COPYRIGHT NOTICE

James Ockey/Making Democracy

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, © 2004, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.
The ruler [of Siam] was a reincarnated deity. . . . The king’s person was unapproachably sacred and his authority absolute. He was owner of all the land and also of the bodies of his subjects, who were legally his chattels. . . . The ruler’s autocratic control was unqualified.
—(Cady 1964:326).

In theory, Thai monarchs were absolute. The king was not only phrachao phaendin (lord of the land), he was also chao chiwit (lord of life). He was both the physical receptacle of morality for the kingdom and the embodiment of the state. His word was law, state revenue his private purse. The king stood at the apex of a vast pyramid of status relations, the sakdina system, where all had their place in relation to the king and, by extension, to each other. Each individual was given a certain number of sakdina points by the king, which determined position in the pyramidal structure. Thus, leadership in Thailand, in theory, was authoritarian and absolute.

As is well known, in practice leadership in Thailand was quite different, both in Bangkok and in the provinces. And yet much of the literature on Asian democracy, and on democratization in Thailand in particular, is predicated on the notion of traditional authoritarian rule. Scholars such as Pye (1985) and Huntington (1991: 300–307), and political leaders such as Sarit Thannarat, Lee Kuan Yew, and Mahathir Mohammad have argued that democracy in Asian cultures is at best problematic, if not entirely inappropriate. Pye (1985) has perhaps stated this argument most clearly and powerfully. “Asian cultures . . . share . . . the common denominator of idealizing benevolent, paternalistic leadership and of legitimizing dependency” (1985:vii). “For most Asians the acceptance of authority is not inherently bad but rather is an acceptable key to finding personal security. . . . For Asians the search for identity means finding a group to belong to—that is, locating an appropriate paternalistic form of authority” (1985:x). While Pye did allow for some degree of cultural change, he argued that continuity is by far the more impor-
tant aspect. Therefore, since democracy is not part of the enduring Asian culture, he argued, it is not likely to develop there. “Any thrust for democracy that exists tends to result from the desire to appear respectable in Western eyes” (1985:340). Thus, the argument goes, democratization is both unlikely and inappropriate, since it is not culturally relevant. However, this conceptualization is based on court culture, and an idealized model of court culture at that.

Most scholars of Thai politics have avoided this claim that democracy is inappropriate to Asian cultures. Yet many scholars and politicians who believe in the possibility and desirability of democracy in Asia have nevertheless implicitly accepted this underlying notion of traditional authoritarian culture. Consequently, rather than seeking for indigenous roots of participation and democracy, they turn to foreign influence, arguing that democratization has only come to Asia in general and to Thailand in particular through the middle classes. In this most common explanation for democratization in the literature, it is the middle classes who are exposed to Western lifestyles and to Western ideas of political participation and democracy, and it is the middle classes and Western ideas that bring about democracy. For example, in one of the most influential analyses of Thai politics, Wilson (1962:274–275) argued that the Thai political system was remarkably stable and nondemocratic because it had no middle class. Thai society had “a simple structure, consisting of an extremely large agrarian segment and a small ruling segment . . . in which the classes are physically as well as economically separated, and differential status is satisfactorily justified” (ibid.). As for the future, he thought that change could possibly occur, based on the role of some incipient middle-class elements and the spread of Western ideas:

The generation of constitutional government since 1932 has created within the groups of parliamentary politicians, journalists, and intelligentsia a cadre of potential leadership which, under sufficient inducement, perhaps could and would disrupt the consensus which sustains the ruling class . . . there are signs of incipient demands among the rural population; and increasing penetration of education into the lives of these people . . . may, indeed, be weakening the hold of tradition. (Wilson 1962:282)

It is quite striking that Wilson clearly identified deep divisions between agrarian and ruling segments yet assumed they shared a common culture. It is this flawed assumption that has focused attention in the democratization debate on the influence of Western ideas, and on the role of the middle classes in perpetuating those Western ideas, obscuring the role of indigenous culture and the lower classes.

Given that leadership and participation in practice varied considerably from the model that forms the basis of these contentions, reconsideration is in order. While I do not wish to overlook the contribution to democratization of Western
ideas, I will argue that support for democracy also has indigenous roots in Thai village culture. Because political participation is a part of traditional village culture, as we shall see, support for democracy has gone well beyond the middle-class elements. This has important implications for democratization. For if democratization comes entirely from foreign ideas assimilated by the educated middle classes, then the lower classes, especially in rural areas, may be an obstruction to democratization: only when they are educated can they effectively participate. When democratization is understood in this way, rather than encouraging rural and lower-class participation, building on indigenous participatory patterns, such broad-based participation is subverted. Then, middle-class Western-influenced democratic ideals are (unsuccessfully) imposed from above. This has long been the case for Thai democracy, from the time of the first constitution in 1932, which allowed appointed M.P.s until educational standards could be improved, through to the 1997 constitution, which required a university education for all M.P.s. However, if participation and elements of democracy are part of Thai village culture, as I contend, then participation should be encouraged, and the problems and solutions may lie elsewhere. Of course there are also nondemocratic elements present in both village culture and middle-class culture. It is therefore important to examine how differences between village culture, court culture, and Western ideas of political participation have shaped not only the emergence but also the nature of democracy in Thailand.

The focus on the middle class and the foreign origins of democracy is often intensified by a tendency to concentrate on the development of democratic institutions rather than democratic attitudes and political participation. This contributes to the tendency to overlook indigenous traditions of participation, as there were no parliaments or political parties in Thailand prior to the arrival of the West. To see the democratic elements in Thai political culture, we must look instead to participation in decision-making and to patterns of leadership.

