ One week later, Dome Daeng organized a symposium at Thammasat University on the thirty-third anniversary of the October 14, 1973 event and staged a mock election. Nearby, about five hundred members of the October Generation held a non-political 'ceremony' at the October 14 Memorial. The speakers urged the interim government to lift martial law and restore public participation.¹⁵⁷

In the midst of the anti-coup campaign, NGOs and civic groups from across Thailand gathered at Thammasat University's Rangsit campus for the Thai Social Forum over the weekend of October 21-23. Although planned in 2005 with an agenda to discuss political and social reforms, their focus was redirected to consider the role of civil society in relationship to the military government and to offer suggestions on a new charter. The forum, led by former senator Jon, called on the CDR to lift martial law, revoke its ban on political gatherings, end interference with the media, refrain from implementing any mega-projects and suspend talks on FTAs. The role of social and political activists in relation to the military government ignited an intense debate at the forum, exposing a deep ideological divide among former colleagues. 19 September Network leader Sombat said,

This is an NGO crisis. We've been split on certain issues before, but never to this extent. To see people I admire and respect serving a dictatorship is painful and defies explanation. I don't object to anyone wanting to work with the government, but this is not a normal regime. They stole power from the people. The NGO role is to stay on the opposite end of such regimes and hold them accountable.¹⁵⁸

While Pipob said he opposed the coup and would not work with the military dictatorship, other forum participants encouraged a more 'pragmatic' approach of

¹⁵⁶ TN, October 7, 2006

¹⁵⁷ BP, October 25, 2006

¹⁵⁸ TN, October 22, 2006

working with the government to solve problems. At the conclusion of the three-day forum the participants agreed to draft a parallel 'People's Constitution' to balance the new constitution being drafted by the junta.¹⁵⁹ About two hundred demonstrators marched to Democracy Monument, chanting 'Another World is Possible'. Anti-coup demonstrators joined them and distributed pamphlets announcing their planned protest at Government House. Five armed soldiers attempted to arrest Student Information Resource Center leader Chotisak, saying the march was against the martial law.

On October 24, about one hundred students from the 19 September Network protested at Government House, calling the members of the NLA 'junta lapdogs' and a rubber stamp for the generals. The students, wearing black and carrying black wreaths, displayed banners demanding the members 'get out' and attacking them as 'servants of dictators'. The students also carried empty tin cans for the legislators to wear over their heads to 'hide their faces in shame', while singling out Thammasat University rector Surapol Nitikraipot, pro-democracy academics, and progressive former senators for special criticism. Sombat said, "We did not expect these respected people would accept and serve the dictators who robbed democracy and tore down the constitution.... We encourage NLA members still conscious of right and wrong to resign."¹⁶⁰ Former SFT secretary-general Pongsatorn also joined the rally.

Beginning October 28, the 19 September Network staged a regular Saturday rally against the coup leaders and the interim government at Thammasat University *Tha Phra Chan* campus. At the same time, Dome Daeng launched an online petition demanding that Surapol choose between his position as Thammasat University rector and member of the NLA. The petition stated, "Historically, Thammasat University has always been a political space for and a symbol of the struggle for democracy since it was founded by Pridi Panomyong. The rector's involvement with the coup in one way or another would be considered as supporting the coup and being part of propping up its power."¹⁶¹ The group also charged that the coup leaders recruited

¹⁵⁹ The People's Assembly for Political Reform (PAPR) held its first public hearing on the new constitution at Chulalongkorn University on February 18, 2007.

¹⁶⁰ TN, October 25, 2006

¹⁶¹ TN, October 29, 2006

reputable people, academics, journalists, media representatives, and high-ranking civil servants into the NLA and to enhance the legitimacy of the coup.

Less than two months after staging a coup d'etat, the NLA lifted the ban on public gatherings; in response about ten members of the 19 September Network held their first legal anti-coup rally at Thammasat University on November 11. The following Saturday, the group staged a demonstration to demand the immediate lifting of martial law, adoption of the abolished 1997 constitution as an interim charter, and new elections. About five hundred people, including the new-elected leaders of the SFT, marched from Thammasat University to the Royal Army Headquarters, wearing black and carrying banners demanding the ouster of the National Security Council (NSC).

Almost three months after they staged their first rally at Siam Center, Thailand's Constitution Day and International Human Rights Day presented the coup opponents with an opportunity to seize a historic holiday to protest against the military take-over. With the pro-Thaksin groups promising to stage rallies, the army instructed the police to intercept participants from northern Thailand attempting to join the Bangkok rally, eliciting condemnations of 'harassment' from rights activists. Chotisak said, "This action is the most concrete evidence yet of junta curbs on people's rights and liberties. It reveals both the junta's dictatorial nature and the fact it's afraid of people power. The junta says a poll shows it has eighty percent support. If that's so, it doesn't need to worry. But I don't think that's true."¹⁶² The AOP issued a statement, saying:

Politics of the poor have been denied and the right to bargain with the state to solve problems has been eradicated. The smoke of martial law is still smoldering in the rural provinces and it's full of the suppression of rights and liberty. [The plight of the poor must be] considered part of political reform.¹⁶³

Although one pro-Thaksin group staged a rally nearby, the 19 September Network staged the larger of the two demonstrations with an audience of about five

¹⁶² TN, December 11, 2006

¹⁶³ TN, December 11, 2006

hundred. The organizers were almost exclusively students and young people, including Uchaen, Sombat and Chotisak and other students from Ramkhamhaeng, Thammasat and Chulalongkorn universities. In addition, several ‘seniors’ were backstage, including Human Rights Commissioner Jaran Cosananund, former Senator Prateep Ungsongtham Hata, and several university professors.

The crowd—mostly middle aged and older, in contrast to the student organizers and speakers—grew to about one thousand as several groups joined the march to Democracy Monument, shouting ‘CNS get out! CNS get out!’ and carrying banners and posters condemning the coup. At the monument the protesters lit candles and listened to speeches from Weng Tojirakarn, leader of the Confederation for Democracy, and Prateep who said, “If people have no right to wear black or travel freely, then it's worse than a communist state. If you want democracy, you must create a democratic climate.” Pongsathon criticized members of the news media and academics who joined the NLA.¹⁶⁴

With an abundance of caution and perhaps some skepticism of the student organizers, the CPD and PAD leaders did not join the rally; however, they promised they would evaluate the performance of the interim government later in the month. Instead the CPD joined a coalition of human rights groups including the Thai Coalition for the Protection of Human Rights Workers, Amnesty International (Thailand) and the Union for Civil Liberty in holding a simultaneous rally at Army Headquarters where it submitted a letter to the CNS chairman urging the junta to uphold international human rights standards.

The 19 September Network held another rally on Sunday, December 17 at Sanam Luang with approximately three hundred people in the audience. On this occasion they responded to a ‘trial balloon’ floated by General Sonthi and some academics for the new constitution to allow a non-elected prime minister to assume office—an idea Sombat denounced as allowing the military to maintain its political dominance. He said, “We have rarely heard anyone talk about a non-elected prime minister in more than a decade. These academics are taking Thailand back to the

¹⁶⁴ TN, December 11, 2006

past.”¹⁶⁵ Also, in response to General Sonthi’s claim that there were illegal migrants among the December 10 protesters, Sombat said his remark was reminiscent of the 1976 military junta’s efforts to incite hatred by accusing the student protesters of being communists and Vietnamese.

On January 18, six Ramkhamhaeng University students calling themselves the Thai Students’ Network for Democracy Group staged a demonstration at the Singapore Embassy to protest Thaksin’s CNN and *Wall Street Journal* interviews held in that country. On January 21, 2007, about one thousand demonstrators gathered at Sanam Luang and marched to the army headquarters. They demanded an end to the military’s political role and the immediate scheduling of elections. Weng called Prime Minister Surayuth, General Sonthi and General Prem ‘dictators’ and urged the privy council president to stay out of politics. The network accused the military of betraying the people by repeatedly staging coups and called for reforms to weaken the army politically while maintaining its military strength.

As the new constitution was being drafted, anti-coup groups, led by Sombat, organized a ‘Thai Say No’ campaign to defeat the ‘coup constitution’ as they called it. On March 3, about ten students marched from Siam Center shopping center to the Onnuj skytrain station and launched an online petition at www.thaisayno.com. In advance of the March 17 anti-coup mass rally, the police arrested several political activists who were protecting their stage at Sanam Luang. Nonetheless, between one and two thousand people attended the rally, many of whom were Thaksin’s supporters. The following day, Weng led a march of about eight hundred to one thousand anti-coup activists to General Prem’s residence while calling for the restoration of the 1997 Constitution.

The political desk of *The Nation* described the anti-coup group of leftists and NGO activists as opponents of the monarchy and “working closely with former TRT heavyweight Phumtham”. It said the group “is well-organized, has an ideology and foreign support network” and is being closely watched by the military.¹⁶⁶ However,

¹⁶⁵ TN, December 18, 2006

¹⁶⁶ TN, December 7, 2006

this researcher was unable to uncover any evidence of the supposed connection between the 'leftists and NGO activists' and the TRT party, and its existence remains an unsubstantiated opinion of that newspaper.

Some student protesters who took part in the anti-coup events said they felt let down by the Thai media because the print media supported the coup and left no space for those who thought differently. That space was filled in the Internet as computer-savvy students took to cyberspace to spread their message. The first entry was a virtual petition established by Thongchai who collected signatures demanding that the CDRM not arrest nor harm anti-coup protesters. The 19 September Network created the www.19sep.net site. Two other sites, the Midnight University's www.midnightuniv.org and the independent critical news site, www.prachathai.com, were also popular among activist students and the anti-coup public.

