



THE CONTINUITY OF THAILAND'S 'BAMBOO BENDING WITH  
THE WIND FOREIGN POLICY': THE PERCEPTION OF  
NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

BY

MISS KORNCANOK NUSHKASEM

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (ASIA PACIFIC STUDIES)

THAMMASAT INSTITUTE OF AREA STUDIES

THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC YEAR 2018

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ENTITLED

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POLICY': THE PERCEPTION OF NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts (Asia Pacific Studies)

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze the motives behind the continuity of Thailand's traditional 'bamboo bending with the wind' foreign policy between 1868 and 2017. The research focuses on explaining how Thai leaders' perceptions on 'national independence' have played a significant role in directing this flexible foreign policy. This has been done by examining speeches at the cabinet meetings from four prominent leaders of Thailand, namely King Chulalongkorn, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Each leader was selected to represent a different time period, world order, external threats, and domestic political structure. However, one common finding is that the image of being independence and free from external controls has remained as an honor and dignity of the nation. Therefore, Thailand would bend to whichever directions of the wind that allow the country to protect its national prestige based on the idea of national independence. By analyzing Thai foreign policy throughout a long period of time, this reveals how a desire in maintaining the image of national independence has long been at the heart of this lasting 'bamboo bending with the wind' foreign policy of Thailand.

**Keywords:** 'Bamboo bending with the wind', Thai foreign policy, National Independence, Thailand

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

A stiffest tree is easily cracked, while the bamboo survives by bending with the wind. The body of a bamboo tree is relatively small, thin and hollow by comparing to other larger trees. But one of the most impressive factors about the bamboo is how it sways with the wind. The bamboo trunks always bend with any directions the wind blows. No matter if the wind is a gentle breeze, a strong wind or even a typhoon the bamboo still remains firmly standing and solidly rooted to the ground. This flexible yet firmly rooted allows the bamboo to bend but does not break. The bamboo analogy often uses as a model for the way of life for individuals. As aikido master Kensho Furuya says that “the bamboo in its simplicity expresses its usefulness. Man should do the same” (Reynolds, 2010). This bamboo metaphor also applies to state behavior to explain the pattern of foreign policy, especially to the foreign policy of Thailand.

The analogy of “bamboo bending with the wind” characterizes the core features of Thailand’s foreign policy throughout the history. This solid nature of the foreign policy has lasted for at least four centuries, and continues on the count. Scholars such as Suhrke-Goldstein (1968), Buszynski (1994), Kislenko (2002), Chachavalpongpun (2010), and McKercher (2012) agree that the nature of Thailand’s foreign policy has been based on the ideals of flexibility and pragmatism. This metaphor is widely accepted as the significant nature of Thai foreign policy among academics and scholars, however a specific study on “bamboo bending with the wind” as a central nature of Thailand foreign policy is absent from the studies of Thai foreign policy as a whole. The nature of Thailand’s foreign policy is mentioned in the introductory or background section of the papers in a descriptive manner rather than a critical or an argumentative approach (Suhrke-Goldstein, 1968; Buszynski, 1994; Kislenko, 2002; McKercher, 2012). The lack of diverse views to

understand the nature of Thai foreign policy making process likens seeing merely one side of the complete story. As various different factors contribute to the process of foreign policy-making, explaining the policy from a single perspective may make the understanding of Thai foreign policy becoming myopic. This analyses of Thailand's foreign policy through various perspectives may offer new visions to explain the reasons behind the existing nature of a prolonged 'Bamboo bending with the wind' behavior in the conduct of Thailand's foreign policy.

The thesis evaluates the continuous nature of Thailand's foreign policy throughout its diplomatic history. It critically examines the prolonged and taken-for-granted understandings of Thailand's foreign policy behaviors, by employing a different perspective to understand characteristics of Thai foreign policy. This study aims at placing the nature of Thailand's foreign policy as the central focus of the research. It attempts to illustrate the reasons behind the long lasting nature of Thailand's 'Bamboo bending with the bend' strategy in the foreign policy making process. Most of the existing studies use the realist approach in international relations which refers to self-interests maximization, survival, and the balance of powers in order to describe Thailand's diplomatic behaviors. This research uses a constructivism approach to understand the nature of Thai foreign policy.

Constructivism helps to explain Thailand's foreign policy from an internal perspective. The approach focuses on how the concept of norm, ideology, worldview, and value influence state behaviors (Walt, 1998). This paper believes that the value of national independence plays key role in the continuity of "bamboo bending with the wind" in Thailand's foreign policy. The author will examine how the concept of national independence remains existed throughout the diplomatic history of Thailand, and how the concept of national independence creates a flexible and pragmatic Thai foreign policy.

## 1.2 Thesis Statement

The continuous nature of Thailand's foreign policy as "bamboo bending with the wind" is the result of Thailand's perception on national independence. The perception of national independence as Thailand's ultimate goal is to secure its national independence plays key role in influencing Thailand to protect itself from external intervention in its domestic affairs. That results in Thailand behaving in bamboo bending with the wind manner throughout the history.

## 1.3 Literature Review

The existing literature on the study of Thai foreign policy ignores to explain the reasons behind the continuity in the nature of Thailand's foreign policy. Many studies emphasize the nature and fundamental characteristics of Thai foreign policy in their introductory sections in order to provide clearer understandings on the background and historical origins of Thailand's foreign policy-making. The nature of Thai foreign policy is likely to be mentioned in a descriptive manner rather than in an analytical fashion. Scholars (Suhrike-Goldstein, 1968; (Buszynski, 1994; McKercher, 2012) tend to explain and criticize the behaviors of Thai foreign policy makers under selected relatively short periods rather than studying the foreign policy of Thailand as a linear and continued process throughout the history. Both international relations theorists and scholars of Thai foreign policy usually aim at examining the reasons and causes behind the changing behaviors in foreign policy. Limited scholarships consider the importance of the continuity in the conduct of foreign policy. This study aims to fulfill that gap in the study of Thai foreign policy by explores the durable and continued nature of Thailand's foreign policy which both Thai foreign policy scholars from both school of international relations and school of history, and mainstream international relations theories such as realism, liberalism and constructivism relatively ignored.

### 1.3.1 International relations perspective

Most scholars on Thai foreign policy commonly agree on the flexibility and pragmatism nature of Thailand's foreign policy. Likhit Dhiravegin (1974, p. 78-79), a Thai political scientist and politician, recognizes the flexible features in the conduct of Thailand's foreign policy. Dhiravegin explains that this flexibility is a result of Siam's, a former name of Thailand, geographical location as a buffer state between foreign powers, and the intelligence, skillfulness and farsightedness of the Siamese kings. He maintains that the monarchs' ultimate goal was to pursue the national interests which refers to securing national sovereignty and territorial integrity and to minimize foreign influence into domestic affairs. Similarly, Pavin Chachavalpongpun (2010, p. 64) agrees with Dhiravegin on both Thailand's national interests and the nature of Thai foreign policy. Chachavalpongpun further explains the connection between the two. He notes that Siam's success in avoiding the direct colonization has become a diplomatic milestone for Thai foreign policy makers, and that the protection of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence has been the core objective in the conduct of Thai foreign policy. Sometimes, leaders have used the concept of national sovereignty and territorial integrity to stimulate of nationalism among Thai citizens in order to maintain legitimacy for regimes and also to gain support for regime's interests. This kind of nationalism has largely influenced the direction in Thai foreign policy.

Chachavalpongpun (2010, p. 69) believes that the nature of Thai foreign policy is based on the concept of bamboo bending with the wind. This bamboo metaphor refers to the flexibility, resilience and pragmatism. Thai foreign policy makers have precise understandings on the nation strength and capability, and decide to behave based on reality rather than idealistic goals or uninhabited ambitions. The conduct of foreign policy is based on practicality. Policy makers emphasize the nation's historical experiences, type of government, and Thailand's relationships with other foreign powers (Chachavalpongpun, 2012, p. 205). Thai government officials, at all time, seek to flexibly formulate foreign policy to maintain friendly relationships with great powers, which in turn help Thailand secure its own sovereignty and integrity. Owing to this flexible adaptation, Thai foreign policies

largely rely on the interests of other external powers, even at the sacrifice of Thailand's own moral stance and principles. This results in strategies of bandwagoning, alliance and opportunism. For example, in the case of the relationship between Siam and China during age of tribute system, the relationship between the two is represented in the form of tributary. Siam provided tribute to China as a sign of political submission to the over lord in exchange for the nation's legitimacy in the game for foreign politics. and other extra benefits such as economic benefits (Chachavalpongpun, 2012, p. 205-206). The example shows that Siam chose the bandwagoning strategy and sought to bend with the Chinese wind by compromising through the action of submissive state in order to survive in the international system.

For Chachavalpongpun, the nature of Thai foreign policy as flexible and pragmatic is considered to be a unique characteristic of Thailand. He perceives Thailand's foreign behavior as an art that has been inherited from generations to generations. It is the flexibility and pragmatism in the conduct of Thailand's foreign policy that preserves the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence for Thailand in the past history. Chachavalpongpun believes that the nature of Thailand's foreign policy as bamboo bending with the wind also exists in Thai foreign policy in the modern era. The mere changes in Thai foreign policy are the national interests that have been shifted overtime. Thailand's national interests has changed from national security and territorial integrity to economic prosperity and wealth (Chachavalpongpun, 2012, p. 207). However, even though the new national interests were introduced, but the nature of Thailand's bamboo bending with the wind remains unchanged in the conduct of Thai foreign policy. For example, in the recent years, the rise of China has played significant role in influencing Thai foreign policies. During Thaksin's administration, Thailand chose to ignore and not to condemn China on its violation on human rights on various occasions. This shows that Thailand accommodated China because it was considered as a new great wind in the region. As China was a powerful economic power in the region, it was no surprise for Thailand to bend with this economic power in order to secure its economic security and gain economic prosperity from this relationship. Chachavalpongpun provides

important details on the changing in characteristics of Thailand's national interests overtime, and the way in which Thai foreign policy makers have adopted to this new challenges. He also mentions the unchanging nature of Thailand's bamboo bending with the wind. However, Chachavalpongpun does not explain the reasons behind this long lasting nature of bamboo strategy.

In contrast, Busbarat (2016) has a different view on the nature of Thailand's foreign policy. He agrees with Dhiravegin and Chachavalpongpun on Thailand's strategy of bamboo bending with the wind. Busbarat, however, argues that this bamboo nature has slightly shifted from bamboo bending with the wind into bamboo swirling with the wind in the recent years. Unlike other scholars, Busbarat (2016, p. 253) introduces a new explanation on the origin of the foreign policy. He explains that the flexible behaviors in Thai foreign policy is originally influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist cosmological concept of Mandala. The core idea of this concept refers to the practice in which the weaker polities acknowledge the limit of their capabilities, and, at the same time, recognize the superiority of other powerful polities. As the result, the weaker states will behave in a submissive fashion. For example, the weak submits itself as a tributary state to other great powers in the region. In the Mandala's concept of international system, the stronger states are always perceived as potential threats, therefore the small states need to accommodate and maintain friendly relations with the superiors in order to secure their autonomies (Busbarat, 2016, p. 235-236).

As in the cases of Dhiravegin and Chachavalpongpun, Busbarat, also acknowledges that Thailand's flexibility in the conduct of Thai foreign policy helps Thailand to maintain friendly relations with foreign powers, and also to secure national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Thailand (Busbarat, 2016, p. 236). Yet, Busbarat argues differently. Since, for him, bamboo bending with the wind is a well-thought and well-crafted strategy (Busbarat, 2016, p. 242). The bamboo refers to nation's ability to maintain close relationships with more than one great power in the region without having to concern too much on losing trusts or other benefits from each of those powers. He added that even though Thailand bends with any directions of strong winds, but Thailand always has solid stance in preserving

Thailand's national interests. However, Busbarat argues that this has shifted. The conduct of Thai foreign policy, in the recent years, is lacked of well-planned strategy, and some policies have partially required the sacrifices and compromises of Thailand's national interests. Thailand is willing to bend with any new or stronger wind at the time without having concern on a long term strategy or its core national interests. For example, Busbarat claims that Thailand has no well-crafted foreign policy strategy to counter-balance and maintain friendly relationships with both China and the United States in the age of Sino-US competition in Southeast Asia (2016, p. 242). Busbarat names this new nature of Thai foreign policy as "bamboo swirling with the wind".

Busbarat's study on the changing nature in Thai foreign policy is one of very few studies which focuses on exploring the nature of Thailand's foreign policy in a linear historical process. Even though the study provides clear explanations on how Thai foreign policy has shifted through the history, the scholar has neglected to provide reasons why the shift has taken place. The studies of Thai foreign policy, provide detailed descriptions and clear definitions of the unchanging characteristics and objectives of Thai foreign policy.

### **1.3.2 Historical Perspective**

Historians, similar to the international relations scholars, perceive the nature of Thai foreign policy through the bamboo bending with the wind phenomenon. According to Viraphol (1976), one of the early studies on Thailand's foreign policy, notes that the traditional practice of Thai foreign policy is based on the concept of flexibility and pragmatism. Thailand's prevailing nature is a result of Thailand's perception of international politics and its own capability. Thai foreign policy makers understand that permanent friends or enemies are absent in international political system. That makes Thailand concerns more on its survival rather than pays attention to morality in the game of international politics. The foreign policy makers also acknowledges the fact that Thailand is a small power which can be easily influenced by other great powers. Viraphol, therefore, mentions that Thailand's way to survive and to maintain its independence and freedom from external influences is to strengthen its friendly relationships with other Southeast

Asian nations in order to gain more bargaining power for negotiation with other great powers in the region (Viraphol, 1976, p. 60). This study shows that the nature of Thailand's foreign policy as flexible and pragmatic have long been understood by scholars since the 1970s. However, once again, the study rarely explores the nature of Thai foreign policy in a continue fashion.

Unlike Viraphol and other scholars, Kislenko's study on Thailand's bamboo bending with the wind is one in a very few literatures that focus on studying the continuity in the nature in Thailand's foreign policy. Kislenko, similar to other scholars, explains that Thailand's foreign policy as bamboo bending with the wind means that Thailand "always solidly rooted, but flexible enough to bend whichever way the wind blows in order to survive" (Kislenko, 2002, p. 537). Similar to Chachavalpongpun, Kislenko also perceives this bamboo nature as a long-cherished philosophical practices that has not merely existed in Thai foreign politics, but has also reflected the Thai culture and religion. According to Kislenko, this prevailing behaviour in Thai foreign policy is not a mere random acts, rather the policies are consistency crafted and are well calculated with cautious. Kislenko's study is different from other scholars of Thai foreign policy as he explains the continued nature of Thai foreign policy. His study covers wide range of historical events; from as early as 14th century in the age of Ayuthaya kingdom through to the modern Siamese state, the colonization era, the First and Second World War, the Cold War, through to the rise of China in modern era. Kislenko (2008) well explains on how the flexible nature in Thai foreign policy has remained existed and has developed overtime. The study, however, merely proves the consistency in the nature of Thailand's foreign policy. He does not provide a clear answer to why Thailand's bamboo bending with the wind still existed in history of Thai foreign policy.