**Traditional Patterns of Leadership and Participation in Thailand**

In traditional Thai society, the pattern of leadership in any community, and the pattern relevant for any given individual, varied considerably. At the top of the societal pyramid, in the capital, we find that, in practice, the king often had his power constrained by the *sangha*, by princes, and even by high-ranking nobility. In extreme cases, kings were killed and replaced by other members of the royal family in early Thailand (Wood 1982:74–75, 108–112, 174–175, 189–190). Akin (1996:70) pointed out that the early Chakri kings believed the fall of Ayutthaya was due to the excessive power of the princes and sought to circumscribe their power. King Taksin, who restored Thai rule after Ayutthaya was sacked and burned...
by the Burmese, was deposed after a conflict with the *sangha* (Wyatt 1984:143–144; Tambiah 1976:183). Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Bunnag family controlled the most powerful ministries and much of the revenue of the kingdom, placing significant constraints on the power of the king (Wyatt 1979).

For other residents of the capital, the presence of the royal family and much of the nobility meant that the *sakdina* system held considerable sway. Nevertheless, there were ways to avoid it. According to Akin, during the early Bangkok period there was an increase in informal patron–client relationships, particularly between *nai* (nobility) and *phrai* (commoners), which existed outside of the *sakdina* structure. These informal relationships were dependent on mutual support and obligations, not on status bestowed by the king. While such patron–client ties were paternalistic and exploitative, nevertheless, because they involved mutual support and obligations, they did allow clients some input into decision making. These informal relationships indicate the complex nature of leadership at all levels of society in the capital city.

Outside the capital the patterns were even more complex and less like the formal *sakdina* system. Perhaps the most important distinction was geographical. The capital ruled directly in only a few nearby areas. Beyond those easily accessible areas were a number of provinces where local nobility, ostensibly appointed by the king, but in practice generally hereditary, had control (Pasuk and Baker 1995: 212–214). In most cases, the king did not (could not) select rulers in these provinces, but recognized and sanctioned existing leaders. Generally speaking, the more remote the province the greater the independence of local leaders. In many places, the power of the absolute monarch meant little compared to the power of the local leader. In the tributary states, the king could only demand tribute, which was paid only intermittently, on threat of war.

Below the provincial level, generally the local nobility appointed their own leaders within their own areas, although a few important officials may have had the king’s writ to recognize their authority. At the top levels of the provincial hierarchy, local nobility often appointed their own relatives to positions (Bunnag 1977:21). Outside the provincial capital, local nobility often had to accept existing leadership arrangements in their areas, just as the king had to accept the local nobility. In some cases, even “bandit leaders” had to be accepted (Bunnag 1977: 23). Again, the more remote the town or village, the less control exercised by the local nobility.

It was in the villages, where the majority of the population dwelt, that patterns differed most from the theoretical absolutism of the king. Particularly with the expansion of settled agriculture in the 19th century, peasants had a great deal of independence (Pasuk and Baker 1995:396ff.). The king could not even provide security in villages; he left it to village leaders. Although patterns varied from village to village, generally there were two types of leaders in village communities.
First, there was the phuyaiban, or village headman. According to Steinberg et al. (1987:28):

Headmen generally were informally elected from among the elder men in the village. Their age gave them an automatic high status and their experience gave their judgments weight. Being the wise old men they were, however, they employed consultation and persuasion to perform the acts required of them by central authority [mainly labor conscription and taxation] and to settle disputes by conciliation and compromise. These were part of a style of leadership inculcated by folk tradition and encouraged by the values of village society.

Second, there were the nakleng or “bandit leaders” mentioned by Bunnag, who were responsible for the protection of the village. In some cases, the nakleng and the headman were the same person, though generally the headman was an elder, the nakleng a young tough. Such leaders are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. The point to be made here is that the experience of villagers was entirely different from the absolutism that the king, theoretically, exerted over their lives. The lived experience of the villager within the village was generally participatory, and even somewhat “democratic,” though leadership was narrowly restricted by age, gender, and wealth.

Another crucial difference between the court and village cultures can be discerned in the pattern of gender relations. In the palace, polygyny, seclusion, virtue, passivity, and subordinate status were the rule. The nobility and the wealthy sought to emulate this court culture. In village culture, though women were not equal, they “had freedom and authority, for example, to control the family purse strings and share in decision making in the household” (Darunee and Pandey 1991:16; see also Bencha 1992:17). Juree (1993:179–180) argued that, “as the social and political elite strengthened its hold on society, the values and norms that elite society saw as appropriate for itself were disseminated to the rest of society.” Darunee and Pandey (1991:17–18), on the other hand, have argued that recently evolution toward greater equality has taken place, due to education and Western influence among middle-class professionals. It is striking that here we see the same assumption of the dominance of court culture over village culture, and the need for foreign influence to break it down. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that the reverse also took place: that as villagers were increasingly brought into contact with government, women accustomed to the patterns of gender relations in village culture, including participation in decision making, contributed to the demands for democratization.

In addition to providing useful background information, this glance at the past suggests the need to look beyond central governmental institutions and their formal power and to examine carefully the patterns of leadership at various levels.

Changing Patterns
of society if we are to understand the nature of political participation and democratization. In the pages that follow, I shall examine patterns of leadership, political participation, and democracy in modern Thailand. Particular attention will be paid to the differences between village and urban culture, which have been especially stark, and to the related influence of Western ideas on the (primarily urban-based) middle-class elements.

**Leadership and Participation**

Although much has been written of democratization in Thailand, relatively little literature exists concerning the relationship between leadership, participation, and democracy. The only book-length analysis is that of Yot Santasombat (1986; 1990). Yot interviewed some twenty Thai political leaders and presented results of interviews with four of those leaders. In the earlier version, his dissertation, Yot’s theme had been the necessity of studying personality in order to understand leadership. He wrote that Thai leaders tended to have certain personality traits, including strong achievement motivation, a well-developed self-identity and sense of competence, a willingness to accept responsibility, and the ability to manage patron–client ties successfully. These traits, he argued, were the result of the psychological development of a leader, particularly in the formative years. In the revised version published in Thai, Yot shifted his focus slightly to emphasize the importance of patron–client ties. He argued that Thai leadership is based on “uncertain” patron–client ties. Leaders who successfully manipulate those ties, both as clients and later as patrons, will rise to the top. This shift in focus allowed Yot to pay more attention to the relationship between leader and followers, and is the key to the political participation that interests us here. Nevertheless, Yot’s primary focus remained on the importance of personality in understanding leadership in Thailand.