Immediately after staging the coup, the military government ordered all critical Internet-based media shut down or their content destroyed. The managers of those sites were vocal in their opposition to the coup and critical of the self-censorship taking place in the media. Midnight University's Somkiat Tangnamo petitioned the AC to allow him to return to operations after his site was shut down, adding, "The interim government's job is to organize the fairest possible election and then haul their asses out of here. We can draft our own constitution."¹⁶⁷ Kasian described the Midnight University website as "the foremost free and critical educational and public intellectual website in Thailand...[and its closure] not only a huge loss to academic and intellectual freedom in Thai society, but also the closure of a free forum for the contention of ideas so as to find a peaceful alternative to violent conflict in Thailand."¹⁶⁸ Jeeranuch Premchaiporn, manager of Prachatai.com, urged the NHRC to protect Internet-based media; in response, Jaran said the censorship trend was likely to continue despite protests from media reform advocates and prominent coup supporters. As of the end of 2006, access to the 19sep.org website had been blocked six times and Sombat's offices were visited by military officers. The CDR also ordered the closure of more than three hundred community radio stations in northern Thailand. The Freedom Against Censorship Thailand organization charged that the

¹⁶⁷ TN, October 14, 2006

¹⁶⁸ TN, October 1, 2006

number of blocked websites rose five hundred percent between October 13, 2006 and January 11, 2007 as a result of censorship by the coup-installed government—by blocking web discussion boards or ordering them to self-censor. The result was a “frightening increase in thought control and abrogation of civil liberties and human rights in Thailand.”¹⁶⁹

It would be a mistake to characterize the anti-coup movement as dominated by students and young adults, although they were the most visible people and behind virtually all the public demonstrations. Many individuals and groups associated with the anti-Thaksin movement were also outspoken against the coup. On October 11—the ninth anniversary of the ‘People’s Constitution’—the CPMR held a wake for the constitution at the Democracy Monument in response to the military’s clampdown on free media expression and held a press conference calling for restoration of those articles in the 1997 Constitution that guaranteed media freedom. On November 12, Pipob and a group of PAD supporters—including Suriyasai, Somkiat and labor leader Somsak—launched the People’s Assembly for Political Reform to create a charter that would give more power to the people while cutting state authority by educating people nationwide about their rights to participate in the political process. Pipob said, “The best way now is to continue moving ahead with political reform that will greatly benefit the people.”¹⁷⁰ In a December 17 press conference, the People’s Assembly demanded the new constitution state that the prime minister must come unconditionally from an election and maintain the key principles of the 1997 constitution. Also active in anti-coup activities were the Confederation for Democracy, the AOP, and the Thai Labor Solidarity Committee.

¹⁶⁹ TN, February 1, 2007

¹⁷⁰ BP, November 13, 2006

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

In considering the previous chapters and the history of student activism over the past ninety years since the founding of Chulalongkorn University, several themes first introduced in Chapter Two must be reconsidered: The class struggle between Thailand's elite and lower classes that originated hundreds of years ago and continues today; the progress toward and retreat from democracy that continues today; and the closure of political space by various governments, whether civilian-democratic or military-dictatorship, that also continues today. One soon sees "the vicious circle in Thai politics"¹, the opening and closing of political space; the activism that occurs during the former and the repression that characterizes the latter; the proliferation of free magazines and newspapers and their closure; freedom of speech and assembly, and martial law prohibiting them; and corrupt 'democratic' elections followed by military coup d'etats. One cannot help but be concerned for the future of democracy in Thailand. This thesis has attempted to candidly chronicle the apathy among Thailand's Millennial Generation while seeking out signs of hope that young people today engage with the Thai political system in its continuing struggle to further the democracy movement and promote social, political and economic justice.

When examining the differences between the October and Millennial Generations, one is reminded of the required disclosure by United States investment companies: "Past performance is no guarantee of future results." So it is with student activism in Thailand, the October Generation's powerful 'past performance' and the less promising 'future results' delivered by the Millennials during the Thaksin era and in the aftermath of the September 19 Coup. The comparison is useful, however, if only to better understand today's students.

¹ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

Public ceremonies are held every October 6 and 14, either at Thammasat University or the October 14 Memorial, commemorating the events of thirty and thirty-three years past. The veterans of those events (also known as *Khon Duen Tula*, October People or Octoberists), the families of murdered students, and progressive Thais gather to resurrect the ghosts of the idealist students “who were willing to fight against injustice, even if it crushed them.”² Perhaps they gather to reminisce in a mood of nostalgia, perhaps to replenish their youthful idealism, perhaps to summon the spirit of their long-dead classmates into the current political scene. They probably do not gather to heed Thaksin’s plea to “forget” the political conflict and “stop” trying to fix responsibility for the civilian deaths and injuries.³

The students of the Millennial Generation have grown up in the October Generation’s shadow, born in the days after the massacre at Thammasat University and during Thailand’s greatest years of prosperity. For most students, the 1970s has been consigned to boring history books that sanitized the ‘people’s movement’ and grass-roots politics. For some it is an inspiration for their own idealism and hopes for a better world. For others it is the burden of a child struggling to create his/her own identity while failing to measure up to an esteemed parent. For most of their parents, that era represents a cautionary tale for their children to avoid political activism and its risks of government repression and violence. Regardless of their response to the specter of the October Generation, its unresolved history casts a spell over Thai society and politics for the Millennial Generation.

5.2 Change of Political Context

When examining the differences between the October and Millennial Generations—separated by less than four decades—one is drawn to a comment by Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) co-leader Kittisak Sujittarom who said that today’s students “do not want to bear the responsibility for the past” and that one “cannot expect the SFT to act the same as in the past” because the social context

² *Bangkok Post* (BP), March 22, 2001, quoting Seksan Prasertkul

³ *The Nation* (TN), October 17, 2001, quoting from Thaksin’s speech at the inauguration of the October 14 Memorial

today is different.⁴ In fact, that context could hardly be more different, beginning with the dissimilar international trends that influenced each generation.

The October Generation was caught up, somewhat belatedly, in the international student movement that peaked in 1968—although before their fellow students in China and South Korea. Students of that era shared heroes from around the world: India's Gandhi, Cuba's Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, China's Mao Tse-Tung, and Martin Luther King, Jr. from the United States. Their enemies were United States' imperialism, its war in Vietnam, capitalism, and authoritarianism in every imaginable form; they fought for civil rights, peace, and democracy.

No comparable worldwide trend yet exists in the twenty-first century, although a smaller scale of student activism has taken place in the Middle East, within the former republics of the Soviet Union, among Muslim students as part of the modern Islamic movement, and in seemingly isolated incidents around the world.⁵ The end of this chapter will briefly explore the 'anti-globalization' movement as a possible future harbinger of student activism.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Robert Lauer wrote that the "young are likely to lead in change when there is a clear contradiction between ideology and reality."⁶ Thirty-four years ago, students rallied against the absence of democracy and the abuses of corruption—two themes that have mobilized Thai political action for earlier generations and since. The October Generation's ideology—if not decidedly Marxist, it was at least leftist and strongly pro-democracy—could not have been more clearly in contradiction to the prevailing 'reality' of the Thanom-Praphat regime.

⁴ Interview with Kittisak Sujittarom, December 4, 2006

⁵ In addition to nations in the Middle East and former Soviet Union, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Puerto Rico and France all experienced student protests in 2005-2006.

⁶ Robert H. Lauer, *Perspectives on Social Change*. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), p. 314-315

In the words of Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej, the October Generation grew “up in a suppressed-democracy era.”⁷ In 1973 students rebelled against a military dictatorship and appealed for a democratic society with a constitution. Their short-lived victory was followed by a history that wove its way between authoritarian and quasi-democratic rule, culminating in Thailand’s 1997 ‘People’s Constitution’, the most democratic ever in its sixty-five year history under a ‘constitutional monarchy’. The democratic elections in 2001 and 2005 created a powerful mandate for Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that lasted almost six years.

For the Thai Millennial Generation, the absence of Lauer’s condition kept most students on the sidelines of political change. The prevailing ideology in Thailand, as in most of the world, was capitalism and consumerism. And no person better represented that ideology than Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. As a result, there was no contradiction to drive the young to “lead in change”.

In contrast to his generation, Dr. Prommin said today’s students have grown up in “totally different circumstances” that he characterized as a “pro-democracy era”.⁸ Thammasat University Student Union (TUSU) president Thanachai Sunthorn-anantachai saw that different political context—democracy rather than dictatorship—as the reason his generation of students were reluctant to become politically engaged.

Although today’s students grew up during Thailand’s longest democratic era (1980-2005) interrupted briefly by the 1991 coup, that democracy was weak and storied by the similar limitations on free speech, unionization, and protest as less democratic eras. When the October Generation activists fought for democracy, they envisioned ‘free and fair elections’ that would empower the nation’s poor to cast their votes for officials that would represent their interests and improve Thai society. Cornell University’s Thak Chaloehtiarana described today’s students as “jaded by democracy”.⁹ He said they are disillusioned by rural villagers who have perverted the idealism of the 1970s, using their democratic rights to sell their votes.

⁷ Interview with Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej, December 18, 2006

⁸ Interview with Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej, December 18, 2006

⁹ Interview with Thak Chaloehtiarana, October 18, 2006

Author Paul Handley blamed the monarchy for destabilizing democratic institutions in Thailand when the king “referred to democratic principles as simply highbrow ideals that could weaken society.”¹⁰ He further charged that the king defended the monarchy at all costs while partnering with military dictators, all the while undermining elected politicians as self-serving, unrepresentative of the people’s needs, corrupt and inept—thus limiting the development of a liberal democracy and conditioning the Thai people to adopt his negative view toward democracy.

Political democracy contains four main elements: free and fair elections, open and accountable government, civil and political rights and a democratic or ‘civil’ society. Under Thaksin those elements were subtly compromised (as described in the previous chapter) and he was accused of being a ‘democratic dictator’ presiding over a ‘parliamentary dictatorship’. Pipob Thongchai, a co-leader of the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), admitted that was a fine distinction that made the fight against Thaksin much more difficult than in October 1973 and May 1992.