### **1.3.3 International relations theories**

Mainstream international relations theories explain states' behaviors from different viewpoints. Realism believes that the struggle for power determines state actions (Waltz, 1998). Classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau (1973, p. 35) highlights that state behaviors derive from human nature. States, similar to human beings, desire to predominate others, greedy and power-hungry which



often leads states into wars and conflicts. In contrast, neorealism focuses on the structure of international arena rather than human nature. For Neorealism, state behaviors are the results of an anarchical international system. Neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz (2010) believes that the international system is an anarchy in which there is an absence of central authority to govern states. As there is no international police to protect states from one another, therefore states need to look after their own survivals. Thus seeking for survival become the ultimate goal for each state. Waltz also mentions that the weaker states are more likely to balance against the strong states, rather than bandwagon in order to survive in such system. For defensive and offensive school of realism, weak states are more likely to be conquered. Therefore, states always seek power in order to secure their survival (Waltz, 1998). Overall, realism believes that the seeking for power and survival are the key drivers for state behaviours, including in the conduct of foreign policy.

Liberalism has various sub-branches to understand state's behaviours. The three main schools of liberalism are economic interdependence, liberal democracy and liberal institutionalism. One school of liberalism believes that states can peacefully cooperate through economic means. Economic interdependence deters states from going to war with each others because warfare is costly, and also threaten the benefits from economic gains (Moravcsik, 2010, p. 16). In contrast, liberal democracy considers that democracy is a key to achieve peace and security. Liberal democracy claims that democratic states are less likely to go to war with each other. Since, a voting system of democracy decreases a desire of war in comparison to one single decision of a monarch or a dictator (Wiebrecht, 2013). For liberal institutionalism, international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank help to promote cooperation between states and help to shape state behaviors into a less selfish fashion which lead into a more peaceful world (Keohane and Martin, 1995). In general, the liberals believes that the cooperation between states in whichever forms such as economic interdependence, through democratic value, or institutionalisation would increase peace and security to the international arena.

Unlike realism and liberalism, constructivism focuses on norms and identities rather than the structure of international system. Alexander Wendt, one of the leading scholars in constructivism, disagrees with realists on the fact that the nature of international system as anarchical would lead states into competitions and wars. Wendt famously argues that “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992, p. 394). Constructivists argue that an anarchic international system exists. Yet, the system itself has no ability to direct states to behave in a certain way. This type of anarchical system allows states to act freely according to their wills. In short, an anarchical international system cannot lead to either war or peace, but it is up to states to interpret the meaning of the system. For constructivists, state behaviours are based on state’s conception of self and others. The conceptions are shaped by history, experiences, norms and identities which derive from state interactions (Ruggie, 1998). States that share positive experiences and history are likely to perceive each other as a friend rather than as an enemy. Therefore, the two are likely to behave in a more peaceful way. On the other side of the same coin, states with negative relations would act in a more aggressive fashion.

All three international relations theories focus on explaining the driving forces that drive state behaviours. The realists, democratic liberals, and constructivists believe that state behaviours are the result of an anarchical international system, democratic values, and norms and identities respectively. Each theory aims to explain the reason why state acts in a particular direction. Mainstream international relations theories try to explain the reasons behind state’s changing behaviours.

Both mainstream international relations theories and international relations scholars see the importance in the shift in state behaviors, but ignore the stable and unchanging state behaviors. Many theories and scholars have taken the continuity of state behaviors for granted. Therefore, the study of state behaviors in a form of continued process become limited. In the study of Thailand’s foreign policy, a few numbers of literature focus on studying the nature of Thailand’s foreign policy in a linear fashion through the history. Both international relations scholars and historian on Thai foreign policy agree on the continuity in the nature of Thailand’s

foreign policy which refers to the “bamboo bending with the wind”. Furthermore, the existing literature provides clear explanations on the definitions, characteristics, and objectives of bamboo bending with the wind. But relatively few scholarly works have questioned ‘why’ the nature of Thai foreign policy as bamboo bending with the wind remain unchanged throughout the history of Thai diplomacy. Thus, the main objective for this thesis is to explore the causes and reasons behind the unchanging nature of Thailand’s foreign policy which has been taken for granted by both international relation theories and scholars in Thai foreign policy.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

My research adopted a qualitative methodology. The main focus is to understand the reasons and causes that effect the behavior of Thailand’s foreign policy. To be more precise, this paper aims at examining the factors that help to maintain the continuity of Thailand’s bamboo bending with the wind behavior in the conduct of Thailand’s foreign policy from the period of King Rama the fifth to the present time.

The study aims to understand the reasons behind the continued nature of Thailand’s foreign policy through the perception on national independence. The main approach that will be used in this study is a constructivism approach in international relations. This approach will be used to analyze and investigate how Thai leaders at each selected period use the conception of national independence to produce their policy outcomes. The author is willing to investigate the possible connection of how Thailand’s perception of independence helps maintain the ‘bamboo bending with the wind’ nature in the decision making process of Thai foreign policy.

The paper is divided into four significant era. The era represents different world order including the multi-polar world, the bipolar world, the unipolar-world, and the new bipolar world respectively. The difference of world order helps to guarantee that even though at the change of world order, Thailand’s “bamboo bending with the wind” diplomacy remain unchanged. The four era are: One, the

colonization era during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and Phibunsongkram. Two, Sarit Thanarat and Prem Tinsulanonda during the Cold War period. Three, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis during Thaksin Shinawatra regime. Four, the age of the rise of China during Prayuth Chan-O-Cha. The selected regimes well represent a long and stable government at the time. Therefore, it is likely this their foreign policy behaviors are stable and solid enough to be analyzed.

Cabinet meeting speech by the king/prime minister is the main source for this research. The paper will examine the concept of national independence through the speech of leaders at the time to see how each leader use the concept differently. The paper also willing to how has the concept of national independence been used overtime based on different leaders in order to produce foreign policy. The sources of cabinet meeting may come in different forms from reserved books, newspapers, videos or other media resources. The collected material will be analyzed in order to see the linkages between how the existing concept of national independence results in the continuity in the foreign policy of Thailand.

## CHAPTER 2

### KING CHULALONGKORN

The notion of flexibility frequently appeared in the way Siam conducted her foreign policy during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). The King knew very well that the most important action for a small state like Siam, in order to avoid Western colonialism and at the same time retaining the country's independence, was to be well adjusted to the direction of the changing international situations. King Chulalongkorn conducted limitless accedes to the Superpowers, even though that caused the nation to lose its prolonged royal traditions, political structures, social practices or a piece of its territory in exchange for its sovereign independence. Fundamental thinking to the Thais, especially to the monarch, was that "it was better to lose some parts of the country than to lose independence" (Dhiravegin, 1974, p. 17). King Chulalongkorn ingeniously adopted this skilful diplomatic tactic in dealing with the Western powers because his predecessor, King Mongkut (Rama IV), had laid down a firm guideline to independence.

King Mongkut realised that Siam was trapped between the two powerful colonial powers, the Great Britain and France. It was almost impossible for a weaker nation like Siam to respond with armed forces to those stronger armed powers. This would merely worsen the situation for Siam. Thus, to resist the British and the French, King Mongkut employed a flexible diplomatic skill as a key tactic for Siam to survive. This was emphasised in Mongkut's letter to Phraya Suriyawongse Vayavadhana, a Siamese ambassador to France, in 1864 said:

I think that now is the chance for Britain to put into practice her policy of bringing Siam under her protection, since Siam is being harassed by the French on one side, with the British colony on the other...It is for us to decide what we are going to do; whether to swim up the river to make friends with the crocodile or to swim out to sea and hang on to the whale...The only weapons that will be of real use to us in the future will be our mouths and our hearts constituted so as to be full of sense and wisdom for the better protection of ourselves. (Busch, 1959, pp. 67-68)

The King's message indicated that Siam had to decide whether to lean on either the crocodile which referred to the British nor the whale which referred to the French for her future survival. This defined that King Mongkut did not have a fixed preference option to decide which side to bend along with. Instead, his policy decision depended on the situation at a specific moment in time. As of in the above case, three years after the letter was written, Mongkut had to cede Cambodia and six islands to France in order to avoid clashing with the French who became a more serious threat to Siam (Dhiravegin, 1974). This suggests that the King conducted a policy to whichever direction that save more benefits or advantages to Siam's interest which was to survive. In dealing with Western powers, this idea had continued and was intensified by the successor.

King Chulalongkorn played important role in maintaining Siam's sovereignty through his skilful diplomacy. Numbers of Western scholar agreed that it was his farsightedness and cleverness in conducting foreign policy that helped Siam to preserve her independence. As Vandenbosch and Butwell in their book called *South-East Asia Among the World Powers* said "Siam is the only country in Southeast Asia which escaped becoming a Western colony... Nevertheless the story might have been different if the Siamese had not displayed a remarkable cleverness in diplomacy" (Vandenbosch and Butwell, 1957, p. 158). Likewise, Russell Fifield mentioned in his *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia: 1945-1958* that "Thailand's independence was attributable to the skilful diplomatic of some of her leaders in adjusting to new international situations" (Fifield, 1958, p. 75). In the book *Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, Wendell Blanchard also spoke of Siam's diplomacy in a similar direction saying "Thai diplomats enjoy a high reputation for skilful negotiation, and Thai foreign policy is far more declined to gain its end by talk and manoeuvre than by force and bluster. Playing off foreign powers against each other and ability to remain on good terms with stronger powers, while retaining national integrity, have been Thai fortes" (Blanchard, 1966, p. 38). Siam's successful manoeuvre from turning into Western colony confirmed the ingenuity of Siamese leader. This was the golden era of Thai foreign policy. As reflected in several occasions especially during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

## 2.1 The Modernisation of Siam

Like his predecessor, King Chulalongkorn adopted a flexible strategy for Siam to adjust to the changing international situations in order to accommodate the dominant powers. The King noticed that to preserve the country's independence, Siam must reorganised, or modernised to be more precise, herself in accordance with Western notions or at least pretend to do so (Hall, 1964, p. 636).

The modernisation of Siam was intense and comprehensive. The reform involved such as the abolition of slavery system, promoting the improvement of health, hygienic, sanitary and safety of Siamese people, encouraging basic education as well as Western education such as languages and science, the introducing of the Post and Telegraph, improving judicial and financial institutions, advancing the constructions of railways, roads and canals, reorganising the central administration and other basic structure of government, and many more (Wyatt, 1969).

In 1873, Chulalongkorn also announced the abolition of a Siamese traditional royal practice of prostration before the monarch (Dhiravegin, 1974). This ancient practice refers to the act of submissiveness usually kneeling to the ground to show respect before the king. King Chulalongkorn perceived such tradition as a sign of oppression and backwardness. As he mentioned in the Royal Siamese Government Gazette saying "In modern major powers, in other great capitals of the world... these countries once enshrined the practice of prostration, commanding the subordinates to prostrate before superiors and the nobles, just like what is currently experience by Siam. But now, those countries have abolished the prostration practice... The kind of practice is a source of oppression. Therefore, I want to abolish it" (Royal Siamese Government Gazette, 1873). The king pushed Siamese kingdom in line with other modern European powers to escape outdated fashion and to catch up with the new international trend.

Another major modification was the structural reform of public administration. In 1892, King Chulalongkorn ordered the reformation of the structure of the government changing from traditional Siamese pattern into becoming more Westernised. His majesty abolished six traditional ministries including Ministry of

Defence, Ministry of Interior, and the four ministries of Wieng (Ministry of Civic Affairs), Wang (Ministry of Palace Affairs), Klang (Ministry of Finance), and Na (Ministry of Agriculture). These were replaced by European ministry structure consisted of a new Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Capitals, Ministry of Privy Seal, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Royal Household, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vickery, 1970). This new structure centralise all new ministries under the Ministry of Interior and all ministers owned equal rank. Chulalongkorn also introduced tax and salary system to government officers. Instead of receiving annual rewards from the King, the new structure allowed officers to receive their salaries every month. Apart from that, into administrative subdivisions (monthons), towns, districts, sub-districts, and villages. Each subdivision consisted of a High Commissioner who possessed a status of government official rather than as a semi-autonomous ruler like in the past (Wyatt, 1969).

For King Chulalongkorn, this new administration contributed to the liberation of the kingdom. In March 1892, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab returned from England after the King sent him to study the structure of British government in order for the King to plan his new model for Siamese cabinet and ministries. This process was significantly important to Chulalongkorn as he mentioned to Prince Damrong who was assigned to relocate from Ministry of Education to Ministry of Interior. The King said “[Ministry of Interior] was more important than the work of the Ministry of Education...if the administration could not be modified and developed into modern system the country would be in danger; or worse, we might lose our independence and freedom. So to protect the country by changing and developing the administration of the provinces was much more important than the work of the Ministry of Education, because the provinces were to be subject to the Ministry of Interior” (Siffin, 1976, p. 164). To avoid colonial aggressions, Chulalongkorn deigned to abandon a traditional Siamese government structure and replaced it with an unfamiliar modern administration from the West in order to keep up with the Europeans.



The process of modernisation turned Siam into becoming a more Westernised nation. King Chulalongkorn did not hesitate to lose the country's royal traditions, a prolonged government model and many other practices in exchange with her ability to adapt into the prevailing European notions to preserve her integrity. This remarks that any changes were acceptable if they were to protect the independence of Siam.

## 2.2 The 1893 Paknam Incident

Before discuss about the crisis itself, it is worth to mention Siamese relations with Great Britain and France in order to have greater understanding of the incident.

During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the British interest in Siam was economic. England was more concerned on economic expansionism, enlarging the market, exploiting for raw materials, and searching for other opportunities to profit her enterprises from Siam. In 1884, Great Britain possessed a shipping of 150, 768 tons of goods to Bangkok. That was equivalent to sixty-one percent of the total amount of foreign imports to Siam. This ranked the British as the largest trading partner and also the largest foreign investor to Bangkok. In return, Siam also exported large amount of rice and teak to the British, earning 1,865,762 Pound in the same year. On top of that, Siam also granted an agreement on extraterritorial jurisdiction allowing the Britain to exploit Siamese teak forests in the northern areas (LaFuze, 1935, p. 4). Apart from economic partnership, Siamese monarch and local elites also sent their offsprings to schools and universities in Great Britain (Busch, 1959). These helped to promote closer friendship between the two kingdoms.

The French, on the other hand, was more interested in territorial expansion particularly in the area of Mekong valley. This part of Siam would allow the French to spread more influence northward from Luang Prabang and to have a greater access over Indo-China. The valley would also connect the French to a Chinese province of Yunnan, located on the north of Siam, which was believed to have rich natural resources and more opportunities for the French to search for new

markets. On top of that, the Mekong river itself would provide a faster trading route for France to deliver her commercial goods around the region (LaFuze, 1935). The interest in Mekong valley had led the French to strengthen her administrative control over the area.

The clash of interest between Siam and the French began after France attempted to claim Siam's possession around the Mekong. On March 14, 1893 the French minister to Siam, Pavie, declared that France intend to occupy all Siam's territory on the left bank of the Mekhong river. To solve the dispute, Siam proposed to submit the case before the arbitration. But, the French ignored to negotiate and sent three small troops from Vietnam to take over the middle and lower Mekong areas. In respond to the invasion, Siam captured Captain Thoreux, killed Inspector Groscurin and some of his crews in June of the same year to deny French's demand (Tips, 1996).

Due to Bangkok's positive correlation with England as mentioned earlier, Siam was hoping to lean on British protection to ward off the French aggression. Unfortunately, that was not the case, as Britain tried to encourage Siam to surrender to French's requisition without having to struggle (Hall, 1964). This was because Britain had limited interests in the Mekong valley and most importantly the British did not willing to involve in a controversial conflict with the French.