Yot later returned to this theme in a volume on leadership and national security (1989). Here he made two additional important points relevant to this study of leadership. First, he pointed to the “damage” done to legitimacy by the 1932 coup. According to him, this sudden dramatic break with the past left the nature of the legitimacy of the new government suspect (Yot 1989:84–85). Second, he pointed to the erosion of patron–client ties, arguing that such ties have “become more instrumental, less expressive, and hence less resilient,” as well as “of less intensity” (Yot 1989:89). These two changes opened the way for transitions to new forms of participation—including, eventually, democracy.

Another article by Sombat Chantornvong and Montri Chenvidyakarn (1991) is part of the same series. It emphasized the close relationship between institutions and styles of leadership, and the impact of that relationship on legitimacy. As we shall see, one key aspect of democratization has been exactly this struggle to legit-
imize democratic institutions with democratic styles of leadership. Sombat and Montri also provide some very useful analysis of the personalities of former prime ministers Prem and Chatchai; however, the comparison is not done in a systematic way but as part of the more general theme of institutionalization of leadership.11

Another approach, taken by Montri (1984), has been to examine the characteristics of Thai prime ministers to determine what factors have made political leaders successful over the years. Montri examined the socioeconomic backgrounds and career paths of these leaders. He categorized prime ministers as military or civilian and organized his material into two periods, 1932–1957, when all prime ministers came from the group that overthrew the absolute monarchy, and 1957–1983, when they did not. He then examined their performance. He concluded that military leaders entered politics when civilian politicians failed to perform well, and that civilian prime ministers needed strong personalities to survive. His primary focus was on the influence of occupational background and strength of personality on performance.

Surin Maisrikrod (1993) also examined differences in styles of political leaders. The main theme of his analysis seems to be that Thai society is becoming “polarized” between two groups characterized variously as “conservatives” and “reformists,” “pro-military” and “pro-democracy,” and “traditional military/bureaucratic power holders and the new business-based power-seekers” (Surin 1993:85, passim). In contrast to Yot, who had argued that personality shapes leadership, Surin held that “pro-democracy” leaders “emerge[d] largely because of changes in the different ‘environments,’ specifically in education, the media, the corporate world, the bureaucracy and the international security and economic arena” (Surin 1993:92). In other words, the political culture shaped the nature of the leader.12 Like Yot’s attention to patron–client ties, this focus on political culture allowed a careful consideration of the relationship between leader and follower, here combined with an analysis of the institutions that shape such relationships. This concentration on the role of institutions is reminiscent of Sombat and Montri; however, Surin considered political culture more generally rather than legitimacy specifically. In the analysis that follows, both are considered.

My own earlier work (Ockey 1996), which I draw on here, attempted to combine elements of these approaches. Since Yot and Montri had found personality of the leader to be the most important factor, at the risk of oversimplification I attempted to provide a culturally relevant typology for the personalities of leaders, dividing past prime ministers into those who exhibited nakleng-style characteristics and those who exhibited phudi-style characteristics. The nakleng as described by Thak (1979:338–340), is a type of traditional Thai leader who is tough, charismatic, and above all loyal to friends. The phudi (literally “good person”) style
of leadership is associated with *khunna*, or moral goodness. Originally this term was used primarily to describe members of the aristocracy, and it retains those connotations; but it also refers to the “well-mannered” and to “good” people in general, and is not linked to gender. *Phudi* prime ministers have been consummate compromisers or mediators. This, I argued, made them more suitable to democratic styles of government. Historically, *nakleng* were most successful prior to the 1970s, while *phudi* have been more successful since that time. This, I believed, indicated that a change in the nature of legitimacy had taken place, a change to styles of legitimate leadership conducive to democracy. More recently, *nakleng* have also had to adapt to changes in the nature of legitimacy.

While this argument highlighted the importance of changes in political culture and the nature of legitimate leadership, it did so by drastically oversimplifying. As I pointed out at the time, leaders are complex, and their personalities cannot be easily characterized by a simple typology. I should also have pointed out that both the *nakleng* and the *phudi* styles of leadership have elements of paternalism and of participation. In its aristocratic version, the *phudi* was the wise leader who knew best what to do for social inferiors. Popular participation in politics was not necessary, nor did *phudi* think it necessary to listen to the opinions of social inferiors; acting wisely was enough. This legacy remains for the *phudi* of today, who conceive of democracy in terms of representation rather than participation (Ockey 1999). At the same time, while *nakleng* are decisive, they also depend on reciprocal relationships with their followers that require them to understand and look out for the needs of their followers. This is particularly true of the new-style *nakleng*, who has to shore up weak patron–client ties with loyalty and generosity. Thus the *nakleng* and *phudi* traditions are both paternalistic and participatory, in different ways.

As for patron–client ties, I argued that, while they were eroding everywhere, they remained stronger in rural than in urban areas. Weakened patron–client ties were being shored up by institutional structures, particularly in the military and the bureaucracy, and, especially in rural areas, by generosity, often in the form of cash payments for participation in demonstrations or elections.

While all these themes are important to understanding Thai leadership, it remains to draw them together and to relate them to participation and democratization. Although we shall explore the relationships among culture, leadership, participation, and democracy from a broad-based perspective, there will be six main tasks for this examination. First, we shall consider how political culture—particularly the differences in urban, rural, and Western cultures—shapes leadership, participation, and democracy in contemporary Thailand. Second, evolution over time has been a consistent theme in the discussion of leadership, participation, and democracy. We begin with a brief examination of periods of change in Thai history and continue to focus on change in our analysis of the contemporary era. Third, in terms of leadership and participation, we shall examine the nature
of leadership by loosely dividing leaders into our categories of nakleng and phudi styles, keeping firmly in mind that we can only identify broad patterns using this typology; where necessary, individual leaders will be assessed in more detailed and nuanced terms. Fourth, we shall look at the effects of the erosion of uncertain patron-client ties and its impact on participation and democracy in Thailand. Fifth, we shall investigate the nature of political institutions, and how they relate to political culture, leadership, and participation. Finally, we will consider the role of gender, class, and, given the focus of previous work on the middle classes and on Western culture in the democratization process, of Thai village culture and its impact. I shall begin by briefly sketching the historical development of leadership, participation, and democratization in Thailand prior to the period under study here.