Unlike the Thanom-Praphat regime whose weak political legitimacy was staked to defense of the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy from communism, Thaksin had a stronger claim. In a nation where politicians claim absolute legitimacy with electoral victory, Thaksin’s huge successive victories arguably gave him the greatest political legitimacy of any Thai leader. And unlike many before him, Thaksin could point to an impressive record of achievements to further enhance his standing. However, like all those before him, Thaksin also sought to limit the political space for an engaged citizenry. When the extent of Thaksin’s corruption and pursuit of private interests became widely known, the avenues to articulate those concerns and issues were largely closed. That closing of political space, in large part, explained Sondhi Limthongkul’s popularity as he was both articulate and forceful in presenting a political challenge to the prime minister. The dysfunction in the political decision-making process—marginalizing and excluding those voices critical of the government—also explained the many ways in which students sought to become politically engaged in an attempt to create a mass movement.

¹⁰ Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 343, referring to the King’s 1958 birthday speech

The imperfection of democracy under Thaksin and the subsequent coup d'état raise the question of what 'democracy' means for Thailand—is it based upon the 'western' model or is it a unique 'Thai-style' democracy based upon the country's distinctive culture and history? Immediately after the September 19 Coup, the *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)* printed an article that quoted several prominent Thais who attempted to answer that question. Former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, himself installed by military governments yet considered one of Thailand's better leaders, said, "It's not that every country has to emulate American democracy....It should be homegrown." Further promoting this concept of a 'Thai-style democracy', General Prem said that Thailand's democracy rests upon the authority of the King, with whom Thailand will never be without.¹¹

Amara Pongsapitch, an outspoken anti-Thaksin activist when she was dean of the political science faculty at Chulalongkorn University and a post-coup screening committee member for the National Legislative Assembly (NLA), addressed the question at a Thammasat University symposium on Democratic Culture and Unity organized by the university's Women and Youth Studies Program. She spoke of the 'unique Thai-style of democracy' that should not be defined in the same terms as Western democracy, saying it is important to recognize the different styles of democracy, depending on different social and historical contexts. The former dean said, "I look at Asian countries and nowhere do I see it being the Western type of democracy. So we need to write a new text on Asian democracies."¹² The dean suggested that a Thai democracy should consider a new form of parliament that would include elected or appointed representatives from different sectors—including the monarchy. Citing the prevalence of corrupt elected politicians who had abused their power, Thammasat University historian Chaiwat Boonnag expressed a similar opinion, saying:

The [western] representative rule is a very scarce thing. This kind of democracy is a death structure for Thailand. Villagers think democracy is equivalent to elections ... but it has always been [operating] under a patronage system....[What Thailand needs is] democracy that is rooted on 'Asian-ness'

¹¹ Colum Murphy, October 2006, "Putting Thailand Together Again", *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*

¹² TN, December 1, 2006

and then encompass ‘Thai-ness’. We must explore the issue because province-based representatives only produce godfathers who lack a human conscience.¹³

Their comments harken back to Thanat Khoman’s remarks justifying General Sarit’s coup d’etat in 1958. As the military dictator’s ambassador to the United States, he wrote in obvious reference to the value of the Thai monarchy:

The fundamental cause of our political instability in the past lies in the sudden transplantation of alien institutions onto our soil 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....If we look at our national history, we can see very well 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.¹⁴

When I posed that concept of a ‘Thai-style democracy’ to the collected members of the 19 September Network and Student Information Resource Center, one student called the idea “bullshit”. Somewhat more eloquently, Chulalongkorn University’s Giles Ungpakorn said, “People call this a Thai-style coup, or Thai-style democracy. I find this insulting, especially to those who stood up against the dictatorships in 1973, 1976 and 1992.” Citing the failures of the Democrat and other parties to mount an effective campaign, he continued, “You can go out and create a new party, and if you don’t win, you can do it again and again in the next election.”¹⁵ Another student said that there is only a ‘Thai-style dictatorship’ when referring to the coup leaders.

One month after the 19 September coup, in an interview with a small group of Thai students studying at Cornell University in the United States, they all agreed that Thailand was often better off with appointed governments—prime ministers, members of parliament and senators—rather than elected officials who were more likely to be corrupt, in what one referred to as the “Anand Model”. Regarding the post-coup future, they were hopeful but cautious—not because they had any concerns about the new constitution, but because they feared going back to the governments of

¹³ TN, December 1, 2006

¹⁴ David K. Wyatt, *A Short History of Thailand*, (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1982), p.

¹⁵ TN, October 14, 2006

the past, citing the Chuan example of weak coalition politics with the same cast of corrupt politicians returning.¹⁶

Traditionally, democratic societies have a system of 'checks and balances' that may include the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government or, in Thailand under the 1997 Constitution, independent commissions. Given the impotence of those commissions and absence of any checks and balances during the Thaksin administration, Thais began to allow the argument that the country would be better served by a strong bureaucracy and extra-democratic institutions, such as the monarchy and military. Thais seem to admit that they need to be protected from themselves and their elected politicians by reaching out to these traditional institutions of power.

Thaksin was credited with marginalizing Thailand's bureaucracy, long criticized for being non-responsive, in favor of politicians. After the coup, the sentiment toward the bureaucracy changed. General Saprang Kalyanamitr, a member of the Council for National Security (CNS) wanted Thailand to return to the days of technocrats and bureaucrats playing a more significant role than politicians. He was supported by Dr. Prawase Wasi, formerly an advocate of a strong party system, who believed that bureaucrats should have more power in the next constitution and be less subject to political interference.

The more typical belief in Thailand has the monarchy providing the 'check' on elected governments whether frequently and behind the scenes; occasionally in the king's annual birthday address offering advice and criticism; or rarely as in the examples of 1973 and 1992. Thais generally feel a reverence for their king, and the sense that he is both 'above' politics and their 'safety valve' during a national political crisis that provides an extra-political balance to its elected governments. That sentiment is not, however, shared by most of the young activists interviewed for this thesis nor the veterans of 1976 who expressed cautious discontent with the palace's role in the violence of that era.

¹⁶ Interview with Thai students at Cornell University, Pisut Wisessing, Ken, Surin, Prahpan and Thad, October 18, 2006.

Likewise, Thailand's military promotes itself as the guardian of the nation and the monarchy while serving as another 'check' on elected governments. Judging from Thai history, too often that guardianship has served as justification for a coup d'état. Thammasat University's Worachet Pakeerut said, "In the future, Thais will think that coups are a good solution whenever they face political problems. Instead of thinking about the rule of law, they'll think about the military. I'm not sure if the folk spirit of the Thai people is that of autocracy or not, because they tend to approve of using power to solve problems."¹⁷

From the preceding observations we can conclude that the clarity with which the October Generation fought against dictatorship and for democracy has been replaced by a very muddled context for the Millennial Generation. For many of today's students, it is no longer clear what democracy means—'Western' or 'Thai-style'—and whether the traditional Thai institutions of the monarchy, bureaucracy and military are better suited to ruling the country. While today's student activists were clear in their opposition to Thaksin and the coup, the vast majority of young people were less confident of their certainty.

The change of contexts between the October Generation and the Millennial Generation was far more complex than questions of democracy in Thailand. The atrophy of student movements around the world has been accompanied by the apparent demise of leftist politics. In the 1960s and 1970s, Marxism, communism, socialism, and Maoism were the ideologies *du jour* among young people, including Thailand's student activists. Internationally, that changed in the 1980s as the Berlin Wall crumbled down. The perceived failure of socialism and communism resulted in the death of ideology as 'neutral' India, Communist China and Soviet Russia substituted nationalism and the drive for economic growth as their dogma. The collapse of the Soviet Union allowed for the emergence of the United States as the world's sole superpower and the unchallenged extension of its hegemony over the world economies and cultures. Some writers posit that the world is less affected by the 'absence of ideology' than it is by the fact that capitalism and globalization have supplanted all other ideologies. "For the first time since the Reformation, there are no

¹⁷ TN, December 4, 2006

longer any significant oppositions—that is, systematic rival outlooks—within the thought-world of the West; and scarcely any on a world scale either, if we discount religious doctrines as largely archaisms.”¹⁸

That monumental international shift was dramatically played out in Thailand. The October Generation was strongly influenced by Marxist ideology, even if most students in the 1970s did not consider themselves Marxists. Clearly, the student activist leaders were, if not decidedly Marxist, at least sympathetic toward its philosophy and ideals and most would have at least declared themselves as socialists. In the latter half of the decade, many joined the communist insurgency, although often out of fear rather than ideology. Only a few years later those same students walked out of the jungles with a mixture of disillusionment and a sense of failure. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), caught in the middle between its Chinese and Vietnamese sponsors, faced a slow but certain death in the 1980s. The student movement seemed to die along with it as former communists and socialists seemed to abandon leftist politics.

If the death of ideology was the greatest contextual change between the generations, then the saddest of all changes was loss of hopefulness among youth. The October Generation and the worldwide student movement of the 1960s were characterized by a belief in its ability to change the world, to dream that anything was possible, and to hope that things would be better as a result of their struggle. In the United States, the Negro spiritual, “We Shall Overcome” became the anthem of protesters, whatever the cause. In France, students marched under the slogan, “Be Reasonable. Ask for the Impossible”. And in Thailand, student activists built on small successes (boycotting Japanese goods and protesting rising bus fares) to create enough political space through which to march hundreds of thousands of students.

Today, in Thailand and many other nations, the vast majority of students no longer have faith in their ability to influence social change. The SFT’s Kotchawan Chaiyabutr opined, “Thai students don’t think they have any impact at all and even if

¹⁸ Alex Callinicos, *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), p. 4, quoting Peggy Anderson, “one of the key intellectuals of the Western left for the past generation.”

they think they have impact, they don't think they can find a way to resolve the problem. So they don't want to involve in the movement."¹⁹ Instead, they seem to see society as immutable and their best option is to capture as big a piece of pie as possible.