But the game had changed after the British heard the rumours about that the French would send her troops to Bangkok. This movement seriously concerned the British. As if the French stepped in and asserted its control over Siam, the British would lose numbers of benefit especially in term of economic. The French would put more restrictions on British trade, denying the Britain to exploit the resources in the area, or other limitations that would weakening the British influences in the region. In the worst case scenario, this might escalate into a serious confrontation between the two European colonial powers in the Indo-China. From that, the fear had led Britain to send two gunboats to Bangkok in order to protect Siam and its people in June 1893 (Dhiravegin, 1974).

The situation became worsen as the French announced that her vessels would arrive in Bangkok on July, 13. However, upon the Siamese refusal to allow

those vessels to enter into her territorial water and together with British's denial to ascend her warships close to Bangkok, the French foreign minister then decided to dismiss his order on July, 12. But, the French naval commander ignored the new order and continued to proceed the vessels to Bangkok (Tips, 1996).

On July, 13 the French vessels arrived on the entrance of Chao Phraya river at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. These warships crossed the estuary and continued to the Paknam fort where France had agreed with Siam under the 1856 Franco-Siamese treaty that no foreign warships would pass beyond this fort without consent from Siam. As the warships continued, at 6.30pm, the fort opened fire with two blank rounds to warn the French, but the vessels continued. On a third shot, Siam opened a real fire and hit the water in front of a French gunboat named Jean Baptiste Say, and that still did not stop the vessels. In the end, the fourth shot was fired from Siamese gunboat Makhut Ratchakuman and Maratha Wasitsawat onto the French warships. Instantly, the French return fired back to the fort and the combat lasted about twenty-five minutes (Tips, 1996).

Due to France's military advancement, one Siamese gunboat was sunk and another was seriously damaged by the fire. This left ten Siamese men died and twelve others wounded. The French also suffered but to a lesser degree. Three French men were killed and two were injured. French gunboats were also hit by the cannon fire several times. However, the French ships were able to escape from the fort, proceeded onto Bangkok, and stopped in front of the French embassy to Siam (Dhiravegin, 1974).

Almost immediately, the Siamese troops prepared to bring out a new gunboat to renew her combat with the French. However, King Chulalongkorn, with his ingenuity and farsightedness, denied to reopen the fire with France, but instead the King deigned to the colonial demands.

As the king acceded, France seized the opportunity to demand Siam to cede the whole territory on the left bank of the Mekong river, including the realm of Luang Prabang to France (Hall, 1964). This was equivalent to approximately 143,000 square kilometres or nearly one-fourth of overall Siamese territory at the time (Department of Publicity, 1940). France also demanded Siam to pay a compensation

of three million francs in recognition for the loss of French casualties and the damage of French vessels during the Paknam incident and the earlier incident happened in the northern areas. On top of that, the French also required Siam to punish those officers who were in charge for the firing at Paknam fort and the murderers of Groscurin (Dhiravegin, 1974).

Under the pressure from France blockaded of the river and her promise for Siamese independence, together with the urged advice from the British, King Chulalongkorn unconditionally accepted all French demands. As independence was an ultimate goal for Siam, King Chulalongkorn would rather lose a smaller piece of territory in order to preserve the solitary of the whole kingdom. Ceding the northern part of the territory to France was an aggrieved decision for Chulalongkorn to make, however the King did not show any sign of regret. As he mentioned after the incident that “the loss of those margins along the boarder of the pharatcha-anachak [the royal kingdom], which we could not look after anyway, was like the loss of our fingertips. They are distant from our heart and torso, and it is these we must protect to our utmost ability” (Sukhabhanij, 1975, p. 252).

King Chulalongkorn deigned to comply in accordance with the French demands without having to involve in a bloodshed conflict. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the King, at all time, realised that a renewal of fighting with France would merely worsen the situation for a small armed power like Siam. The outbreak of the conflict might lead to French’s annexation of the whole Siamese kingdom. The King, with a good sense, acted in accordance with French demands to avoid Siam to involve into further conflicts. As Siam had always been tried to accommodate the French, for example in the case of Khamkoet and Khammuan in 1886, Chulalongkorn advised his officers to conduct a policy of accommodation toward the French. The King said “In the case of Khamkoet and Khammuan, [we] are more disadvantaged...if it is possible to make Khamkoet and Khammuan ours by whatever means, contemplate on this and do it. If it is too ambitious or it will cause a dispute with France, don't try; [we] do not lose anything apart from the fact that our boundary would not be on the mountain ranges” (Sutthisongkhram and Inthuchanyong, 1980, p. 190-191). This showed that Chulalongkorn preferred to

conduct a policy of accommodation rather than a policy of collision. It was this policy of adjustment in accordance to the threats that helped Siam to avoid any serious clashes with the European powers. This notion became King Chulalongkorn's remarkable tactic in dealing with Siam's external threats because it had successfully preserved the independence of Siamese kingdom during her difficulties. It was important for Siam to be able to bend to the direction of the major power of the day, perhaps more than one great power.

### **2.3 Siam and the Superpowers**

Great Britain and France were not the only global superpowers in the time of King Chulalongkorn. These two colonial powers were two powerful immediate threats to Siam only because Siam was sandwiched between them. Thus, Chulalongkorn carefully accommodated them to prolong the independence of Siam as long as possible. However, the game of accommodation had not always been on the Siamese side. It was problematic for Siam when the British and the French gathered together to seize advantages from Siam.

The Great Britain, as mentioned earlier, played a very limited role during the Paknam incident. A relatively positive relationships between Siam and Britain through their trade and economic activities, educational exchanges, and other interactions raised high expectation for Siam that the British would help Siam to ward off the French threat in the face of the crisis. The Siamese rulers imparted all stages of the dispute to the British and consulted the British on each every step they took during the conflict. Siam even requested the British to impose a "protectorate of a modified kind" to safeguard Siam (Jeshuran, 1970). However, a cumulative friendship between Britain and Siam was not enough for the British to protect Siam. Instead, Great Britain employed a non-intervention policy and left Siam to struggle alone. Besides, as the crisis escalated, the British advised King Chulalongkorn to surrender, unconditionally, to the French demands and cede the left bank of the Makhong to the French in order to prevent the dispute (Dhiravegin, 1974). This was because the

British did not willing to interfere into further conflict with the French. Siam was very much disappointed.

Without British support, there was no way for Bangkok to retaliate against the French on her own. Hence, King Chulalongkorn ingeniously reached out to other global superpowers to help Siam encountered against the immediate threat at home, even at the time before the 1893 crisis.

The Kingdom of Siam and Russia had developed closer friendships after King Chulalongkorn graciously welcomed the Russian Crown Prince Nicholas, who later became Czar Nicholas II, visited to Bangkok in 1891 (Nuechterlein and Thailand, 1965). In the same year, the Siamese Prince Damrong visited Livadia, today's Crimea, where he was given an audience by the Russian Emperor Alexander III. Chulalongkorn also sent several royal members and young aristocrats to military schools in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. The son of King Chulalongkorn, H.R.H Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath, was also sent to study at the Corps des Pages and General Staff Academy and served in the Russian Army. The Prince stayed in Russia for several years and married to Ekaterina Desnitskaya in 1906 (Chonchirdsin, 2009). Later the friendly exchanges between the Czar of Russia and the Siamese King had continued. Chulalongkorn hoped that to establish close relations with Russia, a great power at that time, would be useful for Siam and her interests.

In Siam's most difficult time, as the King believed, Russia played a part in helping Siam in the face of French aggression during the Paknam crisis. As Likhit Dhiravegin (1974), a Thai scholar, argued that most Western scholars ignored the role of Russia at the time of the incident. Emperor Nicholas of Russia, then an important ally of France, strongly impuled France to be moderate toward Siam for the sake of his friendship with King Chulalongkorn after the French became more outrageous and increased her demands against Siam during the Paknam crisis (Chakrabongse, 1960).

Apart from Russia, King Chulalongkorn also brought other Western powers into play. The King organised his first trip to Europe in 1897. He visited France, Russia, Germany, England, Austria, Italy and the Scandinavia countries. The Ultimate purpose of this trip was to introduce Siam to become more well known to the West and to cultivate friendly relations with the European powers which might be useful for Siam

similar to the case of the Czar of Russia in the 1893 incident. Chulalongkorn, with success, was accepted by England, France, Russia and Germany as the King of a sovereign nation. Due to German monarch's recognition of Siamese sovereignty, King Chulalongkorn seized this opportunity to establish closer relationship with Germany, a rising European power at that time (Chulalongkorn, 1899). This trip had largely extended Siam's diplomatic relations with the powerful Europeans. At this point, Siamese legations were established at Saint Petersburg, London, Paris, Washington and Berlin. King Chulalongkorn played important part in enhancing the existence and prestige of the kingdom of Siam to the international arena (Graham, 1913).

An intimate friendship with global superpowers allowed Siam to enhance her bargaining power in world politics. After the visit to European, King Chulalongkorn had more confident to persist against a great power as discussed in his letter to Phraya Visudhi Suriyasakdi, the Siamese Ambassador to London (Chulalongkorn, 1899). In 1899, Chulalongkorn proposed a request to the British to be part of "a four-power guarantee of Siam's independence" (Dhiravegin, 1974, p. 79). The four included Great Britain, France, Russia and Germany. But, Britain denied to comply with Siamese request. In respond to British's refusal, King Chulalongkorn remarked that this had at least shown to the British that Siam was no longer on her own. Bangkok had received moral supports from three powerful European powers of the day. Meaning that the independence of Siam was cooperatively protected by these global powers without the Britain (Chonchirdsin, 2009). This sided Siam with France, Russia and Germany while left the British in an alien position.

Another case was Siam ingratiated with France in 1902. Siam appeased the French through many means such as promoted the study of French language in Siamese schools and colleges, allowed the establishment of a bacteriological institution under French physicians, and also promised to set up a department of sanitation under French engineers. This was to show Siam's willingness to reestablish positive relationship with France upon their clash in the 1893 dispute and at the same time making the British jealous and anxious (Dhiravegin, 1974). The King carefully played the game of power-balancing between the four global superpowers through his foreign policy to maintain the legitimacy and well-being of his kingdom.

## 2.4 Conclusion

King Chulalongkorn's foreign policy of adapting to external situation and leaning on the dominant powers successfully helped Siam to be the only Southeast Asian nation to escape from becoming Western colony at the height of Western colonialism. His principle of adjustment was relatively limitless. As it was based on the situation rather than a fixed standpoint. The King acceded to bend with any demands or directions of the colonial powers without resistance to make sure that his nation was in line with the great powers and also to avoid any serious clashes with them. Chulalongkorn even deigned to abolish some of Siam's royal traditions such as the practice of prostration and the reformation of Siamese old-style governance that had been practiced for more than two hundreds odd years ago in order to becoming more modernised in the eyes of the world. The King also unconditionally complied with the French demands by ceded more than one-quarter of the overall Siamese territory at that time to France as a compensation to prevent further military conflict with France after minor dispute had broke out at Paknam fort in 1893. More than that, King Chulalongkorn had ceded a total of approximately 394,700 square kilometre of the territory to the French and the British throughout his reign. That left Siam with only approximately 513,447 square kilometre of her very own sovereign land (Department of Publicity, 1940). Moreover, the King's principle of leaning on the dominant power continued as Chulalongkorn reached out to Europe and developed a close friendship with superpowers such as Great Britain, France, Russia and Germany through his direct visits and other connections. This especially brought Russia and Germany to help Siam encountered against the powerful British and French at home. The friendly relations with the West helped Siam to acquire more moral supports from the dominate powers and also legitimised her bargaining power in world politics.

Siamese foreign policy in the age of King Chulalongkorn was very flexible. Even though Siam was intensely sandwiched between the mighty British and the aggressive French and might fall into the colonial traps at any second, but King Chulalongkorn took all possibilities, even at his lost, to preserve the independent of



Siam. The King deigned to lose the country's traditional practices, long-established governing system, nearly half of its territory, and also its trustworthiness in the eyes of the world due to its variable relations with the dominant powers in order to bend with new global trends, demands from dominant threats, new rising powers and other changing orders. Upon King Chulalongkorn's ingeniously and farsightedness in successfully preserving the sovereign independence of Siam, thus his flexible foreign policy gradually served as a grand strategy for Siam to handle with the external threats because it was this flexible principle that safeguarded the freedom of Siam in the face of difficulties. Hence, King Chulalongkorn was considered one of the Great king of Siam (Chomchai, 1965) and his legacy of flexible foreign policy has continued on.



### CHAPTER 3

#### PHIBUN SONGKHRAM

The fall of the monarchy and the rise of the new democratic ruling elites was one of the significant turning point in the history of Siam, but strangely enough the country's foreign policy behaviour left unaltered. At dawn of June 24, 1932, a small group of 114 intellectual military personals and civilian bureaucrats who formed themselves into Khana Ratsadon or the People's Party and called themselves "the Promoters" staged a coup d'état against the monarch. The revolution led by the Promoters had ended almost 800 years of absolute monarchy by persuaded King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) to surrender his absolute autocratic power and initiated Siam under the system of constitutional monarchy. This was the beginning of many changes to the country.

After the 1932 Revolution, following the democratic path, the People's Party granted the Siamese people their first Constitution, the People's Executive, the Assembly of People's Representatives, and scheduled Siam's first ever election for Prime Minister in the following year. However, the infighting in the government led to more coups which resulted in short-lived prime ministers. On June 20, 1933, another coup was launched by the progressive wing of the People's Party against the conservative wing who tried to restrain the power of the military faction. This coup was staged under the help of Lieutenant-Colonel Pleak Phibunsongkhram (commonly known as Phibun Songkhram) who was one of the leaders of the military branch of the People's Party during the revolution of the 1932. The coup successfully defeated the conservatives which had led Phibun to become the man of the moment. Phibun continued rose to prominence after the government troops under his command won over the Boworadet Rebellion after three days of intense fighting in October 1933. In the following year, Phibun was appointed Minister of Defence, Deputy Commander-in-chief of the Army, and the rank of group captain of the airforce, as well as that of the naval force (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995).

In 1938, Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram was elected by the National Assembly to become the third Prime Minister of Siam replaced Phraya Phahon who was forced to resign after a scandal. Prime Minister Phibun was the country's longest serving prime minister. He was in power for a total of 14 years and 11 months from 1938 to 1944 and 1948 to 1957. As of having a military background, Prime Minister Phibun and his administration likened to that of a military dictatorship. Phibun supported fascism and nationalism which resulted in his intense injection of nation-building campaign, cultural reforms and other nationalist policies. Throughout his enduring administration, Phibun issued several nationalistic decrees to bring changes to the country such as in 1939 he changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand which means 'land of the free'. Phibun rescheduled the date of country's official new year from April, 1st in Thai calendar to January, 1st following Western calendar. Also, the Thais were obliged by law to wear Western style outfits such as shirts, trousers and ties for men and skirts, blouses, hats and gloves for women. More than that, due to Phibun's fear for Chinese dominant in Thai economy, he restricted Chinese immigrations, closed hundred of Chinese schools, and dismissed Chinese newspapers and other Chinese cultural practices (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995).

Apart from those domestic changes, Phibun also conducted a major political change in the direction of Thai foreign policy during his administration. Phibun shifted and changed the nation's foreign policy direction several times to make sure that Thailand survived and adapted quick enough to the changing international environment. Regardless of a sense of betrayal, Phibun drove Thailand under an immediate switch of alliances.