The Historical Evolution of Leadership, Participation, and Democratization

Changes in attitudes toward leadership and participation tend to be incremental; however, as Yot pointed out, there can also be some periods of accelerated shifts. We can identify at least four of those since the late nineteenth century. First, the efforts of King Chulalongkorn to strengthen the power of the central government, combined with the endeavors of his son Vajiravudh to strengthen the visibility and power of the monarchy through nationalism amounted to an attempt to expand the leadership tradition of the court to a wider segment of society. Second, as Yot pointed out, in 1932 there was a collapse of traditional monarchical leadership. The collapse was not complete, however, because the monarch remained as a figurehead for the new regime. Furthermore, the state was strengthened while, at the same time, the new parliament was weakened, as political parties were banned and half the members of the legislature were appointed. The third accelerated shift took place in 1957, when Sarit overthrew the Phibun government. Sarit briefly allowed elections and a parliament but then turned to centralized authoritarian rule, all but abandoning even the rhetoric of democracy and participation. Finally, in the 1970s, parliamentary rule returned, and with it new ideas of leadership and participation.

Increased contact with the West after the Bowring Treaty of 1855 established the preconditions for the attempts of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh to shift patterns of leadership and participation in Thailand. The Bowring Treaty opened the economy to foreign trade, and increasingly to foreign ideas. In reshaping the economy, it began to bring villages into closer contact with the market and the state. As colonialism continued to spread through Southeast Asia, King Chulalongkorn reacted by seeking to centralize power in the kingdom by rationalizing and centralizing the bureaucracy, and attempting to extend court views of leader-
ship and participation to the regions and the villages. The bureaucracy was divided into functional ministries (rather than a mix of functional and regional ministries). Civil servants were made subject to the ministry rather than to the locality. From that time, civil servants were placed on salary paid by the ministry and were subject to transfer, making it difficult for them to build up a local power base. The bureaucracy also expanded dramatically. The models for this reformation were the colonial administrations in neighboring countries during the same period.13

Villages could not escape either the political or the economic impact of these changes, most notably the beginnings of the erosion of patron–client ties Yot (1989) discussed.14 Structures of leadership and participation in the villages underwent two important changes. First, the Ministry of the Interior began to organize formal elections. Second, as part of the attempt at centralization, these newly elected headmen became increasingly responsible to the state, but without becoming civil servants or receiving any salary. As the task became increasingly onerous, and as it came to depend increasingly on interaction with the state rather than with other villagers, many were reluctant to stand for elections. Those elected were often civil servants accustomed to dealing with the state, whereas villagers continued to rely on the same nakleng and village elders for leadership in the village.15 Thus a gap began to open up between the ostensibly democratic institutions initiated by the state, which were concerned with the interests of the center, and informal (participatory) leadership, which continued to deal with the everyday concerns of villagers (Bunnag 1977:188ff.).16

King Chulalongkorn also began a process of making the monarchy more accessible; his son, King Vajiravudh, took up this task in earnest. Vajiravudh sought to popularize the monarchy through developing a conservative pro-royalist nationalism (Vella 1978). This early attempt at nationalism was confined largely to urban areas, and to the educated. While generally considered to have been successful, it was aimed at preserving the status quo rather than implementing change. It did little to enhance the ability of the monarchy to impose its version of leadership and participation on either the villages or the elite. Rather, it was so ineffective at popularizing the monarchy that, not many years later, the absolute monarchy was toppled.

In 1932, another accelerated shift in attitudes toward leadership, participation, and democracy was initiated. In the midst of the depression, the absolute monarchy was overthrown by a group of mostly young, mostly Western-educated nationalists led by Pridi Phanomyong on the civilian side and Phibun Songkhram from the military. It was this group which had been most affected by Westernization and the rapid changes taking place in Southeast Asia. As Yot pointed out, the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy marked the collapse of the traditional monarchical form of leadership at the top. New attitudes led to the development of new Western-style institutions and new types of leaders. A parliament was instituted,
with half of its membership appointed, half elected. This composition reflected the ambivalence of the new Western-educated leaders. While they were open to somewhat greater participation, they were not convinced that the people of Thailand were educated enough to participate effectively. Furthermore, shortly after the new system was established, political parties were banned. Thus there was no democratic or participatory structure to mediate between the people and the new institutions. Instead, political leaders turned to the state itself, which was decidedly nonparticipatory (Riggs 1966), so the gap between the demands of the state and the culture of participation we noted in the election of village leaders also emerged between parliament and people. As an institution ostensibly based on participation but with little basis in indigenous forms of participation, the new parliament struggled to develop any semblance of legitimacy, especially outside urban areas. The result was that, in this initial period following the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, the state was strengthened even as it was taken away from the royalists, and consequently participation was weakened even as Thailand became, formally, a “democracy.”

In the late 1930s, Prime Minister Phibun, like Vajiravudh before him, turned to nationalism to shore up support for his leadership, but this time the effort was aimed at the masses. Phibun was a leader in the nakleng style. He also sought to appropriate the monarchical tradition of leadership, designating himself phunam (leader) and focusing much of the nationalism on himself. This mass-oriented nationalism did organize and mobilize people throughout much of Thailand. Of particular importance were the organizations designed to mobilize women. But again, this was mobilization for the purposes of the state, not for political participation. As with Vajiravudh, the nationalism that developed did little to preserve Phibun’s personal authority.