As this thesis comes to a conclusion in April 2007, the political situation—a seemingly incapable interim government struggles to manage the country as a new constitution is being drafted—has little to encourage today's youth. A February 2007 survey of young Thais revealed that only slightly more than ten percent were hopeful that it would improve by year's end, while more than half anticipated no change and more than a third thought it would worsen.²⁰

In closing a discussion of the changed political context between the October Generation and the Millennial Generation, one last dramatic difference stands out. Although the press and this author were eager to describe 2006 as a period of political 'crisis' in Thailand, that was clearly a hyperbole except as it applied to the southern region, which is not the topic of this thesis. The times were uncomfortable and tense, but events never rose to the level of crisis—and violence—that marked earlier crises in 1973, 1976, and 1992. Except in southern Thailand, the soldiers and police did not shoot any protesters and despite an atmosphere of fear, no student's life was endangered in Bangkok. The violence that students encountered at the Election Commission (EC) headquarters camp-out, Siam Paragon, and Central World Plaza was undoubtedly scary, but never life-threatening. Thaksin and his followers were wise enough to keep the conflict from escalating, and the police at PAD rallies were courteous, if not decidedly friendly. The government kept their followers, including the Caravan of the Poor, at a distance from the PAD rallies and, although they unleashed the Caravan, taxi and motorcycle drivers on the anti-government newspapers, no one was hurt. Bombs were found or detonated in several locations, including Lumpini Park, Sondhi's newspaper offices and General Prem's residence, but only property was damaged and the impact was purely psychological. Although Thaksin and his allies filed numerous lawsuits against their opponents, no one was

¹⁹ Interview with Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, April 28, 2006

²⁰ TN, February 6, 2007, reporting on a Suan Dusit poll

arrested and jailed. Clearly, Thaksin's October Generation allies knew the risks of escalating the conflict with his opponents and gave the prime minister, and his wife, good counsel. Together, the Thaksin government kept the tension from rising to the levels of 'crisis' experienced by previous generations. In the absence of such a crisis, Thak said today's students were not motivated to political activism.

It would be a mistake to conclude this discussion of the changed political contexts between the October Generation and the Millennial Generation without acknowledging one positive change that has occurred over the past thirty-four years: Thai students and the 'mass movement' no longer accept violence as a means to achieve their goals. Perhaps in reaction to the blood spilled in earlier protests, today, non-violence and civil disobedience are widely accepted as the norm, in what a *Thai Rath* editorial described as "a sign that the people's participation in the democratic process in Thailand has progressed another step, a beauty that emerges from a political crisis."²¹

5.3 Contrast of Leadership

Thak added that in the absence of a crisis, there was no need for today's students to look for mentors, role models and heroes. They also did not gravitate toward any of their fellow students as leaders, unlike the student activists of the 1970s. The student leaders of that era are well-known today—partly because they were popular and effective thirty-four years ago and partly because they remain prominent now: Thirayuth Boonmi, the first secretary-general of the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) and now Thammasat University professor; Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, secretary-general of the NSCT in 1973-1974 and dean of the Public Administration Faculty of the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) today; and Seksan Prasertkul, Thammasat student and persuasive speaker then and Thammasat professor now. The nation accepted their leadership as well. At that time few young people went to college and, because education was highly valued, students in general enjoyed an elevated stature in the

²¹ BP, March 12, 2006, quoting the Thai Rath editorial

rarified air of Thailand's intelligentsia. Students of that generation had also shown that they saw education as a tool to give something back to their communities, further earning society's respect.

In contrast, the leadership of the anti-Thaksin movement was led by an entirely different—in every imaginable way—cast of characters: first by newspaper publisher Sondhi Limthongkun, and latter by Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, a veteran of Black May 1992. While they each had large legions of loyal followers, for the most part students were not among them. In fact, there were serious and well-founded doubts about the integrity and motivations of Sondhi and Chamlong—both former Thaksin supporters. Also, Sondhi's pro-royalist message, adopted by the PAD, SFT and anti-Thaksin movement, failed to engage students. By and large, students did not trust them, were not inspired by them, and did not join them.

The PAD experienced similar problems. The PAD leadership included Pipob, a senior NGO activist and education reformer; Suwit Watnoo, a slum activist and former communist insurgent, Somsak Kosaisuk, a veteran public-sector labor leader; and Somkiat Phongpaiboon, a university lecturer and protest movement leader. These lesser-known individuals were from Thailand's civil society and had little in common with Sondhi and Chamlong—in whose shadow they worked—except their opposition to Thaksin. They followed the royalist message, despite serious misgivings, of these two more charismatic and flamboyant men. Only PAD spokesman Suriyasai Katasila, secretary-general of the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) and secretary-general of the SFT in 1995, was close in age to the student protesters. The others were all members of the October Generation. According to Thammasat University's Kasian Tejapira, the anti-Thaksin factions that the PAD tried to represent “were too diffuse, ideologically and politically, to forge a coherent opposition to the Thaksin government....In the end the only rallying point for these disparate forces was the King.”²²

The student leaders of the anti-Thaksin movement faced an even more challenging problem. As membership in Thailand's intelligentsia grew over the

²² Kasian Tejapira, May-June 2006, “Toppling Thaksin”, *New Left Review*, No. 39

previous three decades, students did not enjoy the same level of status that the Octoberists did. Nor did society believe they deserved the respect their parents' generation had earned—being stereotyped as materialistic and immature young people hardly concerned at all with society. In 2006, only three achieved any standing that would justify calling them leaders: the 2005-2006 SFT secretary-general Kotchawan; TUSU president and leader of the petition drive against Thaksin, Thanachai; and Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization's (RUSO) president Somchot Meecha.

To the older generation, Kotchawan was the ideal candidate to lead the students. She was articulate, bright and attractive with an intelligent understanding of the issues confronting Thailand. Unfortunately, her fellow students did not hold her in the same high regard. It was difficult to understand why, although it would not be unusual for a woman in leadership positions to face sexism in any country, no less Thailand.²³ Some questioned her close relationship with the NGOs that were also held in weak regard by the more radical student activists for their compromising and accommodating style. Others questioned the manner in which she was elected secretary-general of the SFT, implying that the organization had no following and no longer spoke for Thai students. Regardless of whatever criticism might have been openly expressed or silently implied, there is no doubt that her following, and the student identity with the SFT, was extremely limited in number.

Prinya Thaewarumitkul, advisor to the TUSU, said that Thanachai would have been an excellent student leader had he not graduated within months after the anti-Thaksin campaign kicked off. Also bright, articulate, and well-mannered, Thanachai eschewed the mass movement in favor of legal maneuvers to oust Thaksin—the petition drive, court filings, and the 'Vote No' campaign. Although many students joined the petition campaign and respected his ideas, most students at Thammasat University were unfamiliar with the head of their student union and one senses he would not stand out in a crowd.

²³ The similar lack of support for Campaign for Popular Media Reform (CPMR) secretary-general Supinya Klangnarong suggests that the gender of these two leaders might have influenced those sentiments.

RUSO's Somchot—also leader of the campus' Sansaengthong party and the anti-Thaksin Alliance for Democracy—claimed a following of several hundred students and was able to mobilize several thousand students for a ten-kilometer march to the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party headquarters in April 2006. He and his followers were instrumental in organizing the protest at the EC headquarters in March-April 2006 and staging 'photo-ops' that satirized Thaksin and his government allies. His appeal, however, did not extend beyond the university.

Others students did achieve a measure of leadership during the anti-Thaksin campaign, but their sphere of influence was also limited to a handful of friends. Some groups seemed to have no leaders at all. As mentioned in Chapter I, Alan Scott describes the "new social movements" as characterized by a loose, non-hierarchical structure and are largely focused on the participatory democracy. Many, including the Network of Concerned University Students and the Students Coordinating Center, were philosophically opposed to the concept of leadership—somehow seeing it as either elitist, anti-democratic or egotistical—and, as a result, deferred opportunities to organize student activities to any significant extent. The Civil Society Network to Stop the Thaksin System (CSNSTS) adopted a similar loose structure in reaction to the PAD's top-down decision-making organization. Pleethum Triyakasem, leader of Rangkids, was sensitive to the easy criticism of others and became more focused on promoting his members than assuming a prominent role himself. In the ultimate act in denial of leadership, in 2006, the SFT decided to forego electing a secretary-general to lead the organization in favor of a committee of five. Metha Martkhao, SFT secretary-general in 2001 and founder of the Young People for Democracy (YPD) in 2002, was unique among his peers for his commitment to establishing a network of student activists and providing education and training for his younger peers. However, he too eschewed activism in favor of official statements and declarations because "the time is not yet right."²⁴

²⁴ Interview with Metha Martkhao, December 6, 2006

5.4 The Legacy of the October Generation

When the students left the jungles, they entered a very different world, one in which the political space for ideological politics was closed. Their history, especially the violent confrontations with the pro-government military, police and para-military forces, was never fully exposed to light. Those responsible for the deaths and injuries were never held to account. The roles of prominent citizens who remained silent in the aftermath of the October 6, 1976 massacre were never opened to public scrutiny. The political space was simply closed. The idealism of those former student activists who re-engaged in politics within mainstream political parties, often through their prior family connections, was compromised by the practical concerns of getting elected in a corrupt political environment. Having made a transition from naïve youngsters to empowered activists, from victims of government brutality to jungle insurgents, they lived through an experience that probably cannot be understood by anyone who did not share that history.

In the absence of political space, the most idealistic among the student activists ventured into the realm of social activism and joined with Thailand's many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that attempted to right the country's social wrongs with rural development programs. Their shift from political activism to social activism reflected a lack of faith in their ability to affect broad social change and ushered in a generational change in focus for Thai society. As a result, the expectation of changing Thailand's political structure to reform Thai society was largely ignored.

Instead, leading Thai intellectuals—Somchai Phatharathananunth credits Dr. Prawase and Thirayuth among them—proposed a partnership between NGOs and Thailand's public and private sectors to solve the nation's problems, forgoing confrontation for an accommodative relationship with the status quo and dedicated to making only marginal changes in Thai society. By the time the Millennials came of age, the NGO movement had morphed into Thailand's civil society dominated by the nation's elite, working within the structure of the 1997 Constitution that was subjugated by the Thaksin government. Grassroots politics, formerly driven by labor and peasant organizations with support from students and communists, were now

either managed by the elite civil society or allies of the Thaksin government: former communist insurgents who populated the village and district governments and remained close with their former comrades in the TRT party. Thaksin, however, was the more powerful and Thailand's civil society was unable to mobilize grassroots' opposition to the prime minister. Even after months of demonstrations against Thaksin, it was only the military that could trump him. Unfortunately, the October Generation's legacy—from student protesters to communist insurgents to social activists to civil society—seemed to bear little fruit; in the end, they were forced to the margins of a political power struggle won by the military, with support from the palace.