### **3.1 The Stage of Neutrality, 1938 - 1941**

Since the outbreak of the conflict between Siam and France at Paknam fort in 1893, as mentioned in previous chapter, the policy of neutrality had become the main practice for Siamese leaders in dealing with foreign powers. Siam learnt the most bitter lesson after her policy of preferential treatment and dependence towards Great Britain during King Chulalongkorn had failed to protect the country

during her most difficult time (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). The British denied to provide military support upon the Siamese request against the French aggression and besides that the Great Britain even persuaded Siam to accept all French demands without conditions in order to preserve her sovereignty (Dhiravegin, 1974). This incident taught Siam not to rely too much on one single dominant power, instead remained neutral.

The 1932 Promoters carried out the policy of neutrality up until the Phibun administration. During his first term, Phibun and his government maintained absolute neutral in handling foreign relations particularly towards Great Britain, France, United States and Japan. Thailand wished to deliver goodwills and equal maintenance of friendships with both old and new powers. Great Britain and France remained Siam's most serious threats due to their strategic positions (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). Thereto, the Britain also greatly dominated over Thai economy due to her massive trade volume with Thailand. On top of that, Thailand also intended to make good friend with the new global superpowers such as the United States, as well as maintained a positive relation with the rising regional power such as Japan. At that time, the concept of neutrality played important role for the Thai government.

Phibun tried his hardest to uphold Thailand's neutrality even at the sacrifices of his life and the lives of his follow citizens. The prime minister believed that neutrality was the best way for Thailand to survive power struggle between big powers in the Pacific. As Phibun made a remark to his people on 10 December 1939 said "first of all, we must be united; we must love our country and we must be determined to defend our neutrality and our just course. In the unfortunate case that we should be called upon to fight to maintain our neutrality, I implore you, my fellow-countryman, to sacrifice even our life for the neutrality and safety to our nation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1939). For Phibun, the policy of neutrality was more than just a foreign policy. It was treated as Thailand's important core value which all Thais needed to protect.

Even on the eve of the breakout of the war between England and Japan in the Pacific, Phibun still maintained strict neutrality to its best. The prime minister seemed to believe in the concept of 'what you give is what you get'. Thailand offers

equal goodwills to all and goodwills will return from all. As in 1941, Phibun addressed to the nation in order to convince his people about the necessity of this neutral policy. He said “do not forget neutrality is the best policy for us? Conversely, were we to become hostile to others, who would be good to us? Only friendship and goodwill cultivate friendship and goodwill in return” (Ministry of Interior, 1941). For example, in May of the same year, Phibun reshuffled the Cabinet in order to balance out the numbers of his Cabinet member who favoured towards the West, especially the Great Britain and those who favoured towards Japan and the Axis, to create a fair representation of sentiments within the Cabinet (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). This was to maintain Thailand’s neutrality at its fullest.

Even then, Phibun had been held his hidden hesitation about this neutrality at all time. He realised that Thailand would fall into a difficult position after the outbreak of the Pacific war. The conflict would definitely force Thailand to take side and that would be the end of its neutrality. On 23 October 1940, Phibun stated “If there were war between England and Japan... it would be most difficult for us to maintain our neutrality. Under the circumstances, we would be forced to take sides. If we decline to join England, we would be forced to fight her. At the same time, Japan now controls the High Seas in Asia... If Japan refused to let us import rice to China, we would be forced certainly be in trouble. This is because we are tied up financially to Great Britain... but we depend on Japan economically... I am at my wits’ end as to the course of our action [if such a situation were to arise]” (Office of the Chief Secretary to the Cabinet, 1940). Taking either side of the conflict would surely come with negative consequences. Therefore, it was a matter of taking whichever side that provided most benefits to Thailand.

Thailand’s neutral position had gradually changed. According to Phibun’s speech on 3 May 1940, he clearly stated about the plausibility of change in Thai foreign policy saying “while we [government] are upholding our neutrality as best we could, if the situation should arise that compelled us to choose other courses which would be more beneficial to our nation... we would have to do it. However, at this material moment, we have no intention of changing our [foreign] policy... when time comes which makes the maintenance of this policy impractical, we shall follow raw

dictates of the time. Every national has the right to look after itself” (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). This remark shows that Phibun was not totally depend on one direction of foreign policy. He was flexible enough to conduct any foreign policy that best served the country’s interests at a particular point in time.

### 3.2 The Struggle for Thai Neutrality

The beginning of the end of Thai neutrality started when the Japan rapidly built-up her troops in Indo-China. In respond to the Japanese threat, Phibun reached out to Britain and the United States for assistance in case if Japan invaded Thailand. The Prime Minister imparted that Thailand alone would not be able to protect herself from Japanese aggression due to her superior military capacity both in numbers of men and technological advancement in weaponry. But unfortunately, Phibun’s requests had failed. Both Great Britain and the United States denied to provide military supports to Thailand (Foreign Office, 1941). This disappointment led Phibun to perceive that both Britain and the United States were wanting “[Thailand] to fight single headedly” (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). Thailand was left alone and had to deal with the mighty Japanese threat on her own.

However, fighting against Japan would not be a reasonable option for Thailand. According to Phibun’s analyse, fighting Japan single-headedly or even with armed support from other great powers would leave Thailand with negative consequences. The prime minister discussed about these consequences during the Cabinet meeting on 3 December 1941. He said “[If] we fight Japan and Great Britain does not come to our assistance, the country will be in total ruin... On the other hand, if we side with Great Britain against Japan, the result will be somewhat similar, that is to say, the country will be a total wreck, we will be dead [politically] (Office of the Chief Secretary to the Cabinet, 1940). Either way would turn the country into a bloodshed battlefield with dead bodies and city ruins. As a result of this analyse, Phibun tried to avoid Thailand from going to war against Japan, but “will only fight [Japan] if necessary” (Chavanam, 1970). Phibun knew very well that an aggressive militaristic response would only worsen the situation for Thailand. The prime minister

took a realistic viewpoint to understand this situation. He understood that it would be impossible for Thailand to safeguard her country in case if the battle broke out. Bangkok would turn into a total ruin in seconds.

Thus, Phibun made some compromises with Japan in order to avoid the clash. Negotiations carried out between the Japanese diplomatic representative, Colonel Tamura Hiroshi, a Japanese military attache, and Phibun in early December. Japan offered four peaceful solutions for Thailand. One, to allow the passage for Japanese troops through Thai territory to Burma and Malaya. Two, to sign a Thai-Japanese Defensive Pact. Three, to commit an agreement to join Japan as an ally against the United States and England. Or, four, to sign a Thai-Japanese commitment for the mutual defence of Thailand (Foreign Office, 1941). In respond, Phibun notified Tamura that, indeed, Thailand had no intention to fight Japan, but at the same time Bangkok could not commit any co-operative agreements with Tokyo that would go against Great Britain and the United States (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). Phibun denied to take a complete side with Japan because he was unsure about Japan's true intention towards Thailand. In case if Japan invaded Bangkok, then Phibun might still have those two European powers to back him up because Thailand never went against them. This was the moment when neutrality became useful for Thailand.

It seemed that Phibun's ambiguity could not restrain Japanese aggression for long. Even though Japan was looking for a peaceful cooperation with Thailand. But Bangkok's unclear position deeply concerned Prime Minister Hideki Tojo of Japan. He was unsure whether Thailand would allow the Japanese troops to peacefully pass through Thai territory or not (Christie, 1998). As military tension escalated around the Indo-China, in the morning of 8 December 1941, Tojo made it clear to the Thai government with an ultimatum to allow the Japanese military to enter Thailand. Phibun was given two hours to respond. Thailand's late response led to Japanese invasion of the country. The Japanese army started taken control of Thailand's military strategic points throughout southern Thailand and south of Bangkok. This battle ended up lasting for about five hours (Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997).

At this juncture, the Thai Cabinet decided to accept the first option which was to allow the passage of Japanese troops through the country. However, Phibun was successful in persuading Japan to include the assurance of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Thailand in the official communique in exchange for allowing the passage of Japanese troops. The Japanese government promised to walk their troops outside Bangkok. Japan also allowed Thai forces to remain armed as well as promised to take no control over Thai military installations (Foreign Office, 1941). Apart from that, Japan also pledged to regain territories which King Chulalongkorn ceded to England under the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty (Foreign Office, 1941). This option seemed to be least harmful for Thailand. By accommodating with Japanese demands, it helped Thailand to avoid military conflict with Japan, and at the same time this alternative was not too submissive to the point that Thailand lost her national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence to Japan.

Those benefits, particularly national protection, Thailand received from Japan had shifted Phibun's perception towards Japan. The prime minister stated to the Cabinet meeting on 10 December that "[Thailand need to] learn to be friend with the Japanese for the sake of the nation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1941). Not only Phibun, but more than half of his cabinet members also supported the idea of taking a total commitment to Japan. At this point, cooperate with Japan was the best option for Thailand, especially when the Japanese troops marched all over Thailand. It would be nonsense for Thailand, even more than before, to fight with Japan at this moment. In contrary, to comply with Japan would give Thailand a higher chance to survive as Japan promised to guarantee Thai sovereignty and independence (Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997). Thus, to further safeguard the country, on 11 December, Phibun decided to take part in the Pacific War and created the Japanese-Thai Pact of Alliance against the Allies. This concluded the Thai neutrality.



### 3.3 The Pro-Japan Period, 1942 - 1944

The more victorious Japanese military became, the closer Thailand leaned towards Japan. The breakout of the Pacific War seemed to be on the Japanese side. On 7 December 1941, Japan launched a surprise military strike on Pearl Harbour and damaged the American naval base to prevent the United States from interfering with Japanese military operation plans against the Allies. After the Pearl Harbour attack, Japan successfully occupied U.S. island territories of Guam and Wake Island in the Western Pacific Ocean (Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). This military success led Phibun to move Thailand much closer to Japan than ever before. On 25 January 1942, the Thai government led by Phibun decided to declare war on the United States and Great Britain as Phibun and his cabinet believed that Japan will win this global war and will become one of the world's next leading nations. This was not only a self-protection movement, but also an advantage seeking moment for Thailand.

As a matter of fact, any potential war winner nation would be considered as Thailand's next best friend. It was just happened to be Japan at that time. Similar story also applied to those potential defeated nations. According to Net Khemayothin, Phibun was reported to have stated in 1942 that "whoever loses this war will certainly become our enemy" (Khemayothin, 1967). This showed that Phibun's decision on side-taking during wartime was regardless of prolonged friendship, economic cooperation, social interaction, personal sentiments or any other relations occurred between Thailand and her partner nations throughout the history. The only factor was the winning or losing status at war, because joining the winning side and betraying the losing side would not only safeguard the country in the post-war order but it would also help Thailand to gain great benefits at the end of the war. The pro-Japan movement was the way Phibun took advantage of the coming global order. This was the time Thailand became very opportunistic player in the game of politics.

Therefore, there was no surprise if Thailand switched side after the war-winner has changed. It seemed that Phibun's calculation was inaccurate. In response

to Japan's Pearl Harbour attack, the United States decided to declare war on Japan. After June 1942, Japan started to struggle after the American naval beaten Japan in the Battle of Midway. Two months later, the United States attacked Japan in the Solomon Islands led to the withdrawal of Japanese forces from the island of Guadalcanal. In late 1944, American airforce started massive airstrike attacks on Japan and successfully occupied the Japanese territory of Okinawa in June 1945 (Miller, 2013). On 6 August, the United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Japanese city of Hiroshima and followed by the second bomb three days later on Japanese city of Nagasaki. The two blasts caused at least 129,000 civilian deaths and left many injured from the radiation. This ended the second world war as well as ended Japanese's potential war-winner status after Tokyo officially surrendered to the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union on 2 September 1945 (Hoyt, 2001).

#### **3.4 The Pro-Western period, 1944 - 1947; 1948 - 1957**

Japanese surrender made alliance between Thailand and Japan came to an end. Bangkok took a complete turndown against Japan, and openly flattered the Western powers through her new pro-West/anti-communist approach after the second world war.

It is worth to mention that the fall of Japanese aggression caused Phibun to lose his premiership. He was being charged for committing war crime activities and facing death penalty if found guilty. By good fortune, according to the War Criminal Act on 15 October 1945, the court retrospective act was unconstitutional practically saved the ex-premier.

From August 1944, Phibun's administration was taken over by the new governments. It was under the guidance of prime minister Pridi Banomyong, a member of the progressive socialist-oriented Seri Thai (the Free Thai Movement), who brought Thailand back to her pre-1932 approach of the pro-West stance. The Seri Thai refused to deliver Phibun's war declaration to the United States, and decided to set up contact with the Allies instead. During the war years, while Phibun

decided to openly court with Japan, Pridi and his Seri Thai on the other hand operated an underground resistance movement with American military training and armed support to resist against imperial Japan (Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997). This underground cooperation saved Thailand from being defeated at war, as well as helped to return Thailand back to her pro-Western side without facing much criticism.

Bangkok's pro-Western stand became more intense after the comeback of prime minister Phibun as a military leader of the Coup Group in 1948. This time, with an addition of an anti-communist implication. An ex-Japanese supporter, Phibun, completely switched side and openly courted the Free World to re-build his trust, confidence, friendship and goodwill with leading nations of the new global order. The country's alignment and commitment to the West, particularly the Britain and the United States, became more explicit especially during the year 1950. For example, Phibun's recognition of Bao Dai government of Vietnam, one of the Associated State within the French Union in Indo-China. This means that the Thai government had granted international credibility and political power to the French-supported regime against the Ho Chi Minh's communist government. Also during the Korean War, Phibun ordered 4,000 troops to South Korean to fight against North Korea under the request of the United Nations. Thailand also sent 40,000 tons of rice to the South during the war years (Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997). It is important to note that Thailand was the first Asian nation to openly provide assistance to South Korea, and also considered as one of the larger supporters at war. In the same year, Bangkok also signed three cooperation agreements with the United States including the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, the Education Exchange Agreement, and the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (Hoyt, 2001). These examples show that, in the post Second World War period, Thailand had created a strong bond with the Western bloc particularly the United States through various levels of cooperation. This was not only because the United States had the potential to become the world's next hegemonic power, but the United States also held the highest ability to protect Thailand from the aggressive fast-growing communist threat in mainland Southeast Asia.

At that time, to be part of the Western democratic bloc was more beneficial for Thailand, particularly in regards to national security. Phibun knew that Thailand was unable to defend herself against direct attacks from her communist neighbours after the communist Viet Minh, supported by China, successfully invaded Laos in 1953 and again Cambodia in the following year (Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997). This left Thailand to be directly surrounded by the communist threats. As the situation became worsen, the fear of falling into the domino effect of communist influence and losing national sovereignty motivated Phibun to strengthen Thailand's position on pro-Western/anti-communist stand. Thailand formally submitted herself under the US security umbrella by becoming the US ally through the formation of Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1954 (Hoyt, 2001). In addition, Phibun bent Thailand closer to the US side through movements such as allowing the United States to use airbases in eastern region of Thailand to conduct military activities against North Vietnam, sending more troops to support the US in Laos and Vietnam, and signing a secret agreement with Washington in 1961 (Miller, 2013). However, to establish closer tie with the United States by converting the country into a pro-West/anti-communist nation during the escalation of this ideological warfare was not for the sake of national ideological preference. It was a matter of national security. Thailand used a pro-West/anti-communist stance as a tool to attract security protection from the United States. While Washington focused on containing the spread of communism in maintain Southeast Asian through Thailand, at the same time Bangkok was exploiting this containment movements to safeguard her national sovereignty and independence from fallen under communist aggression without losing much of her own blood, sweat and tears.