While Yot argued that the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy led to a sharp break in the nature of legitimacy, in fact the shift was not so sudden. King Prachathipok continued as a figurehead for several years, and then was replaced by King Ananda. Patron–client ties also continued to erode, but again, without a sharp break. Instead it was the disruptions associated with World War II that accelerated the breakdown of patron–client ties and the process of bringing middle-class elements, villagers, and Western ideas together in support of greater participation and democracy. The most important aspect of this was mobility: villagers moving to the cities, middle-class elements temporarily fleeing Bangkok, and, at the end of the war, Westerners arriving in larger numbers. After the war, economic disruptions led increasing numbers of people to leave the countryside for cities, especially Bangkok, many temporarily, some permanently. During this period, Bangkok grew by an estimated 7.1 percent annually (Siffin 1962:135). All this movement broke up patron–client ties and brought different attitudes toward leadership and participation into closer contact.
In the aftermath of the war, politics in Thailand became more participatory than at any point in the past. Political parties were allowed, and campaigning was quite vigorous. A range of political parties and newspapers representing all parts of the political spectrum developed. Labor unions were organized. Even the Communist party was legalized. Parties supporting Pridi Phanomyong, who was on the political left and a strong opponent of colonialism, easily won the election. This political participation was soon interrupted, however, when a military coup returned Phibun to power.

The reinstatement of Phibun meant that unions and parties were banned and the press faced censorship. Nationalism was again promoted, and the military was expanded to fight the Cold War. During his second stint as prime minister, Phibun depended on the support of others who directly controlled the armed forces and the police. Within a few years, two men, General Sarit Thanarat, army commander, and General Phao Siyanon, police chief, had built up large and powerful bureaucratic institutions. Phibun was left looking for a way to find support of his own, and he looked to the people. That meant actively encouraging participation in politics. Relying on his experience in mobilizing the people during the war through the use of nationalism, this time Phibun attempted “democracy.” He revived elections, instituted press conferences, and opened Hyde Park–style “speakers’ corners” (where free speech and political debate were allowed) throughout Thailand. As in the period immediately after the war, participation was widespread and enthusiastic. Unions and political parties formed, and tens of thousands of people turned up at political rallies in Bangkok and in the provinces. Students became politicized. During this period came the election of the first women M.P.s and the nationwide organization of women’s cultural associations as women grew politically active. Furthermore, public prominence was accorded to La-iad Phibunsongkhram, wife of the prime minister and leader of the cultural associations, to the Queen Mother, and to the young queen, especially at the time of the royal wedding. Participation among various social groups—lower classes and professionals, migrants and residents—in Bangkok and other urban centers reached a new high (Kasian 2001; Ockey 2002). Unfortunately for Phibun, little of this support was for him. Instead, most of the support went to the opposition Democrat Party, to a host of smaller leftist parties, and to his rival, General Sarit.

This period between the end of the war and the Sarit coup of 1957 demonstrates the various traditions of participation coming together in complex ways. In the institutional structures of the parties, the parliaments, and the labor unions, for example, we see the influence of Western ideas. Many of the politicians who participated in the political institutions were from middle-class backgrounds, while those in labor unions were from the lower classes, and in many cases either recent migrants or temporary migrants. Election rallies and the Hyde Park–style speakers’ corner attracted tens of thousands of people, including students, workers,
bureaucrats, hawkers, and samlo drivers. Speakers appealed primarily to the tastes of lower classes (Ockey 2002). Furthermore, election rallies and speakers’ corners were also held in the provinces, as participation spread in new ways to rural areas.

In 1957, army commander General Sarit, with the support of students, Hyde Park demonstrators, the monarchy, and the Democrat Party, carried out a coup and removed Phibun from power. Sarit made a brief, halfhearted attempt of his own at democracy; then, in 1958, he instituted the most repressive regime, led by the military and supported by the bureaucracy, and initiated the most sudden and drastic shift in patterns of participation in modern Thai history. Development replaced democracy as the stated priority of politics. The bureaucracy and the military expanded further. Local and parliamentary elections were eliminated, and authoritarian leadership, appointed from the top, was instituted at all levels of society. Participation was forcibly suppressed, or channeled into development activities directed by the state.

Sarit put into place a regime that established its legitimacy by appealing to the most authoritarian tendencies in Thai political culture in a number of closely intertwined ways. First, he eliminated Western-style democratic institutions, including parliament and the political parties, as well as other organizations such as labor unions and the free press. Second, Sarit reestablished the prominence of the monarchy as a symbol. By doing so, he ensured that there was a symbolic absolutist leader to legitimize his own authoritarian regime. That the monarchy had no formal power, and could not therefore be blamed for any of the problems of society, removed it from any criticism regarding the lack of opportunities for participation and helped to ensure its popularity (Anderson 1978). Indeed, later, when demands for participation emerged, appeals for support were made to the monarch. Third, Sarit appealed to the least participatory elements of the nakleng tradition to further legitimize his rule. He exemplified decisiveness, risk taking, loyalty to friends and ruthlessness to enemies, and debauchery (Thak 1974:432). Furthermore, Thak (1974) pointed out, Sarit sought to portray himself as a benevolent father figure, “to make decisions independent of the wishes and desires of the public… Development in the political sense of expanding political participation, political mobilization, and the building of new political institutions was no part of the Sarit regime’s goals” (Thak 1974:280). This style of rule Thak designated “despotic paternalism.” Sarit’s regime was therefore symbolically masculine, and with the military and the top levels of the bureaucracy being entirely male-dominated, women were marginalized from national-level politics. Fourth, Sarit relied on the institutional structures of the military and the bureaucracy to strengthen patron–client ties. The system of ranks and the obedience to authority provided concrete structure to these ties, and a sense of camaraderie that solidified what Yot called the “uncertain” patron–client ties of Thai society. (Of course, a narrowing of participation also helped to make the remaining patron–client ties more effective.)
Finally, Sarit’s nakleng style was particularly effectual during wartime, and Thailand was increasingly drawn into Cold War rhetoric and the war against communism in Indochina. With the country in a state of war, a soldier and nakleng style-protector made an attractive leader for many people.

Under Sarit, the authority of the village headman—once based on popular support and elections—derived from appointment by the national government. At the same time, to counter insurgency, Sarit made rural development a priority of the national government. This changed the nature of the gap between local concerns and national politics. Sarit was interested in rural development and did initiate some policies that benefited villages, so national politics and local concerns did coincide on development. However, these development concerns were separated from the tradition of participation and leadership, as local leaders were all appointed by the state. Furthermore, the rural economic growth initiated by Sarit’s policies opened the way for the development of a new style of nakleng. The ability of new nakleng to span the gap between national politics and local concerns and to bring resources and development to their villages ensured their position in village society. With headmen appointed, and development initiated by the state, participation was eroded—except through these new nakleng. In these ways, Sarit subtly shifted the balance between participation and authoritarianism in village society.