In many ways, October Generation's greatest legacy was fear of government-condoned violence that marked the massacre at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976, and the October 1973 murders of students by the police and military. And in the unlikely event those nightmares were almost forgotten, sixteen years later, a third incident of massive government-sponsored violence took place in May 1992, reminding all that political activism was a dangerous sport in Thailand. In fact, 'fear' has been the most powerful repressive weapon in the arsenal of Thai governments. Throughout its history, kings, dictators and democrats have suppressed dissent by every imaginable means: accusing dissenters of being 'trouble-makers' and a threat to society, national security and unity, or damaging the national image; labeling critics as 'communists' long after the demise of that ideology; threatening arrest, and imprisoning and murdering (directly or through proxies) many.

In response, the October Generation discouraged their sons and daughters from becoming involved in progressive politics. Students for Democracy leader Yos Tansakul described an atmosphere of fear felt by today's teachers and parents—fear that the parents' careers and the students' futures could be damaged—and his fellow students. I often spoke with adults who cautioned me when I told of my plans to attend the Sondhi shows at Lumpini Park or the PAD rallies at Royal Plaza and Sanam Luang, frightened that police and soldier violence would revisit those demonstrations. Many students with whom I spoke were discouraged, if not forbidden, by their parents from attending those events.

Further complicating their legacy, by the time of the Thaksin era, the former student activists of the October Generation drifted apart into two factions—those who rationalized their support for the prime minister as furthering the ‘pro-democracy’ movement and those who joined the anti-Thaksin movement, claiming to remain true to their ideals. Those Octoberists did not project a unified image to which the Millennials could relate; instead, they seemed to represent the divorced parents between whom their children refused to choose sides.

5.5 The Future: 2007 and Beyond

For democracy to take root in Thailand, there are numerous obstacles to overcome—so numerous that it would be easy to choose apathy over the struggle to overcome them all. Among them are systematic corruption, a weak mass media mostly under direct or indirect government control, an outdated education system, the absence of strong democratic institutions including the judiciary, an authoritarian culture, and the remnants of a client-patron system that discourages idea-based politics in favor of well-connected personalities. More radical observers would add the dominance of an out-of-control capitalist system that has created a widening gap between Thailand’s rich and poor and overpowered the nation’s traditions with a culture of consumption, greed, and selfishness. The more immediate concern would be to make sure the current military leaders do not hijack the soon-to-be new constitution and permanently close the space for people’s participation that was provided in the 1997 version. This writer believes the long-term success of Thai democracy is dependent upon a politically engaged student movement that will re-energize, and eventually replace, the aging members of the October Generation.

This thesis will avoid the overly ambitious task of trying to design a political agenda to overcome those obstacles and accomplish that goal. On the other hand, it seeks to share the thoughts of the many politically engaged people interviewed—student activists, NGO activists in their thirties and members of the October Generation—and present my own ideas for how to encourage the politicalization of today’s youth. For the relatively good times that Thailand has enjoyed will not last forever, a future crisis is inevitable, and students will be needed once again to help

right society. And in the meantime, they are needed to promote the numerous small changes that will positively impact Thai society.

The most commonly discussed issue is political reform which, unfortunately, means different things to different people. One TRT MP proposed eliminating the prohibition against MPs owning majority interests in companies because ‘everyone was doing it’. At this moment in Thai history—between the abrogation of the ‘People’s’ Constitution and the writing of the next—most progressive Thais are eager to see the ‘people’s participation’ provisions of the 1997 document restored if not strengthened in the new one.

While Thailand seems to be always striving for the perfect constitution, those efforts lack merit if they enable the re-election of the same corrupt vote-buying politicians time after time. While the new constitution will likely attempt to address that problem, it will not be successful unless political reform is accompanied by an anti-corruption campaign with participation among all Thais. During the Thaksin era, the Millennial Generation chose apathy over outrage when faced with the well-known charges of corruption and abuse of power by his administration. In contrast to the student activists of the October Generation, today’s students have become inured to corruption. One pro-Thaksin student at Ramkhamhaeng University said that “every government has corruption, but Thaksin is the best when compared to the others,” expressing an opinion that was widely shared among most segments of the Thai population.²⁵ Despite frequent admonitions from the king, members of the Privy Council and respected citizens, young people were largely unmoved to anger and action about the corruption that troubles their nation.

The new constitution will also determine whether there are sufficient provisions and institutions of democracy—one thinks of an independent judiciary—to affect change by ‘working within the system’, or whether it will be necessary to work outside ‘the system’ through a mass movement.

²⁵ Interview at Ramkhamhaeng University, March 9, 2006

One frequently mentioned impediment to student activism is Thailand's education system. No one doubts that it needs to be reformed, but little has been done to accomplish that goal. On the other hand, the October Generation was educated under the same system and managed to overcome those limitations to become the most politically engaged generation in the nation's history. Therefore, while not wanting to over-emphasize the importance of reform, Thailand clearly needs to improve the civic education of its students with a "compulsory curriculum in [the] basic knowledge of politics and constitution."²⁶ Rather than emphasizing the role of kings and the elite, social studies classes should teach the importance of government to people's lives and how people can interact with their government to achieve positive changes. Older students should sponsor political debates, invite speakers representing opposing views to their schools and universities, hold mock elections, and serve as monitors for the nation's elections. University administrations should reverse the impression that they are more eager to please the government than their students and faculty, and "allow and encourage all political activities in campus without prejudice."²⁷

More ambitiously, education reforms should encourage student participation and expression, and critical thinking skills. One common theme expressed by student activists was that they had always been "different" from their peers and freely expressed their ideas and opinions, even in the classroom. By contrast, even in master degree classes at Chulalongkorn University, most Thai students in the Thai Studies program were reluctant to speak up and share their ideas even though they were much better versed on the subjects related to their own country than their *farang* classmates.

There was one other aspect of education reform that emerged from the anti-Thaksin movement: the idea that elite high schools and universities, from which many of Thailand's morally dubious 'movers and shakers' graduated, should redesign their curriculum to teach Moral Studies and Ethics. Considering that students of the Millennial Generation place a high value on morality, it would be an excellent idea to integrate those topics into school curriculum throughout the nation, if not the world.

²⁶ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

²⁷ E-mail interview with Khanin Boonsuwan, July 5, 2006

The suggestion that Thai students should be encouraged to be more expressive leads to a more sensitive issue: Thailand's Buddhist culture. Despite a history of activism, does Thailand's non-confrontational character inhibit a politically engaged society? Is Thailand in need of cultural reform, if such a thing exists? Kotchawan thought the apathy of Thai students could be partially explained by Thai traditions, saying "Thai characteristic is clumsy. Thais are very different". Thai characteristic is "very kind, smile" and they "don't want to deal with conflict...Even if we are cheated by the shopkeepers, few people go back and call for the right [change]."²⁸

There is also a strong autocratic culture that still admires the brutal Phibun and Sarit for the stability and progress they brought to Thailand. Human rights campaigners lament a culture that condones police abuses and violence, and overwhelmingly approved of Thaksin's War on Drugs that resulted in over a thousand 'extra-judicial' killings. In 1981, John Girling wrote of a Thai culture of apathy that would certainly resonate with critics of the Millennials a quarter of a century later. He described the power relationships in government: "Consciousness of power on the part of the bureaucratic elite accompanied by consciousness of lack of power by the rest were the twin norms of Thai politics."²⁹ In 1997, Kevin Hewison characterized political activity in Thailand as "strongly influenced by passivity, individuality and deference."³⁰

While all similar observations about Thai culture have a strong element of truth to them, it is also true that Thais have historically confronted the powerful and fought for their rights. Although this thesis accepts the limitations that Thai culture and traditions impose upon the development of a politically engaged citizenry, it rejects the notion that those limitations cannot be breached. So too did several Western 'experts' on Thailand, including Hewison who wrote, "To explain social or political action by simple recourse to assumed cultural values obscures the

²⁸ Interview with Kotchawan Chaibutr, April 28, 2006

²⁹ John L. S. Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 164

³⁰ Kevin Hewison, "Introduction: Power, Oppositions and Democratisation", *Political Change in Thailand*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 4

significance of the way such values change and the broader political and economic changes taking place in society.”³¹ William Callahan expressed a similar idea, writing in 1998 that traditions “are continually written and rewritten according to historical and social circumstances.”³² And at least one Thai expert on Thailand, Kasian, articulated the same idea in his dissertation, that “emphatically regards national culture not as an immutable essence but a repertoire of changeable and dynamic material practices and institutions.”³³

Just as “patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel”³⁴, the defense of ‘Thai culture’ is an over-used excuse by those Thais in power to justify their abuses, especially after the October 1976 massacre. Similarly, the myth that ‘unity’ and ‘harmony’ are at the essence of Thai culture has been behind virtually every coup d’etat in Thailand’s history. The military coup-makers in 1976 ‘created’ unity by arresting and jailing opponents (and occasionally murdering them), restricting the media and limiting citizen rights—in what would more accurately be characterized as suppressing dissent. Chris Baker wrote that “the 1991 coup was called *Samakkhitham*, the party of righteous unity.”³⁵ Thaksin used the appeal for unity to his advantage as he tried to suppress dissent and the media during his premiership, and his opponents were not shy about using ‘unity’ in their calls for Thaksin’s resignation. And on the occasion of Thailand’s most recent coup, September 19, 2006, the military cited the “growing disunity” caused by Thaksin as justification for their actions as the CNS “reaffirm[ed] its honest intentions to resolve the country’s problems, particularly immediate issues vital to restore normalcy and unity.”³⁶