Apart from fighting communism with less efforts, Thailand seemed to gain numbers of military and financial benefits from its close tie with the Free World. American military assistance to Thailand significantly increased in the eve of Cold War. As in return for Thailand's military assistance in South Korea and the recognition of Bao Dai regime as mentioned earlier, Washington began to provide the present of its military troops in Thailand and also supplied arms and military equipments to the Thai Armed Force. At the peak of the conflict, the United States under President

Eisenhower raised military aid to Thailand from US\$12.0 million in 1952 to US\$ 55.8 million in 1953 (Chavanam, 1970). Also in the post-war years, the United States returned to Thailand the compounded gold in Tokyo which was part of Thailand's loans and facilities to Japan during the previous war. Moreover, Washington allowed the Thai government to control over the enemy's asset of 10 million pounds and London also yielded another 1 million pound to Thailand for the rehabilitation of Thai economy and the reconstruction of the nation (Chavanam, 1970). Apart from those, Thailand also received other development assistances such as a full scale technical supports for development and planning on agricultural and industrial construction in the aftermath of the war.

For Thailand, to blend along with the Western bloc under a pro-West/anti-communist ideology provided the country with security assurance and sovereignty protection, and other extra benefits from increased military aids, financial supports to development assistance. At that moment, there was no reason for Thailand to stand against the democratic Free World or to look for a new player to rely on due to great benefits Thailand received from bending with the United States and its allies.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Thailand's foreign policy direction during Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram's administration underwent three major transitions. During his 14 years and 11 months of premiership, Thai foreign policy direction shifted and changed in accordance with the changing political atmosphere both within the region and international arena at each particular point in time. Under one single national leader, Thailand's foreign policy direction had gone from an ambiguous position of neutrality in the pre-WWII period, to a pro-Japanese towards the end of the Second World War, and ended with a pro-Western/anti-communist stance under a status of an American close ally in the Cold War.

Phibun openly established close alliance between Thailand and whichever nation that would support for security, dignity, independence as well as other benefits to the nation. As prior to the Second World War, Phibun held

Thailand's neutral position at its fullest because power rivalry in the Pacific remained ambitious. At that time, it was still unclear whichever nation would truly support Thailand after the outbreak of the war. Therefore, Phibun maintained equal goodwill to all directions including Great Britain, France, United States and Japan. This multiple friendships allowed Thailand to easily side up with whoever wins the war. As a result, Tokyo's potential winning position and its promise to leave Thai sovereignty untouched led Phibun to clarify his pro-Japanese position by declared war on Britain and the United States towards the end of the Second World War. However, after the Allies led by the United States defeated Japan at war, Thailand immediately shifted towards a pro-Western standpoint. Phibun also strongly submitted the country under US security umbrella against communism and established closer relations with the United States and its allies throughout the Cold War. This was because the Free World willed to protect Thailand from falling into a communist domino affect, yet provided Thailand with numbers of security, military, financial and socio-economic benefits both during and after the war.

The conduct of Thai foreign policy direction during prime minister Phibun disregarded the importance of fixed national ideology, political position, and historical friendships between Thailand and other nations. As Thailand officially shifted its political position from a pro-Japanese to a pro-Western alliance almost immediately after the Second World War. Thailand also established close tight with the United States and its allies during the Cold War, even though Bangkok once officially declared war on Washington and London towards the end of WWII. Phibun's foreign policy direction had a marked tendency to change. A yesterday's enemy became today's ally and vice versa, based on their capabilities to serve interests of the nation. This made Thailand shamelessly switched and changed side without concerning about its disreputable image to the world.

However, it seemed that Thailand's foreign policy direction under Phibun and his government between 1938 and 1957 based on the principle of flexibility definitely benefited Thailand to ensure her national sovereignty and independence as well as to receive other political, military, economic and financial benefits throughout the world's two most bloodiest wars in the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 4

### PREM TINSULANONDA

The spillover of the Cold War into mainland Southeast Asia caused serious security challenges for Thailand and its leader during the 1980s. For most of the decade, Thailand was ruled under Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda administration. Prem is a retired military officer who served as the 16th prime minister of Thailand for 8 years from 3 March 1980 to 29 April 1988 (Warren, 1997). Prem is known for his initiating negotiation against communism from both domestic and outside pressures.

The major mission for Prem during his military years was to suppress the communist uprising. Prem, then a commander-in-chief of the 2nd Army, took part in developing the nation's strategic plan against communism under policy called 'Politics Leads the Military' (in Thai as การเมืองนำการทหาร) (Maisrikrod, 1992). This means that Thailand preferred to fight against communism through political tactics rather than through forceful military means.

At the time before his premiership, General Prem gradually gained popularity from both military and the public for his professional and personal aspect. After the 14th October Incident, Thai politic was thirsted for more democracy. But at the same time, the military still tried to maintain its political power and influence over politics. The powerful young military group known as 'Young Turk' pushed for the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2521 (1978) to give more power to the Senate over the House of Representatives in order to allow the military to continue intervene in politics. Thailand ended up in the era of semi-democracy (Warren, 1997).

As the military began to lose faith in the government under Prime Minister Kriang Sak, the Young Turk as well as other pro-democracy military officers known as the 'democratic soldiers' group started to support Prem and his 'politics leads the military' strategy (Maisrikrod, 1992). The Army wished to restore democracy nationwide as soon as possible in order to prevent the Communist Party of Thailand

to use this uncertain situation to stimulate the public into communism (Warren, 1997). The two military groups commonly agreed that the establishment of democracy for Thailand was most efficient in the hands of the military. Prem's position definitely allowed him to carry out his political acts over his hidden military suit which well served the interests of these military groups.

Prem also had a reputation of being a good man. The General was well respected by military officers as well as the general public for his profession, knowledge, personality, and personal skills. The General was praised for his appropriate gestures, well-behave attitude, non-conceited personality, and his caring and encouraging for his military men as well as for all citizens. Prem also had good reputation for being incorruptible and for honesty. Loyalty was another strength for Prem as he once declared that he was 'married to the army' (Connors & Hewison, 2008). These positive reputations were to leave no doubt about his overwhelming supports.

The continuation of Kriangsak's faithless leadership, weakening government, and unstable political situation had widen Prem's supports, particularly from the political side both coalition government parties and opposition parties (Connors & Hewison, 2008). After General Kriangsak resigned from his premiership, the support movement for General Prem to be seated as a prime minister was immediately intense. On 3 March 1979, General Prem was nominated to be prime minister of Thailand by an overwhelming majority of 399 from 500 votes from the National Assembly (Maisrikrod, 1992). More than that, most political parties similarly announced that General Prem Tinsulanonda was the most 'appropriate person' of the moment (Connors & Hewison, 2008). They believed that this 'good (military) man' would be able to carry out his politics-led strategy in order to overcome the challenges and to bring stability to the nation during the on-going ideological conflict of Cold War.

The greatest threat to Thailand's under Prem Tinsulanonda administration was the spread of communism. This ideological threat had challenged the independence of the nation in a new way. In the Cold War period, the value of national independence had shifted to focus more on the political ideology. To



prevent Thailand from falling under the communist threat, Prem conducted a pretended-omnidirectional diplomacy. Prem's Thailand aimed to maintain good relations with all nations regardless of their political ideologies, economic system and social structures. Thailand pretended that it would not pick a preferable side or an enemy, but at the same time, Thailand remained heavily sided and relied on the United States for its military, economic and social supports.

The chapter will illustrate how Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda's foreign policy helped preventing Thailand from falling under the domino effect of communist influence in the age of the new war. The chapter will also examine the shift and change in the nature of national independence, and how this new wave of ideological threat under the name Communism created serious security concern for Thailand during Prem's administration. After that, the chapter will explain the way in which Prem's Thai foreign policy under his 'Politics Leads the Military' strategy played role in securing Thailand's national independence even under its newest form.

#### **4.1 Communism As a New Threat**

In 1979 when General Prem was appointed to be a prime minister, the world as well as Thailand was already at the middle of the Cold War. This ideological conflict between the democratic bloc led by the United States and the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union drew many regions into proxy wars. The mainland Southeast Asia, with no exception, had divided into two conflicting political thoughts. The ideological confrontation escalated into a regional conflict of the Indochina Wars, between the regional communist forces against mainly France, South Vietnam, the United States, Cambodia, Laos and the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Neher, 1987).

The series of the Indochina wars consisted of three parts. The First Indochina War ended after the French force was defeated in 1954 by the communist north Vietnam (Viet Mihn), with financial and military supports from the Soviet Union and the PRC (Innes-Brown & Valencia, 1993). The Second Indochina War was a

conflict between the South Vietnam government and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) which included the North Vietnamese-based communist Viet Cong and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). In this second war, the United States had supported and backed the South Vietnam government against the communist north. The fighting ended with the communist north Vietnam forcibly conquered the South Vietnam in 1975 (Linantud, 2008). During the same period, other fights also occurred on the mainland included in Cambodia between the United States-backed government, the North Vietnamese Army, and the Communist-backed Khmer Rouge. Also, in Laos between the United States-backed government, the North Vietnamese Army, and the Communist-backed Pathet Lao. Also in 1975, both Cambodia and Laos fell into communist forces, followed the South Vietnam. The Third Indochina War consisted of several fights. Among these wars, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia created most concern for Thailand. The North Vietnamese Army invaded Cambodia and reached to Phnom Penh in January 1979 (Funston, 1998). The Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia made the Cambodian rebel guerrillas to flee and hide in refugee camps across Thailand's boarder (Innes-Brown & Valencia, 1993). Then in June of 1980, only three months after General Prem took the office, the Vietnamese troops crossed over to Thai boarder to wipe out the Khmer Rouge in Thailand with support from China. This made the incursion into Thai territory, and confronted with the Thai Army. The crossover challenged stability, security and sovereignty of the nation.

The communist victories in Indochina leaving a serious security concern for Thailand. In 1975, three of Thailand's neighbouring countries included Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos fell to communist forces. Apart from that, during this time, the United States also decided to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam after the defeat. This had dramatically weakening the existence of the United States in Indochina (Linantud, 2008). In contrary, communist insurgency in Indochina was very strong under great supports from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Innes-Brown & Valencia, 1993). The fallen of Thai neighbours left Thailand's boarder directly exposed to her communist neighbours and their supporters. The communist parties were able to march their forces across the

boarder line into Thai territory at any moment. As according to the domino theory, which held that if one country in the region fell under communist influence or control, then the surrounding countries would soon follow. Then based on geopolitically situation, Thailand was to be the next country in the Indochina to fall under the communist control, and that means to replace the country's traditional political thought and other political practices with communist ideological patterns.

Communism posed a threat to national identity. The spread of communism was not merely limited to the expansion of political structure and the government, but it also involved the restructure of economic and social aspect. The goal for communism was to establish a society based upon public ownership of the means of the production and the removal of any form of social classes in order to form an equal society. Those countries that fall under communist control forcibly underwent a serious reformation. For example, the abolition of Laos Monarchy in 1975 (Funston, 1998). After the communist-led Pathet Lao took full control over Laos in December, the party declared the end of the monarchy. According to the New York Times, On December 4, 1975, the national broadcast announced King Savang Vatthana has giving up this throne, and the representatives of the entire people of Laos accepted the abdication. Later, the congress stated to have decided unanimously to end the 600-year-old monarchy in Laos known as the Kingdom of a Million Elephants, and replaced it with the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic (Linantud, 2008).

The collapse of the monarchy in Laos alarmed Thailand and its leader to concern that communism was not only posed a threat to security and stability of the nation as a whole, but it also posed a specific threat to Thailand's prolonged governing system of monarchy. At this point, the people of Thailand in the elite class as well as the ordinary citizens believed that Communism was the number one threat to Thailand because it would destroy the nation's main institution and would demolish a Thai-way of living and a sense of Thainess (Bhuchongkul, 1992) Prime Minister Prem also strongly supported this notion. As a conservative, he believed that national identity of Thailand based on the nation, religion, and king. Prem once states that "when speaking of the nation, we [Thais] should strengthen our national

identity [as an independent nation]...in terms of religion, we should follow the Dharma teachings...for the monarchy, I worship the royal institution as an inseparable part of our nation and our land. We will protect this institution to remain as an abiding part of country” (Warren, 1997) Therefore, for Thailand, the fall of the monarchy system was not only mean the collapse of nation's political structure, but it also likened that the heart of Thai national identity was conquered, taken away, and replaced by communist doctrine.

The insertion of communism disrupts sovereignty of a nation. The communist states forcibly expand their influences over their non-communist counterparts by sweeping out any form of existing structures, practices, and traditions that does not fit into communist ideology, and replace them with the communist practices such as a establishment of communist-style government, a classless social structure, and a communist economic system of common ownership. Then, if Thailand was to fall under the communist control, the country would lose its governing power to maintain its existing order, and would be forced to restructure itself into a communist nation. This reformation would demolish Thailand’s existing power structure, economic system, social practices, traditional ideology, way of life and other common customs. This is similar to the practice of colonialism, only this time, the coloniser does not exist in a form of a specific nation state but in a form of a political ideology. Thus, Thailand’s foreign policy under Prem administration was mainly conducted to safeguard Thai sovereignty in terms of protecting the country to maintain its full independent right and independent power to govern over itself in its own way, without being subjugated under communist control.

## **4.2 The Omnidirectional Policy**

The maintaining of Thailand’s national sovereignty remains the ultimate goal for Thai foreign policy during Prime Minister General Prem’s premiership. According to the Council Meeting Report No.2/ (BE) 2523 released on 28 March 1980 announcing the Policy of the Government of Thailand, the idea of protecting Thai sovereignty appeared on up to three main policies including Public Policy, Security

Policy, and Foreign Policy. For security policy, the report stated that the government is willing to “strengthen security forces according to plans in order to safeguard sovereignty and to maintain stability of the nation” (Government Office, 1980). The focus of protecting national sovereignty even more explicit in the foreign policy. As noted in the No.2/ (BE) 2523 report that “the government has the intension to adjust the foreign policy in accordance with international situation to preserve national sovereignty, territorial integrity, safeguarding and promoting national security and national interests at most”. The report continued that “in order to achieve the mentioned intension, the government will proceed the foreign policy based on free will” (Government Office, 1980). This shows that Thai foreign policy under Prem administration did not only heavily concerned on protecting the sovereignty of the nation based on its free will, but also to protect it under an adjustable manner in accordance with an on-going situation in the foreign affairs.

A distinct readjustment in Thai foreign policy direction occurred after the Vietnamese incursion entered into Thai territory. The defeat of Democratic Kampuchea led thousands of anti-Hanoi Khmer Rouge to flee and to reorganise their operation from inside refugee camps in forests and mountain zones on the Cambodia-Thai boarder, with assistance from China (Neher, 1987). In respond to the Cambodia guerrilla movement, 200 Vietnamese troops crossed the boarder into the Ban Non Mak Mun area in June of 1980 (Funston, 1998). This caused a three-day battle that left approximately 200 dead, including 22 to 130 Thai soldiers and one Thai villager. One day after, the Vietnamese troops also shot down two Thai military aircrafts (Benbourenane, 1998). Since then, Vietnam and Thailand frequently involved in the Vietnamese raids throughout the 1980s.