While Sarit’s use of the monarchical tradition and the most authoritarian and paternalistic aspects of the nakleng tradition provided some legitimacy in the short term, it did not last. Sarit died in 1963. His successor, General Thanom Kittikachon, carried on for another ten years, though he lacked Sarit’s personal charisma. However, beneath the economic success, and in part because of the economic success, the culture was slowly changing in ways that made the legitimacy of authoritarian leadership increasingly problematic. First, economic development meant large-scale migration to the cities, especially Bangkok. People from the countryside with different attitudes toward participation and politics were more easily mobilized than in the past. Furthermore, having uprooted themselves from their villages, and their past, and having been forced to learn many new things in order to survive, the migrants were in a malleable state. Second, economic development and the Vietnam War brought many foreigners with new ideas and attitudes into the country. Third, and closely related, the developing economy required a more educated workforce. There was a tremendous expansion in higher education in the 1960s and early 1970s. Some of these students went abroad, were exposed to other cultures and ways of thinking, and returned to teach in Thai universities. Such young university lecturers were an important component of the 1973 uprising. Others learned of other cultures and ways of thinking through books and newspapers. So Western ideas became an important force for change. Fourth, economic growth led to changes in the social structure. The most often noted has been the expansion of middle-class elements. A large number of newly rich emerged who wanted greater participation in politics. However, the working class also expanded...
rapidly during this period, as did the urban poor. While the successors of Sarit worked to preserve their legitimacy and power, these new groups began to challenge the regime.

These underlying changes were accompanied by an opening up of opportunities in the late 1960s. In 1968, political parties were allowed to operate, and elections in Bangkok were followed by national elections in 1969. Again, campaigning was vigorous, and people were widely exposed to participation and to democratic styles of leadership. Other groups that sought to strengthen participation also formed, most significantly the National Student Center of Thailand, which organized students. For most Thais, this was not new, but a return of elections after ten years without them. Authoritarian leadership styles again had competition. Electoral arrangements were rigged so that Thanom was returned to power, but with a parliament and an opposition. Although just two years later Thanom eliminated the parliament and the opposition, this brief two-year period went far toward reviving the desire for participation. It set the stage for the democratic uprising of 1973, led by students and joined by women and men of all classes.

Since that time, Thailand has been governed by an elected parliament for all but five years, including the year or so it took to write a constitution and elect a parliament after the 1973 uprising. Twice more during that time, Thais risked their lives to defend their right to participate in elected government. It is my contention that this shift to participation and parliaments, and the willingness of Thais from all classes and both genders to risk their lives to secure it, is best understood when taken in the context of long-standing traditions of participation, rather than considered simply the result of short-term growth of middle-class elements and the arrival of Western ideals. Furthermore, I contend, while all classes and both genders have such traditions of participation, those traditions vary, and those variations continue to shape the democracy that has developed. It is this period since the shift to parliamentary rule in the 1970s that I shall discuss in detail in the chapters that follow.19

**Participation, Parliament, and Types of Leadership**

The development of parliamentary institutions and political parties meant that traditional forms of leadership and participation had to be adapted. How that was done and how it has shaped Thai democracy is a major theme of this book. In an earlier work (Ockey 1996) I identified two broad styles of traditional leadership: the *phudi*, based on *khunna*, or virtue, and the *nakleng*, based on *decha*, or power. Both types have elements of participation and paternalism, and both have been employed over the years by political leaders and adapted to fit existing political and bureaucratic institutions. During the 1980s and 1990s middle-class elements, which had been most affected by Western ideas, tended to support *phudi*-style politicians. In the countryside and among some of the urban poor, a new style of
nakheng politician developed to take advantage of the new parliamentary and party structures. Before turning to a more detailed examination of democratization, participation, and leadership, it is worthwhile briefly to outline the nature of these types of leadership styles since the shift to parliamentary rule in the 1970s.

As we have observed, the rise of the phudi type of leadership style correlates well with parliamentary rule (see also Ockey 1996). The two longest-serving prime ministers since the 1970s, Prem Tinsulanon and Chuan Leekphai, can both be characterized in this way. The parliamentary politician has to deal with many groups that provide support only conditionally. Here any patron–client ties are indeed “uncertain,” and the deliberative style of leadership of the phudi reflects the difficulties in balancing the needs of various loosely tied clients and their factions. Prem and Chuan excelled at this. By nature, a phudi must seem to be incorruptible, a reputation both leaders enjoyed. However, this calm, deliberative style also opens up politicians to charges of being aloof, indecisive, and, in Chuan’s case at least, unable to control the corruption of subordinates. Furthermore, both Prem and Chuan exhibited distaste for populist politics. This combination of perceived indecisiveness, distaste for populism, and the need to win the support of other politicians also made it virtually impossible for Prem or Chuan to gain credit for policies designed to help people in rural areas. That went to the local M.P.s, many of them nakheng, who claimed personal credit for the bridges, roads, and other benefits their constituents received. It was this weakness which Thaksin would later exploit.

The new nakheng style is deeply rooted in the changes of the Sarit era. By appointing headmen to represent the national government, Sarit further eroded the ethic of participation in village politics. At the same time, he made resources available for rural development, and villagers found that certain individuals with good connections to bureaucrats could procure those development funds for the village. Those same individuals, due to their relations with the bureaucracy, were able to develop economic enterprises, often based on government concessions. Naturally, the people with good connections to bureaucrats were often those engaged in illegal enterprises who needed protection. These individuals became the new nakheng.

In national politics, the nakheng style, in the version promoted by Sarit at least, worked well with a more rigid structure of loyalties where patron–client ties were reinforced by bureaucratic and military institutional structures. This style was most effective when the number of actors in the political arena was relatively limited. The arrival of parliamentary rule expanded the numbers of actors and made it impossible to rely on bureaucratic and military structures alone. Thus, after the development of parliamentary rule, the nakheng style had to be adapted somewhat from the style that had developed under Sarit.