The coup opponents, however, were unified in wanting to dispel the ‘myth’ promulgated by the military leaders that they would heal the divisiveness Thaksin had created in Thai society and bring about unity in the country. Prachathai.com’s

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6

³² William A. Callahan, *Imagining Democracy: Reading “The Events of May” in Thailand*, (Singapore: ISAS, 1998), p. xiv

³³ Kasian Tejapira, Ph.D. dissertation, “Commodifying Marxism: The Foundation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1959”, Cornell University, 1992, p. 3

³⁴ Samuel Johnson, April 7, 1775

³⁵ Chang Noi, “Dreams of unity are just that”, TN, January 22, 2007

³⁶ Council for National Security White Paper, unofficial translation in *The Nation*, November 27, 2006

Jiranuch Premchajai-porn called that objective “unrealistic and undemocratic.” She said, “[t]hey say they are for unity, but in real societies people think and act differently.”³⁷ In fact, it is hard to think of a nation that is truly unified or whether such a country would be desirable. The factors that create political disunity in all societies—regardless of how uncomfortable that disunity might be and how strong the pressures for social unity—are inherent in every culture and nation. Human rights campaigner Angkhana Neelapaichit was skeptical about the junta’s call for national and political unity. “But is this unity the kind that demands that we have to shut our mouth and stop talking?”³⁸ This writer would suggest that Thais (and all peoples) embrace a more enlightened definition of ‘unity’ to include tolerance, the acceptance of other opinions and a willingness to listen and work with others despite disagreement—a definition that would not preclude dissent.

Another one of the many institutions in need of reform is that nation’s media. Since the demise of iTV, the nation’s television and radio shows are entirely under government control and controversial programming is regularly taken off the air. Thailand’s newspapers, although independently owned, fare little better under the constraints of business influence and a weak tradition of professionalism. At a minimum, at least one source of television and radio programming needs to function independent of the government. Recent ideas for reformulating iTV into a BBC-like station would be a huge step in the right direction. Even better, the voiding of the Press Act of 1955, revising Thailand’s libel laws, and reinstating the progressive sections of the 1997 Constitution would open up media to a wider range of choices for consumers, unfettered by the restrictions of past political influence and intimidation.

Interestingly, Thailand’s civil society struggled between conforming to their country’s cultural proclivity for social stability and valuing a democratic society with true freedom of the press. Despite their protestations for a free media and criticisms of the Thaksin government for the restrictions it imposed, Thailand’s civil society and its student movement did not fully embrace the concept. On at least two occasions they called for Samak Sundaravej’s provocative television and radio shows to be taken off

³⁷ TN, October 14, 2006

³⁸ TN, December 1, 2006

the air: In April 2005, the SFT called for his shows to be “reviewed or scrapped...because the content [claiming academics and human-rights activists took part or conspired with militants to fuel unrest and violence in the three southern provinces] is destructive and provokes violence.”³⁹ After Samak criticized General Prem on his February 2006 television show, many anti-Thaksin activists, with support or silence from media reform advocates, called on him to resign from his show, prompting one columnist to write, “Sadly, the Samak debacle proves that indeed, civil society and the liberal media are no better than the powers that be when it comes to how different opinions are treated. And so long as this continues to be the norm rather than the exception, Thailand will continue to be infamous for all forms of censorship.”⁴⁰ To my way of [Western] thinking, media reform means upholding freedom of expression for those with whom you disagree in addition to those with whom you agree when they criticize the government. Admittedly, that is easier said than done with a person as reprehensible if not inherently evil as Samak.

There are more realistic alternatives as well: the Internet is already developing as an exciting media with numerous opportunities for alternative political ideas and discussion. It will have a promising future as long as the government stops censoring news sites and political opinion. Additionally, alternative magazines that introduce politics in an interesting style have the potential to expose students to political activism. Unfortunately, as long as those magazines adopt the heavy-handedness of *Liow Sai* rather than the more accessible style of *A Day*, that potential will be underutilized. Universities should also sponsor student-run newspapers and their companion websites and radio stations that allow students to develop journalistic professionalism and provide their audience with interesting political (and non-political) content.

One benefit of the abovementioned education and media reform is the opening of an alternative political space for young people. There are many other opportunities to increase that space. *QuestionMark*'s Passakorn Chorhaka said he would like to see a camp dedicated to producing a book or magazine—he's already given it the name

³⁹ TN, April 22, 2005

⁴⁰ TN, February 22, 2006

“*Prachathai Mai Chai Gig*”—to interest young people, and a discussion group about politics to influence Thai students to become more politically involved. Network for Concerned University Student’s Ratchaneekorn Thongthip thought the best way to reach today’s youth was by giving them the ‘space’ to be exposed to alternative ideas—through seminars, exhibitions and music programs—and letting them choose according to their own beliefs. The success of Kritaya Sreesunpagit’s YIY program to develop social entrepreneurs should be adapted for facilitating politically engaged students who want to create programs enlarging that political space.

Programs like the Thai Volunteer Service (TVS) should be expanded, so as to give students the opportunity to work among Thailand’s poor, thus allowing them to become more socially aware and inclined toward political activism. These types of programs, through universities or NGOs, were uniquely powerful in affecting members of the October Generation and Millennial Generation. Ratchaneekorn described them as “touch[ing] the real situation: the villagers.”⁴¹ Such experiences, Kotchawan said, broaden student volunteers’ exposure to Thailand. In contrast, Cornell University Professor Emeritus Benedict Anderson addressed the “high alienation” and sense of “removal” that exists between the Bangkok middle-class and the up-country “hicks” of Thailand.⁴² Likewise, most of today’s urban students are disconnected from Thailand’s rural poor, unable to relate to their poverty, exploitation and lack of opportunities and unmoved to political activism on their behalf. Thak said they see the rural population, selling their democratic rights to the highest bidder, as opportunists and are not motivated to help them.

Once students take part in a volunteer experience among the rural villages, it is important to convert their understanding into a commitment for political activism. Many activists complained that while students participating in volunteer camps in rural communities might make some physical improvements, they did not contribute to any long-lasting structural changes. Atthaporn Khammano’s goal is to transform student volunteers into activists who expand their ideas into solving social issues,

⁴¹ Interview with Ratchaneekorn Thongthip, June 27, 2006

⁴² Benedict Anderson, ‘Brown Bag’ luncheon series at Cornell University, October 19, 2006, a talk about the award-winning Thai film “Tropical Maladies”

analyzing problems, and persuading friends to join them in their work with Thailand's poor and for political change. Today, he said, they are rare. SFT's Kittisak noted that students today are not aware of reality which is normal in a capitalist society. He wants students "to understand capitalism and see the gap between the rich and poor, and then choose to stand beside the poor because they have less opportunity."⁴³ Kotchawan said her work is to develop the activist movement through training activities and trips for students to broaden their exposure.

Kotchawan displayed a measure of introspection when we wondered aloud about the failures of the student movement to engage young people during the anti-Thaksin demonstrations. "Maybe it's the fact that the movement is not good enough—the management of the movement is not good enough to convince [students] to participate."⁴⁴ When she first proposed that the student movement needs to become popular and the campaign needs to be trendy in order to attract apathetic students, I thought I misheard her. But as I heard that idea from several others, it began to make sense. Bakarín Tuansiri said it was important to make politics appeal to *dek naew* through music, entertainment and dance. He cited *A Day* magazine as an example of "learn what they live and blend politics into it."⁴⁵

In another sense, the PAD successfully did that when it moved its March 2006 demonstration from the historical confines of Sanam Luang to the more popular venues of Bangkok's shopping districts—a case of "If you can't bring the students to the movement, bring the movement to the students." Similarly, one student activist proposed moving the October 6 celebration venue from Thammasat University to Siam Paragon. Kotchawan suggested having initiation activities impact first-year university students.

There are at least two organizations in the United States that are trying to do exactly that: The League of Young Voters and Music for America (MFA). The former is mobilizing young people to get involved in politics by establishing a presence in record stores, clothing stores, coffee shops, places where young people hang out. One

⁴³ Interview with Kittisak Sujittarom, December 4, 2006

⁴⁴ Interview with Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, April 28, 2006

⁴⁵ Interview with Bakarín Tuansiri, July 6, 2006

of their activists described the way they connect with their peers, “If they see someone hanging out at the places they hang out, buying the clothes that they buy, listening to the music that they listen to, the relationship becomes that much more relevant to them.”⁴⁶ The latter group strives to engage students in political activism through music communities—the place where youth convene—with the hope that if hip-hop music gets more political and continues to spread around the world, that it could inspire a new political awareness. MFA Executive Director Molly Neitzel said:

It’s also making politics more culturally normal—making politics ‘cool’ and fitting it into our everyday lives. Taking a political stand becomes more normal for our friends and communities—we’re trying to un-nerdify politics. . . . The music and artists are powerful, but something that is as powerful, if not more, is the community that music creates. So, you’re in a room with a thousand kids that you share a lot with. You like the same music, which tends to mean that you share the same values. You identify with what the singer is singing about—even if it’s not political at all. Punk rockers, indie rockers, hip-hoppers—we all share values even if we don’t talk about it. What MFA started doing was talking a little bit about issues and how we connect.⁴⁷

One of the most disappointing aspects about the anti-Thaksin movement among Thai students was their lack of cohesiveness. Sometimes students seemed more focused on the disagreements with their peers than on their common values and goals. Having played a role in Thaksin’s fall, it is important for students to build on the relationships that they created in the past year in order to strengthen the student movement, and to openly discuss their differences while finding common ground. At least one activist, YPD’s leader Metha, seems to understand the importance of continuing to develop a network of activist youth. Too often in Thailand’s past, the dissident student groups returned to their studies and abandoned their struggle on democracy’s behalf to the few.