At this point, the Indochina was divided into two sides between those who were willing to support the communist Vietnam and those who were willing to contain them. Indonesia and Malaysia were reportedly more conciliatory toward the communist Vietnam because they wanted a strong and stable Vietnam as a potential ally, acting as a buffer state, against Chinese expansionism (Benbourenane, 1998). On the other hand, Thailand and Singapore wanted to contain and limit the Vietnamese military capability and power in the region, in order to prevent further expansion into

Thai sovereignty (Funston, 1998). In response to this split, Prem decided to maintain good relationships with all countries regardless of their ideology. As appeared in his foreign policies number five of the Council Meeting Report No.2/ (BE) 2523 which stated that the government of Thailand “will promote good relationships as well as expanding economic relations to all countries regardless of the differences in political system or economic and social system” (Government Office, 1980). A sense of omnidirectionality further appeared in foreign policy number six, saying that the government “will find a way to promote and to fix a relationship and an understanding as well as to cooperate for mutual interests with neighbouring countries that are not a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, for peace and stability in the region which would also create peace between Thailand and its neighbours” (Chiengkul, 1997). Prime minister Prem needed to build a more stable Southeast Asian region because the regional unified power will help Thailand to have a firm stance against Vietnam.

However, as the communist Vietnam did not only invade Cambodia by itself, but with assistance from the Soviet Union, this made prime minister Prem view the Soviet Union rather than Vietnam as a principle threat to its national sovereignty and regional stability (Benbourenane, 1998). The communist superpower led the communist Vietnamese to have the strongest military capacity in Southeast Asia. From that, the spread of Vietnamese power in the Indochina also means the expansion of the Soviet influence into the region (Funston, 1998). This brought the power struggle between two conflicting superpowers to take place in the Southeast Asian region, challenging national security of Thailand. In response, Thailand, too, brought its back-up superpower into play.

The threatening incidents led Thailand to turn against the communist expansion by condemning the communist Vietnam for its aggression toward Cambodia, based on the US principles. Bangkok under Prem administration claimed that Vietnamese’s invasion of Cambodia was a violation of the UN Charter and international law, by violating sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations (Funston, 1998). This was to warn other powerful nations that the invasion of small states was considered as an unlawful act (Benbourenane, 1998). As clearly stated as

the 1980 foreign policy number one and two, saying that the Thai government “will protect the rights, and follow the obligations of treaties and agreements signed with other nations based on the principle of equality and compensation”, and number two said that the government “will respect and encourage the principle of the UN Charter and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Chiengkul, 1997). It was clearly see that prime minister Prem bought Thailand closer to the US side, by making its stance based on the US-led institution such as the United Nations and the US-led ideology of human rights. As announced in the 1986 policy report that the government “will promote good relation with the superpower in a way that it will support and promote the stability and prosperity of the nation” (Government Office, 1980). Once again, Thailand leaned on the United States in order to gain more political bargaining power to protect its nation from falling into external control.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia pulled Thailand and the United States closer again, especially in security and defence. The confrontation between Thai and Vietnamese forces along the Thai-Cambodia boarder left Thailand in need for military support. In 1981, the United States under President Ronald Reagan provided US\$ 60.7 million to Thailand for security funding. The amount had doubled to US\$121.37 million in the following year (Chiengkul, 1997). In 1984, the total amount of security support from the Washington to Bangkok raised to US\$132.8 million (Benbourenane, 1998). Apart from that, the United States also provided financial support under Economic Support Fund project through the International Military Education and Training Program, and the Development Assistance program (Funston, 1998). Moreover, in 1985, President Reagan also sold 12 F-16 A/B fighter jets to Thailand in respond to the Thai request. As the confrontation remained, the United States also continued its military support to Thailand (Neher, 1987). On January 1987, Thailand and the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Logistic Support between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Kingdom of Thailand that allowed Thailand to have access to a Special Defence Acquisition Fund (Chiengkul, 1997). This agreement allowed Thailand to have a direct access to the US military equipment without having to go through a regular purchasing procedure which could take some times to

process. Moreover, this incident also brought back the Thailand-U.S. military joint exercise known as Cobra Gold which had been on hold for eight years since 1976. It seemed that the relationship between Thailand and United States got even closer than before.

Apart from security and military assistance, Thailand also received economic and financial supports from the United States both direct and indirect way. For a direct assistance, the United States provided economic supports for the Thai villages along Thailand-Cambodia and Thailand-Laos borders between 1980 and 1984 (Funston, 1998). Washington spent a total of US\$19 million for this project alone. This was to support the villagers to build their own economic and social stability in order to prepare and strengthen them against the communist raids (Chiengkul, 1997). In intern of an indirect economic support, at the height of war, some 50,000 military personnels were stationed in seven airbases throughout Thailand to take part in the joint military exercise, providing technical supports, and armed supports (Neher, 1987). This let the Thai entrepreneurs, many with connections to the government, to build new hotels, restaurants and bars to serve the US military personnels during their rest and recuperation time (R&R). Throughout war years, the US military personnels' spending on their R&R added \$US111 million to Thai economy (Benbourenane, 1998). After the war ended, Thailand got to keep all of this money and infrastructure.

At the escalation of the conflicting situation, Thailand was able to convince the United States to support and assist Thailand and its people, particularly in term of national security. The United States became Thailand's number one security ally as Washington helped Thailand to strengthen its military capacity in order to prevent the Vietnamese aggression and its communist expansionism that violated national sovereignty of Thailand on the Thailand-Cambodia boarder area.



### 4.3 Conclusion

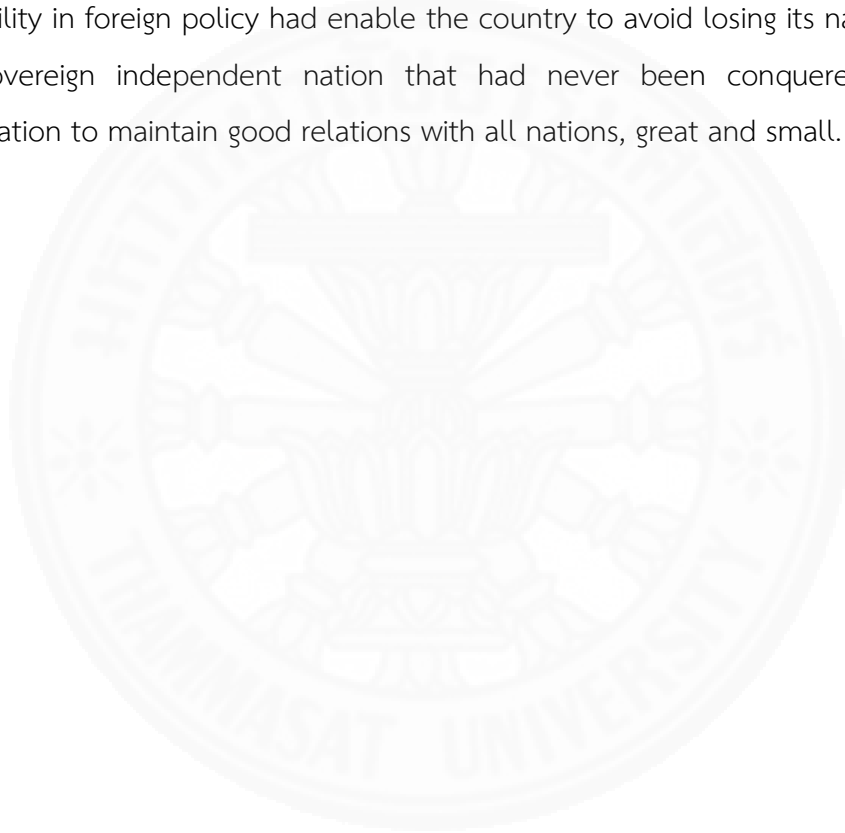
Thailand's foreign policy during Prem administration based on the practice of omnidirectional diplomacy, with a special focus on the United States. Prime minister Prem realised that the issue of Cold War happened in both regional and international level. Prem knew that each level of conflict consisted of their own important players, and Prem tried to side up with whichever players at each level of conflict that would help Thailand to secure its national sovereignty from communist control.

At the regional level, the Vietnamese's invasion of Cambodia and the spillover of its aggression towards Thai soil made Vietnam to be the most threatening player in the regional scale. As mentioned above that this incident divided the Southeast Asia region into two sides. The one that wished for stronger Vietnam and the one that wished to contain them. As Thailand was on the side which wanted to limit the Vietnamese aggression, the split forced Prem to act in a very careful manner with the other side. If Thailand used the hard way to deal with those who wanted to support Vietnam, and they went to support Vietnam even further, then this would only put Thailand into a communist domino effect even faster. Therefore, for Prem, it was best for Thailand to act as neutral towards the rest of the countries in the region as much as possible. Prem maintained good relationship to every nation in the region regardless of their political thoughts, economic patterns, and social structures. This was to prevent any further conflicts amongst the regional members, which makes the outside influence found it more difficult to insert their control over the region.

At the international level, the Soviet Union remained the principle threat in the Cold War conflict. This was because prime minister Prem realised that it was the Soviet Union who was behind the Vietnamese aggression. When it comes to the Soviet influence, Thailand was too weak to fight the Soviet by itself, and it also needed a superpower-back up. There was no surprise that Thailand returned to its prolonged ally such as the United States. Thailand's under Prem obviously took the US side. Thai foreign policy under Prem's administration largely based on the US

ideology such as the UN Charter and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In return for Thailand's siding with the US, Bangkok received military, defence, economic, financial and social assistance from the United States, to fight against communism.

Prime minister Prem's Thai foreign policy seek for cooperations with the ASEAN and the United States. Thailand sided with and also compensated with these two powers in order to contain communism expand into Southeast Asia. The Thai flexibility in foreign policy had enable the country to avoid losing its national identity as sovereign independent nation that had never been conquered due to its dedication to maintain good relations with all nations, great and small.



## CHAPTER 5

### THAKSIN SHINAWATRA

A thirst for national independence is never outdated in minds of the ordinary people of Thailand even in the twenty-first century. In the absence of a real threat such as imperialism, colonialism and invasions, unlike in the past, a practice of a nation seeking to establish its direct control, authority and exploitation over other territories and their native people is no longer fashionable. However, the diminishing of immediate threats has never lessen a sense of national independence in modern-day Thailand. As during the period of prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra administration, a sense of national independence seems to be an essential aspect of his regime. At the time when Thailand lost its feeling of independence due to the 1997 financial crisis, Thaksin did not hesitate to play a leading role in restoring a sense of independence for Thailand and all Thai people. Thaksin uses an image of independent-Thailand as a political tool to satisfy his own political game.

This chapter examines how the image of Thailand as an independent nation plays key role in Thaksin's administration, including the direction of Thaksin's foreign policy. However, before analyzing Thaksin's utilization of the image of independent-Thailand, it is important to note the reasons behind the feeling of lost in dependence for Thailand. This feeling gradually raised during Thailand's economic turndown at the time of the financial crisis. The chapter will, first, briefly explain the economic situation in Thailand prior and during the breakout of the 1997 Financial Crisis. Second, it will examine how Thailand's dependent on International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial assistance created a feeling of lost in national independence for the Thais. Third, the paper will analyze Thaksin's successful utilization on a sense of national independence in order to enhance his domestic popularity from all independence-thirsts at home. Four, seeing how Thaksin's popular pro-independence notion directs Thailand from being blown by the US influence, and at the same time allowing Thailand to bend with the Asian wind.

## 5.1 Thailand Plunged into Economic Crisis

Since the late 1980s, Thailand as the fifth Asian Tiger had experienced rapid economic growth and economic prosperity. Between 1986 and 1996, Thailand's real GDP growth reached 10.4 per cent per year which made Thailand become the world's fastest-growing economy (Warr, 1996). On average, the growth rate of real export was at 14.5 per cent between 1988 and 1996 (Sharma, 2003). The inflation rate remained at a low level between 3.36 per cent and 5.7 per cent (IFS, 2017). This was a result of Thai government's decision on adopting a policy of capital account liberalization and financial market deregulation. Thailand also decided to peg the Thai exchange rate to a basket of major currencies, especially to the US dollar (between 24.92 to 25.59 baht per dollar) (IMF International Financial Statistics, 2017).

By 1994, Thailand removed restrictions and allowed domestic financial institutions to have greater access to international capital market for funds. The Bangkok International Banking Facilities (BIBF) was established in order to promote freer capital flow both in and out of the country. The restrictions on foreign borrowing were removed such as the reduction of corporate income taxes from 30 per cent down to 10 per cent, exemptions of particular tax sales, business tax and stamp duties (Sharma, 2003). The removal of restrictions on foreign loans, together with the pegged exchange rates, allowed the Thai investors to borrow foreign loans at a lower interest rate comparing to borrow domestically. As a result, this attracted a large amount of capital inflows into the country. Thailand's net capital inflows increased by nearly five times within three years, from 455 million dollars in 1992 to 2.25 billion dollars in 1995 (World Bank, 2017). Large part of this overflowed capital went to domestic investment, particularly in the stock market and property sector. The rate of investment in real estate increased by 395 per cent between 1990 and 1996 (IFS, 2017). Banking sector also expand very rapidly. There are more than 50 banks and other financial institutions newly established during the economic boom (IFS, 2017).

The overflows of foreign loans resulted in the skyrocketing external debt. Short-term debt rose from 8.3 billion dollars in 1990 to 47.7 billion dollars in 1996

(World Bank, 2017). This external debt equivalent to 34 per cent of GDP in 1990 and 59 per cent of GDP in 1996 (Sharma, 2003). On top of that, as mentioned earlier, a large share of capital flew to real estate sector which was a non-productive sector. Property such as lands and houses were only sold domestically. This resulted in decreasing export and increasing deficit in trade balance. Thailand started facing the problems of a loss of export competitiveness, rise of inflation and an appreciation of real exchange rate.

In the mid 1996, the current-account deficit, high foreign debt, declining of export and high baht because the baht was expensive which make export more difficult drove Thailand into the further turndown. As a situation had gone severe, foreign investors started to take their money out of Thailand. Also, large numbers of both Thai investors and Thai financial institutions were unable to repay their foreign debts due to bankruptcy. Moreover, the high baht in the real exchange rate left Thailand facing several speculative transaction attacks. Foreign investors and inspectors began to sell Thai baht for dollars which led to a rapid liquidity shortage in the economy (Sharma, 2003).

In order to defend the baht, the Bank of Thailand (BOT) denied to devalue the baht, instead the BOT heavily intervened by injecting billions of dollar into the economy. On 1 August 1996, in one day, the central bank spent as much as half a billion dollar from its international reserves to defend the value of the baht (Sharma, 2003). By June 1997, the BOT pumped more than 90 per cent of its foreign reserves to the economy. Thailand used more than 28 billion out of 30 billion dollars of its stock to maintain confidence for foreign investors in order to save herself from economic recession (BOT, 1998). Unfortunately, Thailand could no longer consolidate the economy.

The trigger of the Asian Financial Crisis started on Wednesday 2 July 1997, when the Bank of Thailand finally decided to free float the Thai baht (The Bank of Thailand, 2015). The government had to devalue the baht and adopted the managed-float exchange rate regime to allow the Thai exchange rate to fluctuate more freely against the US dollar and other currencies for the first time in fourteen years (CNN Money, 1997). Immediately after the announcement, the baht depreciated

by 15 to 20 per cent, from 25.9 to 28.7 baht per US dollar (Mydans, 1997). The value of baht continued to drop in the third and the fourth quarter of the same year to 33.04 baht and 40.66 baht respectively, and reached its peak at 47.09 baht per dollar in the first quarter of 1998 (IMF International Financial Statistics, 2017) This is the lowest value of Thai baht ever since its first recorded in the 1950s.