The new nakheng is generally a provincial politician, whose (disintegrating) patron–client ties are unreinforced by institutional structures. Furthermore, he
cannot possibly have face-to-face patron–client ties to all his constituents. Consequently, he is expected to exhibit, not just manliness or power, but, above all, generosity, whether in the form of vote buying, charitable contributions, or privileged access to government resources, as a means of extending those ties. In this sense, the new nakleng can be seen to embody both the traits of the old nakleng loyal to his own—now generalized to an entire constituency—and the benevolence of the phudi. Former prime minister Banhan Silapa-acha, for example, had the nickname of “the mobile ATM” because of his generosity to colleagues and constituents. He has established a charitable foundation in his home province, has been accused by political rivals of vote buying on several occasions, and has consistently succeeded in obtaining a disproportionate share of government development budgets for his province (Bangkok Post, 3 November 1995, 5). Key to the generosity of the nakleng is giving constituents what they want—whether it be a bridge, a road, or cash—so that, at some level, consultation and participation exists. For the rural voter, both the nakleng style and especially practical (economic) reasons make the new nakleng an attractive candidate. The power of the new nakleng depends in large part on convincing voters that he can deliver benefits that alternative forms of democratic participation, such as a public hearing or support for a political party, could not. The new nakleng has found that perpetuating the gap between local concerns and national politics is in their interest, as it allows them to take the powerful position of mediator between the two. Thus, for villagers, the gap between central government policy and local needs has been reinforced under this style of leadership.

In addition to the increased emphasis on generosity, the new nakleng, like the phudi, must be willing to listen and to compromise at the parliamentary level in order to aspire to national leadership. These talents are necessary skills for maintaining some degree of unity within political parties, which are based on factions, and for supporting often-fragile governing coalitions. Here again, generosity comes into play, as it can help to ease conflicts. Yet this generosity is often sustained through corruption. For example, the Banhan government was plagued with allegations of corruption. While this may not have mattered in Banhan’s home province of Suphanburi, it did matter in Bangkok, where people were increasingly frustrated with the new nakleng style of politics.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, on the other hand, at least in the initial period of his term, has succeeded where Banhan could not: as a new nakleng-style politician acceptable to Bangkok. Thaksin’s ancestors, like Banhan’s, migrated to Thailand, eventually settling in Chiang Mai in the north in 1908. Thaksin’s ancestor Ku Sun Saeng was a tax farmer and silk trader, and the family business gradually expanded to include banking, real estate, bus routes, schools, a cinema, and a department store (Plai-Oh 1987:53–54, 104–105; Ukrist 1998:67). By the time Thaksin was born in 1949, the family was already wealthy and prominent in the north.
Thaksin began his career at the police academy. He graduated at the top of his class (1973) and was given a scholarship for graduate study in the United States, where he earned first an M.A. and later a Ph.D. in criminal justice. On his return to Thailand after earning his M.A., Thaksin married the daughter of a top police general, and his bureaucratic career was off to a strong start. His career with the police department lasted until 1987, when he resigned to devote full time to his business activities. It included a stint attached to the Prime Minister’s Office, giving him connections with some top politicians to complement his friendships in the police department.

Although Thaksin had limited experience with computer technology—he had taken some classes during his Ph.D. study—with the alleged support of his father-in-law, he won the contract to supply computers to the police department in the early 1980s (Ukrist 1998:67–68). On this foundation, Thaksin built a business empire through concessions won from the government. Like Banhan, he had extensive connections he could call upon in his applications for those concessions. His uncle, Suraphan Shinawatra, was for a time deputy minister of communications. Subsequently, Thaksin was able to win several monopoly concessions from that ministry. For instance, he obtained a concession for a cable television channel—perhaps, one report alleged, with the help of a fellow former police officer who then chaired the Mass Communications Organization of Thailand (see Khao phiset, 3 May 1989, 12). Thaksin parlayed these government contracts and concessions into billions of dollars when he listed his companies on the stock exchange in the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, he had become one of the richest people in Thailand.

Also like Banhan, Thaksin began his career in politics partly to protect his business interests from competitors, who were actively supporting political parties (Ukrist 1998:69). His first political party was Chamlong Simuang’s Phalang Tham party, which was then quite popular with Bangkok middle-class elements. Thaksin became foreign minister under the Phalang Tham quota in 1994. However, he was forced to resign just a hundred days later when it was discovered that he still held shares in companies that had contracts with the government. When parliament was dissolved in May of 1995, Thaksin became the new leader of the party. Although he served again briefly as a cabinet minister, he was unsuccessful in his attempts to enlarge the party. In 1998, Thaksin formed a new party of his own, the Thai Rak Thai party, and began once again to prepare to contest an election. Like Banhan, he was the major source of financial support for his party. And like Banhan, he was under suspicion: the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) had found, in an 8 to 1 decision, that he had concealed some of his assets in a declaration made in relation to his position of minister in a previous government.

In terms of leadership style, Prime Minister Thaksin has described himself as
a “Genghis Khan”–style manager, one capable of setting out a “vision and forc[ing] everyone to work like barbarians” (Nation, 8 January 2001, A1, quoting from Asian Business 1995). According to the Bangkok Post (7 February 1995, 3), he has “no fear” and demonstrates “toughness and reliance.” “He is never afraid of making decisions, although caution is not one of his strong points” (Nation, 8 January 2001, A1–2). He is also said to delegate well, but “has a tendency to think that money will solve problems” (ibid.). While described primarily in business terms acceptable to the middle-class elements, this is not significantly different from the nakleng style of leadership, except in that, perhaps appropriately to a new nakleng, money is discussed while loyalty is not.