Building a student movement likely begins with peer contact, one person at a time. MFA’s Ms. Neitzel, said, “There’s a lot of research done on the millennial generation and how we react to things. What we found was that mobilizing young

⁴⁶ Scott Thill, September 20, 2006, “As Pissed as Ever, Young Voters Get Organized”, *WireTap*, www.AlterNet.org

⁴⁷ Dino-Ray Ramos, June 15, 2006, “Music and Politics: The Greatest Combination”, *WireTap*, www.AlterNet.org

people to get involved in politics works best when they are asked by a friend. It's all about the peer-to-peer interaction."⁴⁸ The same is true for young people everywhere, including Thailand. Papan Raksritong believed the key to influencing others is to start with close friends to make them aware of the issues. Atthaporn addressed the alienation felt by those students who are already politically aware and their "problem of how to live with their friends because they are different and their friends and the people around them do not share this awareness."⁴⁹ For them as well, he emphasized the importance of peer contact with likeminded individuals to create a support network, much as described the previous chapter.

Pipob thought long and hard after first commenting that it was "very difficult" to get students more involved in politics today. Pipob suggested several possibilities: Perhaps, it is "possible to start with small groups that share an interest in social issues." Maybe that "small issue [will] become bigger and affect more people in society", giving the example of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) or GMOs. Lastly, "a big political issue [arises that] can lead students to become more active."⁵⁰ What is important is to create the environment where students can become involved in Thai politics in the event there is a political crisis in Thailand in the future, for what Metha called the "right moment".⁵¹

Among the young people interviewed for this thesis, admittedly a very small and select group of Thais, there was a healthy disregard for capitalism and its effect on Thai people and culture. Surprisingly, this has been an oft-spoken theme of the king as he promoted self-sufficiency economics. Despite a nearly constant drum-beat of speeches by the king and his privy council, the concept has gained little favor among Thais. Only one student activist interviewed for this thesis, RUSO's Somchot, expressed interest in it. His faculty advisor, Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, believed that "sufficiency economy is a viable alternative" to capitalism and globalization, while acknowledging that "how to get there is a sticky issue."⁵² Muslim student Bakarín

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Interview with Atthaporn Khammano, July 3, 2006

⁵⁰ Interview with Pipob Thongchai, June 26, 2006

⁵¹ Interview with Metha Martkhao, December 6, 2006

⁵² Interview with Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, July 12, 2006

compared it favorably to Islamic economics, “between capitalism and socialism”.⁵³ While most young people seem to accept the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism, corporate-controlled globalization, and neo-liberalism, some student activists expressed an interest in Marxism and socialism. Although a delightful ‘breath of fresh air’, they were an anomaly among Thai youth.

These whispers of anti-capitalism and anti-globalization heard from young Thai activists are, in fact, being heard around the world. A worldwide movement is slowly emerging that expresses the theme that capitalism has gone too far. They first gained notoriety in the 1999 “Battle in Seattle” during the World Trade Organization (WTO) convention. Their slogan is “another world is possible”. They established the World Social Forum, where the press labeled them as “alter-globalists”. They believe that a momentous change is coming. Although one segment of these activists is decidedly anarchist—seeing the traditional left as irrelevant—the strength of the movement is in participants’ willingness to challenge the accepted norms and seek solutions to the issues facing the world today. At present, those radicals live on the margins of the Thai political page, not because they are suppressed or censored—indeed, one could hardly imagine a Marxist professor at Chulalongkorn University openly converting his students in the post-1976 era—but because the ‘time is not yet right’.

5.6 Concluding Statement

The immediate question facing Thailand and student activists is whether the writing of the nation’s newest constitution will restore military domination over the government. Prinya predicts there will be demonstrations if the military wants to remain in power, if the constitution “goes back to the past some years” and is “too bad.”⁵⁴ Despite justifying the coup as a means to root out the widespread corruption that permeated the Thaksin government, the interim government seems unable to bring the responsible parties to justice or stem the tide of corruption that has engulfed the nation. The Political and Economic Risk Consultancy downgraded Thailand in

⁵³ Interview with Bakarín Tuansiri, July 6, 2006

⁵⁴ Interview with Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, December 18, 2006

2006 and noted that “there is no reason to be confident that [the military junta’s] behavior will be any cleaner.”⁵⁵ More likely, Prinya thinks, is that neither will happen but that democracy and a better constitution will have to wait until future elections. It is critical, however, that despite the power invested in their elders, the military and other traditional institutions, that students advocate for the democratic clauses that will ensure that Thailand’s political space remains open.

It is easy to be pessimistic about the future. The many steps needed to strengthen democracy in Thailand are daunting and likely off-putting to Thai youth. Atthaporn, who has worked with Thai youth over the past several years, is skeptical that the renewed enthusiasm they experienced during the anti-Thaksin movement will foster any longer-term changes, seeing it as only “temporary”. It is easy to be frustrated as well. Kotchawan expressed that feeling in commenting that even the issue of university ‘privatization’ did not concern many students, even though it had the potential to put higher education out of reach for poor and middle-class students.

On the other hand, there is also cause for optimism and not all Millennial Generation students are apathetic. Many are engaged. Some are involved in their communities and dedicated to volunteering to affect social change. In that regard, they are not apathetic. The success of Kritaya’s YIY program to facilitate social entrepreneurship supports the view that young people are eager to be engaged and contribute to a better society.

Some were politically engaged during the Thaksin era and are presently involved in opposition to the coup. They followed several paths during that time. Those associated with the SFT joined with Thailand’s civil society—characterized by the CPD and PAD—in support of NGOs and the ‘people’s movement’ throughout Thaksin’s almost six-year tenure as prime minister. Despite Kotchawan’s opposition to a ‘royal solution’ to the political impasse in 2006, their partners chose to align with Thailand’s conservative elite as the ‘lesser of two evils’ and were eventually co-opted by the new military rulers. Several other students, took a more leftist and activist

⁵⁵ BP, March 13, 2007. Thailand dropped from 7.64 in 2005 to 8.03 in 2006, tying it with Indonesia as the most corrupt nation in Asia after the Philippines.

approach, demonstrating in opposition to the Iraq War, US President Bush, Thaksin's privatization plans and free-trade agreements FTAs and the coup. While small in number, the intensity of their commitment remains strong. Another group chose the route of 'guerilla' activism, staging photo ops for the newspapers and harassing Thaksin at Siam Paragon and Central World Plaza in August 2006. Still others, mostly Muslim students from southern Thailand, were actively involved in opposition to Thaksin's tyrannical policies in that region. Some became involved in spontaneous actions—the opposition to the GMM Grammy takeover in September 2005 and in support of Chulalongkorn University's Dean Amara in February 2006—that gave them a taste of political activism. Many more became spontaneously joined in the anti-Thaksin movement when the movement came to them, moving from Sanam Luang to Siam Paragon. And, in a unique style they could call their own, many students chose to eschew the mass movement in favor of a legal approach to the nation's problems—initiating the impeachment petition against Thaksin and filing a petition with the Administrative Court in opposition to the April 2 election. Many of those same Thammasat students played a major role in the 'Vote-No' campaign.

Unfortunately, there was not a lot of cohesion among these students. If they were unified, they could have created a mass movement. Measured against Alan Scott's standard of success—integration of the “previously excluded issues and groups into the ‘normal’ political process”⁵⁶—these students were not successful. Although it is rather defeatist to consider the current environment as ‘normal’, they are clearly excluded from the political events of the day: negotiating a new constitution and impacting political change. But each chose the path with which they felt most comfortable, seeking to be independent of Thailand's elite civil society while displaying their democratic spirit and enthusiasm for political activism. In the end, they did not succumb to being co-opted by the state. They did represent a reemergence of student activism in Thailand, a new social movement

During the interviews with Thai student activists, it was hard not to be moved by their infectious idealism and commitment to political change. When members of the October Generation spoke of their experiences thirty-four years ago, they

⁵⁶ Alan Scott, *Ideology and New Social Movement*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 153

described a “small group” and “lack of unity” that preceded their mass movement, describing an environment similar to the level of student activism in Thailand in 2006. Change usually occurs unexpectedly with a ‘tipping point’ that cannot be predicted or engineered. What is important, I believe, is to create the foundations on which to build student activism when that tipping point or crisis does occur. Fifteen years ago, Kasian concluded his dissertation with this thought:

There still exist in Thailand the residual nuts and bolts of cultural resistance that has been tempered and molded by the long-endavored frictional combination of communism and Thai culture. And so long as the modern ravages of dictatorship and capitalism are still visited upon Thais, there will be enough new radicals to reassemble them into powerful cultural weapons in the fight for their own and humanity’s survival and dignity.⁵⁷

Presently, one senses that many Thai young people, like their peers worldwide, share an alienation from the norms of today’s capitalistic, materialistic society. Too often, that alienation justifies disengaging from society, adopting a counter-culture persona that rejects without creating. They listen to the non-political but anti-capitalist and anti ‘salary-man life’ of indie music without yet being inspired to political activism. But that could change with one song. They represent a movement waiting to be formed.

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⁵⁷ Kasian, 1992, p 549-550

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Zcongklod (“Gong”) Bangyikhan. 2006, July 7. Editor of **A Day** magazine. **Interview.**

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The Bangkok Post (BP)

The Economist

Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)

The International Herald Tribune (IHT)

The Nation (TN)

ThaiDay (TD)

Wall Street Journal



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APPENDIX

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FIELD RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS

Interviews with student activists, professors and civic leaders; attendance at events (2006)

1. January 13, 2006: Sondhi Limthongkul's (fourteenth installment) 'road show' at Lumpini Park: Nine students from Triam Udom Suksa (3), King Mongkut's University of Technology-Thonburi (1), Kasetsart University (1), Suan Dusit University (1), Suan Sananadha University (1), and the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (1) and one other university. The age of the students ranged from approximately mid-teens to mid-20s.
2. February 4, 2006: Rally at Royal Plaza (Observation only; no interviews)
3. February 10, 2006: Thammasat University: rally to kick-off impeachment petition against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. I briefly interviewed several students.
4. February 11, 2006: Royal Plaza, People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) rally. (Observation only; no interviews)
5. February 26, 2006: PAD rally from Sanam Luang to Government House. (Observation only; no interviews)
6. March 9, 2006: Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, (approximately late 50s) dean of Ramkhamhaeng University's Faculty of Political Science. The interview was very brief; however, he provided some leads and we made a tentative appointment for a future interview.