The Thai economy plunged further into a serious recession. The country's GDP started to have a negative growth. In 1996, the GDP growth rate was at 5.65 per cent. The number sharply dropped to -2.75 per cent in 1997, and continued to fall to -7.63 per cent in 1998 (World Bank, 2017). The value of foreign direct investment also declined, more than a double, from -3.32 billion dollars in 1997 to -7.19 billion dollars in 1998 (World Bank, 2017). Moreover, Thailand lost 6.58 billion dollars of its export of goods and services one year after the crisis broke out (World Bank, 2017). This economic downturns directly effected the unemployment rate. The number of unemployment had quadrupled up from 0.87 per cent in 1997 to 3.4 per cent in 1998 (World Bank, 2017). Following a high unemployment, the rate of suicide also increased to 8.12 persons per 100,000 population in 1998. A following year, the number reached 8.59 persons which is the highest suicide rate ever recorded by the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand (Ministry of Public Health, 2008). The situation was worse than Thailand could handle it alone. Therefore, the government of Thailand reached out for external financial assistance.

## **5.2 The International Monetary Fund (IMF): a Hero or an Opportunist?**

Due to the failure in requesting helps from Japan and China, in despondency, the government of Thailand requested for financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). By 20 August 1997, the IMF approved a stand-by credit for Thailand. This allowed the drawing of up to 3.9 billion dollars over the following 34 months. Out of the total amount, Thailand was able to withdraw approximately 1.6 billion dollars immediately after the approval, and another 810 million would be available in November of the same year if Thai economic performance reached a certain condition. The IMF also clearly stated that

“subsequent disbursements, on a quarterly basis, will be made available subject to the attainment of performance targets and program reviews” (The International Monetary Fund, 1997). This loans, however, have many strings attached.

On top of the disbursement, the government of Thailand agreed to reform its economic structure based on the medium-term policy framework. The program was comprehensively restructuring Thailand’s financial system and fiscal position between 1997 and 1998 (The International Monetary Fund, 1997). To recapitalize the financial structure, Thailand undertook several actions such as providing greater authority to the Bank of Thailand to intervene into a commercial bank or finance company, lowering interest rates, restricting regulations on loan classification, supplying, and recording (Ministry of Finance, 1999), closing down 56 out of 58 suspended financial companies, limiting foreign ownerships, and removing tax incentives in order to encourage debt renegotiations. In terms of fiscal reform, Thailand raised the rate of value-added-tax (VAT) from 7 per cent to 10 per cent (The International Monetary Fund, 1997). This increase in tax had strengthened social safety net, especially the health and education sector. However, government expenditure was cut in several areas, mainly the private sector (The International Monetary Fund, 1997; Sharma, 2003). Other restructuring such as of state-enterprise, monetary, wages, privatization and civil service reform was also taken place in order to restore confidence of investors towards Thailand’s financial institution, and to improve overall economic performance.

After the reform, overall Thai economy gradually recovered from deep recession. The percentage of GDP growth sharply increased from -7.6 per cent in 1998 to 4.6 and 4.5 per cent in 1999 and 2000 respectively (The Bank of Thailand, 2017). Trade balance also returned positive from -9.0 billion dollars in 1996 to 1.5 billion in 1997, and reached 16.3 billion in 1998 (The Bank of Thailand, 2017). Moreover, in 1999, rate of inflation continued dropping to 0.285 per cent from 7.995 per cent in 1998 (The World Bank, 2017). These brought about development and stability to the economy of Thailand.

However, the IMF economic reform policies were facing many Thai and international criticisms. In 1998, the Thai academics, NGOs, social critics, and business

persons started to lose confidence in the IMF. Pia Bungarten (1999, p. 256) states that the Thai people perceive the reform package as “a predator than a helper”. He added that “Thailand was getting no rewards for being the pet of the IMF master”. Bernard Gordon (2001, p. 118), similarly, symbolized Thailand as “a US puppet” due to its “surrendered to the IMF conditions”.

Even though economic indicators such as GDP and trade balance appeared to prove a positive economic growth, however the statistics may not be as it seem. Stanley Kats (1999), in his *the Asian Crisis, the IMF and the Critics*, criticizes the fact that the country’s current account balance shifted from deficit to surplus was not a result of an increase of export, instead it was a result of a dramatic fall of import. Causing more suffering to the economy.

Critics believe that the IMF package drove Thailand into a deeper recession. Jeffrey Sachs blamed IMF’s requirement on rising interest rates, restrict capital in-out flow, and privatization dramatically for pushing the firms into bankruptcy, especially small businesses (The Nation, 1999) These resulted in increasing of unemployment and poverty. Based on the National Economic and Social Development Board (2017), the average income has dropped 25 per cent from 1997 to 1998. This made the locals remained poor and become poorer. Bungarten mentioned that the IMF does not willing to safeguard the interests for the Thais, instead it seemed to preserve the interests of foreign creditors (Bungarten, 1999). As numbers of local companies and businesses ended up in the hands of North American and European ownerships. Similarly, Amarin Khoman, a chairman of the Thai Star Group of Companies, condemned the IMF for ignoring the negative consequences from its policy, rather the IMF merely act as “a tool of the superpowers which take advantage of countries in trouble” (Bungarten, 1999). Gordon (2001) also criticized that the IMF conditions allow their capital finance providers to purchase the assets they wish, and was able to control life’s conditions of the Thais. The more powerful tend to exploit Thailand during its weak economic situation due to the lost of the country’s bargaining power.

Many perceive the action of Thailand’s heavily dependence on the superpower of the day, particularly the United States, for financial assistance as a



lost of national honor, prestige, and dignity. Scholars such as Hanke and Baetjer (1997), Kolko (1998), Henderson (1999), Chang (2002), and Reynolds (2003) agreed to condemn the IMF conditions for its control over Thai economy. Kunyochai (2007) describes Thailand, during the crisis, as a Look Lai (ลูกไล่) or a flunky of the United States. A stooge who lost “its bargaining power, national dignity, and image”. Gordon, too, condemned the United States for controlling Thailand through its IMF economic conditions. He states that the IMF package aimed to “turn Thai people into slave workers and [turn the country into] economic slave forever” (Gordon, 2001, p. 118). Moreover, Thornton (2016, p. 97) firmly states that the “IMF strictures forced the virtual surrender of Thailand’s economic sovereignty”. This view was epitomized by Yuk Si-Ariya (1999) who argued that the relationship between the IMF and Thailand after the crisis was a modern pattern of colonization. For Si-Ariya, the United States, as a colonizer, uses the IMF to spread its influence in the form of neoliberalism and financial liberalism ideologies. On the other hand, Thailand, as a US colony, adopting the IMF policies meant that Thailand accepted and allowed the expansion of US hegemony over its sovereignty. This declared Thailand’s loyalty to the IMF. Si-Ariya perceived such loyalty as a loss of national pride on the emphasis that Thailand was begging for assistance from the United States. Thailand’s relying too much on the IMF does not only cause Thailand to lose its economic advancements, but also lost its image as a sovereign independent nation.

A sense of resentment against the IMF gradually escalated after the crisis. In mid-1998, more than fifteen hundred small-business owners started protesting against the IMF (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2004). New associations such as United Thai for the National Liberal Club, Alliance for National Salvation, and National Salvation for Community were established to oppose the IMF and the Thai government at the time for selling the nation to the IMF (Tejapira, 2002). A sense of protecting the country from external forces (the United States, the IMF, and globalization) spread over and appeared in the form of television series and films such as *Khon Khong Phasendin* (People of the country) in 1999-2000, *Bang Rachan* in 1999, and the popular *Suriyothai* in 2001. All films aimed at deliver a common theme which was to “save the country” from outside forces (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2004). Therefore,

unsurprisingly, the Thais were willing to express a sense of resentment towards external forces in order to strengthen their senses of national independence which was stolen by the IMF during the time of the financial crisis.

### 5.3 Thaksin and his Utilization of the Independence-Craving Thais

Thaksin Shinawatra knew well how to win the hearts and minds of the independence-craving Thais. This Thai billionaire businessman, Thaksin, and his Thai Rak Thai (Thais love Thais) Party capitalize the intensification of an anti-IMF sentiment and a sense of safeguarding national independence as a tool to win the national elections, and to install Thaksin as a Prime Minister of Thailand. On 6 January 2011, the opposing-IMF policies led Thaksin regime to win the election with an outright majority, for the very first time by any party since 1991 (The Office of Election Commission of Thailand, 2001). The Thai Rak Thai won in all areas, except the southern region, which allowed the Party to take 254 out of 500 seats at the parliament (Symonds, 2001). According to a Thai political scientist at Thammasat University, Somchai Pakapaswiat, stated that “Thaksin came into office at the end of the Asian economic crisis, when there was still a lot of anti-IMF sentiment... He’s [Thaksin] good at appealing to Thais’ nationalistic pride” (Lamb, 2004). Peter Symonds (2001) mentioned in his article on *Thai Billionaire Capitalizes on anti-IMF Sentiment to Win National Elections* that Thaksin’s “blasts at the IMF” helped boosting his populism. A Pilipino academic, Walden Bello, too, agreed that it is the anti-IMF expansionary policies which gave a victory to Thaksin regime (Bello, 2005). This noted that the root of Thaksin’s success lies on an anti-IMF populism.

During his time in the office, Prime Minister Thaksin continued his attacks on the IMF to reinforce his popularity. One of the most renowned anti-IMF statement was Thaksin’s declaration of Thailand’s independence from the International Monetary Fund after the final installment of Thailand’s debt to the IMF which incurred during the time of the financial crisis was completed. On 31 July 2003 at 20.30pm, Thaksin appeared on the national television and congratulated all the Thai people across the nation on their achievements of this victory. He addressed: “Today

we paid off the last batch of I.M.F. loans, lifting the commitment to the I.M.F. from our shoulders” (Arnold, 2003). He added “This evening, Thailand’s last payment to the IMF of more than 60 thousand million baht that we lent during the 1997 financial crisis had been paid. The IMF allowed Thailand to withdraw up to 14,500 million US dollars, but Thailand only borrowed 12,296 million US dollars or equivalent to 510,000 million baht. The previous government had repaid 10,000 million baht to the IMF. But, this government had paid the total debt of 500,000 million baht. This saved Thailand from its obligations with the IMF” (Matichon, 2003). Thaksin continued attacked the IMF, as he said “we shall never go back to the days of the IMF again as long as I am in the office” (Shinawatra, 2003). During his speech, Thaksin did not forget to reinforce a sense of nationalism, as he firmly stated that: “I [Thaksin] would like all of you [Thai citizens] to be confident and to be proud to be Thai citizens as today we are free from all form of obligations” (Matichon, 2003). For the Thais, the end of instalment payment to the IMF did not only represent that Thai economy was no longer under the IMF economic influences, but this also proved that Thailand as a nation freed from external forces and, at last, stayed independence.

The exploitation of Thailand’s appreciation of its independence had continued. Thaksin carried on his nationalistic stance in many occasions, most of the time referring to Thailand’s declaring independence from the IMF. For example, during the election campaign in March 2006, Thaksin described how Thai economy had been developed since his government entered the office, and he, once again, used the case of Thailand’s repayment to IMF debt to defend his second term as a prime minister. In front of hundred thousands of his supporters, he proclaimed that “after the repayment of debt, we [Thailand] no longer need to depend on the International Monetary Fund”. He repeated “No longer needed [the IMF]... We are cool now” (Shinawatra, 2006). Thaksin’s stimulation of Thai nationalism through a sense of independence from the IMF seemed to be beneficial for him and his party. Thaksin was Thailand’s first democratically elected prime minister to serve a full term at the parliament (Chachavalpongpun, 2010). His popularity also led him to win a second term with the highest number of vote ever recoded in the history of Thai

election (The Office of Election Commission of Thailand, 2005). These results confirmed Thaksin's right decision in utilisation of a sense of national independence.

As Thaksin's popularity was built upon the notion of non-interference and non-dependence on other states, any external forces that seek to intervene into Thailand's internal affairs seemed to encounter criticisms from its prime minister. Apart from the anti-IMF sentiment, other resentments such as the resentments towards foreigners, the United Nations and the United States also appeared during Thaksin administration. In 2004, there was a spread of international criticism over Thaksin's crackdown on suspected Islamic militants in the southernmost provinces of Thailand which left more than 100 deaths caused by the use of excessive force. As an anti-external-intervention, on 1 May of the same year, Thaksin addressed in a radio said "Please don't intervene. Please leave us alone. It is my job and we can cope with this mater. We are trying to explain this to foreigners. But if they do not understand or ignore our explanation, I don't care because we are not begging them for food" (The Taipei Times, 2004). Thaksin, again, used the attack on foreign intervention to boost the country to be proud of its independence. The statement did not only imply Thailand's abandon of external forces, but also reminded the Thais that their nation was not relying on the outsiders, in fact Thailand was an independent nation responding for its own survival.

One of Thaksin's renowned condemnation of the United Nations was delivered after the United Nations Human Rights Council intent to intervene into Thaksin's war on drug campaign. Just over three weeks into an intense crackdown on the drug trade, more than 100 deaths related to this drug war had been reported. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions expressed concerns over alleged extrajudicial killings and overall transparency of the crackdown (The United Nations, 2003). Due to such violent, the United Nations required Thailand to restrict the use of lethal force by police, to closely correspond with the international laws, and also called for investigation into the allegations of the deaths (Cohen, 2004). In response to UN's requests, on 3 March 2003 in a press interview, Thaksin retorted "Do not worry about this. The U.N. is not my father. We as a U.N. member must follow international regulations. Do not

ask too much. There is no problem. They can come and investigate” (Tunyasiri & Ashayagachat, 2003). This referred to the fact that Thailand was no need to listen and follow the orders from the United Nations. Thaksin’s hidden message was that Thailand was aware of the appropriateness and rightful process of this crackdown, therefore any crackdown-related criticisms, suggestions, commands or other forms of intervention from the United Nations were discontented.

Likewise, the United States, too, could not escape from Thaksin’s criticisms. It is important to note that, during Thaksin’s administration, the image of Thailand had never been represented as more inferior to the United States. Thaksin regarded the United States as a friend of Thailand. In December 2001, during the middle of US-Thai Free Trade Agreement negotiation, Thaksin declared a Thai-US friendship to the US-ASEAN Business Council in Washington. He states “Throughout the colonial era, the global wars of the 20th century, and the conflicts within Asia, Thailand and the United States have remained close friends and allies. That will not change in the dawn of the 21st century” (The Nation, 2004). However, this amity had not excused the US from criticisms. Thaksin attacked on the United States for its interference into Thailand’s domestic affairs in several occasions.

In February 2004, the U.S. State Department reported that the human rights situation during Thaksin’s crackdown on drugs had “worsen with regard to extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests” (U.S. Department of State, 2004). In response, Thaksin called the United States an “annoying friend” for its report on human rights in Thailand. In May of the same year, the same story was repeated. Thaksin called the United States a “useless friend” after the US State Department joined the UN and other human rights group to criticize Thailand’s anti-drug campaign. Prime minister Thaksin expected the United States to appreciate their friendship more, like Thailand did by sending troops to Iraq to support the Washington during its war on terror (Lamb, 2004). Thaksin was capable of taking advantage of US hegemony. His remarks to the United States implying that even though the US is a global hegemony, but Thailand, as a longtime ally, had never been more inferior than the US. This superpower should not to intervene into

Bangkok's internal affairs because Thailand had never been under the supervision of the United States.