Although, like Banhan, Thaksin originally accrued his vast wealth in large part through government connections and concessions,23 the overwhelming victory of his Thai Rak Thai party in the January 2001 election both in Bangkok and in the provinces indicated that he is perceived quite differently. In part, this is probably because Thaksin only entered politics directly after he became wealthy. However other factors are also important. Banhan began by selling chlorine and sewer pipes; Thaksin sold computers. Banhan got his degree through a correspondence course, and his M.A. came with accusations of plagiarism; Thaksin obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in the United States. As prime minister, Banhan still betrayed his lower-class provincial origins in his mode of speech and mannerisms; Thaksin was never lower-class, and spoke and acted like the Bangkok elite. In short, Thaksin won his overwhelming victory because he was able to portray himself not only as decisive in the manner of a nakleng, but as the model “middle-class” success story and as an effective CEO. Banhan can be seen as someone who attempted to reach that same level of legitimacy following a similar path but without similar success, as he never left his provincial lower-class origins behind.

This new style of leadership tells us much about changes in Thai political culture. It reflects the decline in the strength and rigidity of patron–client ties. Whereas in the past, these ties were strengthened by bureaucratic or military structures, current leaders must deal with a wide variety of groups, and no overarching structure exists to confirm patron–client ties. Money has emerged, particularly in the provinces, to help support patron–client ties. However, while structures provided long-term reinforcement of the ties, money provides only short-term reinforcement and must be renewed periodically within a competitive environment.

As Mulder (1992b:chap. 2) pointed out, the khunna-based legitimacy of the phudi tends to be associated with femaleness and the decha-based legitimacy of the nakleng with maleness.24 If khunna-based phudi styles of leadership are increasingly seen as more legitimate than nakleng styles, then we might expect to see more women attaining leadership positions. In fact, in the parliament, there is a trend of slowly rising numbers of women M.P.s. But thus far the change has been very slow. The number of women in parliament increased in the 2001 election,
quite substantially in absolute terms (to forty-four), but only slightly in percentage terms (to 8.8 percent), as the parliament increased in size. Interestingly, the increase was mainly in the provinces, and not in Bangkok nor on the party lists. The associations of *khunna* with femaleness, then, have only slowly begun to benefit women in elections. Nevertheless, although women have only slowly begun to enter the parliament, they have played an important role in the evolution of male politicians from *decha*-based legitimacy to *khunna*-based legitimacy. *Decha*-based prime ministers relied on the male-dominated military and bureaucracy as the primary source of their legitimacy. *Khunna*-based prime ministers have largely relied on the election and the public opinion poll, where women make up half of their constituency.

Much has been made of the differences between urban and rural voters, or alternatively, middle-class and poor voters, and their attitudes toward democracy and participation. Often it is argued that urban voters are democratic, basing their votes on parties and policies, while rural voters are apathetic and willing to sell their votes to the highest bidder (Suchit 1996; Anuson 1998). Anek (1996: 220–223) takes a more charitable view of rural voters, arguing that they expect different results from their M.P.s. Vote buying, he holds, is not as important as the underlying patron–client ties. Rural voters expect their M.P. patrons to address their “parochial” issues, leading to direct benefits such as roads or bridges, rather than “abstract” interests like policies or the public good. “For the educated middle class, influenced by Western thought” (1996:221), the “national” interest takes precedence; and yet, as Anek pointed out, the middle class does not have a privileged position in determining the “national” interest. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, parties have rarely designed policies to appeal to rural voters, leaving the way clear for rural M.P.s to seek votes as individual patrons. As in earlier periods, there is a gap between local interests and national politics, so rural voters have little choice but to choose according to their local interests. Thus, new *nakleng* quite frequently win election to the parliament in the provinces by bridging the gap and bringing benefits to their constituents. This has led to a great deal of frustration for the urban middle-class elements who see parliamentary rule being undermined by the election of new *nakleng* in rural areas.

This combination of village-level support for democracy and middle-class frustration is clear in the survey research of Albritton and Thawilwadee (2002). They report that support for democracy is stronger in rural areas than in urban ones, and weakest in Bangkok, where the middle classes are concentrated. Furthermore, they found that, while more educated people were less likely to participate (a trend they attributed to cynicism about democracy), this relationship was much less important than the difference between Bangkok and rural areas. Taken together with the evidence indicating that both middle and lower classes have participated in democratic uprisings, this phenomenon may indicate that both groups...
support democracy in principle, but have some difficulties with the way it is practiced. Finally, the survey research of Albritton and Thawilwadee (2002) indicates that, relative to other Thai political institutions, trust in political parties is low. Again, this supports the contention that parties have not successfully appealed to the interests of either urban or rural voters, of any class.

In Chapter 2, I turn to the parliament, to the electoral system, and to political parties and their relationship to voters, particularly in rural areas. It is in the parliament and the political parties that leadership and democracy are most visibly linked. Parties have struggled to develop organizations compatible with both parliamentary institutions and local patterns of leadership.

In Chapter 3, I examine the nature of female leadership, the difficulties faced by women leaders, and the factors that seem to allow some women to become leaders in Thailand. I observe in Chapter 3, and argue more fully in Chapters 5 and 6, that space is opening up for a greater leadership role for women as culture, stereotypes, and socialization change. However, progress has been slow.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss a traditional style of local leadership, the nakleng, and examine how it is changing under the aegis of political, economic, and social change. I examine the rise of the jaopho (godfather) and jaomae (godmother), their relationship to the traditional nakleng, and their roles in politics.

In Chapter 6, I analyze changing patterns of leadership in urban poor communities. In some communities, traditional nakleng are still the leaders and patrons of the community. In others, new forms of leadership have emerged to take advantage of democratic institutions. I find that when poor communities have a clear stake in the democratic process, when they stand to benefit or to lose, they quickly learn democratic methods of participation.

In Chapter 7, I turn to the middle-class elements. It has often been argued that middle-class elements are the strongest supporters of democracy. But it is less often recognized that their economic interests can come into conflict with their desire for democracy. I conclude that while the middle-class elements do play an important role in initiating democracy, they also seek to place limits upon it.

After examining leadership and democracy in these contexts—Thai political institutions, cities and countryside, and their relationship to different genders and classes—I return in the Conclusion to the broader issues confronting Thailand and to the lessons that can be learned for expanding our understanding of the democratization process.