Surasak ("Tia") Niengphan, (approximately late 20s) president of the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Organization (RUSO), representing the Tawanmai Party. He was in his eighth year at the university. I also briefly interviewed several other students at Ramkhamhaeng University on the same day.
7. March 9, 2006: Anti-Thaksin Rally at Sanam Luang: Somrak, (approximately 20 years old) a student at Ramkhamhaeng University student and member of the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT).
8. March 13, 2006: Four members of the Social Criticism Student Club at Chulalongkorn University. The four young men—Jut, Bean, Kay and Bay—were all from the political science faculty.
9. March 14, 2006: PAD rally from Sanam Luang to Government House (Observation only; no interviews)
9. April 28, 2006: Kotchawan Chaiyabutr, (approximately early 20s) secretary-general of the SFT and student at Chulalongkorn University.

10. June 8, 2006 : Thanachai (“Golf”) Sunthorn-anantachai, (approximately early 20s) president of the Thammasat University Student Union (TUSU).
11. June 13, 2006: Pokpong (“Pong”) Lawansiri, (23 years old) People’s Coalition Party (PCP), Workers’ Democracy Group member, writer for *Liow Sai* magazine and NGO activist with FORUM-ASIA. Pokpong had recently graduated from Thammasat University where he was active in the Thammasat University Student Council.
12. June 17, 2006: Kattiya (“Duke”) Chan-urai, art director for BK magazine; discussing her master’s thesis (“The Role of Alternative Magazines in Identifying Youth Identity”) about *A Day* magazine (2002-2005). Kattiya obtained her M.A. from Thammasat University in 2005.
13. June 20, 2006: Yos Tansakul, (18-19 years old) leader of Students for Democracy. He was a student at Triam Udom Suksa, one of Bangkok’s most prestigious high schools.
14. June 21, 2006: Chakgrapong Buripha, deputy secretary-general of the SFT and student at Ramkhamhaeng University.
15. June 22, 2006: Papan (“Tong”) Raksritong, (25 years old) writer for Prachathai.com website. He graduated from Silpakorn University in 2005, Faculty of Archeology.
16. June 23, 2006: Passakorn (“Jay”) Chorphaka, (21 years old) editor of *QuestionMark* magazine, student at Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Education.
17. June 26, 2006: Pipob Thongchai, (61 years old) former student activist, PAD leader. He graduated from Prasanmitr Education College; founded the Foundation for Children; secretary-general of the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD); and member of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC).
18. June 27, 2006: Ratchaneekorn (“Jay”) Thongthip, member of Young People for Democracy of Thailand (YPD) and Network of Concerned University Students. Ratchaneekorn received her B.Ed. from Chulalongkorn University in 2002, her B.A. from Ramkhamhaeng University (2004) and her M.A. from Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Political Science (2006). She is also a former SFT member. Currently she is working with the NGO, Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma.
19. June 27, 2006: Pleethum (“Pete”) Triyakasem, (approximately 30 years old) leader of Rangkids and son of former student activist Phiraphon Triyakasem. He currently runs an advertising company. I conducted a brief follow-up interview with Pleethum on December 19, 2006.
20. June 27, 2006: Phiraphon Triyakasem, (approximately mid-50s) former student activist as president of TUSU in 1973. I am not sure of his current employment.

21. June 29, 2006: Chaichana Ingkhawat, (approximately mid-50s) professor of Political Science, Ramkhamhaeng University. He was a former student activist at Thammasat University. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation for Florida State University on the Thai student movement between 1973-1976 (see References).
22. July 3, 2006: Atthaporn Khammano, (26 years old) staff Thai Volunteer Service. He is a former student activist from Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani campus.
23. July 5, 2006: Khanin Boonsuwan (E-mail Interview). Khanin (approximately 60 years old) graduated from Thammasat University in 1969 where he was a student leader. He was a member of the Constitution Drafting Assembly that wrote the 1997 Constitution and currently a frequent commentator on political events in Thailand.
24. July 6, 2006: Bakarín (Lee) Tuansiri, student activist at Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani campus, from where he graduated in 2006 from the Faculty of Economics. He is currently a teaching assistant at Chulalongkorn University.
25. July 6, 2006: Phra Paisal Visalo (Phone Interview). Phra Paisal (approximately 50 years old) studied at Thammasat University's Faculty of Liberal Arts (1975-1980) where he was active in the Thammasat Buddhist Club and editor of *Pajarasarn* magazine, dedicated to non-violence from a Buddhist perspective. He was arrested after the events of October 1976. He entered the monkhood in 1983 and is currently an activist monk known for linking social issues with Buddhism.
26. July 7, 2006: Zcongklod ("Gong") Bangyikhan, (approximately late 20s) editor, *A Day* magazine. He graduated from Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Economics with a B.A. in 1998 and an M.A. in 1999. He was president of the Environmental Conservation Club at the university.
27. July 8, 2006: I interview two student members of Rangkids: Orameth, a 13-year-old student at Assumption College Samutprakarn, and Satawat, a 19-year-old Faculty of Law student at Ramkhamhaeng University.
28. July 9, 2006: Young People for Democracy meeting at Chulalongkorn University, attended by more than thirty student activists. (Observation only; no interviews)
29. July 12, 2006: Wuthisak Lapcharoensap, follow-up interview (see #6 above). He was a student activist at Chulalongkorn University in the early 1970s, but was studying in Japan in October 1973 and in the United States in October 1976.
30. July 17, 2006: Somchot ("Daeng") Meechana, (28 years old) president of the RUSO, leader of the Sansaengthong Party and Alliance for Democracy. He is studying at the Faculty of Political Science.
31. October 18-19, 2006: Cornell University, Ithaca, New York: Thak Chaloeontiarana, (approximately early 60s) was a professor in the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat University in the 1970s and during the October 6, 1976 massacre. He is currently the Director of the Southeast Asian Program at Cornell.

Interview with several Thai exchange students—Pisut Wisessing (24 years old), Ken (37 years old), Surin (28 years old), Prahpan and Thad (approximately mid-20s). Pisut is studying for his B.S. in electrical engineering; Ken is in the Ph.D. program for Electrical Engineering; Surin is in the Ph.D. program for Applied Economics.

A brief interview with Professor Emeritus Benedict Anderson (approximately late 60s) who spoke at the “Brown Bag” luncheon series on October 19, discussing the award-winning film “Tropical Maladies.”

32. December 4, 2006: Sombat Boonngam-anong, (approximately mid-30s) leader of the 19 September Network Against the Coup, and Chotisak On-soong (approximately early 20s), leader of the Student Activity Information Resource and political editor of *QuestionMark* magazine. Sombat was a “student rebel” and activist during the events of Black May 1992 and is currently director the NGO, Mirror Foundation. Chotisak is a student at Thammasat University.

Four other student activists (approximately late teens to early 20s) joined the discussion—one from Ramkhamhaeng; one from Chulalongkorn’s engineering faculty; a political science student from Thammasat and an NGO member working with Burmese refugees in Chiang Rai.

33. December 4, 2006: Kittisak Sujittarom and Nithiwat (“Toei”) Wannasiri, board members of SFT. Kittisak recently graduated from Kasetsart University’s Faculty of Engineering, while Nithiwat is a third year student in the university’s Faculty of Fisheries. They were both involved in on-campus student clubs.

34. December 6, 2006: Uchaen Chiangsaen, (30 years old) leader of Dome Daeng. He was a student activist during the events of May 1992 and SFT secretary-general in 2000. He graduated from the King Mongkut Institute of Technology—North Bangkok in 2002 and is currently an M.A. student at Thammasat University’s Faculty of Political Science.

35. December 6, 2006: Metha Martkhao, (approximately mid to late-20s) leader of YPD which he formed in 2002. He studied at Ramkhamhaeng University and was SFT secretary-general in 2001. He is currently working with the NGO, Thai Coalition for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

36. December 8, 2006: Chulalongkorn University anti-Autonomy Rally (Observation only; no interviews)

37. December 10, 2006: Anti-Coup Rally at Sanam Luang; March to Democracy Monument (Observation only; casual interviews only)

38. December 18, 2006: Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej (approximately early to mid-50s), former secretary-general to the PM’s office and Deputy Secretary for economic affairs under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. He was a student activist at Mahidol University in the mid-1970s and escaped to the jungle and joined the communist insurgency after the events of October 1976.

39. December 18, 2006: Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, (approximately mid to late-30s) Vice-Rector for Student Affairs at Thammasat University. He was SFT secretary-general in 1991 and active during the events of Black May 1992.
40. December 20, 2006: Kritaya (“Au”) Sreesunpagit, (approximately mid-20s) leader of Why? I Why program (YIY). She graduated from the Thammasat University Faculty of Economics in 2002.
41. December 20, 2006: Kengkit Kitriangrarp, (approximately mid-20s) graduate student at Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Political Science, and student activist opposing the state university autonomy plan. He received his B.A. from Chulalongkorn University in 2003.

Unless otherwise noted, the interviews took place at the interviewee’s campus, place of business or at the coffee shop at the Pathumwan Princess Hotel.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

BIOGRAPHY

Douglas O'Donnell Offenhartz was born in New York City on October 13, 1947. He graduated from the Bronx High School of Science in 1964 and Antioch College in 1969 with a B.A. from the Faculty of Education. During those years he was a student activist involved in the peace and civil rights movements. After graduating from Antioch College, he relocated to northern California. After a brief teaching career, he worked in the real estate industry since 1973, forming his own company in 1978. In the 1980s and 1990s, he was an activist in the Democratic Party. In 1982 he was elected as a city councilman in the Town of Danville and served as mayor in 1987. In 2003, he closed his real estate office and relocated to Bangkok with his wife, Sawitree Somburanakul, and enrolled in the Master program in Thai Studies at Chulalongkorn University. He and his wife relocated back to northern California in July 2006.



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