Thaksin's nationalism evoked the Thai people with the pride on nation's independence from external intervention, particularly the United States and its representatives such as the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. The government attempted to deliver resentments and negative attitudes towards the hegemonic west, implying to all Thais that their nation was not a puppet which can be controlled by the superpowers. However, Thaksin's popularity building process by using nationalism continued. The nationalist prime minister was not merely represented Thailand as free from western influences, but at the same time recreating the image of Thailand as a regional leader. Thaksin placed Thailand as a leading role in regional politics and installing Thai sphere of influence over its weaker neighbours. This explicitly appeared in Thaksin's foreign policy.

#### **5.4 Foreign Policy as a Tool For Thaksin's Popularization**

Thaksin used a nationalistic foreign policy to attract more popular support at home. The focus of Thai foreign policy shifted from the United States to the Asian region. This new dimension of Thai foreign policy helped restoring a sense of national independence, and bringing a national pride to all Thais. In order to erase an image of Thailand as a stooge or a puppet of the United States, especially due to its heavy dependence on the International Monetary Fund at the time of the 1997 Financial Crisis, Thaksin decided to leave the intrusive West, and seeking to make Thailand a regional hegemon particularly in mainland Southeast Asia. This transformed Thai foreign policy behavior from reactive to proactive one (Pongphisoot, 2009). Thaksin designed to locate Thailand at the forefront of regional politics, spreading Thai influence over its immediate neighbors on mainland Southeast Asia, and also promoting the country as a center of Asian relations and cooperations.

The foreign policy of Thaksin directed Thailand to play a leading role in the region. Thaksin placed Asia and its member states as his number one priority.

The prime minister seek to enhance a closer cooperation and relations between the Asian members, with Thailand at the core of the grouping. Thaksin push forward a policy of Forward Engagement Policy, promoting Asian collaboration by taking an Asian approach. The core principle of this policy was self-help and self-reliance (Garnjana-Goonchorn, 2008). Again, a similar ideology that Thaksin used to separate Thailand from external interferes. Thaksin intended to establish a notion of “Asia-for-Asians” (Chachavalpongpun, 2010, p. 94), strengthening a regional cooperation, in order to make the Asians relying on their own region, rather than reaching out and depending on others for assistance.

In order to strengthen the region’s capacity, Thaksin initiated a continent-wide cooperation under the framework of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) in 2002. This was the first of its kind in Asia. The ACD is an unofficial forum of discussion for Asian leaders. The aims of the ACD is to incorporate the diverse Asian countries into the integrated “Asian Community” (Chachavalpongpun, 2010, p. 97). In June 2002, the first ACD Ministerial Meeting was held in Cha-am, Thailand. Thaksin successfully brought together the representatives from 18 countries across the region, with Thailand as a center of this collaboration. The ACD discussed on the issue of common interests and enhancing further mutual cooperation in all areas such as reducing poverty, improving the quality of life of the Asian people, and increasing Asia’s economic competitiveness in the world.

One of Thaksin leading role under the ACD, was his initiated program so-called an “Asian Bond Market”. Due to the financial crisis in 1997, which Thailand had no option but to rely on the IMF for financial assistance, Thaksin learnt that Asia had faced some limitations. Asia, as a region, was unable to provide any helps to Thailand nor other Asian countries effected by the Asian Financial Crisis. Therefore Thaksin, as a leading role, offered to provide one billion US dollar in order to promote investment in the region, and enhancing the Asian economies to use their own foreign reserve to secure their economies and to stimulate further wealth to the region (Asia Cooperation Dialogue, 2002).

Thailand continued playing its leading role, as in 1997, Thailand launched the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation or

known as BIMSTEC. This is a cooperation of the countries along the Bay of Bengal, involving Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal. As BIMSTEC became more concrete during Thaksin administration, the prime minister did not miss a chance to take a leading role in this cooperation. In July 2004, Thailand organized the first BIMSTEC leaders' summit in Thailand, making Bangkok a hub of the Bengal sub-region (Chachavalpongpun, 2010).

The role of Thailand as a leader intensively played out on mainland Southeast Asia. Thaksin intended to spread the sphere of Thai influence over its immediate neighbors, namely Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV). The prime minister transformed the image of Thailand as a recipient to a donor, at least towards its neighbors. For example in the case of the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). The core objective of the ACMECS is to strengthening collaboration between its member countries in the areas of trade and investment facilitation, agricultural and industrial cooperation, transport linkages, tourism, and human resources development. However, Thaksin seek to exploit and use the ACMECS to spread the Thai influence, and also to build the image of hegemonic Thailand. Thaksin perceived ACMECS as a tool to help Thailand's three neighbors to develop, with Thailand as the main supporter. As Thaksin addressed at the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit in 2003, "I want to see it [the ACMECS] help reduce poverty and produce sustainable development for our three neighbours" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, 2003). Under ACMECS, Thaksin provided the members with expertise, technical, and financial supports. Thaksin offered a 10 billion Thai baht fund for soft loans and aid packages to the CLMV. However, the procurement contracts must be signed with Thai firms and the currency of exchange was to be in Thai baht (Pongsudhirak, 2007). Thaksin used financial obligation to put the CLMV under Thai control.

A closer cooperation between Thailand and the CLM countries helped enhancing Thailand's image as a regional hegemony. The fact that Thailand provided assistances and had some influences over its neighbor, placed Thailand to be a donor, while the three neighbors were seen as the recipient countries. Moreover, statistically speaking, the GDP of Cambodia, Laos PDR and Myanmar combined



account for 9 per cent while the GDP of Thailand alone presented 91 per cent of total GDP when the four combined (Chachavalpongpun, 2010, p. 117). Together with the attitude that Thailand was sympathy for its weaker neighbors who in need for Thai support, this immediately posed Thailand's image as the influential, yet, benevolent hegemonic power in mainland Southeast Asia.

The intention of Thaksin's foreign policy was to serve a nationalism thirst. The making of Thailand as a leading role in strengthening regional cooperations, locating at the center of region and sub-regional collaborations, and standing as a regional hegemony for its immediate neighbors, all mentioned strategies had one objective and that was to erase the image of Thailand as a subordinate to the western influence. Therefore, bending with the Asian region was not only allow Thailand to take a more superior role in international sphere, but at the same time allowed Thaksin to win more political support at home.

## 5.5 Conclusion

From 2001 to 2006, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra transformed Thailand's international image from one of subordinate into a kind of regional leader. Thaksin knew that a sense of national independence is never unfashionable for the Thais. Even in the era of US hegemony, the United States and its influences were a tower of strength for Thailand, especially during the 1997 financial crisis. While other countries in the Asian region such as Japan and China refused to provide assistance to Thailand during its hardship. The US-led institution like the IMF accepted to support Thailand at the time. However, the Thais did not see the IMF or the United States as a friendly rescuer. In contrary, IMF assistance was perceived as a kind of interference and exploitation. The conditions attached with the IMF rescue package led many Thais to see Thailand as being a puppet of the IMF and the US. This inferior status made people of Thailand perceive their nation as at the lost of national dignity, sovereignty and independence due to its submissiveness to external controls.

This situation allowed Thaksin to insert his independence-restoration notion in order to simulate his own political support at home. Thaksin placed a concept of national independence at the core of his administration. He abolished Thailand's image of submissive dependent nation by played a more assertive and militant role towards the Western influences who seek to intervene into Thai domestic affair through his anti-IMF, anti-US and anti-Western influence sentiments. This was to prove to all Thais that their nation strongly refused to be subordinated under foreign influences. The people of Thailand still see the significance of national independence more than other factors such as economic development. The Thais were unwilling to sacrifice its independence status with external interference in exchange for financial support, even at the time of economic difficulty. This directed Thaksin's foreign policy to flexibly bend to whichever wind that allows Thailand to express a stronger perception of national independence for the people of Thailand.

The image of Thailand as a weak dependent state further abolished through Thaksin pro-Asia foreign policy. The Asian region led Thailand to exercise a stronger image of independence in comparison to the other regions. As Thailand's own regional backyard, it was not too difficult for Thaksin to locate Thailand at the forefront of the Asian region. His initiatives for making Thailand a central hub for regional cooperations, and spreading Thai influences over its weaker neighbours were feasible. The Asian region allowed Thaksin to build the image of Thailand as a regional leader who was absent from all forms of external control, rather a self-dependence and also an influencer in the region. In the end, the long embedded image of Thailand as an independence nation which absent from all sorts of external invention has remained the first and foremost value for the Thais to protect. It is the restoration of the image of Thailand as an independence nation that directed Thailand's bending-with-the-Asian-wind foreign policy during Thaksin administration.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

The practice of ‘bamboo bending with the wind’ foreign policy has been used from the age of King Chulalongkorn through to the modern era of Thaksin’s administration to help Thailand to secure her sense of national independence. This behaviour has been repeatedly practiced up to the point that numbers of scholar perceive such action as a significant and unique characteristic of Thai foreign policy. The policy has been characterised as practical and flexible like a bamboo tree. The reason behind that is because Thailand or earlier known as Siam lacks of political stance which resulted the country to conduct its foreign policy based on the changing circumstances rather than to follow a fixed political ideology. This lacking of a solid political ideology has led Thailand to lose its moral principle when it comes to conducting foreign policy. It has been seen throughout the history that Thailand is able to switch and change side without having too much concern on historical its relationship with other states. A historical relation seem to be less importance comparing to a present-day relation. Enemies and friends are interchangeable as long as it keeps Thailand on the winning side. Due to Thailand’s unbounded political stance and ability to easily switching side, allowing Thai foreign policy to bend freely towards any states that help to protect Thailand’s national independence since King Chulalongkorn era, Phibun’s administration, Prime minister Prem, through to Thaksin’s period and up until today.

During King Chulalongkorn period, Thailand’s foreign policy based on its limitless accede to the Superpowers. The King ceded a piece of territory, reformed its political and social structure, eliminated the country’s prolonged traditions and practices, in order to balance against the two competing European powers which left Thailand to be a buffer state against England and France. King Chulalongkorn acceded to undergo the reform, restructure and elimination of country’s prolonged practices to please both colonisers when it necessary in order to avoid falling into coming a Western colony in the European colonisation period.

Later during Phibun administration, Thailand was capable of immediate switch of alliances. Throughout his premiership during the Second World War, Thailand underwent three major switches in foreign policy direction from taking a neutral stance to a pro-Japan side, and ended up with a pro-Western position. Thailand's Phibun was able to switch and side with any nations that kept Thailand on the war-winner side.

In Prem's period, Thailand took an omnidirectional role to maintain good relationship with all other nations regardless of their political stances, economic structures, and social circumstances during the Cold War. However, even though Thailand presented its omnidirectional stance upfront, but at its back door Thailand remained close relation, particularly military tie with the United States. This shows that at the end of the day, Thailand sided and depended largely on the United States which meant to side with the democratic bloc. Therefore, the country's omnidirectional diplomacy was only a pretended action that helped Thailand to remain neutral which could be very beneficial during the uncertain international order.

During Thaksin period, a sense of national independence have changed. During the period of King Chulalongkorn, Phibun and Prem, the three leaders were protecting its national sovereignty against security threats that willing to take away the territory and its nation as a whole. But in the early twenty-first century, the main challenge that concern Thailand was to suffer from the financial crisis. This was a form of economic threat. It might concerned the nation upon its wealth, economic prosperity, and financial instability which may lead into economic and social problems. However, this incident would not lead the nation into losing its independence in self-control over its nation nor losing a piece of its territory. As during Thaksin administration, the international trend has changed. Thailand was no longer facing security threats.

The four case studies are different in term of leader, form of government, external situation, and form of threats. Each leader came from different background such as from royal family, military personnel, and a business person. Difference also appeared in form of government. It ranged from the monarchy system, an

authoritarian-style government, a semi-democracy, through to a democratic government. More than that, external situations were also different. By this, it meant that each case study took place during different major global political situation timely including period of colonialism, the Second World, the Cold War, and the Global Financial Crisis. These differences in the global situation made each period has their own different threats for Thailand.

At the age of colonialism, Siam faced two serious major colonial threats which were France and the Great Britain. For the Second World War, the most threatening nation for Thailand was the raising Japan. Later, during Prem Tinsulanonda's administration, threat came in a new form. National threat did not come in a form of nation-state like in the past. This time, threat came in a form of political ideology. It was the spread of communism that posed a serious threat to Thailand, especially after Bangkok's immediate neighbour, Cambodia, fell under the communist control. In the last case study, the form of threat was also different from the three cases above. During Thaksin's administration, threats came into two form both old and new. The old-style of threat in this period refers to the United States. This was because the United States is counted as a nation-state. On the other hand, the new-style threat found in this period came in the form of non-state actor. And the non- traditional player refers to the Internal Monetary Fund or known as the IMF. The IMF is an international organisation that played major role in taken away a sense of national independence from the Thai people in the post-financial crisis period.

Table 6.1

*The Comparison between Four Periods*

Leader	Form of Government	External Situation	Major Threats	Bending to...
<b>King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910)</b>	Monarchy	Colonialism	France Great Britain	Great Britain (failed) Russia France Germany
<b>Pleak Phibunsongkram (1939-1944, 1948-1957)</b>	Authoritarian	World War II	Japan	Japan US and the Free World
<b>Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988)</b>	Semi-democracy	Cold War	Communism (Fall of Cambodia)	US ASEAN
<b>Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006)</b>	Democracy	Financial Crisis	IMF US	US (economic) Neighbouring countries (politics)

However, the one stable practice that had never changed is for Thailand to bend around from one side to another especially at difficult times in order to secure its national independence in the changing international situation. This led to the important question for this thesis is why Thailand is still bending like a bamboo even when traditional threats are no longer existed. In the modern era, no country is looking forwards to take complete control over other's territory, manpower and resources. By this, it can be said that in today's context the phenomenon of having control over other's territorial integrity and national independence is outdated and unreal.

Especially during Thaksin's administration, it is clear to see that traditional or old-style threat was no longer existed. There was no external actor who was willing to take control over Thailand. Nevertheless, Thailand seems to have problem keeping up with this new phenomenon. Thailand remained concerning about its sovereignty even at the absent of security threat. This proved by the fact

that the people of Thailand still hungry for their independence as a core value of its nation. During Thaksin administration, many Thai people seemed to agree on the prime minister's manipulation saying that the intervention from the United States to provide economic support to Thailand after the financial crisis was an act of coloniser in a present day. The government perceived this assistance as a movement of spreading the US influence into Thai territory, and that was considered as challenging to Thai sovereignty and independent. As a result, this ended up as part of Thaksin's election campaign, and got him an overwhelming support from the public.

The protection of national sovereignty in the absent of security threat seemed very contradicting. At the time when there are no real threat to national security who will conquer over Thailand's territory or take complete control over the nation, but Thailand still worries about its independence. As Thailand has always been able to protect its nation from falling under the powerful external influences, this made Thailand and its people feeling proud of being an independent sovereign. Overtime, this notion became more powerful and gradually embedded as a core identity of the nation that need to be maintained. It is the duty to preserve the nation's independence that effects the conduct of Thailand's foreign policy. Even though it is only to preserve a 'feeling' of being independent. As Thaksin did by turning its foreign policy preference towards Thailand's neighbouring countries, this was because Thaksin was willing to eliminate the feeling of independent that Thailand needed to depend upon the the United States for its economic assistance, and at the same time established a sense of being an independent leader among its neighbours.

By looking at Thai foreign policy in a long term, the essence of the idea of foreign policy is always base on the same idea which is the idea preserving national independence of the nation which considers to be the core value of Thailand. This bamboo bending with the wind notion will continue as long as national independence remains the most preserved national value for Thailand even at the time when the phenomenon has already been outdated in the international context.

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